



LUND UNIVERSITY

School of Economics and Management

# **Don't Mess with My Milk!**

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## **The Mystery of Spectacular Mundane Consumption**

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# Abstract

This study aims to deepen the understanding of mundane consumption by examining hidden meanings in the case of the Milk Uprising, when sharp decreases in the availability of Skånemejerier's milk in Scania, Sweden, in 2009 ignited a major consumer revolt. We argue that existing literature is inadequate to explain this case where mundane consumption all of a sudden became spectacular, and that such a case presents a great opportunity for deeper exploration of the role that everyday consumption has in people's lives. We use structuralist sociological theories about the everyday on a set of empirical material gathered through interviews and netnography, whereas the main tool that helps us uncover hidden meanings is myths.

Our findings show that through a number of myths, milk is a mediator of social tensions. It is closely embedded in the rhythms and structures of the everyday in Scania, and the disruption of the everyday routine through the removal of Skånemejerier's milk conditioned this revolt. Consumers conveyed the meanings of milk through two main myths: David vs. Goliath and cultural homogenisation. They used the myths to sustain the sense of local identity and community in an overarching centre-periphery power struggle. Milk in Scania is a symbol of self-determination, the way of life and the local identity, which explains why this mundane consumption item was able to ignite a revolution. We conclude that mundane consumption encompasses more than what has been suggested to date and merits substantial further attention in consumer culture theory, behavioural decision theory and branding literature.

**Keywords:** *mundane consumption, everyday consumption, local identity, centre-periphery, milk*

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# Table of Contents

1	Introduction.....	1
1.1	Delimitations.....	2
1.2	Literature Review.....	3
1.2.1	Everyday Consumption .....	3
1.2.2	Cultural Meanings of Milk.....	5
1.3	Critique of Previous Literature .....	6
1.4	Thesis Outline .....	7
2	Theoretical Framework.....	8
2.1	Mythologies .....	8
2.2	Rhythmanalysis.....	11
2.3	Structuration Theory .....	13
2.4	Summary of Theories.....	14
3	Method .....	16
3.1	Research Philosophy and Strategy .....	16
3.2	Research Design.....	17
3.3	Data Collection.....	18
3.3.1	Interviews .....	18
3.3.2	Netnography .....	20
3.4	Method of Analysis.....	21
3.5	The Quality of the Study.....	22
3.5.1	Trustworthiness.....	22
3.5.2	Authenticity.....	23
3.6	Ethical Issues.....	24
3.7	Limitations.....	25
3.7.1	Researcher Involvement .....	25
3.7.2	Generalisability.....	26
4	Case Background.....	27
4.1	The Dairy Industry in Sweden.....	27
4.2	The Milk Uprising.....	28

4.3	Company Profiles .....	29
4.3.1	Skånemejerier .....	29
4.3.2	Coop Sweden .....	29
4.3.3	Arla Foods Sweden.....	30
5	Analysis.....	32
5.1	David and Goliath .....	33
5.1.1	The Good, the Bad and the Ugly .....	33
5.1.2	Opposition to Central Decisions.....	42
5.2	Cultural Homogenisation .....	47
5.2.1	Maintaining the Cultural Order .....	48
5.2.2	Identity through Everyday Rhythm.....	51
5.2.3	Us and Them .....	53
5.3	Summary of Analysis.....	56
6	Discussion .....	58
7	Conclusion .....	62
7.1	Main Findings.....	62
7.2	Theoretical Contribution.....	63
7.3	Practical Implications .....	65
7.4	Future Research.....	66
	References.....	67
	Appendix.....	72

# 1 Introduction

In 2009 the Swedish food retailer Coop makes an agreement with the corporation Arla Foods to have them as the main milk supplier, thus making heavy cuts in their assortment from the southern Swedish dairy company Skånemejerier. When consumers in Scania, the southernmost county in Sweden, reach their local stores and cannot find Skånemejerier, they start a revolt – both offline, demonstrating their disapproval outside shops, as well as online, creating Facebook groups and starting petitions with tens of thousands of members. The retailers quickly realise they have underestimated their consumers and are under pressure to abandon the initial plan and guarantee that Skånemejerier's products continue to be available.

This Milk Uprising was a surprise to many – who would have thought that such a mundane item as milk could cause such an uproar? Milk is often considered to be a low-involvement product, towards which the consumer is rather indifferent and disinterested, and displaying behaviour related to habit and routine (see e.g. Laaksonen, 2010). In economics literature, milk is often given as an example of a homogenised product, meaning that it is difficult or impossible for the consumer to differentiate between products in terms of quality, benefits or features (Business Dictionary, n.d.).

The dairy industry played an important role in developing the new economy in Sweden and Denmark in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Jönsson, 2005). Milk was a suitable product to demonstrate modern progress, because modern technology and scientific advancement enabled milk to be ever more purified and improved, and subordinated to increased order and division (e.g. through separation to milk and cream and homogenisation). It was promoted as “the perfect food” by an organisation called Milk Propaganda (Jönsson, 2005). The national self-image of a Swede was modern, forward-looking and healthy, and milk was a strong symbol of that: “healthy, a drink for sound citizens, at that time served in schools for free, pasteurised and homogenised in square Tetra Pak boxes, all strong symbols for the modern, industrialised welfare state” (translation from Jönsson & Lindqvist, 2010, p. 44).

The competition in the Swedish dairy industry has been increasing and the producers who once enjoyed monopoly status on particular regional markets had to accept others entering their playground (Jönsson & Lindqvist, 2010). Consumers in Sweden have previously been upset by “foreign milk”, referring to concerns about the livelihood of Swedish farmers, the environment, and the health of both people and cows (Jönsson, 2005). However, an uprising of people in Scania towards Swedish milk that was not from Scania was and is a noteworthy phenomenon.

In the background of Swedish milk as a strong symbol, it is very interesting why people from a particular region started an uprising against it. It is not instantly evident how much this has to do with the particular meanings and the role of milk in people's everyday lives, and how much with the particular brand of Skånemejerier. All the more,

such spectacular events would normally not be expected from a mundane consumption item like milk.

The assumption that there is little noteworthy about the everyday can explain why consumer research has mostly focused on the spectacular and conspicuous forms of consumption, such as fashion, luxury consumption, brand communities, co-creation etc., while the strand of literature on more mundane and inconspicuous forms of consumption is much thinner (see the literature review for details). At the same time, it is precisely the mundane things that make up the major part of consumption and therefore this field deserves much more attention.

The research question that will be answered in this study is: *why was a mundane consumption item like milk able to start such a huge revolt among consumers?* We argue that a case where the inconspicuous becomes spectacular and in that sense presents itself as a mystery is a great opportunity to examine the field of everyday consumption. Using sociological theories that deal with the everyday and rich empirical material gathered through interviews and netnography concerning the case, we find that there are hidden meanings in milk for Scanian people that help explain why the Milk Uprising happened. Through a series of myths that are expressed through milk, wider societal issues related to identity, community and power struggles between the centre and the periphery take shape and give significance to an otherwise mundane, low-involvement product.

## 1.1 Delimitations

This study is based on the case of the Milk Uprising that took place in Scania in 2009, thus that is where the main focus lies. Time-wise, the case will be limited to the time span from when the first consumers noticed that Skånemejerier was not on the shelves of their local shop as it used to be, until when the situation had stabilised after the retailers gave in to consumer pressure and restocked Skånemejerier.

In another dimension, we are only interested in the aspects related to consumers' strong reaction to the sharp downsizing of the assortment of Skånemejerier in 2009. This means that we are not interested in a) other events related to Skånemejerier that may have triggered a noticeable reaction from consumers – such as the fact that Skånemejerier was bought up by the French corporation Groupe Lactalis in 2012, now supporting Skånemejerier as a holding company; b) the consumers who did not care about Skånemejerier being taken off the shelves in their local shops. We only look at the parties who were actively involved in this particular case: Skånemejerier, Arla, the retailers (most prominently Coop), and the consumers who were part of the revolt.



## 1.2 Literature Review

Consumer research has largely been looking into more conspicuous aspects of consumption such as shopping, clothing, leisure pursuits, household possessions, recreation, eating out, brand communities etc. (Warde, 2015), while routine, ordinary, and inconspicuous aspects of consumption have remained obscured (Gronow & Warde, 2001). Within the field of mundane consumption, milk has hardly been researched at all, with the main consumer research journals virtually lacking articles for this keyword. The exception is an article of the counter-myth of milk by Kristensen, Boye and Askegaard (2006) which is presented below. The cultural background of milk has also been researched within the field of ethnology, however it has not been researched from the angle of people's everyday consumption.

### 1.2.1 Everyday Consumption

Jayne (2006) argues that the concepts of "mundane" and "spectacular", although seen in opposition to one another, can actually be quite fluid and elastic as they can encompass different things for different people at different times. Everyday does not always equate mundane and can just as well turn out to be spectacular (Jayne, 2006). Consumption is in the centre of the mundane activities that make up everyday life, and helps construct urban spaces, activities, identities and social relations (Crewe, 2000). The mundane can have hidden codes and meanings that are at least equally noteworthy as the spectacular (Jayne, 2006). Warde (2015) notes that almost any daily activity can be elevated to a form of art. But as long as they remain mundane and unglamorous, they are often missed, even though they take up the bulk of people's financial, time and energy resources (Warde, 2015).

There has of course been some research in the field of mundane consumption. Warde (2015) notes that the studies often refer to the role of routine, know-how, shared understanding, the embodied and the material in explaining everyday consumption, and therefore propose an alternative view to the dominant model of the sovereign consumer who deliberates, decides and acts. Routines are the opposite of deliberate, reflexive acts, they are stored and remembered by the body; however, it is not so straightforward in practice to distinguish between the routinised and the reflexive (Halkier, 2001).

Warde (2015) brings out that interest in the everyday is often driven by concerns about sustainable consumption and behavioural change. The increasing individualisation and institutionalisation in the society have been placing normative demands on consumers to weave environmental considerations into their everyday, as "environmental problems of society ... [are] closely related to institutional structures of production, reproduction, consumption, infrastructure and resource management" (Halkier, 2001, p. 28). However, in this view the interest in the everyday is more utilitarian, representing an attempt to make everyday consumption consider the externalities it causes.

An alternative view is more in line with the main idea of consumer culture theory, namely that goods have symbolic value besides utilitarian value. Consumers decide to consume certain products not only to fulfil specific needs, but also because of the symbolic meanings that these goods carry (Corrigan, 1997; Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). Similarly, Halkier (2001) notes that consumption is a specific field of practice in the everyday sociality that combines satisfying needs with expressing identity. According to Arnould and Thompson (2005), consumer identity projects are one of the main strands of consumer culture theory literature.

One of the first authors to use social identity theory to “provide theoretical support for the common-sense notion that we are attracted to products that are consistent with, and that enable the enactment of, the various social identities which make up our sense of self” are Kleine, Kleine and Kernan (1993, p. 209). They find that the mundane products that are used in everyday life functionally relate to people’s specific identities and, depending on the salience of the particular identity, indirectly contribute to the overall sense of self. Later on Laverie, Kleine and Kleine (2002) elaborate on that research to show that possessions influence self-definition because they influence people’s self-evaluation and also how others evaluate them. Self-esteem depends on a person’s ability and opportunity to enact identity behaviours, which are mediated by possessions, social ties and media (Laverie, Kleine & Kleine, 2002). These studies establish that there is a relationship between identities and mundane consumption.

Kleine, Kleine and Kernan (1993) suggest studying consumption phenomena as relating to a particular identity as opposed to the global self. In line with that call to action, Holt and Thompson (2004) look at how American men construct their masculine identities through everyday consumption. They examine the compensatory consumption thesis, stating that the masculine identities of many men have been threatened by socioeconomic changes, and as a response those men have sought to symbolically establish their status as real men through compensatory consumption. But rather than looking at quite conspicuous consumption activities like a “mountain man retreat”, which only takes place for one week each year, they pose that American men creatively use everyday consumption to commute between the acknowledged masculine roles (Holt & Thompson, 2004). This study focuses on the way symbolic resources from the everyday are used in identity projects, but does not deeply explore the background of the symbolic value of mundane consumption items.

Holttinen (2014) studies how consumers enact cultural ideals in mundane consumption by looking at practices of everyday food consumption. When consumers can enact an identity and the relating cultural ideals in more than one practice, they may compromise this identity project and the ideals in some practice, making the consumption fragmented. This is less likely when the consumer is highly committed to an identity project, when resources for enacting it are plenty across practices, and when there are no competing identity projects relating to the same practice. The value of mundane consumption depends on how well and how often consumers can enact their identities

and cultural ideals in the particular consumption practice (Holttinen, 2014). Holttinen's study illuminates how identity projects interact and are expressed through mundane consumption; however, construction of the meanings of everyday consumption items that are used in enacting identities and cultural ideals remains unexplored.

According to Warde (2015), eating and food consumption have always displayed the many tendencies associated with consumer culture and its relations to globalisation, commodification and aestheticisation, as well as people's personal and social identities and social relationships. Eating, which in itself is a mundane form of consumption, has become more conspicuous and a lot of attention has been given to eating out, national cuisines, foodyism, search for the exotic and authentic (Warde, 2015). The inconspicuous parts of food consumption are often overlooked, and it is no surprise since the inconspicuous is hard to observe by definition. Nevertheless, mundane items such as milk have merited some research attention, and as becomes evident, carry rich symbolic meanings just like the more conspicuous aspects of consumption.

### **1.2.2 Cultural Meanings of Milk**

In Jönsson's (2005) thorough cultural analysis of milk in the Scandinavian context, he notes that dairy companies in "the new economy" have moved from manufacturing commodities towards producing experiences. An important change in the consumption took place in the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century when fresh milk started to be consumed. Swedish people have been very critical towards "foreign milk", but this does not apply to other dairy products and the same people can have very positive outlooks on for example foreign cheese and yoghurt (Jönsson, 2005; Jönsson & Lindqvist, 2010). It is particularly interesting in the light that the reasons for preferring Swedish milk have often been stated to be concerns about the local milk farmers, the environment and the treatment of animals, which in fact should be the same regardless of whether the milk comes in the form of drinking milk or as cheese or yoghurt (Jönsson & Lindqvist, 2010).

Jönsson and Lindqvist (2010) explain that the fact that drinking milk is so strongly tied to home-making and the home country has roots in its shorter consumption window compared to other dairy products, and until relatively recently milk was not transportable to longer distances at all. Furthermore, in Scandinavia, as opposed to most of Europe, drinking milk is low pasteurised not high pasteurised, which makes its shelf life relatively short. The Swedish customer is used to this kind of milk and in fact has mental barriers towards milk that has travelled for long and from far. Milk has indeed come to represent the last haven in a world of globalisation (Jönsson & Lindqvist, 2010).

Milk is used for many different things such as creating sensual pleasure, expressing the adult desire to take care of children, expecting good health, and taking a political stand (Jönsson, 2005). In dissecting the myth of wine, Barthes (2009) also touches upon the myth of milk as the opposite of wine, since it has a dense, creamy, soothing nature. While

wine is mutilating and surgical, milk is something that joins, covers and restores. Its purity is associated with the innocence of a child, as well as the calm, white, lucid strength of a hero (Barthes, 2009). In Sweden, milk has become representative of modernity in relation to the increased processing before it reaches the consumer – the traditional ideas of purity, progress, health and whiteness are first and foremost related to the standard homogenised pasteurised milk. Milk is at the same time connected to both the past and the future (Jönsson, 2005).

Kristensen, Boye and Askegaard (2010) present the birth and contextualisation of a counter-mythology to milk in Denmark, which in fact is very similar to Sweden. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as a result of the interests of the fast-developing dairy industry and national health programmes, milk became an inseparable part of the Danes' everyday lives. It represented the national mythology of economic and social pride and strength, and symbolised a healthy lifestyle and caring for the family, considered to be the perfect food that is good for all people to drink to every meal. When the rise of other drinks (such as soft drinks, wine and bottled water) caused milk consumption to decrease in the 1980s, public health authorities and the dairy industry spent a lot of money on advertising milk (Kristensen, Boye & Askegaard, 2010).

However, in the 1990s new challenges started appearing – the status of milk as the perfect drink was being questioned, with doubts about its necessity as a calcium source and increasing incidence of milk allergy. This has been aggravated by increasing acknowledgement in consumers' minds of the links between the dairy industry and national health authorities, as well as new "health authorities" appearing in the form of more and less scientifically based evidence about the relations between milk and numerous illnesses. This evidence is judged by consumers through weighing it against subjective life experiences, and through finding "proof" it has led to the counter-myth of milk as a potentially harmful substance (Kristensen, Boye & Askegaard, 2010).

### **1.3 Critique of Previous Literature**

The existing literature indicates that on the one hand, everyday consumption is often related to routines and subconscious understandings of how to behave. On the other hand, the value of everyday consumption lies in enabling us to enact and express our different identities, and we can use consumption to help keep our identities stable in a changing world. This assumes that even the most mundane consumption items have meanings constructed by consumers. Milk, for instance, has become to symbolise modernity, health, recovery, strength and purity. It has been strongly related to locality and in Sweden this has to a large extent meant the national level.

However, as was indicated in the literature, the everyday is not always mundane, because the mundane can have hidden meanings. We argue that we need to deeply explore these hidden meanings in order to be able to explain why the mundane can

suddenly become conspicuous, and low involvement can become high involvement. The current myths around and interpretations of milk are too general to be able to solely explain cases such as the Milk Uprising.

Jönsson (2005), and Jönsson and Lindqvist (2010) give us great and detailed insights about milk consumption in Sweden as such and the history of milk, and further motivate this uprising with the myth around milk and what it has meant to people over time. However, they discuss the meanings around milk in a rather general way relating to all of Sweden while we intend to understand it on a deeper level and relating to a particular region, Scania.

Previous literature is therefore inadequate to explain the case of the Milk Uprising and all the complexities, nuances and contradictions around it. With this study we aim to dig deeper and show how the hidden, not instantly obvious meanings can shed light on the role of everyday consumption in consumers' lives. We bring in relevant sociological thoughts in order to theorise and explain these complexities, which is also what differentiates this study from previous literature.

## **1.4 Thesis Outline**

This thesis has been structured as follows. In the next chapter we present the theoretical framework that is used in this study. We adopt an eclectic approach, drawing ideas from different theories, namely Giddens' structuration theory, Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis and Barthes' theory on mythologies. We use an eclectic approach in order to attain a kaleidoscope like view of the case, to cover different angles of the case and to dig deeper into the meanings involved. The third chapter presents and argues for the methodological standpoint and the methods chosen to collect and analyse the empirical data. Moreover, this chapter will identify and discuss possible restrictions and shortcomings of the methodological choices. The fourth chapter will provide a detailed background of the case, including a presentation of the key companies Skånemejerier, Coop and Arla. The fifth chapter will introduce the key findings from the empirical material, and put these in relation to the ideas from the theoretical framework. The sixth chapter will present a discussion of the results, and the most important findings will be put into a broader context. The final chapter concludes by addressing the research question, outlining our theoretical and practical contribution, and giving suggestions for future research.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

*This chapter consists of the theoretical framework for this study and will give an overview of the chosen theories. We adopt an eclectic approach, so that as opposed to using one main theory in the analysis, several different theories are drawn upon in order to uncover different angles of the case, and with different theoretical viewpoints obtain a kaleidoscope-like view on the Milk Uprising. The three main theories we will present below are those of mythologies (Barthes, 2009), rhythmanalysis (Lefebvre, 2004) and structuration (Giddens, 1984).*

Since milk is considered a mundane, everyday product, and mundane consumption has been under-theorised as was presented in the literature review, we have chosen to use theories from the broader sociology literature to analyse the everyday – Giddens' structuration theory (1984) and Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis (2004). In the analysis process we will use myths as a tool, because it is through myths that people convey the underlying meanings of milk. Therefore, we also rely on Barthes' (2009) ideas on mythologies.

We have chosen an eclectic theoretical approach featuring different theoretical perspectives to help us uncover the different and hidden narratives in the Milk Uprising case. One of the similarities that can be seen among the different theories is that they are all to some extent based on a structuralist approach. Structuralism carries the idea that different aspects of human culture must be understood in relation to each other and these relations form structures that underlie human behaviour, thoughts and feelings. Rhythmanalysis is concerned with the interrelations of different rhythms, and structuration theory with the structures that govern everyday action. Also mythologies are based on structuralism since the latter has its origins in the linguistics theory of De Saussure (1959), who posed that signs gain their meaning from their relationships and contrasts with other signs. We argue that combining these different structuralist theories will allow us to dive deeper into the meanings of milk and how they relate to the society in general, and therefore explain the spectacular case of the Milk Uprising in the realm of everyday consumption.

### 2.1 Mythologies

In theorising mythologies, we mostly rely on the ideas of the French author Roland Barthes which were first published in 1957. According to Barthes (2009), a myth is a type of speech, a mode of signification – it is not an object, a concept or an idea. Barthes claims that everything can be a myth, because every object can be talked about, and instead of myths deriving from the nature of things, they are created by human history which turns objects into speech (Barthes, 2009).

Speech is not only oral, but also appears in writing, photography, cinema, reporting, shows, sport, publicity, and even objects can become speech if they mean something (Barthes, 2009). Myth, as a type of speech, is therefore the object of study of semiology – the science of signs that Ferdinand de Saussure first presented in 1916. A sign consists of the signifier and the signified; for instance, roses can be a signifier to passion (the signified), so roses and passion become a sign together, even though both of them existed already before they were united in this sign (Barthes, 2009). The link between the signified and signifier is not intrinsic, but rather arbitrary, which is why signifiers “are quite detachable from signifieds, and can circulate freely among other signifiers, thereby creating meanings that have nothing to do with their signifieds” (Corrigan, 1997, p. 85).

A myth is “a second-order semiological system”, because it builds on a semiological chain – a sign becomes a signifier to something else (Barthes, 2009, p. 137). This builds on the idea of the freely circulating signifieds. Language, made up from signs, becomes a signifier in the sign that is myth, and writing and pictures work just as well for myths, because what matters is the fact that they are both signs for the semiologist (Barthes, 2009).

In the Milk Uprising case we will see how different signs are constructed by consumers. Milk, the word, is a part of a linguistic sign that has no intrinsic connection to the white nourishing liquid it represents. However, several myths follow that make use of the linguistic sign. For instance, milk becomes a signifier of Skånemejerier, so that when one speaks of milk, it necessarily means Skånemejerier’s milk, while Skånemejerier becomes a signifier for the underdog. It also works the opposite way, for instance so that Skånemejerier comes to represent local milk, and that milk in turn signifies local identity. Therefore, we even go beyond the second-order semiological system here, since one myth becomes a signifier for another myth, which can be considered a third-order system already.

To ease the analysis of myths, Barthes (2009) sets a terminology that allows differentiating the linguistic system from the mythical system. The signifier in the language system is denoted by *meaning*, while in the myth system it is *form*. The signified is unambiguous and can therefore always be referred to as *concept*. The correlation between the signifier and the signified is again differentiated, so that in the language system it is called *sign*, while in the myth system *signification*. Barthes (2009) points out that a myth has a double function: it at the same time points out (makes us understand something) and notifies (imposes it on us).

The form makes the meaning lose its value and at the same time draws nourishment for the form (Barthes, 2009). There is an analogy between meaning and form, so that meaning helps motivate the form; therefore, a myth is never completely arbitrary as a sign in language can be. The analogies come from history and are always partial, because the form only keeps some of the analogous features. In addition, myths are not fixed –

they can appear, change, disintegrate and disappear completely, because they are historical (Barthes, 2009). In the case of the Milk Uprising and of milk in Scania in general the analogies evidently have roots in history with Skånemejerier having been the sole dairy company in Scania for a long time. This has created a fertile soil for the thought that milk in Scania means precisely Skånemejerier's milk and not any other.

According to Barthes (2009), myths transform history into nature – it appears to the myth-consumer that the form naturally brings up the concept. The myth aims to create an immediate impression and it does not matter if it is later seen through, because the myth's action is supposed to be stronger than any rational explanations that may prove it false later. The equivalence of the signifier and the signified becomes a natural and causal process in the eyes of the myth-consumer and the signification system is taken as facts. Myth gives naturalisation and justification; a clarity that comes not from explanation but from stating a fact and makes it easy for things to appear natural. This has a function of simplifying and organising the world, eliminating contradictions since the things in it do not have depth and they appear to mean something by themselves (Barthes, 2009).

A similar idea can be found in Holt's (2004) work on cultural icons. He defines cultural icons as "exemplary symbols that people accept as a shorthand to represent important ideas" (Holt, 2004, p. 1). Moreover, he points out that icons represent specific kinds of stories called identity myths that their consumers use to address identity desires and anxieties. Brands can also obtain a status of cultural icons, becoming iconic brands. They do it by performing identity myths, "simple fictions that address cultural anxieties from afar, from imaginary worlds rather than from the worlds that consumers regularly encounter in their everyday lives" (Holt, 2004, p. 8). In line with Barthes, Holt (2004) notes that identity myths resolve cultural contradictions, they add stability to the desired cultural identity at times when it is under stress, and help people create purpose in their lives.

For instance, the myth that Skånemejerier's milk is local milk is an example of this. The form, Skånemejerier, naturally brings up the concept of locality and to a lot of consumers this relation is stronger than any counter-arguments that would point out how in reality not all of Skånemejerier's milk is from Scania. By taking the myth as something natural, consumers cast aside the contradictions that otherwise arise from the fact that Skånemejerier gets some milk from elsewhere while Arla has some farmers in Scania. The myth is an identity myth of the Skånemejerier brand and helps keep stable the local identity of Scanians.

The transformation of history into nature is used deliberately in, for example, advertising: products are linked with other objects or the consumer in ways that seem completely natural, while in fact they are not (Williamson, 1978, cited in Corrigan, 1997). People start seeing commodities as a natural and unquestionable part of life and the fact that such links are entirely manufactured becomes invisible (Corrigan, 1997).



Furthermore, by borrowing or stealing meaning from outside itself, a product can go one step further and start meaning itself, becoming a representation of that meaning (Williamson, 1978, cited in Corrigan, 1997). Brands, as carriers of particular meanings and values, can take over the actual commodity and become the main carrier of meaning (Corrigan, 1997).

This is similar to what has happened with Skånemejerier's milk as it became to mean the one "true" milk for Scanian people, and an unquestionable part of their life. The belief that Scanian people drink Skånemejerier's milk seemed completely natural to consumers.

## 2.2 Rhythmanalysis

Rhythmanalysis is a tool of analysis developed by the French sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre in the 1980s. His writings on rhythms are, as Elden (2004, p. ix) put it, "the attempt to get us both to think of space and time *differently*, and to think of them *together* [original emphasis]". According to Lefebvre (2004), it is possible to grasp some aspects of today's society directly through observation and intellect, without taking apart and subsequently stitching together its complexity – by collecting the rich meanings from the everyday, from rhythms.

Rhythm appears everywhere where time, place and expenditure of energy interact (Lefebvre, 2004). Without energy, time and space are incomplete as a concept, because energy animates them, reconnects them and makes them conflictual. A rhythm is not simply a movement, nor a sequence of movements or objects – it has to include a certain repetition in movement, as well as contrasting temporal elements such as strong and weak times that return according to a recognisable rule (Lefebvre, 2004; Lefebvre & Régulier, 2004a). Consuming Skånemejerier's milk is one of such rhythms. It may be different for different people in terms of for instance the strong and weak times; some may drink it to every meal while for others it can be related to coffee breaks. In any case this is a repetitive act with people knowing that they will do the same thing – drink Skånemejerier's milk – next time.

Repetition is an important concept for rhythm. It is through repetitive organisation that the everyday establishes itself. There is no rhythm without repetition in time and space. However, Lefebvre points out there is no identical absolute repetition; difference is always introduced into the repetitive since there is always something new and unforeseen in the everyday rites, ceremonies, rules and laws (Lefebvre, 2004).

Lefebvre (2004) writes about four different notions relating to rhythms:

- Polyrythmia – the multiplicity of rhythms (like in the body) and the uniqueness of particular rhythms (like the heart, the kidneys etc.);

- Eurhythmia – the uniting of rhythms with one another in a state of health, in normal everydayness;
- Arrhythmia – discordance in rhythms, leading to suffering, pathological states and even fatal disorders;
- Isorhythmia – the equality of rhythms (like in the orchestra), which is mutually exclusive with eurhythmia.

It must be understood that there is polyrhythmia in everything and that nothing, not even a stone, is immobile; just some things have rhythms that are very slow compared to those in the rhythm analyst himself and therefore hard to notice (Lefebvre, 2004). Also, it is difficult to grasp the existence of rhythms when they function normally – often their existence is perceived more strongly in arrhythmia (Lefebvre, 2004). Lefebvre brings the example of being out of breath as opposed to normal breathing, while in the case of the Milk Uprising it is easy to see that eurhythmia involves drinking Skånemejerier’s milk while arrhythmia is “being out of Skånemejerier’s milk”, i.e. the situation where it is no longer there.

An important thought in Lefebvre’s (2004) rhythmanalysis is related to dressage. To be a part of a society, a group, a nationality, one needs to be dressaged to conform to the accepted norms and models. Dressage puts into place automatic repetitions, fulfilling the place of the unforeseen and the initiative of living being, and it determines the majority of rhythms (Lefebvre, 2004). This too, is related to relieving anxieties and avoiding contradictions – something to simplify everyday life.

Rhythms can be divided into “rhythms of the self”, which are mostly turned towards private life, are quieter and more intimate, and “rhythms of the other”, which are activities turned outwards, towards the public, they are more restrained and formalised. Those are entangled with each other and there are multiple transitions between the two poles: think of the bedroom, the house, the street and the town, or the immediate family, the extended family, neighbourhood and the city (Lefebvre & Régulier, 2004b).

The rhythms of the self (for individuals, groups, families etc.) tend to resent the rhythms of the other, refusing homogeneity and centrality – each group, each entity, each religion and each culture considers itself the centre, a producer of rhythms in social time. However, rhythms of the other keep coming back to that which refused them, and when they manage to make rhythms of the self impossible, then total crisis – arrhythmia – breaks out (Lefebvre & Régulier, 2004b). In the Milk Uprising the rhythms of the other are those that involve Arla’s milk, and the rhythms of the self, for example drinking Skånemejerier, are made impossible when that milk is no longer available for some consumers, creating chaos in their life.

## 2.3 Structuration Theory

Structuration theory was developed by Anthony Giddens and outlined mainly in *The Constitution of Society* (1984). It aims to desert the dualism of structure that is often present in social theory – a division between objectivism and subjectivism – and see it instead as a duality (Giddens, 1984). The leading idea is that human social activities are continuously recreated by social actors via the same means with which they express themselves as actors; i.e. through their activities agents reproduce the conditions that make the activities possible (Giddens, 1984).

According to structuration theory, all humans are knowledgeable agents who know about the conditions and consequences of their everyday actions (Giddens, 1984). This knowledge is largely embedded in “practical consciousness”, which carries all the tacit knowledge of actors about how to go about in the contexts of social life, without being able to express it discursively (Giddens, 1984). Actors can usually also discursively describe what they do and why, but this rationalisation mostly goes unnoticed, until someone asks the individual why they did what they did. And such questions are normally asked only if the behaviour departs from convention or the regular habits of the individual (Giddens, 1984). The tacit knowledge of Scanian people included drinking Skånemejerier’s milk, but it was the Milk Uprising that triggered the need to justify this kind of action. In a situation where they would all of a sudden either have to drink some other milk or stop drinking it, people came to producing reasons for their regular behaviour.

This knowledgeability is on the one side bordered by the unconscious – the motives, the wants that prompt particular action, which are not easily reported by actors – and on the other side by the unacknowledged conditions and unintended consequences of action, which can feed back into further acts and therefore have significance for system reproduction. For behaviour to be considered action, it must have been intentional, even if all of its consequences were not (Giddens, 1984). The strong reaction of the consumers was an example of unintentional consequences that the retailers did not expect, but their move to downsize Skånemejerier was nevertheless an action that was enforced knowingly.

An important notion is that agency does not refer to the intentions that individuals have when doing things, but the capability to do those things at all (Giddens, 1984). That in turn is related to the ability to exercise power, which in Giddens’ view is “the means of getting things done” (1984, p. 175). If power is to persist in social systems over space and time, there needs to be some regulation of the relations of autonomy and dependence between actors or groups in contexts of social interaction. Giddens claims that all forms of dependence still provide resources for the subordinate to affect the activities of the superior; this is what he calls *dialectic of control* in social systems (Giddens, 1984).

Structure is what enables similar social practices to exist across time and space and makes them systematic (Giddens, 1984). It consists of rules and resources which are used in producing and reproducing social action, and at the same time also the means of system reproduction – this constitutes the duality of structure. As opposed to a lot of other sociologists (starting with Durkheim) who see structural properties as something that constrain action, structuration theory claims that due to the duality of structure and agency, structure is always both enabling and constraining at the same time (Giddens, 1984). The social practice of drinking Skånemejerier represents such a cycle: people drink it because it is there, and it is there because people drink it.

According to Giddens (1984), institutions are the social practices with the greatest time-space span. Studying the everyday life is a part of analysing the reproduction of institutionalised practices. Everyday conduct is governed by rules of social life, which are basically techniques applied in the enactment and reproduction of social practices, and awareness of such rules forms the core of the knowledgeability of agents. Structure cannot exist independently from the knowledge of actors about what they do in their day-to-day activity (Giddens, 1984). The duality of structure also means that daily routines and societal institutions reproduce each other.

Routine is the basic element of everyday social activity, fulfilling the task to reduce unconscious sources of anxiety and thereby enabling a sense of trust or ontological security to be sustained in social life (Giddens, 1984). Routinisation explains the order that stretches across time and space in human relationships, persisting even through large social change. When the taken-for-granted routines are disturbed, people might feel like victims of events they did not initiate, or get caught up in revolt (Giddens, 1984). This is just what happened in this particular case of everyday milk consumption. When consumers could not find their regular Scanian milk in their regular supermarket, their routines were disturbed and a revolt was started.

## **2.4 Summary of Theories**

We have presented the three main theories that will be used in our analysis. Lefebvre's (2004) rhythmanalysis and Giddens' (1984) structuration theory help us interpret this case, since they both carry a similar idea that chaos breaks out when the normal everyday routines and rhythms are interrupted. From rhythmanalysis we find the angle that repetition, which largely determines everyday rhythms, is related to being able to belong to societies and groups. Structuration theory, in turn, provides the view that the rules and resources that govern social action are both constraining and enabling human action.

As a tool in the analysis process we will use Barthes' (2009) ideas on mythologies. A myth is basically a sign where the relationship between the signifier and the signified is not as arbitrary as in language, and is constructed by people based on analogies from

history. Myths aim to create immediate impressions not rational explanations, with the purpose to simplify and make things appear natural even though they are not. In the Milk Uprising case myths appear to be one of the main constructs that allow us to explore hidden meanings and therefore the reasons behind the unexpected consumer behaviour. The different myths embedded in the case of the Milk Uprising will be linked to theories of the everyday to uncover what milk means to consumers.

## 3 Method

*The theoretical framework together with the nature of the case and our research question have shaped our selection of research philosophy into an interpretive epistemology and constructivist ontology. In this chapter we explain, discuss and argue for our choice of methodology, which constructs the basis of this study. The chapter proceeds with describing how we have collected our data and presenting hermeneutics as our strategy for data analysis to answer the research question. Further, the quality of the study will be discussed, and the ethical issues related to it as well as the most important limitations will be acknowledged and motivated.*

### 3.1 Research Philosophy and Strategy

Most debates among philosophers concern matters of *ontology* and *epistemology*. Ontology refers to the nature of reality and existence whereas epistemology is about the best ways of enquiring into the nature of the world. Ontologically this study takes a nominalist approach, assuming there is no truth and social reality is only created by people through language and discourse (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). The nominalist ontology is most fitting with constructionist epistemology. It focuses on the ways that people make sense of the world especially through sharing their experiences with others via the medium of language. The aim is therefore to understand and appreciate the different experiences that people have, rather than searching for external causes and fundamental laws to explain behaviour (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012).

Since the research question is *why*, which in terms of epistemology guides us to social constructivism, it is most appropriate to use qualitative data. Qualitative research often takes an inductive approach, focusing on generating theories through research (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Although the inductive approach broadly means attempting to move from research to theory, this is not so straightforward – theory is used as a background for qualitative investigations (Bryman & Bell, 2015) and often an iterative approach is adopted with weaving back and forth between theory and data (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012; Eisenhardt, 1989; Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Our research is inductive in its nature, but we argue that using knowledge of some theories to structure our data collection process is beneficial since it helps to expand our view and enable us to notice and include aspects into our study that we otherwise might not have paid attention to. We see and use our preconceptions as a frame of reference rather than a source of bias, as noted by Gadamer (1975, cited in Thompson, Pollio & Locander, 1994). With that said, we are very open to aspects that do not fit with those theories, or our own world view for that matter. We use the data to generate concepts

and links for new theory, and return from the theory to data to collect more interpretations, more material. This is how we aim to uncover underlying meanings and make sense of the empirical material.

## 3.2 Research Design

We have chosen to study mundane consumption by analysing a spectacular and unique case, which seems like quite a paradox. As previously highlighted by Warde (2015), the significance of the everyday is missed as long as it remains mundane and unglamorous. Therefore, we propose that it is beneficial to examine an inconspicuous phenomenon when it has all of a sudden become conspicuous. Behind this is the idea presented by Alvesson and Kärreman (2007) that theory development benefits from examining the instances where the alignment of theoretical assumptions and empirical impressions breaks down so that something unanticipated and unexpected happens. A really interesting breakdown means that an empirical “finding” cannot easily be accounted for by available theory; however, not all breakdowns allow the construction of a “real” mystery. A mystery might be defined as a breakdown that has high potential to contribute to theory (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007).

Alvesson and Kärreman (2007) present the research process of mystery-focused research as one that consecutively discovers a breakdown, deems that breakdown interesting, finds that existing literature cannot explain it and detects signs of mystery that stand up to closer scrutiny. They suggest that a contribution will be made regardless of success in solving the mystery: if solved, the mystery together with the solution shall be presented as contribution; if not solved, only the mystery itself will be contribution. In our case we start out from where a mystery has appeared and therefore our contribution must lie in trying to solve that mystery.

We argue that this case, where consumer reaction was extremely unique and not at all in line with consumer decision-making theories surrounding low-involvement products, implies that there is something hidden and mysterious about mundane consumption, which is not really visible when everyday life flows in its normal rhythm. This case of the Milk Uprising is particularly interesting in itself because it is not just a general thing that happens every now and then. Flyvbjerg (2006) notes that atypical or even extreme cases can provide a much richer dataset than a typical case or a random sample, particularly if the interest is in deeper causes and consequences of a problem as opposed to the occurrence of its symptoms.

We do not claim that nothing like this can happen to any other mundane product than milk, but another paradox should be noted here – if a similar thing happens to another type of product but there is no consumer reaction, then there is no signal that the

mundane hides more than solely meets the eye. In short, there is no mystery. That is why we consider it worthwhile to study this particular case of milk.

We expect a case study of the Milk Uprising to provide very rich insights and data in the field of mundane consumption, which both researchers and practitioners can learn from in the future. We aim to study the meanings that milk has for consumers, as implicated by its symbolic value and surrounding myths, to an extent that it causes such a high a level of engagement with a mundane consumption item. Therefore, the primary object of study are the consumers and the analysis will be done on an individual level.

### **3.3 Data Collection**

What differentiates a case study design from other research designs is “the focus on a bounded situation or system, an entity with a purpose and functioning parts” (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 68). When conducting a case study, it is advisable to use a combination of different qualitative data collection methods and thus avoid relying on one single approach (Knights & McCabe, 1997, cited in Bryman & Bell, 2015). We have chosen to gather our empirical material through interviews and netnography. With the interviews we can guide what kind of material we get, for example ask questions that are most relevant. It must be noted though that the interviews are retrospective and concern events that took place several years ago. The netnography, on the other hand, mirrors people’s thoughts and feelings as they were expressed at the time of the Uprising. Therefore, the two methods complement each other and provide us with a rich set of empirical material to analyse.

#### **3.3.1 Interviews**

Qualitative interviewing, which allows to “collect information that captures the meaning and interpretation of phenomenon in relation to the interviewee’s worldview” (Kvale, 1996, cited in Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012, p. 253), is clearly one of the most suitable methods of data collection for this study. Furthermore, qualitative interviews are flexible and open up for further questions in the direction the interview develops, since the interviewer is not so tied to an interview guide as in quantitative studies (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This is very important since the focus of this study is to explore the consumers’ minds about a specific case and the possibility to continue further on the most interesting tracks is needed to enable rich, detailed answers. The interviews will be semi-structured to keep a balance between the flexibility (to choose when to probe some aspects further and when to move away from certain lines of inquiry) and structure (to maintain that all topics that are relevant to the issue will be covered) (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012).



A critique to unstructured and open interviews is that although they allow to get as much information from the interviewee as possible, this can also be a limitation for the researchers' future analysis. Having an unstructured interview opens up for the researchers' own interpretations of the answers, and hence will likely put the answers in relation to their own opinions while coding, and the research may be biased if the researchers are not aware of this at all times during the analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Alternatively to the broadly accepted view that interviews are good for obtaining a rich account of the interviewee's experiences, knowledge, ideas, and impressions, Alvesson (2003, p. 14) warns that an interviewee might not always be "a competent and moral truth teller, acting in the service of science and producing the data needed to reveal his or her "interior"". The interview situation is socially, linguistically, and subjectively rich and complex and can encompass various notions for the interviewee such as communication of facts and experiences, political action, script following, and impression management. Alvesson therefore underlines the need for a "reflexive pragmatist approach". Reflexivity means considering several of those interpretations in order to avoid traps and/or produce rich and varied results, while pragmatism means putting aside some doubt and still using the material for the best possible purpose(s). In short, he suggests the possibility that what is conventionally seen as source of bias that needs to be minimised can actually provide interpretations of its own (Alvesson, 2003). We consider this an idea worth taking into account and will try to see behind the words that people use in an interview and to give alternative interpretations to their answers.

Lastly, we must also take into account that our interview outcomes may depend on people's memories. The case took place about seven years ago and it is normal that the interviewees do not remember all the details. However, the likelihood of remembering is increased by the fact that this case was so unusual. We are sure that regardless of the time that has passed the informants are still able to give rich insights and therefore it is no reason to disregard this method or the case altogether. Furthermore, getting all the details straight is not the most important thing here, since we are really interested in the different stories and what they tell us – following Alvesson's idea, the fact that the stories will divert from reality provides an opportunity for another dimension of interpretations.

For this study we gathered data with seven qualitative interviews, mostly in April 2016. The respondents have been chosen by theoretical sampling to increase the likelihood of getting rich and detailed insights (see Table 1 for an overview of the respondents). Three interviews were made with consumers who in one way or another were key figures in the uprising, two with representatives of Skånemejerier, one with a representative of Coop and one with a representative of academia. Five interviews were done face-to-face with both researchers present and lasted around one hour. The interview with Sture Johansson was done by the researchers via email according to the respondent's wish; and the interview with Caroline Olsson was conducted by Ulf Johansson, Professor in Business Administration at Lund University, in October 2013.

**Table 1.** Interview respondents

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Representing</b>	<b>Role</b>
Docent Håkan Jönsson	Academia (Lund University)	Ethnographer with a focus on consumption, food and meals, and culinary tourism; PhD dissertation and articles on the cultural analysis of milk
Mats Genberg	Consumers	PR professional, started the Facebook group “Coop sucks! Sell Scanian milk in Scania”
Ingrid Jönsson	Consumers	Vegetable farmer and working with information about agriculture in schools for the Farmer’s Association in Scania, started protesting and distributing leaflets outside her local City Gross
Ingvar Willander	Consumers	Manager of the dairy section in an ICA shop, started the website “YES to Skånemejerier!”
Anna Radelius	Skånemejerier	Current Brand Communication Manager and at the time of the revolt the Project Manager of Action Marketing
Caroline Olsson	Skånemejerier	Marketing Director
Sture Johansson	Coop	Marketing Director of Coop Kristianstad Blekinge Ktf

### 3.3.2 Netnography

A netnographic study is tailored to examine communities that have an exclusive online existence (Kozinets, 2010; Kozinets, 2012, cited in Bryman & Bell, 2015) and can unfold the underlying thoughts and values within a consumer’s mind when in a group. A netnography can be used to find out the tone of voice and the argumentation of the debate. It can also show the behavioural intention and commitment behind their choices. The study will include observations of posts in relevant forums and Facebook groups concerning the Milk Uprising, to be able to get information on symbolism, meanings and consumption patterns (Kozinets, 2002) and further see shared ideas, questions and argumentations in the discussion regarding consumers’ view on milk.

As opposed to interviews, netnography is a more naturalistic (Bryman & Bell, 2015) and unobtrusive way of gathering information. Especially with regard to how consumers interact with each other, as an example stated in Kozinets (2002), marketers are increasingly recognising the importance of the internet and studying consumers who are active in online communities. Since this study aims to explore what happened during the

Milk Uprising and why the consumers reacted like they did, it is of relevance to be aware of one of the major factors that influence a brand's positive brand equity over other brands, namely consumer advocacy. Online forums are therefore a great way of studying the context in which consumers partake in discussions where their goal is to inform and influence fellow consumers future purchase decisions (Kozinets, 1999; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, cited in Kozinets, 2002).

Netnography is a narrower version of the better known method ethnography, since it focuses only on communities that appear online, and it is therefore not possible to apply or generalise the findings to similar offline communities. Linked to generalisability is also the lack of identifiers of informants online, as it is easy to fake your age, gender and where you come from. In this case, it is not a big problem, since we are not interested in looking at different consumer characteristics in our analysis. A different issue is that people may not entirely be themselves on social media and in forums, or be very restrictive with what they share (Kozinets, 2002). Hence, researchers must consequently be mindful about what they are analysing, and make sure to analyse the content of the communicative acts themselves rather than quantify everything consumers do in a particular community.

The netnographic material for this study was gathered from two Facebook groups, four relevant forum threads on different forums, and ten relevant blog posts from different blogs together with the related comments. The sources are listed in the appendix.

### **3.4 Method of Analysis**

To understand the underlying meanings in the material that we use in this study, we adopt a hermeneutic approach. A crucial point in hermeneutics is the hermeneutic circle: the part can only be understood from the whole and the whole only from these parts. Linguistic expression and acts must be understood in the socio-historical context of the actors and the researcher has to use intuition to interpret the underlying meanings of the agents' expressions (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2007). As Thompson, Pollio and Locander (1994) point out, consumer behaviour takes place within a multifaceted network of cultural influences such as social settings, rituals, mass media images, product symbolism, cultural ideals, gender roles, and religious and ethnic traditions, etc. Therefore, we need to take these settings into account when trying to understand consumer behaviour.

A second, complementary hermeneutic circle happens between understanding and pre-understanding (Thompson, Pollio & Locander, 1994; Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2007). We enter analysis with some pre-understanding of relevant theories and through the analysis of our data we create new understanding. This requires moving back and forth between theory and data, as was explained previously. The researchers ask questions to

the text and listen to it in a dialogic form (Caputo, 1987, cited in Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2007) and questions targeted at the whole alternate with questions targeted at the parts (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2007). We seek for answers about the particular case of the Milk Uprising as well as the socio-historical context that it took place in.

It is important to discuss arguments as well as counter-arguments in order to reach the most plausible result, and account for different interpretations or at least the possibility of different interpretations (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2007). This is in line with the previous notion on interviews that there can be multiple other concepts than “presenting the truth” (from the interviewee’s point of view) that step into the interview process. We will pay great attention to interpret the text – and that also applies to the netnographic material we analyse – from different angles, in which our eclectic approach to theories will help us.

We perform a thematic analysis on our material in the form of interview transcripts and online interactions. We code it into topics, connecting those to more overarching topics again and again, so we discover the underlying themes that allow us to answer our research question, using theory iteratively in the process (see Bryman & Bell, 2015). As our approach is hermeneutic, we interpret the same text from different angles, meaning that it might be categorised into several different topics. Also, we pay attention to look at the parts of text in relation to the whole and account for its context.

## **3.5 The Quality of the Study**

One of the key limitations in qualitative research is the lack of reliability and validity as they relate to quantitative research; however, there has been a discussion concerning the relevance of those two concepts in qualitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2015), and alternative criteria have been proposed. Lincoln and Cuba (1985, cited in Bryman & Bell, 2015) pose that reliability and validity standards assume there is an absolute truth to be discovered, but since this is generally not the assumption in social research, they instead suggest trustworthiness and authenticity as general measures of quality for qualitative studies.

### **3.5.1 Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is made up by four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Cuba, 1985, cited in Bryman & Bell, 2015). The research has to have credibility, e.g. the researcher must give a plausible account of an aspect of social reality (Bryman & Bell, 2015) Therefore, triangulation – a combination of different methods and sources of data – is used (Bryman & Bell, 2015). A challenge with our study is that years have passed from the case and we might not be able to reconstruct it fully

due to the lack of material: the different actors' memories have faded somewhat, online entries may have been removed by their authors. However, our main aim is not to reconstruct the case as a sequence of facts that present what "really" happened. We are looking for different perspectives and narratives, and for this there is still a rich set of material available.

Transferability refers to the potential to apply the findings to another context or even the same context at another time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Bryman & Burgess, 2015). To achieve this, we aim to provide a thick description of the case, which will allow the reader to make judgements about how applicable the results could be in different contexts. Providing a thick description is also aided by triangulation.

Dependability is related to following proper procedures during the research so that any theoretical conclusions would be justified (Bryman & Burgess, 2015). We strive for this by keeping full records of all of our data as well as detailed documentation of the research procedures, so that it would be available for "auditing" by fellow researchers if necessary.

Confirmability is largely related to reflexivity of the researcher, as it should be clearly shown that the researcher has not allowed personal values or theoretical standpoints to divert the course of the research and thus affect the results (Bryman & Burgess, 2015). To this end we strive to be as objective as possible, even though we acknowledge the fact that in qualitative studies it is virtually impossible for the researcher to have no effect whatsoever on the research process – be it data collection, interpretation or drawing conclusions. As a team of two we aim to be reflexive both towards ourselves as well as each other, and continuously observe whether we are doing our best to decrease our influence on the research process.

### **3.5.2 Authenticity**

The criteria of authenticity relate to the wider political impact of research. The main point is that research should be fair, so that the different viewpoints of the members of the social settings are included. Arguably, the results should help the members understand their social setting better as well as appreciate the different perspectives of other members; it should furthermore give both incentives and power to the members to take action to change their circumstances (Bryman & Burgess, 2015). It can happen that the research data and results will be used out of context to strengthen the case of one group against another, as noted by Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2012).

In this case there is the threat that some parties of the Milk Uprising might be made to look like the villain. That is because the main focus of the case is on the consumers of the brand Skånemejerier, and not on the retailers or competitor brands. There is a risk that this side will not be fairly represented, even though the aim of this study is neither to

put blame on any party nor to illustrate conflicts within the industry. In this case the major political issue is related to the question of who is being heard: is it the milk farmers, milk drinkers, engaged consumers or habitual consumers, or is it the big corporation, the supplier, or the retailer? To attain results as objective as possible and that show a fair view of the situation, we collect information from key participants that can represent different sides of the case.

### **3.6 Ethical Issues**

We are aware that our research, like most other, might include problems related to ethics. Bryman and Bell (2015) point out the main types of ethical issues that can occur in research: harm to participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy, and deception. There is no intentional deception in this study, but the other three issues are somewhat more likely to appear.

In this study, the interviewees are informed about the purpose of the study and will have given their consent to be interviewed. However, we also conduct netnography, where we will not ask for consent from the participants to use their expressions of opinion. That is because the platforms we include are public – public Facebook groups and forums, public comments under blog articles etc. so we expect the authors to be prepared that their opinions might spread outside of the group with which they were initially shared.

As for privacy issues, we do not consider the topic of the research very sensitive in general; however, we acknowledge that this might be evaluated differently by some people. Also, it can sometimes be hard to know where to draw the line between being curious and being intrusive. Unconsciously there is a risk to step on someone's feet by asking questions that the interviewee may be offended by. Therefore, we take care to respect every participant's right to decline answering certain questions or to withdraw from the study at any moment if they feel continuing would be uncomfortable. We also make sure to stress the point of the study – to understand what is behind a mysterious phenomenon, not to judge who was right and wrong.

Harm can also be done, for example, if the interview questions for some reason should cause stress to the participants. We believe this to be unlikely with this case and topic, but just in case use a strategy to fade into more specific sub-themes gradually to probe the respondents and drop lines of inquiry that seem to cause them stress or discomfort. Also, since semi-structured interviews will be used, having thought through which sub-topics to cover minimises the risk of putting excess burden on the respondent by asking about things that will not be used in the analysis later.

## 3.7 Limitations

Problems relating to our methods of data collection have been discussed in previous sections, but we also want to point out some general weaknesses that follow from the research design we have chosen. Since we are conducting a qualitative study, the two main issues are researcher involvement and generalisability.

### 3.7.1 Researcher Involvement

One of the most common critiques to qualitative research is that it is too subjective and relies on unsystematic views of what is important and significant to study (Bryman & Bell, 2015). To put it differently, there is a worry that the researchers are building the results too much on their own interpretations. As Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2012) underline, it is crucial to think about reflexivity – the role of the researchers and their effect on the research process, which is particularly important with the social constructionist approach that we are using.

Since qualitative research assumes that meanings are constantly negotiated through interaction in the social world, the researcher inevitably takes part in constructing those meanings when interacting with the respondent (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). Therefore, it can be hard to disentangle the researcher's perspective from the study subject's perspective, and the researcher's perspective also affects what and how he or she sees (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Silverman (2000, cited in Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012) also notes the threat of the researcher picking evidence out of the mass of data to support their particular prejudices.

Therefore, we strive to be straightforward and transparent about our role in the construction of interpretations, and we do not attempt to claim that we have discovered the truth, the "real reality". We will pay great attention to reflexivity, i.e. continuous awareness and attention to how different linguistic, social, political and theoretical elements are integrated into new knowledge through constructing, interpreting and writing new empirical material (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000, cited in Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). We deliberately and regularly take a step back and ask ourselves the following questions proposed by Alvesson and Kärreman (2007, p. 1270): "Can I construct/make sense of this material in another way than suggested by the preferred perspective/vocabulary? Can I let myself be surprised by this material? Can it productively and fairly be constructed in a way that kicks back at my framework and how we – in my research community – typically see and interpret things?"

### **3.7.2 Generalisability**

Case study research is often associated with an inductive approach, which is also true for our case of studying the Milk Uprising. Although ideally inductive research leads to new theories, it has been noted that this is not always the case and often researchers end up with mere empirical generalisations (Bryman & Bell, 2015), or just theories about specific phenomena and no “grand” theory (Eisenhardt, 1989). The quality of theoretical reasoning can be a challenge in case studies – how well is the researcher able to generate theory out of the findings and support the theoretical arguments with data (Mitchell, 1983; Yin, 1984, both cited in Bryman & Bell, 2015)? That poses a general threat to our aim to make an academic contribution, and particularly to the possibility to apply our findings to other contexts.

The most important critique on case study research has evolved around the external validity or generalisability of the study. The discussion brings out that one single case cannot possibly be representative enough (Bryman & Bell, 2015). However, some researchers claim that even though they are mainly interested in the details of one single event, they can achieve some degree of theoretical generalisation based on the case, generate concepts and give meaning to abstract propositions (Kanter, 1977, cited in Bryman & Bell, 2015). This connects back to what was discussed in the previous sections, that the measures of quality for qualitative research are not the same as for quantitative. The goal for case study research is to focus on the uniqueness of the case and to understand its complexity, and generalisations drawn from it will be theoretical not statistical.

We will return to a discussion of the generalisability and transferability of our particular findings in the concluding chapter.



## 4 Case Background

*In this chapter we will present the background of the dairy industry in Sweden to give context to the case, and then give an overview of the case itself as well as the main companies concerned, Skånemejerier, Coop and Arla.*

### 4.1 The Dairy Industry in Sweden

Jönsson and Lindqvist (2010) give a detailed overview of what the dairy market in Sweden has been like over the past decades, that leads up to the case that is studied in this thesis. When Sweden entered the EU in 1994 the Swedish food industry became like other markets exposed to international competition. More and more brands were available on the shelves and for most goods the consumers seemed positive towards the new situation, that led to more choices and lower prices. However, there was one exception – the milk.

In most stores there were only four variations of milk; mini, light, middle and standard and they all came from the same dairy company. This is how it had always been and it looked like it was going to stay that way – at least for the first years after the EU-entry. The different dairy cooperatives had divided the country between each other. Skånemejerier had monopoly in the very south, Arla in the south and middle part of Sweden and more north there were Milko, Gefleortens Mejeriförening and Norrmejerier. They had agreements that said that they should not compete on each other's core markets, and they even had cooperatively owned national companies for products such as juice and butter.

In the periphery changes were to be noticed, Swedish Arla merged with the Danish MD Foods in 2000. The new company Arla Foods became one of the biggest European dairy companies, with over 90 percent of the Danish market and 60 percent of the Swedish and was also active on other European markets. Skånemejerier was stuck between the Swedish and Danish parts of Arla, and with certain worry they had realised the fact that Arla was about 20 times bigger.

The first sign of competition on the milk market did not come from within the country but from abroad. In 2000 an attempt on launching Danish milk in some Scanian stores to a much lower price was made, but was met with sceptical reactions and the attempt was abandoned after six months.

## 4.2 The Milk Uprising

Almost seven years ago, in 2009, the Swedish food retailer Coop made a settlement with the corporation Arla Foods to be the only milk supplier, thus decided to stop selling milk from the southern Swedish brand Skånemejerier. This agreement forced Skånemejerier to major downsizing as Arla became the main supplier of milk in the supermarket Coop. This situation meant that Skånemejerier had to let around 200 employees go and lost 15 million kilos of milk per year and five percent of the total production (ATL, 2009).

It initially started already in September-October, 2008 with the food retailer City Gross taking Skånemejerier's milk off the shelves and replacing it with Arla's milk. Some dedicated consumers (Ingrid Jönsson, her husband and neighbour) got together around the kitchen table and decided to make a protest by handing out flyers to every shopper that was passing by the parking lot of City Gross (interview with Ingrid Jönsson, April 5, 2016). One by one dissatisfied customers started with their own protest initiatives, however the media coverage was poor and the protests did not reach its full magnitude. Until Coop also decided to stop selling the milk brand, then the consumers became extremely upset which was not something that the retailer had expected and an outrageous revolution started amongst the consumers.

Petitions and solicitations started circulating on Facebook and were quickly filled with tens of thousands of signatures from Scanian sympathisers. Two examples of this internet revolution was the Facebook group "*Coop suger fett! Sälj skånsk mjölk i Skåne*" (Coop sucks! Sell Scanian milk in Scania") created by the PR-consultant Mats Genberg and the webpage "*JA till Skånemejerier*" ("Yes to Skånemejerier") that was created by three employees working at the competitor supermarket ICA. Some of the consumers even threatened to boycott the food retailers City Gross and Coop (Elmberg, 2009).

These online initiatives started spiralling and by the end of the uproar they managed to engage about 15,000 people on Facebook and around 65,000 on the petition website. In 2009 that was not very common due to the fact that Facebook was still new to many and the number of companies that existed on social media at that time was small. People did not yet understand how to use the internet as a marketing tool.

One of the reasons behind the supply shift of milk was that Arla was supposed to have a larger ecological assortment range than Skånemejerier, since a lot of consumers request ecological products nowadays. Other products from Skånemejerier, such as yoghurt, were still sold; it was only the milk that was missing in the shelves in the two supermarkets. Even though Skånemejerier had a lesser assortment of ecological milk before, they are now investing largely on ecologically labelled milk (Elmberg, 2009). Many of the local Coop and City Gross supermarkets could not handle the consumer pressure and the many requests of bringing Skånemejerier's milk back on the shelves led to milder consequences for Skånemejerier than they initially had predicted.

## 4.3 Company Profiles

### 4.3.1 Skånemejerier

Skånemejerier started as a financial cooperative in 1964, owned by its farmers; around 600 milk farmers in the southern part of Sweden and the region Scania in particular supply their dairy factories with milk. In 2012 Skånemejerier went from being a co-operative to becoming a holding company when the shares were sold to the French dairy corporation *Groupe Lactalis*. Skånemejerier produces a variety of different dairy products and fruit drinks, but milk is undoubtedly their core product (Skånemejerier, 2009).

The company's business idea is to "offer the conscious consumer dairy products that contribute to health and quality of life. To every day capture the flexibility of the small company and the personal engagement in the entire value-chain is what makes Skånemejerier competitive on the market." (Skånemejerier, n.d.)

In Skånemejerier's interim report from 2009 the CEO Björn Sederblad began with presenting one of the best interim results in the dairy company's history and thanked their loyal customer who made it possible. He continued the report by stating that Skånemejerier has developed into a very strong brand during the past year, not only in Scania but also in other parts of Sweden and in Denmark. Moreover, the report brings up the tough times during the event of the uprising and the hard pressure from their biggest competitor. They lost large volumes in their core market and in only a few months almost half of the turnover was gone.

After the consumer revolt in 2009, 91.2 percent of the sold milk in Scania came from Skånemejerier. Skånemejerier further entered into partnership with the small dairy producer Hjordnära Ekologiska Mejeri to meet the demand of ecological, local quality products (Skånemejerier, 2009). Skånemejerier had twelve percent of the shares of the Swedish milk deliveries in 2010, Arla Foods Sweden had 64 percent, Milko ten percent and the rest was divided among smaller dairy companies (Lukkarinen & Lannhard Öberg, 2012).

### 4.3.2 Coop Sweden

The food retailer Coop is a co-operatively owned company and is mostly owned by "Kooperativa förbundet, KF" and "Konsumentföreningen Stockholm, KFs" that hold 67 and 33 percent of the ownership, respectively. There are 659 Coop stores in Sweden and they are owned by 3.4 million members in 32 consumer associations. Coop or KF as it was called back in 1899 when it all started, is based on the idea of good food in good stores to a good price, an idea that is still the baseline of Coop today.

The organisation states that they are protective against the environment and health, and that the business should always be in tune with what the members prioritise and request (Coop, n.d.). Furthermore, their promise is “Better for you and your family” and their vision is defined as “The good power in the Swedish food retail industry”. On their webpage they claim that sustainability is part of their DNA, and that their aim is to be the company that set the agenda in the food retail industry, the good force. (Coop, n.d.).

Swedish retail industry had a turnover of about 600 billion SEK during 2009, where the general grocery industry held approximately 44 percent and the discretionary industry about 56 percent. The competition was continuously intensive in the industry, where the retail chain ICA dominated the market with approximately 50 percent market share. Coop has during many years been the second largest retailer and Axfood on third place. These three retail chains dominated the market with 88.1 percent in 2009. During 2009 Coop’s market share increased for the first time in many years. In the annual report from 2009 they state that they are moving from only actively working towards sustainability by doing a forceful effort on increasingly having a green profile. Further they state that as a member and employee one should be proud of Coop and KF (KF, 2009).

### **4.3.3 Arla Foods Sweden**

Arla Foods is one of the world’s largest dairy companies; it is originally a farmer-owned cooperative with a long history tracing back to 1915, owned by 3,838 Danish and 3,787 Swedish dairy farmers (Arla Foods, 2009). In 2000 the Swedish company Arla merged with the Danish dairy company MD Foods and became Arla Foods (Arla Foods, 2015a). Arla is now a global cooperation owned by milk farmers in Sweden, Denmark, Great Britain, Germany, Belgium and Luxemburg (Arla Foods, 2015b). Arla’s core brands are Arla, Lurpak, and Castello, and their core markets are Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Great Britain, Germany and the Netherlands. Today they are active in more than 30 countries, have over 19,000 employees (in 2015), 13,413 milk farmers (in 2014 (Arla Foods, 2015c), sales in more than 100 countries and 96.5 billion SEK in turnover (in 2014) (Arla Foods, 2016).

In 2009, the year of the Milk Uprising, Arla reported a turnover of DKK 46 billion, and a profit of DKK 971 million. In 2009 Arla had approximately 650 farms supplying them with organic milk (326 in Sweden, 294 in Denmark, 24 in Great Britain). Arla reports in their financial report from 2009 that the demand for organic products in Sweden was greater than the supply in 2009 (Arla Foods, 2009).

In 2009 their goal was to have proud members, although the year 2008/2009 was more turbulent than normal, the reason behind this is stated as trying hard to create a single culture in the company after the fusion in 2000. The chairman Ove Møberg states in the

chairman's report, "In the future we want to highlight local features even further. I want all members to be proud of Arla. Arla farmers should not refer to the company as "*them*" but as "*we*" – Arla is a company that belongs to its members, and they form part of the company's image." Especially in Sweden the supplied amount of milk to Arla and number of members is decreasing, while still the consumer demand for milk-based products is increasing. He furthermore expresses that this fall in numbers is unfortunate, because in order to further develop Arla would need as many dairy farmers with them as possible (Møberg, 2009, pp. 6–7).

## 5 Analysis

*In this chapter we present the analysis of the empirical material that we have gathered. We used myths as a tool to uncover hidden meanings in milk and therefore the chapter is structured based on the numerous myths that we identified.*

To answer our research question of why this Milk Uprising happened, we analysed a rich collection of empirical material consisting of interviews and netnographic material. We were looking at the meanings of milk to consumers to understand what motivated their unexpected actions, and it became evident to us how the whole case is studded with myths. As was presented earlier, there are myths about milk in general (see Barthes, 2009; Kristensen, Boye & Askegaard, 2010), but we found that the Milk Uprising involved myths that were constructed around milk in different ways and mirrored much more than people's relationship with milk per se. Milk, although an ordinary consumption item, became the mediator of other social and cultural myths. In particular, we found that a lot of the ideas of Giddens (1984) and Lefebvre (2004) took shape through those myths.

In our interview, Håkan Jönsson (April 5, 2016) opened up the cultural meaning of milk in Sweden (and Scandinavia altogether). According to him, one of the most important parts of the myth around milk in general is modernity. Paradoxically, milk drinking is often perceived as an ancient habit in Sweden, but it did not really become widespread before the onset of urbanisation and industrialisation. It became a symbol of the modern welfare state, connecting the interests of a lot of different groups. As Barthes (2009) used the comparison of milk and wine to illustrate how milk is seen as pure, innocent, calm and strong, covering and restoring, as opposed to wine which is "mutilating and surgical", Jönsson (interview, April 5, 2016) also uses the comparison of milk with alcoholic beverages. If alcohol can be seen as immoral and forbidden, even though it might be carried in ancient traditions, milk represents the correct way to live and be civilised – to be a decent modern citizen. So taking milk off the shelves can be said to rob people of the possibility to be modern and civilised.

However, here it was not the case that milk altogether would have been taken away from people. It was that to a certain community of people, the Scanians, there was a *right* milk and a *wrong* milk. The right milk was the milk of Skånemejerier – that was the good, useful, tasty, pure, nourishing milk that is the object of the general milk myth. The wrong milk was Arla's milk, which was disgusting, horrible and bad-tasting, not at all as milk should be. So morally, drinking Arla would be a bad and uncivilised way to live. But looking deeper, this was not about the milk really being different; it was perceived and constructed as different because of the myths that were built around milk but stretched far beyond it.

In our analysis we found two main themes that explained this differentiation. First, there is a myth of David vs Goliath with the good little guy fighting the big bad giant, and an

opposition to central decisions made by those in power. Second, there is a myth around cultural homogenisation, driven by the fear of losing the Scanian cultural identity and order and the perceived threat to “us” from “them”. All in all, our findings show how myths are used by consumers to convey meanings and sustain the sense of identity and community.

## **5.1 David and Goliath**

### **5.1.1 The Good, the Bad and the Ugly**

Studying this case of the Milk Uprising the involved companies clearly have different roles in the eyes of the consumers. These can be illustrated by the roles of the Good, the Bad and the Ugly, a representation that has been applied a number of times in academia (see e.g. Aaker, 1990; Dalby, 2015). Aaker (1990) uses it to explicate the negative, the positive and what helps the negative, whereas Dalby (2015) equates his discussion with an interpretation of the classic western movie: in the search for the gold, neither “the good” nor “the bad” have the whole story and “the ugly” will turn out to be decisive in determining how things play out.

In this case Skånemejerier is seen as the local, small, harmless company with a lot of goodwill; Arla is seen as the bad, evil and filthy villain with a hidden agenda and at first Coop was also seen as the bad guy but became more and more seen as the bad guy’s helper. There clearly exists myth building around the companies and their actions. These clear roles unleash the sentiment that it is the little, innocent guy versus the enormous, spiteful giant – just like in the Biblical story of David and Goliath. In that story the original intent is to show that David is the true king of Israel (Hays, 2005), and in the Milk Uprising it could be said that the intent is to show Skånemejerier as the “true king” of Scania. Therefore, there was a large amount of consumers on Skånemejerier’s side supporting David in the fight against Goliath.

As Barthes (2009) highlights, a myth creates an immediate impression, never mind it will be seen through later, because the action of the myth is assumed to be stronger than any rational explanations that may falsify this impression. This assumption is also supported by our empirical material and thus makes this strong myth a fitting theoretical concept used in the analysis. The myth-consumer sees the equivalence between the signifier and the signified as a natural and causal process and the system of signs is interpreted as facts. Like in this case, the myths around the companies may be true or false but in the eye of the consumer, the myth is a fact. That Arla is bad and Skånemejerier is good are evidently myths that have been created by humans and history. For the consumers in Scania the myth about Arla as the big bad giant and Skånemejerier as the small local guy gives justification and clarity by stating a “fact” that makes it easy for things to appear natural. Humans do this to simplify and organise the

world, and remove contradictions that could arise if one started to dig into the depth of things (Barthes, 2009).

### 5.1.1.1 The Good and Innocent

From the way that consumers call on each other to support Skånemejerier it is evident that the company is seen as the good guy and thus it is easy to identify with the small and weaker actor. It therefore becomes a powerful myth.

*“The hero was Skånemejerier, the smaller dairy company that stood up against Goliath and used the muscles they actually had by going in and helping other small companies. Like their ecological milk today is called Hjordnära, and Hjordnära is a small dairy company that Skånemejerier bought.”* (Interview with Mats Genberg, April 8, 2016)

Skånemejerier's milk as an object of myth obtains similar qualities as Barthes' (2009) milk because it is related to the good guy. It is seen as something very fine and useful, related to life, natural, and one consumer even called it holy. Its taste and even the package are idealised. Anna Radelius, one of the representatives from Skånemejerier (interview, April 5, 2016) points out that the most common word they hear consumers describe Skånemejerier with is safeness (in Swedish *trygghet*): they know what it is and they know what they get. The consumers are obviously furious that both City Gross and Coop have taken away their fine, Scanian milk. There seems to be a perception among the consumers that there is a right and a wrong milk, as Ingrid Jönsson (interview, April 5, 2016) mentioned telling her neighbour that he can come and have a cup of coffee with the *real* milk in it.

*“What is more holy than our Scanian milk? /.../ SCANIAN MILK IS LIFE!!!!”*  
(Linus, Coop suger fett...)

*“I am a big fan of Skånemejerier's 1 l milk for its wonderful taste and practical packaging and also love their Åsen milk with a similarly practical packaging as well as fine taste.”* (Peter G, Coop suger fett...)

But sometimes the myth of the good guy who needs support and protection is countered. The viewpoint that it should be Skånemejerier or nothing at all for Scanian people is not so taken-for-granted for some consumers. At the same time there is blame for “forcing” Scanian consumers to choose Arla, as Skånemejerier apparently cannot keep up with what the consumers demand. This is coupled with the attitude that Skånemejerier will get whatever it deserves, depending on how they act. Identified in the quotes below is also that Coop is being blamed for not selling Scanian milk while also giving a pointing finger to Skånemejerier to step up, so that the consumers do not have to buy Arla products. There is also a tendency of fear that Skånemejerier will go under.



*"I also think that it's crazy that Coop will not sell Scanian milk. Nevertheless, I think Skånemejerier should be criticised. For a long time, their yoghurt assortment has been so below the standard that even Scanian consumers have chosen Arla. They have also failed to get producers to go over to ecological production and have therefore been forced to "import" ecological milk from Middle-Sweden in order to meet the demand. Because of bad management they were even, in order to get money, forced to sell the whole juice production to Arla. Shape up Skånemejerier." (Gert-Olof, Coop suger fett...)*

*"It's a bit shoddy to only draw Coop into this when it is Skånemejerier who have served up the transition themselves by persistently offering less for milk than Arla. That us, Scanians, don't like Coop from the beginning is probably reason enough, but if one is to protest then it should be done in every rank and not just against Coop. Will be cool to see if Skånemejerier still exists in a year. I will still continue to buy Skånemejerier's products because I want to buy locally produced as much as possible. Arla will not come into my home! So wake up now, Skånemejerier, unless it's unfortunately already settled!" (André, Coop suger fett...)*

Not all consumers accept and reinforce the myth around Skånemejerier as something good and pure. Some question the authenticity of it and the knowledge of those who spread it. Also, the representative of Coop indicated that the myth around Skånemejerier being completely local brought about the strong reaction by the consumers (interview with Sture Johansson, April 15, 2016). This is evidence of what was brought out by Barthes (2009) that the consumers may be missing a blind spot when they justify their impressions with the myth and make it more natural and true than it actually is.

Thompson and Arsel (2004) highlight in their study about Starbucks being a hegemonic brand a similar thought to that of Barthes (2009) that these oppositional localists are on the one hand quick to deconstruct and criticise the design and model of Starbucks and local coffee shops that imitate this. On the other hand, they are not capable to turn a critical eye towards their favourite "bohemian establishments" and prefer to see these as "spontaneous expressions of communally shared social and political values". Due to this reflexive blind spot they will not confront a number of potential puzzles raised by "glocalisation", which according to Robertson (1992) is the adaptation of international products around the particularities of a local culture in which they are sold. Oxford Dictionaries (n.d.) defines glocalisation as "The practice of conducting business according to both local and global considerations. The process allows integration of local markets into world markets." In other words, this local coffee shop, or in this case dairy company with an aura of anti-establishment, may still run its business in a manner that differs from the social values of the oppositional localists, for example a local company with global or national expansion across borders. People questioning the authenticity of Skånemejerier are maybe seeing this blind spot with a critical eye that the oppositional localists miss. Interestingly, the myth of Skånemejerier being the good guy is so strong

that an act of buying up smaller dairies (like Hjordnära that now produces ecological milk for Skånemejerier) is seen as a positive, helping thing. Although they are doing a similar thing as Arla and other corporations, it is seen by the consumers in a totally different light.

*“Wasn’t it Skånemejerier who didn’t get enough milk when people started buying more and had to “import” milk from Norrland so it would suffice – not exactly the locally produced milk one thought they were buying then!! There was a lot about this in newspapers then, I believe it was Skånemejerier. (Edit) I checked – it was Skånemejerier’s ecological milk that was brought from Norrland...”* (Anki, Odlase forum)

*“Obviously the strong reaction from the consumers depended on that consumers were not aware of how it works in the dairy sector, i.e. that Skånemejerier’s products do not always come from Scanian farmers; it was believed that everything was “genuine Scanian”. Consumers didn’t know that there are Arla farmers in Scania and the other way around. They lived in the belief that everything that is produced by Skånemejerier comes from Skåne.”* (Interview with Sture Johansson, April 15, 2016)

However, the myth-busters seem to be aware that the myth is strong and that the myth-consumers might put up an aggressive defence of the myth. For instance, one myth-buster is trying to defend herself precisely by expressing that she does not want any wild opposition.

*“I don’t mean to create any wild discussion around this topic... But do you know that Skånemejerier buys milk from farmers who live in Gävle and southwards? It is not just Scanian milk like everybody believes... Just a little notion. But I do not want to get a lot of opposition. Just wanted to inform...”* (heleina, Kolhydrater iFokus forum)

Interestingly, the representatives of Skånemejerier bring out that it was the Milk Uprising that made them realise how strong their brand equity actually is among the consumers. Anna Radelius (interview, April 5, 2016) seemed astounded when she mentioned the surprising consumer action, “... it’s really really weird that the consumers would just stand up for the milk... It’s a low-engagement product definitely. So I don’t really know why they did it.” Further they discovered that their brand is very much equal to the farmers and it cannot be built without them. It is through the farmers that Skånemejerier is such a great part of the local identity in Scania. Everybody at least knows somebody who is or knows a farmer, and in that way the community is related. It was acknowledged that the consumer actions were not about saving the company as such, but saving the farmers.

*“It [the origin of the milk, locality] matters. It also depends on the consumers. And that’s something very unique for Skånemejerier’s consumers, they are very*

*loyal to the farmers, yes. ... because Scania is very small, so a lot of our consumers know a farmer or know someone who knows a farmer, or have someone in the family who is a farmer. I think that's also something that contributes to the loyalty. ... And in the end it really just exploded, with consumers standing up for the farmers, it was really more the farmers than the company as such. They just said "don't touch my milk!"*" (Interview with Anna Radelius, April 5, 2016)

*"I think we didn't know that it was that strongly attached to the farmers. We know it was the... For us it was more like the farmers that we get the milk from. This actually told us that the farmers equal the brand. We can't continue to build this brand without our farmers, we will always need them."* (Interview with Anna Radelius, April 5, 2016)

What is also noteworthy to bring out is that Skånemejerier had a secret weapon like David who had a sling and some stones – not the classical armour that Goliath was expecting. The secret weapon was in the shape of the consumers taking action to save their beloved milk brand. Several consumers contacted Coop in all possible ways in order to fight the decision. Ingrid Jönsson (interview, April 5, 2016) pointed out that she thought Skånemejerier had a special part in people's lives and that during this crisis people noticed it even more, that they had to have Skånemejerier milk. This insight can be related to Lefebvre's (2004) theory about the rhythms of self and the rhythms of others: when people cannot have what they always had and what they are used to related to their own rhythms, chaos breaks out. This is what Ingrid Jönsson (interview, April 5, 2016) points out as the reason why people acted like they did. Håkan Jönsson (interview, April 5, 2016) argues that this Milk Uprising became such a big thing because of social media and not because angry consumers were protesting outside the stores. He highlighted in the interview that one of the key things that made this rebellion succeed was that it was the first time the internet was used as a political tool, a new medium, and the consumers managed to force the retail chains to back and by that fought the central power.

*"So a lot of consumers became angry... they bought up milk and poured it out outside Coop supermarkets. But it would probably not have been such upheaval as it was if it wasn't for the new phenomena at the time – of social media, of Facebook. And that you can create this kind of Facebook group – we who want to drink Scanian milk. It was a massive thing and forced the retail chains to go back. So yes, that was basically the story."* (Interview with Håkan Jönsson, April 5, 2016)

*"... I think that the consumers, they actually thought "Yes, we can do something" and that's the important thing I think. That they realised that everyone can do something."* (Interview with Ingrid Jönsson, April 5, 2016)

The consumers had the important role and power of choosing who to endorse in this case, according to Mats Genberg (interview, April 8, 2016) "... they were the ones standing there on the scale and they could walk left or right and decide where to tip, and I think that was something that they really felt that they made a difference the consumers and they could see the results".

According to Anna Radelius (interview, April 5, 2016) this consumer action and the unified consumer group really supported the farmers actually more than Skånemejerier. With the Facebook group this rebellion got viral and consumers put their foot down standing behind the farmers in the periphery in the battle against Coop's centralised decisions in Stockholm.

*"... I know there were three or four different groups but his really got viral and spread, and through that group as well they arranged some demonstrations around Scania, with the farmers. And in the end it really just... exploded, with consumers standing up for the farmers, it was really more the farmers than the company as such. They just said "don't touch my milk! This is what I want to buy and you don't get to decide, or I'll go to another store". (Interview with Anna Radelius, April 5, 2016)*

Moreover, the consumers are disappointed by how Coop was acting and communicating, their previous trust in the company working *for* their consumers has changed. They question Coop's argumentation and doubt whether Arla actually has a wider assortment of ecological products than Skånemejerier, by making it look ridiculous and using irony. If Goliath does not even have more to offer than David, then why would you not support David?

*"What is missing? Coop are saying that they have a better eco-assortment than SM. But what is it that is missing? Ecological oat soured milk with wolf taste? Ecological 3,7% liquorice-vanilla yoghurt? Or? Tips?" (Mats, Coop suger fett...)*

*"... I agree. SM has really invested in their ecological product the last couple of years... I strongly doubt that Arla is the one with the widest ecological dairy product assortment... One could wonder if Arla is ready to also take over Scania." (Niclas, Coop suger fett...)*

However, some consumers are sceptical whether David would actually stand a chance against Goliath. In a blog post one consumer expressed insecurity of the result of the rebellion.

*"Personally I am a little insecure of the result of this drama. I am not sure that the Scanian consumers' loyalty to the local dairy will be enough to organise and operate a boycott that will be sufficiently severe for Coop. But I might very well be wrong. If Arla doesn't watch out, one might have a Scanian version of the Mohammed crisis, where the consumers opt out Arla products simply because it is Arla products." (Stellan Löfving in the "Salt" blog)*

The loyalty among the Scanian consumers is questioned, and whether they will actually be able to make an imprint with this boycott. The consumer is sceptical towards the consumers, e.g. “the weapon”, having enough power to fight against the giant. However, he remains hopeful in the end, saying that maybe it will be enough and consumers may be able to put up a total boycott of Arla based on just this one action, so it would be a Scanian version of the Mohammed crisis (where the Danish newspaper Jyllands Posten published a Muhammad caricature and then the readers boycotted the newspaper simply because of that).

### **5.1.1.2 The Big Bad Giant**

As this study developed we could see some interesting parallels with this case of the Milk uprising and the study that Thompson and Arsel (2004) did in their article “The Hegemonic brandscape of Starbucks”. As they put it

*“A hegemonic brandscape is a cultural system of servicescapes that are linked together and structured by discursive, symbolic, and competitive relationships to a dominant (market-driving) experiential brand. The hegemonic brandscape ... also shapes consumer lifestyles and identities by functioning as a cultural model that consumers act, think, and feel through.”* (Thompson & Arsel, 2004, p. 362)

To put it differently a hegemonic brandscape provides a constellation of objectified meanings (i.e. discourses) that consumers may embed into their own worldviews and use to interpret and construct their identity.

This can be paralleled to the Milk Uprising, Arla with their fast paced growth and global dominance, has given rise to a big oppositional discourse by the consumers of Skånemejerier. Consumers criticise Arla for cannibalising the market and killing the “real” and authentic agriculture, and thus also for propagating for a soul-numbing aesthetic homogeneity and killing the original farming culture. Furthermore, rebellious consumers attack Arla for using vicious business practices that have harmful effects on the local milk trade, the environment and the economic well-being of the milk farmers in Sweden.

Oppositional localists, as Thompson and Arsel (2004) call the local consumers revolting against the capitalist corporations, take the success of Arla as an affirmation that local competitors have been crowded out. The local consumers describe situations where they had little choice but to buy Arla’s milk, when going to Coop and City Gross. Instead of seeing Arla as just another alternative they go on about the lack of locally produced alternatives. Many of the consumers give voice to this myth-building.

*“I have noticed changes in the food shelves but not really thought so much about it, until it struck me when I drank a glass of milk and it tasted thin and a*

*little sour, not as rich, mild and generous as it used to. Then I looked at the package and saw that the milk was from Arla.” (Stefan Stenudd in his blog)*

*“Is there a dairy that has worse packages than Arla? I don’t think so! I now live in Sörmland and am pissed off by their miserable packages. These cannot be resealed and besides are completely unmanageable to pour with. Arla is a non-modern dairy that has not understood that one needs to have packaging like Skånemejerier does. Of course Coop and Arla really go together well. Two companies that have absolutely no idea.” (Peter N, Coop suger fett...)*

Arla as a company is definitely not a good guy; it is depicted by some consumers as a mean giant that eats smaller beings. This is illustrated by using the name Glufs-Glufs, which is a character from a fairy tale – a giant with a lot of aggression but little wits. An alternative is Goliath, another mean giant known from the Bible whom the young man David has to meet in a seemingly unequal fight. Also, the character of Black Peter is used for comparison – from a certain card game where the loser is the last one holding the card called Black Peter. Lastly one compares Arla to the mafia. The bottom line is that no one wants to be stuck with just Arla.

*“In the latest issue of Land Lantbruk it said... how Arla must grow to become more profitable. They want to push local dairies to merge by taking their customers in a price war.” (Mats, Coop suger fett...)*

*“This is David vs Goliath! Arla will grow even more and take over the market in the Netherlands and Germany! Arla does not work for its suppliers or consumers any more – it’s all about Arla as an “organism”. In Sweden Arla is trying to push out the existing local dairies, in Finland just the same and in the Netherlands and Germany!” (Lena, Coop suger fett...)*

*“It seems like us consumers will be enclosed to be sitting with Black Peter (read: Arla) in our hand in the end. Arla-giant Glufs-Glufs is clearly very hungry.” (Micke, Coop suger fett...)*

Arla is characterised by unchivalrous behaviour and evil plans to “dominate the world”. It is something to be feared, as it symbolises the foreign, since it is Danish – even though the milk they sell in Sweden is Swedish. There is quite some future-telling done by consumers who paint out how they see Arla taking over the whole Swedish market using unfair methods and then tainting it with foreign milk, or rising the prices on the account of their own profit (as opposed to paying the farmers more). All in all, Arla is the enemy in the “milk war”. Ingrid Jönsson (interview, April 5, 2016) pointed out that there was a tendency that the people in Scania sensed that Arla’s only goal was to buy Skånemejerier and put it down, and they were determined that this should NOT happen.

*“Arla’s latest weapon in the fight is the so-called price dumping. They engaged in this in Denmark only a few years ago. Local dairies were bought up in a fast pace or the price of Arla’s milk lowered in the sales areas, until they were kicked*

*off their feet. Now Arla is sitting at a market share of 95% in Denmark with a milk price in the shop that all of a sudden is two kronor [SEK] higher than what they have in Sweden. History follows the exact same pattern in Sweden. They will dump the prices in about two years, make the local disappear in Sweden, and then when Milko, Carlshamns dairy and Skånemejerier have gone under they will raise the price over 10 kr per litre.” (Aron, Coop suger fett...)*

*“I for my part have never had a problem with Arla before this here happened, have drunk their milk for more than 10 years in Uppsala. After this Scanian milk-strike it’s however another thing and I know there are many with me. This has become a symbolic question. I don’t want to have a monopoly situation in Sweden as Arla has in Denmark. /.../ However, there can be more declarations of a milk war in the future... the question is how armed we and the Scanian milk producers and dairies are then?” (Johan, Coop suger fett...)*

*“I’m gonna buy you or I’m gonna eat you. So you have those options, be bought or be crushed. And so they also in a way helped us, and today people in general don’t see Arla as oh, the farmer and the milk, they see Arla as a company that wants to paint that picture but really are just a multinational conglomerate.” (Interview with Mats Genberg, April 8, 2016)*

Arla’s milk is surrounded by a myth that is contrary to that of Skånemejerier’s milk. It is attributed with bad qualities, building a myth of something disgusting, bad-tasting, unfresh, ugly, with bad packaging that is neither smart nor practical nor modern. In the end, it is simply the “wrong” milk, and that is precisely because Arla is the bad guy. The consumers of Skånemejerier see Arla as the big bad giant that destroys the market and eliminates the smaller businesses in the periphery. When consumers say that there is a difference in the taste of the milk, which is most likely not true, they could actually be referring to Arla as a brand being tasteless and ugly, something that also affects how their milk tastes.

### **5.1.1.3 The Ugly Helper**

Coop is attributed the role of the other “bad guy”, the ugly helper, in the Milk Uprising besides Arla. Although sometimes some consumers draw attention to the other chains that also switched out Skånemejerier (like City Gross), it is Coop that gets most of the blame among retailers. The blame for pushing out Skånemejerier is amplified by the green and environmentally friendly image that Coop has been building up for their brand. There is also the notion that Coop helps giant Arla in their taking-over-the-world agenda while they should be protecting the local producers instead.

*“Coop wants to give the impression of being concerned about the environment. How does that go together with that dairy products will be driven crisscross over Sweden?” (Tord, Coop suger fett...)*

*“This is so sick! I am a fan of cooperatives and had trust in Coop and Konsum. I really believed that I can trust them and that they work for what’s best for their customers and members. But apparently not. Coop should really care for the small dairies instead of giving even more market to the big big dairy giant Arla. Damn Coop. Shame on you. The worst is surely that Skånemejerier goes out... Based on a contract. (Niclas, Coop suger fett...)”*

It was after Coop’s actions that the revolt transitioned to social media, where everything can be magnified much more easily. Interestingly the Facebook group was called “*Coop sucks...*” but as the uprising developed, the focus of the consumers’ anger shifted to Arla. In the end Coop could be seen as the “bad guy’s helper” who does bad things, but at the same time gets bullied by the “real bad guy”.

*“Because Coop was one bad guy but the bad guy who we all really wanted to get to was Arla. Because it became obvious after a while that Arla had pressured Coop into doing this, it was not just a matter of selling the product, it was a matter of selling the product and at the same time saying, ok, if you’re buying enough milk from us we’ll take care of fixing up all your refrigerated units in your dairy departments and btw while we do that, we’ll make sure that you can only sell our milk in them because we have these trolleys so ok we will take care of remaking your dairy coolers and when we’ve done it you will only be able to use our trolleys.”* (Interview with Mats Genberg, April 8, 2016)

This quote illustrates the myth of Coop as the “bad guy’s helper”, and the myth of Arla as the “real bad guy”. By controlling the market with smart logistic strategies Arla manages to also have control over Coop and the products they sell, leaving them little choice.

### **5.1.2 Opposition to Central Decisions**

Kjeldgaard and Askegaard (2006) investigate the concept of regionalisation by demonstrating how local appropriations are shaped by structural commonalities, using the example of youth culture in Denmark, which they conceptualise with the term “glocalisation”. Kjeldgaard and Askegaard (2006) find that in Copenhagen many and lived out styles flourish and global consumption and cultures are embedded in a localised context, while in Greenland, which is remote and rural, global styles exist in the background due to their lack of manifestations. Locality discourses on the other hand emerge in the foreground. This leads to a stronger reflexivity over locality, which constructs an important element of the inhabitants’ different ways of defining their identity. This is similar in this case with the Scanian consumers that support their local dairy company, because it is something small and relatable and not a company coming from the big capital that they have no relationship to. The consumers from Scania want



to drink the milk that they have always been served and that in some way narrates a part of their identity.

### 5.1.2.1 A Head Office Decision

One way to interpret the Milk Uprising is by looking at the small and innocent versus the big and powerful not only in relation to the two competing brands but also by looking within the companies and also by looking at this from a national perspective. The quote below shows a clear example of what Mats Genberg (interview, April 8, 2016) called the *Stockholm norm*, meaning the world revolves around the capital in many companies and decision-makers' minds. Typically, because a lot of companies have their head offices in the capital and therefore have a very heliocentric view on the world, where the head office is the sun and the local stores are the planets circulating around the head office. Basically meaning what is good for the people in Stockholm must be good for the rest of the country too. According to some consumers the milk from Stockholm is perceived to be "ugly" or bad, the term "08" is often used when badmouthing people from Stockholm and when using the term 08-milk it is meant in a negative way. This term therefore symbolises the Stockholm norm and due to that fact the milk comes from Stockholm it is seen as ugly and disgusting.

*"Don't buy 08 [Stockholm area no.]-milk viz. "Ugly-milk"!!!!!"* (Jane, Coop suger fett...)

*"Wouldn't occur to me to drink 08-milk from Arla since it tastes disgusting."* (Thomas, Coop suger fett...)

This milk situation seems to have a strong symbolic value for the consumers in Scania, Dalarna and Norrland, these regions feel stepped on by the actors in the capital. This is a clear tendency of opposition to the capital and it is connected to the symbolic meanings that milk has, especially when it is a local company that signifies the milk they are drinking. Some brands have a strong symbolism in certain regions and this is something that the headquarter of Coop have not realised yet, nor has Skånemejerier themselves. The consumers want the possibility to choose which brand they want. Thompson and Arsel (2004) further bring out that when individuals sometimes feel like they do not belong to the mainstream society or are politically marginalised, the anti-establishment is very inviting and a sense of community among the ones with the alternative lifestyles is emerging. These experiences of being at home, in the company of kindred spirits, can generate a powerful emotional resonance and a sense of devout loyalty to the shop, its owners, and community of patrons. Likewise, such emotional attachment and loyalty can very much be seen when looking at the consumers but also the employees and farmers of Skånemejerier, unlike Coop or Arla, where the employees, local store owners and members of the cooperation feel disappointed, exploited and overlooked.

*“... I believe this has a big symbolic value for us in Scania as well as Dalarna and Norrland (where they have the same type of “uproar”). Our regions often feel stepped on by the actors of the capital. Now one of our symbols are being stepped on – but this time we can raise our voices. Feel free to sell Arla. But keep OUR milk too... I simply believe that they have not understood that some brands have that strong of a tension/connection. I actually don’t believe Skånemejerier has understood it themselves either.” (Mats, Coop suger fett...)*

The local dissatisfaction is not only growing in Scania but all over Sweden. It seems like there is a wider opposition to the capital, and the decisions that have been made in the headquarters of Coop and Arla in Stockholm. One consumer points out that by behaving badly and not listening to their consumers they have lost this battle. This is a proof of the belief that when consumers act they can influence decision-makers. When analysing the Milk Uprising and why this was so important for the consumers, we found that there is a need for glocalisation and regional adaptation in today’s marketplace. The urban areas are strongly influenced by global trends and perhaps more liable to other cultures, products and so forth, while the countryside care more about their locality and reflects more over their identity and heritage (Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006). The consumers are past monopolistic strategies and demand a range of choices and have the option to decide for themselves.

*“The dissatisfaction is not only sprouting in Scania. It has been spread all over the country. Both Coop and Arla have lost this, by proving to be totally not responsive to what people want on the shelves. The giant “Glufs Glufs” has by its behaviour also lost customers... They have already lost this battle.” (Peter N, Coop suger fett...)*

As a reply to the blog post “Biter det digitala upproret mot Coop? [Does the digital uproar bite against Coop?]” by Rolf van den Brink Mats Genberg brings out that this acting by Coop sparks the feeling among Scanians that the people in Stockholm act like “the big Swede” and thus make people very angry which leads them to “Scanian nationalism”. What is interesting is that Genberg seems to feel a need to react to this accusation of Scanian nationalism, but then to change the subject saying that it is about something else, that what made him so furious was the idea of a monopoly. However, later he comes back to the locality theme which implies that this is still very much related to being patriotic to your own region.

*“Scanian nationalism is a sad word... But this kind of pursuance surely arouse a feeling that “the big Swede shall decide” for many. And this makes many people pissed off... For me it is more regarding that I don’t like monopoly nor being forced to choose between certain brands. And that I want to buy as local food as possible and food whose origin I know of as far as possible.” (Mats Genberg, comment in Rolf van den Brink’s blog)*

This also comes back to the hegemonic brandscape notion mentioned previously, that individuals who feel like they do not belong to the mainstream society or are politically marginalised, can be attracted to the anti-establishment a sense of community among the ones with the alternative lifestyles. As Mats Genberg pointed out (interview, April 8, 2016), there are some Sweden democrats (members of the Swedish nationalist party) in the Facebook group, meaning that there were people with very different backgrounds and from marginalised communities joining the group. He also added that he has no connection to these people, meaning that this does not mean supporters of the anti-establishment share all the same views but that it is a connection point that many different people can relate to.

According to the quote below, Arla is using other strategies than dumping the prices to rob market shares. Arla uses a strategic exercise of power to dominate the market by changing the height of the milk carriers, to make it more complicated for the stores to have more than one distributor. By changing the height of their carriers to a different height than Skånemejerier's they can make sure that if Coop decides Arla to be the supplier of their milk, they would have to rebuild the complete dairy section in the local stores and thus not be able to have other milk brands because they simply do not fit into the shelves. This is connected to the Stockholm norm because it makes it harder for the local Coop retailers to have other alternatives.

*“... Yes, the problem except of course that one has taken in Arla as main supplier ... there is a height difference between Arla's and Skånemejerier's milk carriages. They are well aware of this at Coop's office in Stockholm and commanded that all milk sections will be rebuilt to Arla's benefit. Very few Coop retailers will have that possibility to rebuild ... and thus give Skånemejerier a somewhat fair chance to compete with Arla... This will require extra staff resources because the turnover ratio on “our” milk is so high. Which not every retailer can dispense” (Peter G, Coop suger fett...)*

Arla can be paralleled with what Thompson and Arsel (2004) argue for companies like Starbucks, Microsoft, Disney, Nike, Coca-Cola, McDonald's, and Wal-Mart that are transnational brands with a considerable success factor that on the other hand are being persistent targets of anti-brand activism and grass root efforts to block them to expand. Also it is highlighting that consumers wishing to take a stand in the debate of globalisation via consumption choices might aim for David-like brands, such as Skånemejerier, interpreted as the heroic brand fighting a battle against the big bad corporations of global capitalism, Goliaths. However, this battle can not only be seen between the small local company vs the big conglomerate, but also between different levels within the big company.

### 5.1.2.2 The Power Struggle within Coop

Kjeldgaard and Askegaard (2006) discuss glocalisation and regionalisation and state some clear differences between the urban and rural areas. This is also highly applicable in this case when analysing the netnographic material. The idea of smaller locales opposed to the capital's decisions becomes noticed when it is pointed out that having Arla as main supplier applies for all Coop stores in Sweden, however some regional and local adaption would be possible. The local shops want to sell Skånemejerier but might not be allowed. In the second quote it seems that if the local retailers obey the central power, but according to Coop they are not allowed to take such decisions on their own, "the good will is suffocated by the central power". There is an ongoing discussion whether this agreement is a good or bad decision and whether this is a centralised decision concerning all retailers or not.

*"... It is good if they are allowed to do it. But according to Coop they are not allowed to make those decisions themselves ... So it can be that the good will is suffocated by the central power."* (Mats, Coop suger fett...)

*"... Some local adaptations are made to some extent but there is no room for separate agreements... So the retailers surely want it. But the question is if they are allowed to ..."* (Mats, Coop suger fett...)

The centralised leadership is questioned and ignored by some local Coop retailers who support the consumer action and believe that it is a stupid decision to not sell locally produced milk. This proves that consumers request glocalisation and regional adaptation, and even that the retail owners understand it, while the decisions are made high up in the management ladder. The consumers in the rural locales seem to be more reflexive over locality while the urban areas embed global consumption in their locality. Local shop owners stand up to the decisions from the capital and keep Skånemejerier, although there seems to be a certain degree of confusion among consumers about whether the shops can do that or not.

*"All honour to Coop at Värnhem in Malmö ... does not follow the rest of Coop ... will continue to buy and sell Skånemejerier's milk ... big local supplier and to not sell their milk is everything but clever."* (Björn, Coop suger fett...)

*"... There are big signs in and outside the store that they have chosen to keep Skånemejerier. Apparently the local retailers can decide themselves?"* (Helen, Odlase forum)

Even one employee of Coop wants the Scanian milk to be sold in Scania and does not want to buy milk at Coop anymore. It seems to be a decision coming from high up that the regional managers have to obey, and the Stockholm norm is exemplified. An interesting thought is that this employee believes that it is in general worthless to protest and this employee does not seem to believe that consumers could do anything to influence the decision from above.

*“I work at Coop Forum myself... We down here in Scania WANT THE SCANIAN MILK!! Even the regional manager can't do shit, it is UNFORTUNATELY DISGUSTING STOCKHOLM who decided this!! So to protest outside the supermarkets is pretty useless... but it is surely damn sad that we will have Arla, I will not buy my milk at Coop...” (Charlotte, Coop suger fett...)*

Anna Radelius (interview, April 5, 2016) describes how the local Coop stores got really sad when they all of a sudden had to sell milk from someone else than Skånemejerier. The local stores were apparently really “grumpy” on the management’s decision and tried to explain to their customers that it was not their decision.

*“... And then we started to hear from our sales force that the Coop stores got really really sad, because they have a really close relationship with our sales team and now all of a sudden they were going to sell another milk from another sales person who doesn't know what they won't like or so... And so we started to hear that stores were really grumpy, they weren't happy about this. But they just had to do it. And then it all started. We could see the big signs outside the stores, the stores tried to explain to the consumers: this is not our decision, it's made higher up. And we got these pictures... consumers leaving the stores because they didn't want to buy the milk they didn't know about. We even heard stories about consumers throwing the shopping basket at the staff in the stores.” (Interview with Anna Radelius, April 5, 2016)*

This indicates that the people in the local stores probably had quite mixed emotions; they sided with Skånemejerier and the local community, but clearly as Coop employees they should follow the orders that come from the capital. They were both sad and angry, and the negative feelings seem to have been strong enough in the end to step up against the decisions from the capital and the Stockholm norm. And at the same time they remained representatives of that norm in the eyes of the consumers who did not understand that this was not a local decision and the Coop people in the local stores would not have chosen to take this action.

## **5.2 Cultural Homogenisation**

A second main theme we found is a general fear of losing identity. Skånemejerier’s milk is an important symbol of the local identity and thus the attack against Skånemejerier is seen as an attack against that identity. It is special to people and needs to be retained, they do not want to be homogenised and as a result become just like any other region in Sweden. Retaining the regional particularities is a huge concern and is manifested through milk. A number of myths are in action, related to how Skånemejerier equals the local, how the community is under attack and must be protected, and how the everyday

is disrupted and with that also the local identity today as well as how it connects the community through time and space.

### 5.2.1 Maintaining the Cultural Order

A lot of the consumers express it as a self-evident truth that in Scania one must be able to buy Scanian milk. This can be regardless of whether the person thinks that the milk from different producers is in fact the same or whether the person comes from Scania. Scanian milk and Scania itself are tightly tied together. This is the order of things to keep the Scanian identity consistent, and if Scanian people do not consume Scanian milk, then something is obviously wrong. The bond is reinforced by its expression; as Giddens (1984) put it, the activities of agents reproduce the conditions that enable these activities. People drink Scanian milk in Scania, and that is why there *is* Scanian milk in Scania. Or at least there should be, as is the clear perception among consumers.

*"If one lives in Scania, one drinks Skånemejerier....."* (Angelica, Köp Skånemejerier i Skåne)

*"I live in Scania, come from Scania and therefore also want to drink milk from Scanian cows!!!!!!!!!! That is surely self-evident I think!"* (Madelen, Coop suger fett...)

Milk has a special role in Scania, allegedly more than anywhere else. It is through milk that the local identity is manifested, even though it is such an everyday thing in itself – a low-involvement product that usually is considered not very relevant to identity. But this is different in Scania, where Skånemejerier milk has become an important symbol of the Scanian identity. This explains why Scanians are putting up such a strong fight for their milk.

*"... it is a low-engagement product. It's a bulk product, it's just something you... But I think that's why we're having this discussion, because there is something very very unique down here in Scania particularly about the milk."* (Interview with Anna Radelius, April 5, 2016)

*"Here it has actually become quite an important actor in the creation of identity for the people living in Scania. ... it comes to the packaging, ... the cartons in Scania ... look different from the rest of Sweden. ... this feeling of difference, if you grew up in Scania or in the rest of Sweden, it was kind of manifested in the milk carton. ... And you had Scania in the name of the dairy. So you should not underestimate Skånemejerier's role in the construction of an identity."* (Interview with Håkan Jönsson, April 5, 2016)

Giddens (1991, cited in Zhao & Bhiesta, 2012) has proposed that in late-modern societies identity is not just something given, but instead something that is routinely

created and sustained by reflexive individuals. According to Giddens this is largely due to anxieties caused by rapid social change and the lack of anchor points for the self in those societies. The reflexive construction of the self is therefore a way to deal with those anxieties (Giddens, 1991, cited in Zhao & Bhiesta, 2012). Milk can thus be seen as an anchor to help Scanians sustain stable social identities when they feel the world around them is caught in disorder.

It appears that the central managements of the retail organisations did not understand the importance and meaning of this local identity that was manifested in milk, and did not give it any credit. It can be difficult to understand if one does not experience the same in their own region, particularly if that region is big. Håkan Jönsson (interview, 5 April 2016) noted that those who made the decisions for Coop in Stockholm might not have been aware of the emotional attachment Scanian consumers had to the brand Skånemejerier, particularly since Arla had a strongly positive, Swedish brand image. Using Giddens' (1984) notion, the actions of the central management had unintended consequences which fed back into the reproduction of the system – unexpectedly a reaction from the consumers was triggered which ended up reinforcing the connection between Skånemejerier's milk and Scania.

*"I remember the CEO of KF [owner of Coop], he wrote and said "it was a certain degree of surprise that I noticed the strong reaction of people in Scania", basically saying we have farmers down there as well and this is all Swedish farmers and why are they so upset?" (Interview with Mats Genberg, April 8, 2016)*

*"They [management from the Bergendahls headquarters] talked to us and tried to talk us out of it. "Milk is milk, there is no difference whether it is from Scania or anywhere else, it is still milk." And he didn't understand that it was important for us [the Scanian consumers] to not have Arla's milk. They probably didn't want to understand it." (Interview with Ingrid Jönsson, April 5, 2016)*

*"People called ... up to Stockholm to try ... you cannot do like this ... You get used to it right, they said, and that added fuel to the fire of course. You don't say that. So it was very, it was poorly managed from the beginning from up there." (Interview with Caroline Olsson, October 1, 2013)*

There is a strong myth built around the locality of the Skånemejerier milk. As Barthes (2009) has written, a myth aims for immediate impressions, while it is not very important if the myth is later seen through, since the myth's action is supposed to be stronger than rational arguments. In the Milk Uprising it appears that many people believe Skånemejerier is locally produced. To a large extent this comes out from the way how Skånemejerier and Arla are compared, with the arguments that claim Arla's milk rides for hundreds of kilometres to get "here", while Skånemejerier's milk is, as the name suggests, Scanian and therefore local.

There are also those who are trying to deconstruct the myth – or even build a counter-myth – by suggesting that not all Skånemejerier's milk really comes from Scania. Some suggested the strong reaction from Scanian consumers was caused by the lack of knowledge about where the milk really comes from. But this does not have much power; the myth itself is stronger. Also, the facts of where the milk physically originates from have only secondary value. What really matters is that psychologically, in people's realities, Skånemejerier is the local milk. It is the symbol of the local identity, which the non-local actors (such as Coop's central office in Stockholm) did not think about and were therefore caught by surprise.

*"I don't mean to create any wild discussion around this topic... But do you know that Skånemejerier buys milk from farmers who live in Gävle [north of Stockholm] and southwards? It is not just Scanian milk like everybody believes... I have been thinking that the whole milk debate in Sweden is about that consumers think Skånemejerier is based on Scanian milk and nothing else."* (heleina, Kolhydrater iFokus forum)

*"Obviously the strong reaction from the consumers depended on that consumers were not aware of how it works in the dairy sector, i.e. that Skånemejerier's products do not always come from Scanian farmers; it was believed that everything was "genuine Scanian". Consumers didn't know that there are Arla farmers in Scania and the other way around. They lived in the belief that everything that is produced by Skånemejerier comes from Scania."* (Interview with Sture Johansson, April 15, 2016)

The function of Skånemejerier in the local identity has roots in the history of the milk sector in Sweden, exemplifying what Barthes (2009) said about analogies between the signifier in the myth system and the signifier in the language system, which have roots in history. As mentioned earlier, Sweden used to be "divided up" between dairies so that every region had their own milk dairy. In Scania it was the dairy that was named after the region – Skånemejerier – and the historical track contributed to a lot of people being connected to the company and people perceiving it as such an intrinsic part of the region. It was only natural then that Skånemejerier milk came to signify local milk, and THE milk for people in Scania.

*"In old times it was a big thing that Skånemejerier was pretty much paying for the milk to people and people got their money, work from the milk in the past. And I think that's something that still is a big part of many people because I think the people that today are 40 and 50 grew up with milk and by farmers and so on."* (Interview with Ingvar Willander, April 25, 2016)

*"... we haven't really had any competition in the milk, and the milk here in Scania. ... But then all of a sudden Arla comes and says "now we are going to sell milk in Scania". And that's when you're like "no-no-no, you're not – we're going to buy the same milk as we've always been doing because we know where it*



*comes from and where the farm is, who are the people working there and everything", so I think that's why it's so really really... way back in history for a lot of consumers, because we didn't really have any competition."* (Interview with Anna Radelius, April 5, 2016)

The perception of Skånemejerier as part of the local cultural identity in Scania strongly relates to milk farmers and the tradition of milk farming that has been passed on through generations. According to Anna Radelius (interview, April 5, 2016), "a lot of consumers know a farmer or someone who knows a farmer, or have someone in the family who is a farmer", which is why this identity is so strong. As one consumer in the Facebook group put it, Scania has its "own" history and cultural legacy which our farmers are a big part of" and it is important "[t]o retain life in their farms that perhaps have gone as heritage in many generations". Skånemejerier's milk, with its particular appearance, has become a symbol of that, and as Skånemejerier's representatives put it, the farmers are the brand.

*"And we are still, even if we are big in Scania then we are still small in Sweden, which means that a Scanian can feel proud of that we are what we are, while a Stockholmer can think that it is a little bit cool with those that come from down there. One knows this, it comes from farming, the Scanian farming."* (Interview with Caroline Olsson, October 1, 2013)

Therefore, if Skånemejerier is under threat, the milk farmers are under threat and with them also the cultural identity of Scania – as another consumer expressed on Facebook, "someone is pissing on a part of "our cultural legacy"" and "stepping on one of our symbols". Evidently there is a fear of losing the local identity and becoming just like everybody else in Sweden, just like homogenised milk that is always the same as any other milk and has no characteristics of its own.

## **5.2.2 Identity through Everyday Rhythm**

Another explanation to the strongly negative reaction from consumers can be given in terms of routines. Not being able to buy the "usual milk" that one normally consumes and is familiar with disturbs the normal everyday rhythms and makes people upset. In Lefebvre's (2004) terms, an arrhythmia arises. Giddens (1984) points out that routines help retain ontological security, i.e. the feeling of order and continuity in the individual's life. This feeling depends on experiencing stability and avoiding chaos. Always drinking the same milk, Scanian milk, contributes to ontological security.

Furthermore, this everyday rhythm is supposed to connect people through time and space, and for consumers this is expressed for example as linking parents with their children, but also a person today with his/her childhood, since they have been drinking the same milk since they were children. Lefebvre (2004) states that repetition in the

everyday is a part of “dressage” – training people to conform to accepted norms and models in order to become a part of a certain group. Here the norm is that Scanian people drink Scanian milk.

According to Anna Radelius (interview, April 5, 2016), the Skånemejerier milk feels safe and trustworthy to consumers, “[t]hey know where the farms are so they know it doesn't come from a place they haven't been”. Milk is the persisting component in the eurhythmia of the everyday – the functioning of different rhythms together – even if other things are changing. It is the anchor of the everyday through time and space and helps maintain a stable identity.

*“We have always had our milk and our products, and all of a sudden someone decides to stop selling products from Skånemejerier and instead sell Arla. ... Didn't recognise myself at all among the products, one didn't know what was what there between the shelves.”* (HjärterEss, FamiljeLiv.se forum)

*“That is something you grew up with. When you were a kid it was Skånemejerier that was on the table and I think if you put Arla on it... That is something that comes when you are a kid and it stays with you.”* (Interview with Ingvar Willander, April 25, 2016)

*“... everything is changing, but we want something to be stable. ... In a changing world we want something to stick out. And milk was one of the few things that hadn't changed so much, and why should this change?”* (Interview with Håkan Jönsson, April 5, 2016)

As Lefebvre (2004) noted, it can be hard to perceive rhythms when they function normally. The existence of rhythm becomes clear much more easily when it is disturbed, when arrhythmia occurs. This seems to be testified by several consumers who did not realise the role Skånemejerier played in their everyday until it was threatened. There was surprise to find just how important a part of their life it was. The phrase “taking for granted” is used and one consumer states that this normal rhythm of consuming Skånemejerier's milk should be acknowledged also at times when it is not disturbed. This refers to strengthening one of the important markers of the local community – the rituals and traditions (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

*“I think Skånemejerier has a certain part of our lives. And I think that it has gone even more during this crisis and that people notice it even more. That they must have the Skånemejerier milk. ... Because I saw it myself as I came to the shop, it was a usual Tuesday and there was no Skånemejerier milk. WHAT is this?”* (Interview with Ingrid Jönsson, April 5, 2016)

According to Giddens (1984), it is structure that enables social practices to persist in time and space. Structure consists of rules and resources that are used in producing and reproducing social action and govern the everyday life. Structure constrains action, but

not only – it is at the same time also what *enables* action by providing rules and resources. Skånemejerier's milk can be seen as one of the resources, and "buy Scanian milk in Scania" as one of the rules. On the one hand these rules and resources guide people in Scania to consume Skånemejerier's milk, and on the other hand they allow social actions that make the Scanian identity span over time and space. The structure related to milk is therefore both restricting and enabling, just as Giddens noted, and feeds back to the reproduction of the social structures.

Actors are knowledgeable about the rules that govern everyday life, but as Giddens (1984) marks, they usually do not rationalise the tacit knowledge about how to behave in different social contexts until they are specifically asked why they do what they do. This is similar to Lefebvre's (2004) notion of rhythms being hard to notice in their normal functioning. It was the disturbance in the everyday that brought up the question of what Skånemejerier's milk means to consumers, which in turn helps explain their unexpected behaviour when this milk was all of a sudden under threat. Giddens (1984) has noted that when taken-for-granted routines are disturbed, people may get caught in revolt – and this is precisely what happened in the Milk Uprising.

Interestingly, it seems that the arrhythmia in someone else's rhythms made some people notice their own rhythms. This is evident from how people who either did not consume milk themselves or did not shop at any of the involved chains still expressed their support to and involvement in the revolt. But moving a level up from the individual, this can be again related to the general feeling of community and local identity. Using Lefebvre's (2004) terms there should be eurhythmia – the different rhythms are united together in the normal everyday of the community, and so the disturbance in the rhythms of some community members also affects the other people in the community.

### **5.2.3 Us and Them**

The "milk is milk" argument can be completely valid from a utilitarian point of view. Theoretically, milk is a homogenous product, and if its treatment is the same then it should not be possible to differentiate between one producer's milk and another's. However, there is quite some discussion going on among consumers both in the Facebook groups and the forums regarding the different qualities of Skånemejerier's and Arla's milk. While some consumers remain negative by claiming that all milk tastes the same, and others express certain scepticism ("Is it really possible to feel a taste difference in the same type of milk from different dairies?"), there are strong myths constructed around the two producers' milks.

Skånemejerier's milk as an object of myth obtains similar qualities as Barthes' (2009) milk. Consumers on the Facebook groups and forums use the words *fine, useful, holy, wonderful taste, natural, real*, and the exclamation "SCANIAN MILK IS LIFE!" when

speaking of Skånemejerier's milk. Even the package is positively highlighted as *practical* and *lovely*. On the contrary, the myth built around Arla's milk is very negative. It is described as *washed-out, thin, sour, not rich, disgusting, terrible, ugly, non-modern, and wrong*. Again, the packages are also included in the myth, and in Arla's case they are *clumsy* and *miserable*.

When thinking about this opposition of the "lovely milk" and the "disgusting milk", one can see it in the light of Mary Douglas' (1966) work on purity and danger. Arla's milk is not the milk that is pure, as is described by Barthes (2009). It is, on the contrary, tainted and dirty. Douglas proposes that "... dirt is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder" (Douglas, 1966, p. 2). According to Douglas, anxieties about dirt and pollution can arise in a culture when it feels threatened and endangered in some way (Forty, 1986, cited in Corrigan, 1997). Scanian people drinking Scanian milk is how things should be, it is the order. It is also a part of the culture. When this order is disrupted by taking Skånemejerier's milk off the shelves, Scanians feel a threat to their cultural identity. That is why Arla's milk is being perceived as dirty and disgusting – it brings disorder.

It is also a question of authenticity. Baudrillard (1990, cited in Corrigan, 1997) speaks of objects such as furniture having a history attached to them, and by possessing such items consumers become the authentic keepers of the history and assimilate this history into themselves. Skånemejerier's milk can be looked at through the same prism – by consuming it, people become carriers of the authentic history of the local community. Skånemejerier's milk is the *real* milk, while Arla's is the *wrong* one. The local milk is true and authentic, with consumers relating it to what surrounds them in the everyday, as well as to the history of the region. It is the cows and farms that one sees from their window, it is the *real* people and animals. Authenticity is important for the local consumers and has been embedded by Skånemejerier by offering the chance to track down each and every milk carton and link it to the particular farm that the milk came from.

*"Cows that graze on Scanian meadows are seen every day and how good they feel. Of course I want to have milk from happy cows." (HjärterEss, FamiljeLiv.se forum)*

*"We said that we can show where the milk comes from on the whole. We had a tracking system since earlier, but we had not used it in communications. So then we did, then we found a quick way to be frank. It was not about that the one was better than the other, but on the other hand we could say that we know where our milk comes from." (Interview with Caroline Olsson, October 1, 2013)*

According to Håkan Jönsson (interview, April 5, 2016), milk was a big part of the ecological movement when it started in the 1980s and drinking ecological milk became a way to demonstrate that one cares about sustainability. A great part of the Milk Uprising

case involves discussions around environment-friendliness. This really was the centre of a lot of consumers' disappointment and anger. However, differently from what might have been expected, caring about the environment here is not associated with ecological, but instead local. A lot of consumers express what seems to be a firm belief that anything local is environmentally better than anything far away, even when the latter is ecological. "Locality first" becomes the absolutely necessary criterion for caring about the environment, and locality itself in this myth becomes to mean caring about the environment.

*"It is true, Skånemejerier's products belong to Scania, think about the environment as well? To transport dairy from Scania to Scania is better than Stockholm to Scania or similar. AND if one saves 5 öre or what was it, would surely rather have a future for the coming generations <\_<." (Patricia, Coop suger fett...)*

The environmental issue is one where the different views of the different actors can be seen most prominently. The retailers, both in the comments given to newspapers at that time, as well as their replies to consumers' email inquiries, are bringing precisely the argument that local might not always be environmentally better, thereby trying to counter the myth of local equals sustainable. However, their tone when doing that is rather careful, which probably is related to not wanting to make the consumers even angrier, because it can be sensed that what this really is about goes beyond the environmental arguments.

It is an interesting question whether Arla's milk should not be sold in Scania at all or should be allowed next to Skånemejerier's milk. Being convinced that transportation is environmentally very bad, one should not only demand that Skånemejerier's milk is available in Scania, but also that Arla's milk is *not*, since this would put unnecessary strain on the environment. However, some consumers who use the environmental argument together with the locality myth still express the view that the two milks should be side-by-side in shops. This can be seen as an implication that the environmental concern is not the real underlying reason to protest. The real reason has to do with local identity, but since it is people from the "outside" that need to be convinced, the environmental argument is perceived to work better. Everyone must understand the need for sustainability, while non-Scanian people cannot be expected to understand the need for sustaining the local Scanian identity.

*"My clear understanding is that Coop that cherishes the environment and the locally produced should have Scanian milk from Skånemejerier. If Arla's milk then stands next to it as an alternative choice it is completely okay." (Torbjörn Lövendahl in his blog)*

This need to use the environmental argument as a shield implies how there is "us and them". Although to other Scanians it may be natural that everyone in this locale drinks Scanian milk, they perceive that this is not as good of an argument for "the others". This

is similar to what Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) present as one of the three core markers of community in the sociology literature – consciousness of kind, which denotes a shared knowledge of the members belonging together and simultaneously being different from those outside of the community.

Traditionally, communities were related to a place, particularly a rural place, while contemporary communities often transcend geography and are mostly imagined (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). The community engaged in the Milk Uprising, even though related to a particular brand and also coming together online, can still be seen as a traditional one – tied to a particular rural region. It can be noted how the *we*-feeling in the community becomes stronger under threat.

*“But communities, they can be on different levels. In these very complex societies that we are today, the kind of local/regional communities are small enough to still create this kind of sense of community, but yet still big enough to function ... So there are a lot of emotions attached to it.”* (Interview with Håkan Jönsson, April 5, 2016)

*“... people in very specific regions, especially in those regions where the region has a different background, different history, ... it means a lot to people and it creates a sense of community; whenever that community is threatened it gets stronger.”* (Interview with Mats Genberg, April 8, 2016)

The other two main markers of community are rituals and traditions which carry on the shared history, culture and consciousness; and a sense of moral responsibility towards the community as a whole as well as the individual members, which is also what produces collective action in times of threat to the community (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). These are clearly present also in the Milk Uprising case. Drinking Skånemejerier’s milk is the carrier of the cultural history related to Scanian farmers, and as the widespread consumer action showed, our findings show that there exist a strong will to fight for the persisting of the community as well as its symbols.

### **5.3 Summary of Analysis**

We found two big themes in the data; two overarching myths that in turn contained a number of smaller myths. One is that of David vs Goliath – a well-known biblical story of a small guy stepping against the giant, which nowadays is often used as a metaphor for an underdog situation. For one, we found that the David vs Goliath myth used was expressed across the companies that were involved in the case. Skånemejerier was the hero, the good guy who merited support, and Arla the bad guy with evil plans of world domination, and Coop also having a bad guy image although differently from Arla. Namely, the David vs Goliath situation could also be found within Coop where the small local Coop shops were opposing the “giant” headquarter. This opposition also illustrated

a myth of the Stockholm norm where the capital region was seen as pushing their ways on the rural regions and seeking domination.

The second overarching myth was that of homogenisation, which incidentally also is a part of processing milk, where all fat particles are made exactly the same size so that there are no different parts in the milk; instead everything is the same. It is related to the fear of Scanian people that they will lose their local identity. This was expressed in different ways, for one in the firm belief that there must be Scanian milk in Scania, that is simply the order of things. Skånemejerier's milk has become to symbolise the local identity and culture that is related to milk farming. In addition, that milk is related to everyday rhythms as something that is stable throughout time and space like an anchor, and thus helps consumers maintain a stable identity – the Scanian identity. Lastly, the confrontation of “us and them” was expressed through milk, with a clear understanding that the local identity in Scania is different from the rest of Sweden and has to be protected. The community distinguishes itself from those who do not belong to it and pose a perceived threat to it, and through it comes closer together, putting up great resistance to homogenisation.

## 6 Discussion

*In this chapter we will discuss our findings based on the myths presented in the previous chapter. These myths will be put in relation to the central theoretical concepts we have chosen to apply, we will also raise this discussion to a higher level and elaborate on what the myths hidden in milk all boil down to – a centre-periphery power struggle.*

In the analysis chapter the different myths uncovered in the Milk Uprising case were presented. What we found when looking at them all together is that there exists an overarching theme above all, namely the centre-periphery power struggle. Milk as an object unleashes and mediates some interesting tensions because of all the myths that are inherited in milk. Power struggles between consumers and big corporations, between small and big actors, but also between the centre and the periphery within companies and in the Swedish society in general, are expressed through milk. Milk has a cultural meaning in itself but this case shows that milk also unleashes meanings related to other things, it becomes a generator of the interesting myths of the local versus the national and David and Goliath – it is mediating a revolution against central power. Our findings show that there is more than the utilitarian view that needs to be considered about mundane consumption practices; in fact, the symbolic meanings can be much more important than the use value of milk – which is a generally established idea in consumer culture theory. Mundane items are capable of carrying much more meaning than can be seen at first sight which explains why they are able to spark a consumer revolution.

As was noted, milk in general means modernity and being civilised. Taking milk away therefore means taking away the possibility to be civilised and belong to the modern society. We can see a contradiction between the city and the countryside – the centre and the periphery. Traditionally it has been seen that the city is novel, innovative, the source of civilisation and development. The countryside, on the contrary, is lagging and conservative, traditional, slow-developing... It is very meaningful if milk is taken away from the periphery; this can be seen as a symbol of the centre declaring that the countryside is lagging behind. As Giddens (1984) has noted, the settings of social practices are often regionalised in space and time into “front” and “back” regions that have different degrees of disclosure, i.e. there are things that are kept from others. According to Giddens this disclosure is exemplified in the centre-periphery opposition where the centre has established itself as having control over resources and uses disclosure to maintain the distance from the periphery. In this case to own the milk and to have power over milk, which is the symbol of progress, enables to make sure that the periphery will never catch up or become a competitor or threat to the centre. Instead, the periphery will be dependent on and following the centre.



What is important in this case is that the milk has to be the right kind of milk. Skånemejerier's milk is the true milk and symbolises everything that milk is supposed to symbolise. For the periphery this revolt might be about not accepting milk of the centre as the true milk, because this would mean adopting the idea that the periphery is just an imitator, just trying to be like the centre. But having their own milk that they can say is truly theirs and they can be proud of – which Scanian people obviously are – this means that they are their own centre. Similar to what Kjeldgaard and Askegaard (2006) found in their study, we also found that the periphery can feel independent of the official centre and do not need it to “lead the way”. They do not want it to do that; they want to be something themselves, which links back to retaining the local identity. It is important to be something else than the centre, to have an own identity that differentiates from others, and to be able to make their own decisions. According to Lefebvre (2004), things in everyday life that are relative to social relations appear essential and authentic to people, and if a new element is introduced into the everyday, the existing construction might threaten to collapse and thus show that this construction was neither necessary nor authentic. The introduction of the wrong milk, Arla's milk, was undermining the Scanian order of things as well as threatening the ontological security that Giddens (1984) talks about – the sense of order and continuity in one's life.

Local Coop shops are the periphery of Coop, and it is the rule that they have to do what the centre tells them. But we could see they did not want to obey. They started acting up against the central power. They might have been waiting for an opportunity for long, maybe feeling marginalised in some way or in general having too little power. What leads to suspect this is the fact that the grass root level of Coop, that is, the shop floor workers, did not defend their organisation's central decision. Even a bit higher levels such as local shop managers did not. It does not matter whether they really were marginalised or not, but what is important is that they sided with the consumers. The periphery of Coop finally had the chance to fight for power. This revolt gave them the chance because they had backup. They could see that the consumers were making a revolution happen, and could use the power of the consumers to their advantage. By uniting forces, the periphery would have greater chances of having an effect.

Giddens (1984) speaks of the “dialectic of control” in social systems, meaning that all forms of dependence can provide resources for the subordinate to affect the activities of the superior. This comes from his overarching idea that structures are at the same time constraining and enabling actions. Strong tendencies of this can be seen in the empirical material. Only the fact that the people in the peripheral region of Scania (subordinate) raised their voices and successfully made an effort to affect the activities of big central corporations Coop and Arla (superior), proves that this notion of dialectic of control exists. The fact that consumers in Scania were subjected to central power from Coop enabled them to start acting against it and bring on a revolution.

For Lefebvre (2004), the chance to have an effect on rhythms comes with a crisis, and crises in turn have roots in the disruption of rhythms. This is a similar dialectical notion,

and we can see how the disruption of Scanians' everyday rhythms of consuming Scanian milk produced a crisis that led to the revolt which in turn had an effect on the rhythms. One effect was that the rhythms which were under threat were retained, but another effect was that they obtained a new acknowledged meaning at the same time. As Lefebvre (2004) has pointed out, there is always something new and unforeseen in everyday rhythms as well, and in this case the everyday milk became loaded with implications of centre-periphery power struggles. Even though in the end people were enacting the same rhythms as before, their meaning was different after the disruption and all the myths that were built up during the revolt.

There was also the question of authenticity and connecting to what is real for the consumers. Lefebvre (2004) has written of the evil power of capital and the domination-exploitation that goes with it. He notes that it kills social richness and produces only private richness, it delocalises humans and destroys roots. We can see how consumers have built the same ideas in the myths of homogenisation and David vs. Goliath. There is a lot of talk about huge, monopoly-like corporations concentrating power and exploiting people, in this case particularly milk farmers who get paid too little and the consumers who have to pay too much. Together with it are strong fears of killing diversity and local identity. This builds up to opposition to one brand ruling it all.

The findings show that Arla is very much like a hegemonic brand (Thompson & Arsel, 2004) that is exposed to oppositional consumer power discourse, where the oppositional localists revolt against the big globalised corporations in order to protect what is authentic and real to them. Many consumers felt the need to react because they wanted to support the farmers that were and are still going through a hard time making a financial profit. Some did not engage in this rebellion to save Skånemejerier as a brand but for the sake of supporting the farmers and the concerned employees, that build up the business from a grass root level. Holt (1997; 1998) in particular, emphasises how consumers are reliant on their predominantly class-based, sociocultural resources for negotiating global meanings and practices in their daily lives. What can be identified in this case is that the consumers were not willing to accept the globalisation of the market resulting in the takeover of big corporations in exchange for their local products and in favour for the farmers in their region. It can therefore also be seen as a discussion of class as well as supporting those with the same background as the consumer.

As many consumers pointed out, it is also a principal that there should not even be such powerful giants like Arla – powerful centres that can dictate everything for everyone, leaving the periphery with no choice but to obey. Otherwise they will be crushed – even though by obeying they already are crushed in a way because their capability to act will be more restrained. And yet, it is the restraints that also enabled action, like Giddens (1984) suggested – the consumer action and boycotts had tremendous effect and in the end looped back into strengthening the structures that govern the everyday in the periphery. More than ever it was acknowledged that the everyday routine of consuming

Scanian milk in Scania is something so rooted that it is kind of an institution, as Giddens would say.

The periphery strongly feels that it has the right to be somebody as well. As Kjeldgaard and Askegaard (2006) suggested, the periphery reflects more about their identity than the centre does, and the periphery focuses on locality while the centre happily receives globalism. It is likely that the perceived threat to identity plays a role here. The one who feels powerful does not have to worry about retaining identity; he is the one that takes over others, not the one who would be taken over. But feeling the risk of losing one's identity makes one hold on to it more tightly, and much more aware of its existence in the first place, just like Lefebvre's (2004) rhythms which become most apparent when they get stirred up and disrupted. Scanian consumers realised how important their milk is to them on the day when they did not find it on their shop shelves anymore. They took this as a direct attack on their identity of someone that is separate from the rest of the country and the central region, and also on the right to self-determination.

As can be seen, the struggles between the centre and the periphery have taken shape in a number of myths related to milk. A mundane item has become a carrier of some of the most important values to humans and society: the right to decide for oneself, to retain a stable identity, to not be bullied or exploited, to not feel repressed and destroyed, and by and large for power to be divided more symmetrically. In this light it is very hard to look at milk as just a low-involvement product anymore. The involvement is hidden in deeper levels of meaning, and mundane consumption appears to be intertwined with larger societal problems, underlining how valuable it is to take a good look into inconspicuous phenomena.

# 7 Conclusion

*In this final chapter we present our main conclusions. More specifically we address our research question and aims, the theoretical and practical contributions of our work, and some potential directions for future research that emerged from our study.*

## 7.1 Main Findings

The research question addressed in this study is why a mundane consumption item like milk was able to start such a huge revolt among consumers. We have analysed empirical material gathered with interviews and netnography, using myths as a tool and sociological theories about the everyday as a lens to look through. By taking a deep look into the meanings of milk we have revealed that this mundane consumption item was able to ignite a noteworthy revolt because milk is a mediator of broader social tensions for the people in Scania. Drawing to a large extent on Giddens, Lefebvre and Barthes, we have shown how milk is strongly tied to everyday rhythms and social structures in Scania, and how the disruption of order brought about protests and revolt.

Milk became a suitable outlet for social tensions because of the numerous myths that are embedded in it. We identified two main myths. The first of these was about David and Goliath, representing the good, little guy's fight against the big bad giant, and an opposition to central decisions. The second big myth dealt with cultural homogenisation, where the symbolic value of milk helped maintain cultural order and a stable identity through everyday routines and rhythms, and there was a strongly perceived threat to the distinct cultural identity in Scania. We found that these myths in one way or another boiled down to the power struggles between the centre and the periphery.

Scania is periphery in Sweden, while Stockholm is the centre that gets to make a lot of decisions that affect the whole country. However, Scanian people seemed to feel that this has gone too far and the ruling from the centre is threatening their self-determination, starting with the way to live and ending with the local identity. Milk has tremendous symbolic value for the Scanian community, being an anchor that connects the past with the future through everyday routines, and giving a feeling of independence and the right for even the "little guys" to decide for themselves. These are all very important notions in the human society and even though milk is considered a low-involvement product, it was able to capture and represent all those kind of tensions, leading to events that turned the mundane into something very significant and remarkable.

Naturally, since our study was a case study, we cannot statistically generalise the results by claiming that they hold in all sorts of contexts. However, theoretical generalisation is possible. We are convinced that our findings are not specific to milk only and there are

other mundane consumption items that can be found to have similar significance. As Barthes (2009) noted, everything can be turned into a myth, and our empirical material also contained implications that similarly to milk, other mundane products can be embedded into myths that are constructed around wider problems in the society such as the tensions between the centre and periphery. The same applies to the findings applying to other regions than Scania, and also outside Sweden. We conclude this from the way our interview respondents replied to questions about the possibility of similar consumer revolts, as well as the examples and parallels with other items that were presented in the netnographic material we analysed.

## 7.2 Theoretical Contribution

The main aim of this study was to obtain a deeper understanding of mundane consumption because we found that existing literature in the field was not enough to explain the reasons behind a case such as the Milk Uprising. Previous studies have found that mundane products are used in everyday life to enact identities (e.g. Halkier, 2001; Kleine, Kleine & Kernan, 1993; Laverie, Kleine & Kleine, 2002). However, it seems these identities are often viewed as related to status and displaying certain identities to others (e.g. Holt and Thompson, 2004), as well as aspiring for cultural ideals (Holttinen, 2014). Holt (2004) has pointed out that consumers flock to brands that embody their ideal identities and express who they want to be, and that both managers and academics have had a simplified view on the identity value of brands, implying that brands are mostly used as status symbols.

We agree that mundane items are relevant in terms of identity. However, our research has revealed that it is important in other dimensions than just showing something to others or gaining status. The identity value in mundane consumption is important for the feeling of consistency and security of identity because of the rhythmic nature of the everyday and also everyday consumption. As opposed to what has been found before, we therefore argue that the identity value in mundane products also has an internal direction, as opposed to the more external angles of chasing ideals and status.

Second, the findings related to identity construction also contribute to research on branding. It is known that consumers use brands in identity projects but our study underlines the need to acknowledge that some brands have clear regional connections – an aspect that has been mostly overlooked so far. Such connections are important in how people construct and maintain their identities. For instance, Jönsson (2005), Jönsson and Lindqvist (2010) and Kristensen, Boye and Askegaard (2010) have presented the symbolic value of the mundane consumption item milk for a whole nation, both in Sweden and Denmark, where the important thing about the brand is that it is Swedish or Danish. But our study of the Milk Uprising case has made it clear that this is on a too general level. To understand the identity of brands such as Skånemejerier and

the consumers that use this brand in constructing their own identities, we need to look at more detailed levels of locality. It is evident from our study that brands can be strongly linked to particular areas and through that become more authentic to consumers compared to other brands that might be available.

Third, our study has implications for behavioural decision theory. In the existing literature in that field, low-involvement products such as milk are related to routine behaviour that has the aim of making the everyday more convenient and easy, so that more time and energy would be left for decision making around high-involvement products that are more important in terms of expressing identity (Laaksonen, 2010).

We have shown that routines have other and arguably more important roles than simplifying the everyday life. The routines and structures in people's daily lives can function as the link that ties mundane consumption to social and cultural order. Disturbances in daily consumption habits therefore signify disturbances in the principal structures of the society. The Milk Uprising illustrates how mundane consumption mediates power struggles between the centre and the periphery and is concerned with the general right of everybody to independence and self-determination consumption is a crucial part of the modern western society and therefore we should not be surprised to find democratic values deeply intertwined with it. This can explain why an assumedly low-involvement consumption item all of a sudden becomes high-involvement with people spending considerable time and energy on it.

Fourth, this study further contributes to literature on brand resistance and anti-consumption (see Kozinets, Handelman & Lee, 2010; Kozinets & Handelman, 1998; Thompson & Arsel, 2004). By illustrating this with an example that made everyone stop and wonder – why on earth do people care about milk – this study brings clarity to brand avoidance and sheds light on the power of *not* buying a particular product by showing that the meanings behind the consumption are equally or even more interesting than the consumption practice itself.

Kozinets and Handelman (1998) illuminate that consumer boycotts traditionally have been conceptualised as a collective act of consumer resistance. Previous literature has viewed the meaning of this particular boycotting behaviour as focused on the practical aims of either to construct a functional change in a company's marketing mix, or a structural change in the whole system of marketing and commerce (Ganett, 1987, Friedman, 1991, both cited in Kozinets & Handelman, 1998). We additionally contribute to the stream of literature on boycotts and buycotts and brand resistance by adding an understanding in terms of the centre-periphery notion. Consumers are not avoiding brands such as Arla just because they do not like their products or do not like the CSR of the company, but because of the fact that it represents something bigger, a perceived problem in the society.

Lastly, this study contributes to consumer culture literature by focusing on the consumer action and the underlying meanings and symbolism that support the non-

consumption of a particular product or brand. Thompson and Arsel (2004) write about the hegemonic brandscape and how smaller competitors on the market make use of an anti-corporate brand image; more specifically they describe the opposition of local coffee shops and the multinational corporation Starbucks. Interestingly, we find that such "local producer" identity can be taken on by a brand that is relatively large itself. The equivalent of local coffee shop in our case should be the local milk farm, but instead Skånemejerier, which unites hundreds of farms, manages to adopt a local image that is completely credible in consumers' eyes. Therefore, the ability to make use of this anti-corporate position depends on more than the size of the company.

### 7.3 Practical Implications

From a more practical point of view we underline that much like researchers, companies and managers should also not underestimate the symbolic value that can be hidden in seemingly mundane products. Just because something seems to be first and foremost related to routines does not mean that it cannot have a strong significance to consumers. As we have shown, everyday routines can have substantial meaning to people as they help retain stability and social order, and therefore the items related to those routines also become meaningful. Therefore, it is important when entering a market to try to understand the cultural context and the underlying hidden cultural meanings and orders that are not self-evident.

Brands might have more value than they perceive themselves, as illustrated by how Skånemejerier was surprised by this consumer revolt and the support they received. It is important to look into this and be aware of the deeper meanings of your brand. Safeness, which the representatives of Skånemejerier thought their brand signifies, can mean more than the ability to be sure that you always get what you expect. It can, as was illustrated in this case, represent the kind of safety that is related to the social world retaining its order, safety of being able to retain a stable identity, and safety from the feeling of being "rolled over" by someone more powerful. Making use of such knowledge enables to build a much more powerful brand than one that is only communicated as delivering stable quality, which is something that everyone expects anyway and therefore a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for an outstanding brand promise.

As can be seen in the article about the hegemonic brandscape by Thompson and Arsel, (2004) and also in this case, there is a power struggle between the big corporation and the small bohemian brand; a David and Goliath situation that enables the little actor, Skånemejerier, to act as David. Our findings and the discussion of Thompson and Arsel (2004) show that it is not always bad to *not* be the market leader, since this can lead to potential openings of new positions on the market, to do business and make money, but in a way that appears different to consumers than that of "Goliath-brands", which in turn

allows them to obtain more sympathetic consumers that really appreciate the small, local and authentic.

There are also implications for retailers to better understand these deeper meanings of the brands they are selling. An important notion that arises is that even though it can be hard to have control over all the nuances related to all the brands one sells in their shop, it is important to be receptive to the smallest cues and implications. If these are missed and mundane products are discredited as something that consumers do not care much about anyway, small disapproval can quickly grow into a huge revolt that causes a lot of damage.

## **7.4 Future Research**

This research was particularly about milk and showed that the myths around milk go even wider and deeper than what was known from previous literature. However, as Barthes has pointed out, everything can become an object of myth and therefore other types of mundane consumption items should be researched as well. These items may be more or less embedded in myths and therefore have different potential in becoming such significant representations of larger social phenomena.

Something that also can be further researched is the strong ties between the local identity and a brand. This study focuses in particular on consumers in one specific region in Sweden but it can also be interesting to see whether these findings can be transferred onto other regions in Sweden and other countries than Sweden.

While researching why mundane items are able to cause great turmoil, we also saw that there is a lot of material related to the question of how such consumer revolutions happen. Some of our analysis gives insight into this question as well, but it was not our aim to organise and draw conclusions from this. However, we recognise that future research can continue to dig deeper into the community feeling that emerges in this type of case and receive fruitful results. There is more to add to the literature on e.g. consumer tribes (see e.g. Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Maffesoli, 1996; Cova, 1997) and consumer publics (see Arvidsson, 2013) concerning mundane consumption items and the ephemerality of consumer groups that join forces for a cause and then, once the mission is accomplished, vanish into thin air.



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# Appendix

**Table A.** Sources for netnography

<b>Title</b>	<b>Type</b>
Coop suger fett! Sälj skånsk mjölk i Skåne!	Facebook group
Köp Skånemejerier i Skåne och INTE ARLA eller dylikt!	Facebook group
Väljer du skånemejerier framför arla?	FamiljeLiv.se forum
Skånemejerier vs Arla	Bukefalos.com forum
Coop slutar sälja Skånemejeriers varor, Dags at[t] boycotta Coop?	Odla.nu forum
Coop backar om Skånemejerier	Kolhydrater iFokus forum
Gör en Pudel - Coop	Kenneths Vardag blog
Slutord mjölkdebatten	Kort från Kvarnby blog
Biter det digitala upproret mot Coop?	Rolf van den Brink's blog
XBong om mjölk	Stefan Stenudd's blog
Facebook presence for Skånemejerier	Genberg & Co blog
Nu är det sluthandlat på Coop	Sverigedemokraterna Simrishamn web page
En liten uppföljning	Salt blog
Coop och Skånemejerier	Torbjörn Lövendahl's blog
Skånemejerier	Veckans Middag blog
Tala om spilld mjölk	Svenska Livsmedel blog