



LUND
UNIVERSITY

SMMP40 - Service Management: Master's Thesis

**The Practice of Shopping Discounted Near-Expiry Food
in Retail Stores Across Sweden**

Mary Thalia Travelita Pasaribu

Matilde Agostinho Simão

Supervisor: Kristina Bäckström

19th May 2026

Acknowledgements

Firstly, we would like to thank our families for their unconditional support, even being away from home, and for everything they have done for us.

Secondly, we would like to thank our supervisor, Kristina Bäckström, for always being available, for the excellent input provided during supervision sessions and for always being willing to help.

Thirdly, we would like to thank everyone who was involved in the completion of this master's thesis, especially the interviewees who generously volunteered their time to contribute to this research.

Fourthly, we would like to thank all our friends who became family while away from home, and for all their company here in Sweden.

Finally, we would like to thank Lund University and all the lecturers who taught the courses that contributed so much to our learning, in both the Service Management courses and those specific to each specialisation, Retailing and Consumption and Culture and Creativity Management.

Thank you,

Mary Thalia Travelita Pasaribu

Matilde Agostinho Simão

Abstract

Grocery shopping is an essential and regular part of everyday life, and retail stores across Sweden have sought to reduce the risk of near-expiry food becoming waste by selling these products at discounted prices. Discounted near-expiry food is particularly interesting because it is often perceived as risky, yet also offers consumers a way to shop more ethically by saving food and money. While previous research has examined what motivates consumers to buy such products, less attention has been paid to the practice of shopping for them in the store. This master's thesis explores the practice of shopping for discounted near-expiry food in retail stores across Sweden, focusing on the in-store shopping environment, consumers' knowledge and skills, and the meanings and values involved. Using a qualitative approach, the research is based primarily on 19 semi-structured interviews, complemented by in-store observations and virtual ethnography. The analysis is grounded in practice theory as developed by Shove et al. (2012), Reckwitz (2002) and Warde (2005). It also draws on Warde (2014) processual understanding of consumption and Gregson et al. (2002) perspective on shopping as a spatial practice.

Keywords: Near-expiry food, Sweden, Shopping, Practice theory

Table of contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1. Background on Near-Expiry Food Shopping in Physical Retail Stores.....	1
1.2. Problematisation, research aim and research questions.....	2
1.3. Thesis Outline.....	3
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	4
2.1. Near-Expiry Food Shopping in the Literature.....	4
2.2. Consumer Risk, Quality, and Safety Perception.....	5
2.3. Social and Moral Meaning.....	5
2.4. Food Retail Stores.....	6
2.5. Knowledge Gap.....	7
3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	9
3.1. Practice Theory.....	9
3.1.1. Meanings.....	10
3.1.2. Competences.....	11
3.1.3. Materials.....	11
3.2. Processual Perspective on Consumption.....	12
3.3. Shopping as a spatial practice.....	12
4. METHODOLOGY.....	14
4.1. Research Approach.....	14
4.2. Method Justification.....	15
4.2.1. Semi-Structured Interviews.....	15
4.2.2. Observations.....	15
4.2.3. Online Ethnography.....	16
4.3. Data Collection.....	16
4.3.1. Semi-Structured Interviews.....	16
4.3.1.1. Interview Guide Development.....	16
4.3.1.2. Sample and Participant Selection.....	17
4.3.1.3. Interview Context and Conduct.....	17
4.3.2. Observations.....	18
4.3.2.1. Store Selection.....	18
4.3.2.2. Observation Object.....	18
4.3.2.3. Observation Protocol and Variation.....	18
4.3.3 Online Ethnography.....	19
4.4. Analytical Procedures.....	19
5. ANALYSIS.....	20
5.1. Socially Shared Routines of Near-Expiry Food Shopping.....	20
5.2. Meaning in Near-Expiry Food Practices.....	22
5.3. Knowledge and Skill in Shopping Near Expiry Food.....	26
5.3.1 Acquiring Discounted Near Expiry Product.....	26
5.3.2 Assessing Near-Expiry Products: Price, Dates, Senses and Risk.....	31

5.3.3 Appropriating and Appreciating Near Expiry Food.....	37
5.4. Material and Spatial Barriers to Near-Expiry Food Acquisition.....	41
6. DISCUSSION.....	47
6.1. Near-Expiry Food Shopping as a Collectively Reproduced Practice.....	47
7. CONCLUSION.....	50
7.1 Research overview.....	50
7.2 Implications.....	52
8. REFERENCES.....	55
9. APPENDIX.....	60
9.1. Consent form.....	60
9.2. Interview guide.....	62

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background on Near-Expiry Food Shopping in Physical Retail Stores

Grocery shopping is an essential and regular part of everyday life (Seo, 2024; Hagström et al., 2025). In this context, retailers offer a variety of products in each store (Kök et al., 2008). This assortment may include products that are near their expiry date, which are the result of stock management and discounting techniques designed to minimise food waste and maximise profit (Haijema et al., 2026). In Sweden, as in other countries, these products are made available to consumers at reduced prices (Naturvårdsverket, 2021).

Near-expiry food refers to food whose expiry date is approaching and which no longer meets optimal conditions (Song et al., 2021). Research shows that products with a short remaining shelf life are often perceived as lower quality or higher risk than those with a longer shelf life, even when they are safe and suitable for consumption (Chen et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2023). However, consumers may still choose products that are perceived as risky for both ethical and economical reasons (Cicatiello et al., 2019). Discounts can be useful for promoting products that are not in the best condition, as they can encourage purchase intent for items that might otherwise be rejected. They also encourage more exploratory purchases, including products consumers would not consider at full price (Chang et al., 2024).

Despite the growth of digital food platforms, studies indicate that a large part of consumers in Sweden still prefer to shop in person, particularly for regularly purchased items such as food (Grönlund et al., 2024; Fuentes et al., 2021). This preference for physical retail demonstrates that food stores remain as a central site of everyday consumption. When it comes to near-expiry food, being physically available in the stores enables consumers to inspect their appearance, touch and compare them before making a decision (Chen et al., 2024). Other visual elements also play a role in how consumers evaluate products and behave in the store environment. These include packaging, product display, signage, labelling, and store layout (Gagarin et al., 2025; Štulec et al., 2016). This is something that digital alternatives cannot fully replicate. Therefore, while shopping for near-expiry food extends across both physical and digital dimensions, the retail stores remain a central site where this practice is performed. However, shopping for near-expiry food is not limited to what happens in the store alone.

Drawing on Warde (2014) processual understanding of consumption, shopping can be understood as a fuller process that extends before and after the store visit. Since the placement of near-expiry products actively influences whether and how shoppers engage with near-expiry products (Basu et al., 2022), understanding near-expiry shopping requires particular attention to what happens in the store.

1.2. Problematisation, research aim and research questions

In recent years, research on near-expiry food has grown, building valuable knowledge about what makes consumers more or less willing to buy these products. Studies have examined factors such as price sensitivity, label perception, safety concerns, and sustainability. This has resulted in a substantial body of knowledge about what makes consumers more or less willing to shop near-expiry products (Aschemann-Witzel et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2024). This research has been valuable in exploring why some consumers are drawn to near-expiry products while others avoid them, and it has identified the communication strategies that can improve purchase intent (Aschemann-Witzel et al., 2018; Collart and Interis, 2018). However, how consumers shop for near-expiry products in the in-store environment, taking into account their knowledge and skills, and the meanings and values involved, remains underexplored. Using the lens of practice theory is therefore useful here, as it shifts attention from shopping as a simple buying decision to shopping as an everyday activity. From this perspective, food shopping involves competences, meanings and material conditions, and is connected to other routines, such as cooking, eating, storing food and household coordination (Fuentes et al., 2021; Fuentes & Samsioe, 2021). This enables shopping for discounted near-expiry food to be studied as a shopping practice performed in a particular retail store.

This thesis aims to explore the practice of shopping for discounted near-expiry food in retail stores across Sweden, considering the meanings and values involved, consumers' knowledge and skills, and the in-store shopping environment. The following research questions were therefore formulated:

RQ: *How is shopping for discounted near-expiry food performed in retail stores across Sweden?*

- **SRQ 1:** *What meanings and values do consumers attach to the practice of shopping discounted near-expiry food in retail stores across Sweden?*

- **SRQ 2:** *What knowledge and skills do consumers draw on when shopping discounted near-expiry food in retail stores across Sweden?*
- **SRQ 3:** *How does the store environment shape the practice of shopping discounted near-expiry food in retail stores across Sweden?*

1.3. Thesis Outline

Thus, this research falls within the field of retail and focuses particularly on shopping for near-expiry products in retail stores across Sweden. This thesis is structured as follows. In chapter two, a review of the existing literature on near-expiry food shopping is presented. This is followed by an identification of the knowledge gap that motivates the research. In chapter three, the theoretical framework is outlined, drawing on practice theory as developed by Shove et al. (2012), Reckwitz (2002) and Warde (2005). It also draws on Warde (2014) processual understanding of consumption and Gregson et al. (2002) perspective on shopping as a spatial practice. In chapter four, the qualitative research methodology is described, including the use of semi-structured interviews, in-store observations, and online ethnography as data collection methods. In chapter five, the analysis and the discussion are presented. And in chapter six, the conclusion is presented, including practical recommendations for food retailers, limitations of the study, and directions for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review was conducted using mainly Google Scholar, the Lund University Finn platform, and Scopus Advanced Search. The search terms included combinations such as "near-expiry food", "close-to-date food", "food with expired use-by dates", and broader concepts including "surplus food", "suboptimal food", and "imperfect food". Additionally, relevant topics for answering the research questions were identified through topic-based searches covering areas such as store environment and related retail topics. Articles were selected based on relevance to the research phenomenon and eliminated through abstract screening. Additional sources were identified through citation tracking and supervisor recommendations.

2.1. Near-Expiry Food Shopping in the Literature

In academic literature, near-expiry products are discussed under a range of overlapping terms. Martin (2025) uses the term close-to-date products. Aschemann-Witzel et al. (2015) use the broader concept of suboptimal food, which encompasses any food perceived as of lesser value than a comparable item, whether due to date, appearance, or packaging damage. Meanwhile, De Hooge et al. (2017) use the term imperfect food, sometimes also called ugly food, to refer specifically to products that deviates from cosmetic standards in shape, size, or appearance, rather than being temporally at risk. These terms are not always used consistently across studies, and grouping them together can obscure what is distinctive about near-expiry products specifically, which is that their reduced value is driven by time pressure rather than cosmetic or supply factors.

Some researchers have begun using the terms near-expiry food or nearly expired food more directly, such as Song et al. (2021) and Chen et al. (2024), both referring specifically to food products approaching their best-before or use-by date. This thesis follows the same usage, adopting the term near-expiry food to refer to food items approaching their expiration date and offered at a reduced price, distinguishing them from other forms of suboptimal food.

Over the last years, the field has moved away from viewing near-expiry products as merely a markdown issue. Newer literature treats them as a consumer decision problem shaped by price, date interpretation, safety judgement, household planning, moral meaning, and retail communication (Aschemann-Witzel et al., 2017; Chen et al., 2024). At the same time, much of this work still conceptualises shopping as an individual, attitude-driven decision and

focuses on willingness to buy, rather than on shopping as a socially situated and materially shaped practice. This thesis responds to that gap by examining near-expiry food as part of an everyday shopping practice performed in a particular retail setting.

2.2. Consumer Risk, Quality, and Safety Perception

When it comes to near-expiry products, as long as they are stored correctly, they are generally considered safe to consume (Lee et al., 2023). Despite this, consumers often perceive them as either riskier or lower in quality when compared to products with a longer shelf life (Chen et al., 2024). Confusion around date labels further contributes to this perceived risk. Kavanaugh and Quinlan (2020) show that food date labels were seen as confusing for many shoppers, which helps explain why they often treat close-to-date items as risky even when they are still safe.

Other research highlights how these risk judgments are shaped by food category. Stangherlin et al. (2019), whose work focuses on suboptimal products close to expiration, found that items were often rejected because shoppers wanted a longer shelf life, yet many were also willing to buy when they believed the product could be consumed the same day or incorporated into recipes. Pandey et al. (2024) add an important category dimension in their study of meat and seafood close to the expiry date, showing that willingness to buy was shaped by perceived quality, food safety, social acceptability, and price, with strong differences across product types. Consumers were willing to pay more for minced beef close to expiry than for cod fillets or chicken breasts, suggesting that not all near-expiry products trigger the same level of concern.

2.3. Social and Moral Meaning

Beyond risk and price, near-expiry shopping also carries social and moral meanings. Aschemann-Witzel et al. (2020) show that buyers of suboptimal food are often perceived positively as economic, thrifty, and environmentally concerned. At the same time, Liang et al. (2024) report that some consumers resist near-expired products because they fear being stereotyped as stingy or unable to afford full-price items. Together, these studies highlight an

ambivalent social image in which near-expiry shopping can signal smart, ethical thrift in some contexts and low status or embarrassment in others.

The image of the store is also implicated. Aschemann-Witzel et al. (2020) show that in an emerging retail market context, selling imperfect or near-expiry products could be perceived as a sign of a careless or low-quality store. At the same time, how near-expiry products are displayed and communicated shapes how shoppers evaluate the products individually, in terms of whether they appear trustworthy, fresh enough, or worth buying. Both dimensions are relevant in the Swedish context, where major food retailers actively communicate sustainability and environmental responsibility as part of their identity (Naturvårdsverket, 2025). The handling of near-expiry products therefore carries implications both for store image and for shopper confidence in the products themselves.

Information and moral framing also affect how consumers justify buying food around its use-by date. Collart and Interis (2018) show that simply explaining the meaning of use-by dates does little to change preferences, as participants still prefer food within the date. When this explanation is combined with information about the scale and consequences of food waste, however, participants become more willing to buy food at or even slightly past its use-by date, especially frozen products or those close to the end of the date range. This suggests that reluctance is limited awareness of the broader consequences of waste.

2.4. Food Retail Stores

Research on store atmospherics and shopper behaviour underlines the importance of physical and visual conditions for shopping practices. Aschemann-Witzel et al. (2019) claim that fresh products are particularly subject to sensory evaluation. Shoppers use smell, texture, and appearance as part of their judgment of near-expiry food, making the sensory conditions of the store directly relevant to acceptance or rejection. Lee et al. (2023) further show that purchase aversion for near-expiry food can vary by channel. In their study of an online salvage store, aversion was stronger on personal computers than on mobile devices, with deep discounts reducing this difference. While focused on digital retail, this finding reinforces the idea that purchase context shapes how time-related risk is perceived.

Martin (2025) examines discounted close-to-date food in Sweden through a practice lens, focusing on how these products are integrated into broader provisioning practices, including planning, cooking, eating, and disposal. She shows that dedicated near-expiry fridges can be

useful once they are known, but can also disrupt shopping routes by requiring shoppers to double back, and that shelf placement, visibility, discount stickers, and product arrangement influence whether shoppers notice, trust, or ignore these products. Her work highlights the role of store environment in shaping near-expiry shopping but treats the in-store encounter as one part of a wider chain.

2.5. Knowledge Gap

The literature reviewed above has provided valuable insights into near-expiry and other suboptimal foods from the perspectives of consumer attitudes, communication effectiveness, label perception, and food waste reduction. Studies have shown how price sensitivity, risk and quality perception, date label understanding, and sustainability-oriented messages influence consumers' willingness to buy these products. This means that the general factors that make people more or less willing to purchase discounted food with a short remaining shelf life are relatively well understood.

However, several gaps remain. One conceptual gap concerns how near-expiry products are frequently grouped together with other forms of suboptimal food, such as cosmetically imperfect produce or surplus items. This grouping can obscure what is distinctive about near-expiry products specifically, namely that their reduced value is driven by time pressure and limited remaining shelf life rather than by cosmetic or supply factors.

A second gap is geographical. Many of the key contributions in this field come from countries such as Denmark, Brazil, Uruguay, and China, while the specific retail context of Sweden remains underexplored.

A third, and central, gap is theoretical and concerns how shopping is conceptualised. Most existing studies are framed through purchase intention models or marketing effectiveness, which treat shopping as an individual, attitude-driven decision.

As discussed above, Martin (2025) begins to move in this direction by examining discounted close-to-date food in Sweden through a practice lens, focusing on how these products are integrated into broader food provisioning practices, including planning, cooking, eating, and disposal. While her study offers valuable insights, its main focus is on the full provisioning chain rather than on the in-store shopping moment specifically. The specific question of how

shoppers encounter, assess, and select discounted near-expiry food in the supermarket, and how this is shaped by meanings, competences, and material conditions, remains largely open.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This thesis uses practice theory as its main theoretical foundation. Practice theory is useful because it treats shopping as something people do through the coordination of materials, competences, and meanings (Shove et al., 2012, pp. 14–16; Reckwitz, 2002). Drawing on this, this thesis will use Warde (2014) processual understanding of consumption as an additional framework.

Warde (2014) identifies acquisition, appropriation, and appreciation as three interconnected dimensions of consumption, and all three will be applied throughout the analysis of this thesis. Together they allow shopping for discounted near-expiry food to be examined as a full consumption process, one that includes how shoppers obtain products in the store, how they incorporate those products into everyday household life, and how they evaluate and form judgments about the practice and its outcomes.

In addition, the thesis uses Gregson et al. (2002) perspective on shopping as practised as a supporting spatial lens for understanding how these in-store moments are shaped by store layout, visual cues, movement through space, and routine ways of engaging with products.

3.1. Practice Theory

In the seventies, new theories arguing that society is constructed through everyday practices have emerged. That is, to understand society, observing the usual ways of acting and living together is also crucial (Reckwitz, 2002).

The concept of practice can be interpreted in different ways. For instance, practices can be viewed as the knowledge and skills that ground human actions. Practices can also consist of organised activities involving people and intangible elements. Additionally, they can be considered as a group of socio-material practices that are linked to other people, contexts, and actions (Shove et al., 2012, pp. 14-16; Reckwitz, 2002). Regarding social practices, Reckwitz (2002) suggests that practice theory offers a new perspective by considering elements such as “body, mind, things, knowledge, discourse and structure/process” as interconnected and integral to these practices (Reckwitz, 2002). Reckwitz (2002) also states that according to practice theory the “body” is where mental order manifests itself visibly. This is because learning something involves acting in a specific way with it. The “mind” is also part of social practice and is socially constructed. “Objects” play an active role in social practices, helping

to shape individuals' behaviour. "Knowledge" is collective and shared by all individuals involved in a social practice. "Discourse" is always linked to everyday activities, functioning as a tool within social practices. In terms of "structure", social structures are formed by routines, and society changes when these routines no longer function and people need to adapt. Finally, the "agent" is the individual who carries out social practices. They are seen as the point at which different practices converge. Therefore, practice theory considers human action more broadly, suggesting that practices are not merely individual decisions, but part of a wider context.

Social practices are not individual actions, but rather a set of interconnected and dynamic elements including material, competence and meanings. Practices therefore exist when these three elements are interconnected, and they can change when these connections are altered or disappear if these connections break down. Competences encompass both know-how and practical knowledge. Materials include everything necessary for the practice. Lastly, meaning gives the practice social value (Shove et al., 2012, pp. 21-26).

In this thesis, the practice theory and its elements are applied to consumption, more specifically to the consumption of near-expiry products in retail stores across Sweden. To this end, it is essential to recognise that consumption is not limited to the purchase of goods, but encompasses a range of specific practices. Consumption choices are linked to what is socially expected in each practice, with actions and interactions shaping what people wish to consume. In this sense, it is important to consider consumption as a moment within these practices (Warde, 2005).

3.1.1. Meanings

The concept of meaning includes ideas, aspirations and symbolic meanings (Shove et al., 2012, p. 14). These have no fixed meaning and change according to what they are associated with (Shove et al., 2012, p. 15). Such associations, however, are unstable and depend on the individuals involved and the context. Furthermore, the reorganisation of these meanings helps to structure society (Shove et al., 2012, pp. 53-56).

According to Warde (2005), when applying practice theory to consumption, practices occur as part of a broader process of gratification. Practices can provide various types of internal or external satisfaction. In this context, some activities are considered more socially valuable

than others. Furthermore, people from dominant groups tend to value practices they consider important more highly, whilst more common practices may be viewed as less relevant.

3.1.2. Competences

Competences include know-how, techniques, and skills (Shove et al., 2012, p. 14). These have to be learned, requiring time. Depending on the location and the people, in some cases, competences can only be acquired once prior knowledge has been obtained (Shove et al., 2012, p. 56-57). Drawing on Warde (2005), it is also important to acknowledge that competences can vary between social groups and influence how individuals engage with and value social practices.

3.1.3. Materials

Materials include all physical, tangible entities, such as objects and technologies (Shove et al., 2012, p. 14). Initially, practice theory focused primarily on elements such as human actions and meanings, overlooking materials which were considered supplementary to social practices.

Since this thesis is grounded in practice theory, the store environment is understood as part of the material conditions that shape the practice of near-expiry shopping. Practice-theoretical approaches give special attention to the role of material arrangements, equipment, and the wider environment in shaping everyday action, rather than treating them as neutral background factors (Warde, 2014; Shove et al., 2012, pp. 8–9, 14–16). Materials do not simply enable practice, they actively shape what is possible, what is noticed, and what feels accessible or out of reach.

In the retail stores, material conditions include the communicative materials through which near-expiry products are made visible and legible to shoppers, discount stickers, price labels, signage, banners, and packaging. These materials are central to the shopping practice since they determine whether near-expiry products can be encountered at all, whether they can be assessed with confidence, and whether the selecting moment can be completed without friction (Warde, 2014).

Material conditions are not equally accessible to all shoppers (Shove et al., 2012, pp. 15–16). The same shelf placement, the same labelling system, and the same store layout can create very different experiences depending on how familiar a shopper is with the store, how much

prior knowledge they bring, and how much physical and social effort they are willing to invest. Understanding the material dimension of the practice therefore requires attention to how those arrangements interact with the competences and meanings that different shoppers bring to the setting (Shove et al., 2012, pp. 14–16).

3.2. Processual Perspective on Consumption

Warde (2014) processual framework treats consumption as unfolding through three interconnected dimensions: acquisition, appropriation, and appreciation. All three dimensions are relevant to this thesis and are applied throughout the analysis (Warde, 2014).

Acquisition refers to the process of obtaining goods, how shoppers encounter, assess, and select products during the shopping trip. Appropriation refers to how goods are incorporated into everyday life and routines. Appreciation refers to how goods are valued, evaluated, and experienced, including the aesthetic judgments, sensory responses, and meanings attached to consumption.

It captures how shoppers assess the value of a product in relation to its price, quality, and perceived risk, as well as the broader meanings they attach to the practice. It often extends beyond the store visit, as shoppers reflect on their purchases, and those reflections shape the meanings and expectations they bring to subsequent shopping trips.

These three dimensions allow shopping for discounted near-expiry food to be examined as a full consumption process, one that begins before the store visit with prior meanings and expectations, unfolds across the in-store moments of encountering, assessing, and selecting, and extends into household life and community sharing after the purchase.

3.3. Shopping as a spatial practice

Gregson et al. (2002) perspective on shopping as practised provides a supporting spatial lens for this thesis, complementing the materials dimension of practice theory and Warde's processual framework (Warde, 2014). Where Shove et al. (2012) treat materials as the physical objects, technologies, and infrastructures that enable practice, and where Warde (2014) focuses on the processual dimensions of acquisition, appropriation, and appreciation, Gregson et al. (2002) draw attention to how store space itself is experienced spatially and socially by shoppers moving through it (Gregson et al., 2002). Together these perspectives

allow the store environment to be examined at two levels: as a material infrastructure that enables or constrains what shoppers can do, and as a spatial and social setting that shapes how that doing unfolds in practice.

Gregson et al. (2002) argue that shopping should not be reduced to purchase alone. It involves relations to goods, relations of looking and seeing, the place of shopping in the rhythms of everyday life, and the socialities of shopping. Crucially, they argue that shopping space is not a pre-given neutral location but is produced through practice, the meanings invested in shopping spaces are generated through what shoppers do, how they move, and how they talk about shopping (Gregson et al., 2002).

Three dimensions of Gregson et al. (2002) framework are particularly relevant to this thesis. The first is their understanding of relations to goods, the idea that shoppers engage with products not only through purchase decisions but through looking, touching, handling, and comparing. This dimension is useful for analysing how shoppers engage with near-expiry products in the food retail setting, where the physical and spatial conditions surrounding a product shape what kinds of engagement are possible. The second dimension is their attention to movement through store space, the idea that what shoppers notice and encounter is shaped by how they move through the store and how goods are made visible along that movement. This is directly relevant to understanding how near-expiry products are or are not encountered during a shopping trip. The third dimension is the socialities of shopping, the recognition that shopping takes place in a shared, visible, public space, and that the presence of other shoppers shapes how and whether certain activities are performed. This dimension provides a useful lens for understanding how the social conditions of the store environment shape engagement with near-expiry sections specifically (Gregson et al., 2002).

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research Approach

A literature review was first conducted to establish whether previous studies had been carried out on the topic, to identify the knowledge gap, and to inform the design of the data collection instruments (Bernard et al., 2017, pp. 17-18). After identifying the gap, the thesis topic was defined, and relevant literature was searched on platforms such as Google Scholar, the Lund University Finn platform, and Scopus.

This thesis adopts a qualitative research approach due to its relevance for the study of social phenomena (Flick, 2023, p. 3). Qualitative research is concerned with understanding how people experience, interpret, and make sense of phenomena in their everyday lives. This approach is suited to the aim of the present study, which is to explore the practice of shopping for discounted near-expiry food in retail stores across Sweden. Since the study focuses on how shoppers encounter, assess, and select near-expiry products in practice, including the competences they draw on, the meanings they attach to the practice, and the role of the store environment, a qualitative approach is appropriate.

For this study, data were collected through three qualitative methods: semi-structured interviews as the main method, with observation and online ethnography as supplementary methods. Although triangulation is often associated with quantitative methods, the term is also applicable here, as more than one method was used to study the social phenomenon and thereby increase confidence in the findings (Clark et al., 2021, p. 364). The combination of semi-structured interviews, observations, and online ethnography is suited to understanding a complex phenomenon focusing on consumers' experiences and meanings (Lim, 2024). Each method contributes a different dimension of knowledge: interviews provide access to shoppers' accounts of their competences, meanings, and routines; observation makes visible the material and spatial dimensions of shopping in real store environments; and online ethnography extends the geographic reach of the study and captures how near-expiry shopping is discussed and represented in digital communities across Sweden.

4.2. Method Justification

4.2.1. Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary method because they give interviewees space to share flexible and detailed responses while still allowing specific issues to be addressed (Clark et al., 2021, p. 425; Flick, 2023, p. 195). This is important for a practice-oriented study, where the goal is to understand how competences, meanings, and routines are described by shoppers themselves rather than to confirm predefined categories. Semi-structured interviews also allow follow-up questions in response to unexpected or particularly relevant answers, making it possible to explore dimensions of the practice that were not anticipated in advance. Interviewers are expected to demonstrate qualities such as active listening, alertness, flexibility, and impartiality, and to observe interviewees' body language to determine whether they are comfortable with the questions being asked (Clark et al., 2021, p. 432).

4.2.2. Observations

Observation was selected as a supplementary method because it offers both factual and experiential insights that interviews alone cannot capture. As Flick (2023, p. 225) explains, observation can be used to examine theoretical ideas by looking at how certain phenomena appear and where they occur, and to describe particular settings. Shoppers may not be fully aware of their own routines and movements, and they may describe their behaviour differently from how it unfolds in the store (Flick, 2023, p. 222). Observation therefore provides a way of accessing the material and spatial dimensions of the practice directly, which is relevant to the first sub-question concerning how the food retail setting shapes the shopping practice.

Following Flick (2023, p. 222), observation also involves the use of multiple senses, including seeing, hearing, feeling, and smelling, which is particularly relevant in retail environments where spatial and sensory conditions shape how shoppers engage with near-expiry products (Flick, 2023, p. 222). This multi-sensory dimension is directly relevant to this study's aim, as material conditions such as spatial arrangement and product display are part of how near-expiry shopping is organised and experienced.

4.2.3. Online Ethnography

As the internet has become an important social space, research methodologies have evolved to include online ethnography. When the internet is viewed as a space, it becomes possible to conduct ethnographic studies of existing online communities (Flick, 2023, p. 410). For this thesis, an online community study without researcher participation was conducted (Flick, 2023, p. 412), examining discussions and material available on social media platforms such as Facebook.

4.3. Data Collection

4.3.1. Semi-Structured Interviews

4.3.1.1. Interview Guide Development

The interview guide was developed based on the theoretical framework and the research questions. The three sub-questions, concerning the store environment, shopper competences, and meanings, were used as the main thematic pillars. Each theme was translated into a set of open-ended questions designed to invite detailed, reflective responses. The literature review, particularly findings related to label perception, quality judgment, and social meaning, also informed the development of follow-up questions. Pilot interviews were conducted as a practice exercise prior to the actual interviews (Clark et al., 2021, p. 433).

The guide included several types of questions (Clark et al., 2021, pp. 429-431). Introductory questions established rapport and oriented participants to the topic, for example by asking them to describe a recent grocery shopping trip. Follow-up and probing questions were used to explore specific themes in more depth, such as how participants decide whether to buy a discounted near-expiry product. Specification questions asked participants to give concrete examples from their own experience, while interpretation questions invited them to reflect on the meanings and values they attach to the practice. At the end of each interview, a closing statement indicated that all questions had been asked and invited participants to add anything they considered relevant (Clark et al., 2021, p. 444).

4.3.1.2. Sample and Participant Selection

The research questions guided the selection of participants to ensure the relevance and meaningfulness of the data (Clark et al., 2021, p. 377). A combination of purposive, snowball, and convenience sampling was employed. Purposive sampling ensured that participants met key inclusion criteria, which is regular grocery shoppers in Sweden with prior experience of buying discounted near-expiry food products (Clark et al., 2021, pp. 382-383). Age, geographic location, and occupational diversity were also considered to ensure a range of perspectives. Snowball sampling was used when participants referred the researchers to other potential interviewees, and convenience sampling was applied where access was limited, particularly for participants outside the Skåne region.

The initial target sample size was sixteen participants, balancing the need to reach theoretical saturation against the need to allow in-depth analysis (Clark et al., 2021, pp. 382-383, 386). The final sample consisted of nineteen participants, including eight men and eleven women. Occupations included graduate students, professionals, post-graduate students, and housewives, reflecting a range of household contexts and shopping situations. Geographically, most participants were located in Skåne, primarily Lund and Helsingborg, which allowed the researchers to visit the stores referred to during interviews, while additional participants from Uppsala, Norrland, and Stockholm provided geographic diversity beyond the southern region.

4.3.1.3. Interview Context and Conduct

Interviews were recorded using a voice recorder (Clark et al., 2021, p. 431). The interviews were then transcribed, coded, and analysed (Clark et al., 2021, p. 425). Transcription was carried out manually by repeatedly listening to the audio and pausing as needed to ensure accuracy (Clark et al., 2021, p. 441). Where there was uncertainty about what had been said, question marks were used. In total, nineteen interviews were conducted.

4.3.2. Observations

4.3.2.1. Store Selection

Observations were conducted in four food retail stores, referred to as Store/Food retailer A, Store/Food retailer B, Store/Food retailer C, and Store/Food retailer D, located across three cities in Skåne: Lund, Helsingborg, and Landskrona. These stores were selected for several reasons. First, they represent different retail formats, including supermarkets, hypermarkets and discount stores, which allows for comparison of how near-expiry products are displayed and encountered across different store types. Second, selecting stores in the same region as the majority of interview participants made it possible to observe the specific store environments that participants referred to in their accounts, strengthening the connection between interview and observational data. Third, the stores were selected to include both larger and smaller formats, reflecting the diversity of food retail settings that shoppers in Sweden typically encounter.

4.3.2.2. Observation Object

Observation was used to understand the overall atmosphere of the stores and how it might influence shopper behaviour and decision making. In line with the theoretical framework, observations focused on three dimensions. Regarding materials, attention was given to how near-expiry products were displayed, including shelf placement, visibility, discount stickers, signage, packaging, and the location of dedicated near-expiry sections or fridges, as well as overall store layout and navigation. Regarding competences, the researchers observed how shoppers engaged with near-expiry products, including whether they searched for discount sections, how they inspected products, read labels, compared options, and handled items. Regarding meanings, attention was given to behavioural cues that suggested how shoppers evaluated near-expiry products, such as hesitation, rejection, repeated inspection, or quick selection.

4.3.2.3. Observation Protocol and Variation

A covert approach was used to minimise disruption to the natural setting and to observe shopper behaviour as it took place in an everyday retail context (Flick, 2023, p. 225). The observations were carried out at different times of day to capture variation in store conditions and customer activities (Clark et al., 2021, p. 266). This was important because the

availability, placement, and restocking of near-expiry products may vary across different times of day, and customer density and behaviour patterns may also differ between morning, afternoon, and evening visits. During each visit, attention was given to bodily movement, pauses, hesitation, and product handling as well as spatial interaction with the display areas. Notes were written after leaving each site and were later expanded into fuller observational reports, capturing both specific actions and broader reflections on how the store environment shaped the shopping experience.

4.3.3 Online Ethnography

Online ethnography data were collected from Facebook pages associated with Store B and Store C, and several Store A and Store D locations. This method was applied to retail chains included in the physical observation phase and across several Swedish cities that could not be covered through interviews or observations, including Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö, Uppsala, Linköping, Jönköping, Luleå, Umeå, Västerås, and Kiruna. This allowed the study to gather data on how near-expiry products are communicated, displayed, and discussed in retail contexts beyond Skåne, contributing to the geographic breadth implied by the thesis's focus on Sweden as a whole.

4.4. Analytical Procedures

The interview material was analysed using thematic analysis, involving familiarisation, coding, and theme development. After transcription, both researchers read through the material and developed an initial set of codes based on recurring topics, patterns, and concepts. These codes were then organised into broader themes, and the coding process was conducted collaboratively.

5. ANALYSIS

5.1. Socially Shared Routines of Near-Expiry Food Shopping

Social practices are not individual actions, but rather a set of interconnected and dynamic elements, which include the material, the competence and the meanings (Shove et al., 2012, pp. 21-26). Competences encompass know-how and practical knowledge, materials include everything necessary for the practice, and meanings give the practice social value (Shove et al., 2012, pp. 21-26). When it comes to shopping for near-expiry products, personal preference is not the only factor; social norms and the influence of family and social groups also influence this practice.

The interviews reflect that family often plays a key role by passing on consumption habits and influencing behaviour relating to consumption and everyday life. Some participants mentioned that their family members had introduced them to the discounts, describing it as something they had inherited.

Participant S: *"... I didn't used to have this habit, I started having a habit when ... My partner started having this habit and then I also have this habit as well. So it's something that I inherit, honestly"*

Similarly, a person's social circle whether neighbours, colleagues or friends, also influences behaviour through practices considered common within the social group. And some interviewees even mentioned that they had subsequently taught their friends about these practices.

Participant P: *"... And sometimes I teach my friends as well."*

Through the in-store observations, it was possible to witness the interactions between shoppers and near-expiry products. One interaction in particular stood out. A shopper that went to food retailer A with the sole aim of buying a bag full of near-expiry products. It was also regularly observed shoppers stopping in this near-expiry food area to browse the available products. Additionally, some interview participants highlighted how they had already integrated these near-expiry products into their routines, sometimes even prioritising them over products with longer expiration dates.

Participant B: “... Well, I think it has become an intention or it has become like a routine, so. I'm moving through the store, but I know that this section is there, so I will make a stop, right?”

Participant R: “... going to the discount aisle was kind of part of our routine [ahnmm] so we knew where it was in [Food retailer C], so we would kind of work it into our routine. So when we would get to the meat aisle, because it was right next to the meat aisle, we would first look at the discount section to see if there's any discount meat, because most of the time we just buy it and freeze it, or use it that day. [ahnmm], but yeah, so it was part of our routine to go to that discount section”

These observations and accounts show that buying near-expiry products has become a routineised part of everyday shopping for some consumers. This aligns with Reckwitz (2002) understanding of social practices as repeated, meaningful patterns of action, where the practice of buying near-expiry products is a learned behaviour, reproduced through family, social circles and cultural norms, and gradually embedded in everyday consumption activities. In this case, the routine manifests itself in various ways, with some consumers almost instinctively drawn to these products and often favouring them over others. This demonstrates how consumption patterns have been internalised and incorporated into daily shopping practices.

Furthermore, shopping for near-expiry products is sometimes a response to digital stimuli, such as content on social media. When these actions are repeated consistently, they become routines that make consumption of these products more predictable. Content on social media that attracts consumers to the store also facilitates this. In this way, digital stimuli reveal the complexity of current social practices. Through virtual ethnography, it was possible to observe that most food retailers in Sweden share their promotions online. Among these, food retailers B and C stand out as being particularly active, with specific pages for their various stores across the country. Individuals interacted with these pages almost as a routine when discounted near-expiry products were available. Some interviewees confirmed that they were aware of these social media pages and had used them themselves, even sharing them with friends.

Participant Q: “Yeah, there was one Facebook page, like one of the grocery stores here. [tangent] The system is, when you want to buy the discounted item, you have to book it by commenting on the post. But sometimes I will also share it with friends because apparently in

that particular shop, sometimes it is cheaper to get something in bulk. So I will message my friends if they want to join and buy together.” “And they will like your comment if your booking is confirmed. And then you can pick it up and pay. But you have to show the Facebook post on your phone.”

Across the Facebook pages and other social media accounts examined in the online ethnography, posts about discounted near-expiry products were typically framed as time-limited opportunities to save food and money, often accompanied by photos of full baskets or shelves and explicit calls to come quickly before items ran out. Comment threads frequently included shoppers mentioning friends, sharing insights about which stores offered the best near-expiry deals that week, and expressing excitement or pride about securing large discounts, while occasionally some comments voiced scepticism about quality or frustration when offers were no longer available. These online interactions mirror the meanings identified in the interviews, and present near-expiry shopping simultaneously as a small social event that can be shared with others, rather than as a private practice that is kept hidden.

5.2. Meaning in Near-Expiry Food Practices

Social practices are not individual actions, but rather a set of interconnected and dynamic elements, which include the material, the competence and the meanings, with the last one conferring value on the social practice (Shove et al., 2012, pp. 21–26). The concept of meaning includes ideas, aspirations and symbolic meanings (Shove et al., 2012, p. 14). As highlighted in the interviews when it comes to shopping near-expiry foods, these meanings usually include, saving money, reducing food waste, finding good deals, among others, thereby attributing to them a cultural and social dimension that goes beyond their functionality.

Participant A: *“... finding good deals. I think that's the only thing.”*

Participant D: *“[pause] I think mostly reducing food waste would be first [reason to consume near-expiry foods]”*

Participant K: *“To me, it means [ahnnmm] saving money.”*

However, as previously mentioned, meanings are socially constructed (Shove et al., 2012, pp. 53-56). The same applies to the meanings of shopping for near-expiry products. For instance,

certain cultural elements contribute to defining what is considered socially acceptable in terms of consumption. As highlighted in the interviews, some participants mentioned that they were taught from a young age not to waste food and to save money, two of the main aspects associated with near-expiry products.

Participant PI: *“For me, it's a very cultural question because I was taught from my young age that we don't, we don't waste food and [ahnmm], my family, we try to be as savvy as possible, like always.”*

Participant E: *“But I think I'm [ahnmm], very sustainable when I'm doing [ahnmm], cook or living my life, like, I'm very attentive about the water usage, electricity from childhood is like in our DNA in the family.”*

When it comes to the meanings attributed to near-expiry products, price is a major factor for many consumers. However, when asked about their decision to shop for near-expiry products, many consumers said they would like to be able to answer sustainability, a factor that society generally values, even though this is not necessarily their actual motivation.

Participant K: *“... I would like to say sustainability, but that's not the reason why I'm doing that [ahnmm] like it's, it's, it's a nice touch to add [ahnmm] but my main reason is to, yeah, save money.”*

Participant S: *“I would go with saving money finding good deals, reducing food waste [ranking of reasons to shop for near-expiry food], not very proud about it, but I would go like that [laughs]. Yes, I am honest [laughs]”*

Once again, as Reckwitz (2002) highlights, the “mind” is part of a social practice and is socially constructed. Therefore, the meaning of shopping for these products is also influenced by social norms, including the social value placed on sustainability.

However, while some interviewees acknowledge this social norm, some also argue that they are not the main source of the problem.

Participant A: *“...I think in the big ecosystem, I'm completely unimpactful, how much food I waste or create or whatever. [self-corrects] I don't think it's like psychological warfare that people play that, you know, I should take the personal responsibility as a tiny ant in this big world.” “...Others, probably they would say that environmental reasons, I would agree with that. So I'm not arguing that it's not unimpact, not impactful. [ahnmm] but, you know, when,*

again, back to [food retailer D] that, uh, basically mold in and rotten fruits appear out of nowhere during the week [ahnmm] that I never saw in the store before. [ahnmm] that's just a weird way to show that this is your trash. That's the store's trash, and then they try to quickly get rid of it, and then it's my responsibility."

Participant B: *"... I think. I don't go there to help the supermarket waste less ... It's also their problem, right? I'm only one of many customers, so... But still, it does matter. To a certain degree, I can help them avoid food waste or reducing, right? But it's not my priority."*

As previously mentioned, price is a major factor for many consumers when it comes to near-expiry products. However, meanings are unstable and depend on individuals and the context (Shove et al., 2012, pp. 53-56). Similarly, price does not have the same meaning for everyone. Some people may see the low price of near-expiry products as a positive factor, as it enables them to save money.

Participant PI: *"So I try to like convince myself to get discounted prices because I know it's good. It's good to save money and it's good to not have this go to waste."*

However, the low price of near-expiry products is sometimes viewed unfavourably by society and can also be seen as a negative factor. According to Warde (2005), certain activities are considered more valuable than others in this context. The same applies to shopping for near-expiry food, as many consumers still believe it carries a stigma.

Participant K: *"... It feels that you're doing something cheap. You know? Which it is but ... [ahnmm]... I don't know ... it is [ahnmm]... I don't like if other people can see that, you know?"*

In this case, the fact that this practice is still stigmatised may cause consumers to avoid or hide it, which demonstrates that some activities are considered more valuable than others.

However, some people actively participate in social media groups dedicated to sharing near-expiry food. This shows that, while some may view it as stigmatising, many also find it rewarding and exciting.

Participant P: *... "He [interviewee friend] opened a Facebook group where he shares food that the supermarket throws away because they cannot sell it anymore. He brings it home and the group, it is quite big, he shares that food for free. [shows phone] You see, all the*

members can share the food. So if people have things at home they do not use, or they got something for free, they share it there. And people can just comment to take it.”

According to Warde (2005), when applying practice theory to consumption, practices occur as part of a broader gratification process, providing various types of internal or external satisfaction. When it comes to near-expiry products, some consumers are also motivated by the gratification that comes from finding a good deal. This gratification also arises from consumers’ involvement in seeking discounts and discovering products with significantly reduced prices, making the purchase more rewarding.

Participant E: *“...But it's good, like [Ahnmm], yeah, economically, [Ahnmm] mentally, [Ahnmm] rewarding experience...”*

Furthermore, surprise is a highly relevant element, as it is not possible to predict which products will be available in stores. This creates a distinctive shopping experience, contributing to the sense of gratification.

Participant B: *“...This finding a good deal feels good maybe, right? Or, yeah, feels like an achievement or something ...”*

However, despite these meanings being attributed to nearly expired products, it is clear that they can change over time. This is because the meanings are not fixed, but change according to what they are associated with (Shove et al., 2012, p. 15). Such associations are, however, unstable and depend on the individuals and context involved, with the reorganisation of these meanings helping to structure society (Shove et al., 2012, pp. 53-56). In this case, although the change in meaning has occurred in only one person, it demonstrates how meanings are socially constructed and that they are not fixed, sometimes also causing others to see things differently.

Participant P: *“...The first concern is the price, of course. But nowadays, like when I am already working, the price does not matter as much. Now it is more for the environment, I think. But yeah, the first time it was for the price. Sometimes they sell it at 50% off, so cheap. But then yeah, I am making money now and price does not dictate my choice anymore.”*

5.3. Knowledge and Skill in Shopping Near Expiry Food

5.3.1 Acquiring Discounted Near Expiry Product

Several participants described having consistent shopping routes when visiting their regular store; routes were shaped as much by the store's physical layout as by personal habit. A common pattern that we found is that shoppers typically began with fresh produce, moved through bread and bakery sections, then continued to dairy and meat before completing their trip through household and non-perishable aisles. One participant noted that the store is designed in a way that naturally guides movement.

***Participant C:** "You start on the right side of the shop, you clear that section out, and when you make a turnaround you go collecting everything back. But it happens by design, I think"*

***Participant B:** "in terms of routine, I just go in and think about what I need and maybe buy a deal that pops up, right? That looks attractive, but I don't have the shopping list necessarily"*

Another participant described following the script the supermarket provides, suggesting that for many shoppers the route through the store is less a personal choice than a response to how the space is organised. This reflects what Gregson et al. (2002) describe as the produced nature of shopping space, where the route through the store is not a neutral or pre-given path but is actively shaped by how the retailer has organised the space and what shoppers do within it. Movement through store space, in this sense, is itself a material condition that determines what shoppers notice, what they pass by, and what remains invisible to them.

This becomes particularly important for near-expiry shopping because where products are placed, relative to the shopper's natural route, determines whether they are encountered at all. In stores where near-expiry sections were positioned within high-traffic areas, such as around fresh produce, near the bread section, or in the middle of main aisles, shoppers came across discounted products as a natural part of their movement through the store, without any additional effort or intention. One participant described noticing near-expiry products precisely because they appeared along the route they were already taking.

***Participant J:** "In my case, most of the time I happen to find the normal-priced product first. And then on my way to the cashier, that is when I see the near-expiry section and realise it contains the exact same thing I had taken before."*

By contrast, in stores where fresh produce and dairy were positioned at the back of the store, which draws shoppers deeper into the store before reaching the sections they came for, the near-expiry products placed around those areas were encountered later in the trip, or sometimes not at all when shoppers took shortcuts to reach what they needed. For shoppers visiting a store for the first time, without prior knowledge of where near-expiry sections might be, the layout of the store became the primary mechanism through which near-expiry products could be discovered.

Through the materials dimension of practice theory, the store layout can be understood as an active shaper of the practice, determining which products enter the shopper's field of attention and which remain invisible depending on where they are positioned relative to the shopper's movement through the store (Shove et al., 2012; Warde, 2014). Thus, the encountering moment is shaped by what the store places in shoppers' paths.

The first challenge we identified of shopping discounted near-expiry foods was distinguishing near-expiry products from the rest of the shelf. Not all stores made this straightforward. Several participants described learning to read the store's own signalling system; red price labels, colourful banners, and special discount signs were the most consistent indicators across stores.

Participant B: *“At least in [food retailer E] they use, like, bright red stickers, right? To attract people's attention. Draw their attention, but yeah, I think in this case, it's well made as well. Easily, easily findable.”*

Participant J: *“I do not really know the exact location, but they usually have colourful banners or something. Well, red labels, basically. Something that catches your eye. So I do not really know the exact location, but you somehow stumble upon it when you walk around or when you are looking around.”*

Some stores used more elaborate systems where the signs indicated a fixed low price for products expiring the following day, a signal that Participant K had learned to seek out specifically in the vegetarian aisle on every visit. Others relied on subtle stickers that required proximity to notice, and at least one store used handwritten labels that, as several participants discovered, were not always registered in the checkout system at all. One participant described one store's approach as loud and visible, almost advertising the discount from the moment you entered, while another store was far more restrained.

Participant E: *"at [store B] they put up stands, it's like the store is screaming 'I have a discount'. At store D it's smaller price tags, so you have to be more attentive"*

These observations show the interdependence of materials and competences in practice theory. In Warde (2014) terms, the encountering moment can fail not because the products are absent but because the material conditions through which they would normally be encountered have changed beyond the shopper's current knowledge. For first-time visitors, or those whose regular store had recently been reorganised, the near-expiry section could feel genuinely difficult to locate. One participant described being unable to find any near-expiry food that was considered worth buying in one store but preferring the near-expiry selection in another store chain.

Participant J: *"[pause] I do not really know the exact location, but they usually have colourful banners or something"*

Participant N: *"In [store D], there is a shelf for things that are like nearly rotten, and they look not so good, and I will not buy those. But as long as in [store B], they are pretty good. The products are still in intact packaging and the consistency, the colour, and the smell are the same."*

Participant A: *"Before, I knew where they were. Now that they moved them at [store D] I don't know where they are, but I'm intentionally trying to find it"*

These accounts suggest that familiarity with near-expiry sections is dependent on how the store maintains a consistent material organisation; the knowledge and perceptions customers have about the general quality of near-expiry products in each store are built through these material arrangements. The same layout that enables confident navigation for a regular shopper can create confusion and barriers for one whose knowledge has been disrupted or not yet formed (Shove et al., 2012).

As the data suggests, the difference between feeling certain and feeling uncertain as a near-expiry shopper is largely a matter of familiarity. Several participants described knowing exactly where to go the moment they entered their regular store. One participant described heading directly to a specific freezer in store D where discounted products regularly appeared, checking it as a matter of routine on every visit.

Participant D: *“There’s a specific freezer that I usually see that they have discounted things.”*

Another described going straight to the vegetarian aisle at store E to look for the discounted products before moving to any other section.

Participant K: *“That’s why I always go through the vegetarian island. If I see that there’s some products discounted like that with this klipp discount, then I will just buy it. And if it’s something that I can also freeze, then I buy a lot and put them in the freezer.”*

Another participant described planning the time to visit the store deliberately.

Participant O: *“I think season does not affect my shopping experience. The most thing that affects me is the last hours of time when the supermarket is packed by people who have already finished their job, like afternoon, after three or four PM”*

For these shoppers, familiarity with the store had transformed near-expiry shopping from an uncertain activity into a practised and efficient routine, one that required little conscious effort because the knowledge of where to look, when to go, and what to expect had been built up over repeated visits. This development of store-specific spatial knowledge reflects the competence dimension of practice theory, competences that must be learned over time and that, in some cases, can only be acquired once prior knowledge has been obtained (Shove et al., 2012, pp. 56-57). The confidence of an experienced near-expiry shopper is not an innate trait but the accumulated product of repeated performance in a specific material environment.

Beyond recognising the visual signals of near-expiry products, experienced shoppers also developed an understanding of the specific discount systems different retailers used and how to work with them. For example, the discount system at store E applied a fixed low price to products expiring the following day, and participants who understood this knew exactly which aisle to check and what the sign meant even before they had approached the product.

Participant K: *“They have this nice thing where, when like a product is about to expire like the next day, and they have many, they put this discount that’s called klipp in Swedish, I don’t know how it’s translated, where like if it’s 50 crowns, then every, well, every one of them is just 10 crowns, you know?”*

Other retailers used percentage-based sticker systems, membership discounts, or handwritten labels, which required different forms of understanding and expectation from shoppers. For

customers motivated primarily to save money, this knowledge made them intentionally shop at different stores according to the products that they wanted to buy, rather than being loyal to one single retailer. One participant described shopping in multiple stores in a single trip based on where the best near-expiry value could be found that day.

Participant C: *"... yesterday, when we went shopping, so basically we made our main shopping list in [food retailer D], and for additional things, some are better in [food retailer A], so we go there and, like, make half and half purchased from these 2 shops to get everything that we need, usually."*

These store navigations required a broader competence of comparing systems. In practice theory terms, this cross-store competence reflects the know-how dimension of Shove et al. (2012) understanding of competences: practical knowledge that enables participation in a practice and, in this case, extends beyond any single store to include how different retailers organise and communicate near-expiry products. Learning to read these systems was itself a competence that developed through repeated exposure and varied across stores and formats. This empirical material supports Shove et al. (2012) view of competences as context-dependent forms of know-how learned over time.

For some shoppers, the skills required to access near-expiry products were extended into digital platforms. One participant described navigating a retailer's Facebook-based booking system specifically for near-expiry products, commenting on posts to reserve items, coordinating bulk purchases with friends to reduce individual cost, and bringing proof of booking to the store at collection:

Participant Q: *"... when you want to buy the discounted item, you have to book it by commenting on the post. But sometimes I will also share it to friends because apparently in that particular shop, sometimes it is cheaper to get something in bulk. So I will message my friends if they want to join and buy together. And they will like your comment if your booking is confirmed. And then you can pick it up and pay. But you have to show the Facebook post on your phone"*

This illustrates a form of pre-shopping competence that is considerably more complex than simply checking a social media page. The online ethnography also showed that regular contributors to these pages had developed practical know-how about booking rules, timing, and store-specific practices, effectively teaching others how to participate in these digital

extensions of near-expiry shopping. The competence required to participate in this system is not self-evident and would be entirely inaccessible to a shopper unfamiliar with the retailer's digital practices. It represents one of the more elaborate extensions of near-expiry shopping competence observed in the data, connecting the individual shopper to a broader community network and requiring digital literacy to perform.

This digital competence shows how the materials dimension of near-expiry shopping is expanded beyond the physical store into digital space: the Facebook booking system functions as a material condition that enables or excludes participation in the practice just as shelf placement and signage do in the physical store (Shove et al., 2012; Warde, 2014). That this competence also requires social coordination connects it to Reckwitz (2002) understanding of knowledge as collective and shared; the practice here is performed not by an individual alone but through a network of participants who maintain it together.

5.3.2 Assessing Near-Expiry Products: Price, Dates, Senses and Risk

Finding a near-expiry product is only the beginning when it comes to shopping discounted near-expiry foods. Once noticed, shoppers engaged in a distinct set of practices that separated near-expiry shopping from regular grocery shopping, a more deliberate and attentive form of evaluation that drew on their personal knowledge, judgement, and sensory experience.

Once a product was identified, shoppers applied a layered evaluation that began with the price. Most participants described having developed personal thresholds for what they considered worthwhile near-expiry discounts. The benchmarks were built through accumulated experience of what had and had not felt like a genuine saving. Some thought in percentages: more than 40% off was worth considering, less than 20% was not.

Participant F: “ think I mentioned it a bit earlier. Based on the price, how big the discount is. If it’s about 40% off the normal price, I would buy it.”

Participant B: “When I’m checking [the near-expiry shelf], I’m considering which of these products can I use, or is there anything that I could integrate into my meals? Because the discounts are usually quite big... bigger than discounts you will find throughout the store.

And that tells you they really want to get rid of those instead of throwing them away.”

Others thought in absolute kronor, noting that a percentage saving on a cheap product could feel meaningless in practice. One participant described dismissing a discount of just one or two kronor regardless of the percentage, while the same percentage off an expensive product like salmon felt transformative.

Participant F: *“For example, for a 20-kronor item, an 8-kronor discount isn’t that big. But if you buy a batch of dumplings, or, like, salmon, from a normal price of 50 or 60 kronor, and then you get it for 12 kronor, that’s a good deal. ... It’s more about the total kronor saved than the percentage itself. I just use the percentage to help me simplify whether the discount is big or not.”*

One participant described using the percentage primarily as a quick mental shortcut, with total kronor saved being the real measure of value.

Participant F: *“it’s more about the total kronor saved than the percentage itself. I just use the percentage to help me simplify whether the discount is big or not”*

The data suggests that these thresholds were not fixed rules but personal benchmarks refined through experience, a form of practical competence that allowed shoppers to make fast judgements without deliberating each time. These personalised thresholds reflect what Shove et al. (2012) describe as the techniques dimension of competence, practical rules of thumb that are developed through experience and that allow practitioners to act efficiently without having to reason from scratch each time.

The expiry date itself was the next layer of evaluation, and here too participants demonstrated a range of knowledge and interpretation. Several described understanding that best-before dates indicated quality rather than safety, a distinction that many had not always held and that some described arriving at through specific experiences or sources of information. One participant had read an academic report during their studies arguing that almost all products remain safe well past their stated date and described this knowledge as fundamentally reshaping their approach to near-expiry shopping.

Participant B: *“I know that the date is an indicator of quality or when is the best quality. Until what time can you expect the best quality of a certain item, right? And I know that it doesn't mean that after that you cannot ... should not eat that product.”*

Another described the Swedish linguistic framing of the date, *bäst före*, meaning best before, as itself communicating that the date was a quality indicator rather than a hard safety limit.

Participant A: *“I just know that the expiration date doesn't mean anything... expiration date is even in Swedish, it's better framed because it's not expiration date, but best before. So it's kind of just a suggestion.”*

Not all participants shared this understanding equally, and for some, particularly with dairy products, the expiry date retained its force as a meaningful boundary. One participant described treating milk and yogurt with considerably more caution than other products, having had direct experience of dairy spoiling before its stated date.

Participant PI: *“[thinking] I think just milk ... milk and yogurt. Because I feel like here, I think it's just probably here in Sweden. I don't think those products last that long actually. Like sometimes I've gotten yoghurt and expired before the expiration dates. So that's, yeah, it's happened a lot actually. So with those products, I always try to take the longest expiration dates”*

The interpretation of expiry dates was therefore not uniform but calibrated, shaped by product category, personal experience, and accumulated knowledge that differed across shoppers. This interpretive skill reflects the competence dimension of practice theory; the ability to read and calibrate a date label is not a single fixed skill but a cluster of practices that develop through experience, cultural background, and accumulated product-specific knowledge (Shove et al., 2012). What appears to be a simple act of reading is, for experienced near-expiry shoppers, an interpretive competence shaped by experience, personal knowledge, and educational background.

Beyond dates and prices, the physical condition of the product played an important role in the evaluation, and this was where the sensory dimension of near-expiry shopping became most visible. Participants described a consistent sequence of physical engagement: scanning from a

distance, moving closer, picking the product up, turning it over, reading the label, inspecting the packaging, and in many cases applying direct sensory assessment. One participant described a practical rule applied to all near-expiry products regardless of category.

Participant B: *"...look, smell, taste, if it looks fine, if it smells fine, if it tastes fine, then there shouldn't be an issue"*

Another described pressing bread gently with a finger to feel whether it was still soft before deciding.

Participant PI: *"If it's bread, I try to like see if it's like squeezy or not. And if it's very, very like hard, I will not get it... if I can, I try to test how the quality feels."*

A third described smelling fruit and vegetables directly, recalling a discounted zucchini that felt soft to the touch and was left behind, and a pineapple that smelled sweet and was taken.

Participant J: *"Most of the times I would look at the texture or the colour of the product. For chicken breast, for example, I use my visual first, which one looks more fresh."*

These sensory practices were not universal; participants who bought packaged or frozen products described having fewer opportunities for direct sensory assessment. However, they represented a core competence for shoppers who regularly bought fresh near-expiry items, one that had been refined through experience of what good and bad products felt, looked, and smelled like. In practice theory terms, this sensory competence reflects what Reckwitz (2002) describes as the bodily dimension of practice: learning near-expiry shopping involves not only using the mind to calculate price and date but training the body to notice, handle, and assess products in ways that develop through repeated physical engagement. The body and its senses are therefore active instruments of competence used to perform the practice.

How the product is categorised also shaped evaluation. Several participants described applying fundamentally different standards to fresh and processed products. For fresh items such as meat, fish, fruit, and vegetables, the evaluation was more intensive: more careful date checking, more sensory inspection, more cautious threshold-setting. One participant described refusing to buy near-expiry processed products that would need to be consumed

over a longer period, while readily buying fresh products that could be cooked immediately or frozen the same day.

Participant N: *"I prefer not to buy a processed or ultra-processed product if it is near the expiry date, because usually I will use it over a longer period. I cannot use it right away. So I prefer to buy products with a longer expiry date. But for fresh products, I can cook it right away and store it in the freezer"*

Another participant described never buying near-expiry raw fish under any circumstances, citing food safety concerns specific to that category, while being entirely comfortable with near-expiry meat that could be cooked.

Participant K: *"If I would eat animals, I wouldn't buy, like, fresh fish, that's about to expire, like, sushi. I see sometimes discounted sushi in shops... I wouldn't buy those... Because... with fresh fish, especially when it's raw... I don't trust it. It's like a feeling that I have that I wouldn't... I wouldn't dare to try because raw fish can be dangerous."*

Some participants had developed product-specific knowledge that went further still. One described knowing that fermented products like kimchi were not meaningfully constrained by their stated date because fermentation continued to improve the product over time.

Participant D: *"but an expired kimchi is not technically expired... because the more it gets fermented, it is like better for your gut Expired or near-expiry kimchi. But other than that, I do not go out of my way to check if there is something"*

Participant PI: *"For mozzarella, I always get them because I always put my own mozzarella in the freezer. So I don't really care about the expiration dates there, actually, because like, I know the life hack, like I can put them in the freezer and when I take them out, I can eat them the same day. So with, yeah, with like mozzarella or other types of cheese that are like it, I don't care so much if its expiration date is about to expire, but like if I find [it] discounted, I will get it."*

These category-specific competences represented some of the most developed and personalised knowledge in the data, knowledge built through curiosity, experimentation, and

sometimes failure. They illustrate the depth and differentiation that practice theory attributes to practical knowledge (Shove et al., 2012) competences are not a single unified skill but a collection of unique practices, each adjusted to the specific conditions, risks, and possibilities of a particular product type.

Failure also played its own role in developing customers' competence. Several participants described bad experiences that had refined rather than ended their near-expiry shopping practice. One described buying a discounted vegan salami that turned out to contain mould, noting that while the experience was unpleasant, the expectation of lower quality had already been present:

Participant K: *"...if I paid 10 crowns for it, I'm not going to complain"*

Another described buying near-expiry raspberries that went mouldy within days, an experience that had taught them to be more selective about which fruits were worth the risk.

Participant A: *"Recently, I threw out a few, also kind of, some kind of berry... You know, that berry that bears eat in cartoons... Never mind. Raspberry, yeah, raspberry."*

One participant described the broader calculus of near-expiry shopping as involving an accepted degree of uncertainty.

Participant F: *"there's always a bit of gambling when you buy a near-expiry product. How long is it going to last in your storage?"*

These accounts suggest that near-expiry shopping competence includes not only the knowledge of how to evaluate and select products but the development of a particular relationship with risk, one in which some degree of unpredictability is accepted as part of the practice. This relationship with risk reflects a dimension of competence that Shove et al. (2012) do not address explicitly: the skill of deciding how much uncertainty is considered acceptable. Near-expiry shopping, unlike regular grocery shopping, involves a degree of unpredictability that must be managed rather than eliminated. The experienced shopper has developed a practised tolerance for it, informed by past experience and incorporated into how the practice is routinely performed. This balancing act also connects to Warde (2014)

appreciation dimension, in which the judgement of whether a product is worth its risk is an evaluative act that shapes the selecting moment and is refined through the accumulated experience of previous shopping trips.

5.3.3 Appropriating and Appreciating Near Expiry Food

As shoppers assessed products, they also considered whether potential purchases genuinely fit their household situation. Although familiar customers shared how they gained skills and competences in how to effectively shop discounted near-expiry foods, not every opportunity that shoppers recognised and valued was one they could act on. Several participants described situations in which the willingness to buy was present but practical constraints made the purchase impossible or unwise.

Quantity was one of the most common limiting factors, especially when products were available in volumes that exceeded what a household could realistically consume before deterioration, regardless of how good the price was. One participant described food retailer's A surprise bag as a recurring example of this: reliably cheap, often containing good products, but always providing more carrots or cabbage than could be eaten in the available time.

Participant A: *“Recently, I threw out a few, also kind of, some kind of berry... You know, that berry that bears eat in cartoons... Never mind. Raspberry, yeah, raspberry.”*

Mobility introduced another constraint. Participants who shopped on foot or by bicycle described being unable to carry large or heavy discounted items even when they wanted to, and described the frustration of finding a good deal and having no practical way to bring it home. Storage capacity shaped decisions too: a participant living in a small studio apartment described passing on bulk near-expiry purchases that a larger household would have taken without hesitation.

Participant L: *“If I cannot consume them before the expiration date I just put in the frozen area in my fridge... like, in my fridge, there are something like... they already got expired, but it's nothing. It's fine. They're in the frozen areas, okay?”*

Beyond logistics, the broader context of the week mattered. Upcoming travel, social plans, periods of limited time or energy, and an already full freezer all factored into whether a near-expiry product that was good value in principle was actually a good decision in practice. These constraints reveal that near-expiry shopping competence is about knowing one's own household situation with enough clarity to judge whether an opportunity is genuinely worth taking, a form of self-knowledge that developed alongside, and was just as important as, knowledge of the store.

This self-knowledge dimension connects to what Warde (2014) describes as appropriation, the process through which goods are incorporated into everyday life. The present data shows that appropriation is not only a post-purchase process but one that is actively anticipated during the selecting moment in the store. Shoppers who have developed a clear understanding of their household's capacity, size, routines, storage space, and weekly schedule are better positioned to judge whether a near-expiry opportunity is genuinely viable or merely attractive. Those without this self-knowledge are more vulnerable to the psychological pull of the discount, buying products that will ultimately be wasted rather than saved.

This integration of spatial knowledge and domestic planning was particularly visible in accounts where near-expiry shopping had become a fully embedded household routine. One participant described building the near-expiry section into their shopping route as a deliberate first stop, going directly to the discount aisle upon entering the store, checking what was available in the meat section, and making a decision about whether to buy and freeze or cook the same day before continuing with the rest of the shopping.

Participant R: "going to the discount aisle was kind of part of our routine so we knew where it was in the store, so we would kind of work it into our routine. So when we would get to the meat aisle, because it was right next to the meat aisle, we would first look at the discount section to see if there's any discount meat, because most of the time we just buy it and freeze it, or use it that day"

This account illustrates how spatial familiarity and domestic competence, knowing where to go and knowing what to do with what is found, develop together as part of the same practised routine rather than as separate skills. The simultaneity of spatial and domestic competence reflects Warde (2014) appropriation dimension operating alongside acquisition: the decision

of whether to buy and freeze the product is not made after the store visit but is anticipated and evaluated during the selecting moment itself.

Moreover, the practice did not always end smoothly at the checkout. Several participants described situations where the discount shown on the shelf was not automatically applied at the register, handwritten labels were unregistered in the system, new barcodes did not scan correctly, or full prices appeared where discounted ones were expected.

Participant F: *“Once, when I bought a batch of frozen dumplings, it was labelled as discounted, but when I scanned it at self-checkout, it wasn’t registered in the system. I called for assistance and they changed the price after I showed them the label on the shelf. They had just missed inputting the discount.”*

Participant B: *“I check if it’s full or not... then I will get closer, check the discounts, check... and when I buy one of them, I pay for it, and then I try to use it as soon as possible at home.”*

Managing this required its own competence: knowing to watch the screen as items were scanned, placing the discount label facing upward at the self-checkout, and being prepared to call a staff member when the system failed. One participant had developed a personal budget calculator used at every shopping trip specifically to catch these discrepancies.

Participant M: *“And every time we do groceries, we use our own calculator. We write a budget, like a maximum total we can spend this trip. So if the price comes up higher than expected, I notice right away.”*

Another described preferring self-checkout precisely because it allowed them to monitor each item as it was scanned.

Participant F: *“I usually go to the self-checkout. I like scanning my own items because I can see every price on the screen.”*

The checkout, in this sense, was not simply the conclusion of the near-expiry shopping practice; it was an active final stage that required alertness and, for some shoppers, its own set of learned strategies. The competences required at the checkout illustrate how the material

conditions of the store, in this case the labelling and payment system, interact with shopper knowledge to shape whether the practice can be completed successfully (Shove et al., 2012). When the material system fails, the burden shifts to the shopper's competence to detect and resolve the failure. The checkout is therefore not outside the practice but part of its material infrastructure, and competence in near-expiry shopping extends all the way to the final moment of transaction.

Although the shopping process might appear as a structured mundane activity, experiencing the store for some participants was not simply a means to an end but a source of genuine pleasure, and this shaped not only how they shopped but when. Several described planning their visits with careful attention to timing, arriving at stores when they knew foot traffic would be low, the near-expiry section would be freshly stocked, and they could move through the space without the social pressure of others nearby. One participant described combining early morning exercise with store visits to store D specifically because arriving before the crowd meant finding discounted meat before others had taken it and being able to examine the section at their own pace.

Participant E: *“I wake up early. That’s why I like to start my morning with some exercise and outdoor fresh air. That’s why I go to food retailer D and when I go back early, I can find discounted meat.”*

This kind of timing went beyond pure guesswork. It drew on a contextual understanding of store rhythms, including when deliveries arrived, when fresh products were put out, when staff rotated stock, and when the near-expiry section was most likely to be full. It also drew on knowledge of the surrounding area, the working patterns of the neighbourhood, the times when students were or were not on campus, and the seasonal fluctuations in how busy particular stores became. One participant described knowing that when students left the city at the end of term, surplus stock would appear in stores serving student areas, and planned purchases accordingly.

Participant A: *“I bought, I don’t know, like 4 or 5 kilos of meat because I saw a lot of discounted products and I think it must have been because students were out... probably the store had too much surplus.”*

This temporal competence of knowing when to be there was among the more elaborated forms of near-expiry knowledge in the data, and it was inseparable from the enjoyment some participants described taking in the practice itself. It reflects what Gregson et al. (2002) describe as the place of shopping in the rhythms of everyday life: shopping is not simply an instrumental act performed at any available moment but a practice that is timed, planned, and experienced in relation to the social and spatial conditions that make it more or less enjoyable and effective. For these shoppers, knowing when to go was as important as knowing where to look, and the pleasure of the practice was inseparable from the conditions under which it was performed.

5.4. Material and Spatial Barriers to Near-Expiry Food Acquisition

From what we gathered, we discover that the way customers begin their shopping did not unfold in the same way for all shoppers. Rather, the data reveals different modes of encountering, each shaped by a different combination of prior knowledge and material store conditions. Shoppers who had gathered information before their visit through social media or store bulletin boards arrived with a degree of intentionality, already knowing what near-expiry products might be available for them to check. For these shoppers, the store environment served as the physical space where a pre-formed intention was acted upon. In contrast, shoppers without prior information were far more dependent on the store's material organisation to make near-expiry products visible.

Another example showed how store scale and spatial organisation shaped engagement beyond simple product placement. In a larger-format store, wider aisles and generous spacing created a calmer atmosphere in which signage and discount banners could be read comfortably, and shoppers could pause and deliberate without feeling pressured by others. In smaller or more densely organised stores, the same amount of discount communication felt visually overwhelming, and close proximity to other shoppers made lingering at near-expiry sections less comfortable. The spatial generosity of the larger store thus created conditions more conducive to the careful, unhurried assessment that near-expiry shopping often requires.

Other observations also revealed a limitation particular to larger formats. During one visit, a near-expiry product was selected and brought to the checkout, where it became apparent that

the wrong item had been taken, a common occurrence given the complexity of near-expiry labelling systems. In a smaller, more familiar store, such a mistake could be corrected easily, the product's location was known, the distance back was short, and the decision of whether to swap or cancel could be made quickly. In the larger store, where the layout had not yet been fully mapped and the distance back to the near-expiry section was uncertain, the correction felt disproportionately effortful, and the purchase was abandoned entirely. This account illustrates that store size shapes near-expiry shopping not just at the moment of encountering and assessing but at the point of completion, a store that is too large or too unfamiliar to navigate confidently can turn a minor material failure into a barrier that ends the practice before it is finished.

The lighting conditions within food retail settings also played a role in shaping how near-expiry products were encountered. Across the observed stores, white overhead lighting made products generally visible and legible from a distance, with packaging and labels readable even when items were stacked within shelves. However, in stores where shelving units were more densely arranged and narrower aisles, the same lighting system created pockets of shadow behind and beneath shelving, conditions in which products placed on lower shelves or tucked behind others became harder to notice involuntarily. In these cases, the lighting did not prevent engagement for shoppers who already knew where to look, but it reduced the likelihood of incidental discovery for those who did not. The store's lighting arrangement, in this sense, quietly distinguished between shoppers who arrived with prior spatial knowledge and those who relied on the store's material visibility to guide their attention, reinforcing the same pattern of differential access that placement and signage had already established.

The vertical organisation of shelving shaped which products entered shoppers' attention and which remained peripheral. Eye-level products drew the most notice at close range, while higher shelves were more visible from a distance. Discounted near-expiry products were often placed on lower shelves, below the natural line of sight, disadvantageous to full-priced items displayed higher up. An exception occurred in some refrigerated sections where arching glass fronts and extended lower shelves created angled viewing surfaces, keeping bottom-shelf near-expiry products within shoppers' passive visual field and partially offsetting the disadvantage of low placement.

Participant PI: *"it always happens that I've reached in to grab the full-price one and then I look down and notice the discounted ones below, so I put back the full-price one and get the discounted"*

The vertical hierarchy of the shelf, in this account, was something the store had arranged in ways that consistently favoured full-priced products, but that attentive shoppers could learn to read and work around.

An example of how material conditions can create barriers to encountering discounted near-expiry food was observed at one store where near-expiry fruit, vegetables, and bread were bundled in bags and displayed near the window, beyond the checkout area. Although visible from outside, the display lacked clear product descriptions and pricing, so shoppers could not easily understand what the bags contained or how to buy them and often dismissed them on first encounter. Over several visits, one participant gradually learned what the bags included and how the purchase process worked, eventually making a first purchase and later optimising the routine by coordinating with a companion, where one person checked the surplus bags while the other held their place in the queue. This account shows not only adaptation to a poorly designed display but the gradual development of a practice through repeated engagement: unclear and inaccessible material conditions did not prevent near-expiry shopping from emerging, but meant it did so only for sufficiently motivated shoppers, consistent with Shove et al. (2012) view of competences as skills learned over time within specific material and social conditions.

The barriers created by the store environment, however, are not always about information or access alone. Even when shoppers are motivated and familiar with where near-expiry products are located, the physical and social conditions surrounding those products can still shape whether they engage. Shopping takes place in a shared, visible space, and the way near-expiry sections are physically arranged can make the act of examining them feel conspicuous, drawing attention to a practice that some shoppers prefer to perform discreetly. In this sense, the store environment shapes the social atmosphere in which that encounter takes place.

This social dimension of near-expiry shopping has been noted in the literature. Liang et al. (2024) argued that resistance to near-expiry products can arise from fear of being stereotyped as stingy, and Aschemann-Witzel et al. (2020) showed that the social image of near-expiry shopping is ambivalent, signalling smart and ethical thrift in some contexts while risking low status or embarrassment in others. The present data confirms this ambivalence and adds a spatial dimension: the social discomfort is not only about what other shoppers might think but about the visibility the store's material arrangement creates. A section that requires squatting in a crowded queue, or that draws lingering attention in a high-traffic area, amplifies the social exposure of the practice in ways that a more discreetly placed or spatially generous section would not.

Confusion also arose from how discount signage was designed and positioned across different brands grouped in the same near-expiry section. When multiple brands of the same product category were placed under a shared discount display, the signage typically highlighted the product name and price in large type, with the brand name in much smaller text. For shoppers scanning quickly, the dominant information was the discounted product and price rather than the specific brand, so items were sometimes chosen without shoppers fully registering which brand they had taken. This was compounded by movable banners and price tags and by products being shifted during browsing, so the spatial link between a sign and the product it referred to was often unstable. A temporary banner positioned above one brand could, after several shoppers had moved items, appear to refer to another, producing a material environment that was easy to misread because the signage system prioritised visual impact over precise product identification.

On the other hand, observations at one store revealed an evolution in how near-expiry processed food was displayed near the cashier area. Initially, products were placed on a bottom shelf at ground level, requiring shoppers to squat in order to examine them properly. This placement created a double barrier: the physical effort of squatting, and the social visibility of doing so in a busy queue where other shoppers could observe from behind. As a result, engagement appeared limited to shoppers who were already motivated and familiar with the products on offer, consistent with Participant P's description of feeling like "a raccoon" when digging through poorly placed near-expiry sections.

Participant K: "you have this small section in the fish, low, which is lower, and then you have

to open, like, go and look, like, I don't know, I feel like a raccoon. You know, Yeah. So I feel like definitely plays a role also the way it's displaced.”

Over several visits, a second hand-level shelf was introduced alongside the original bottom shelf, stocked with similar near-expiry items. This acted as a bridge display, attracting attention at a comfortable height and then drawing shoppers' gaze down to the fuller selection below. The change appeared to make the section accessible to shoppers who might not otherwise have squatted to inspect uncertain products, illustrating how small adjustments in shelf height, visual access, and social comfort can shape whether and how near-expiry shopping occurs.

Beyond placement and visibility, the care with which near-expiry sections were organised also shaped the shopping experience. In some stores, near-expiry displays were tidy and orderly, with products arranged by category and returned to clear positions, presenting the section as a curated, intentional offer that reinforced trust. In others, items from different categories were mixed together, and displays became progressively disordered as shoppers handled and replaced products without a clear system.

Participant B: *“I don't want to compare it to secondhand stores, but...Its rather messy and, as I said, you have to like... browse... this is, you have sausage and cheese and yogurt and, like, pizza, and lettuce all in the same box. I think that's almost like a mystery box, right?”*

One participant described this experience directly, noting that the near-expiry section reminded them of a secondhand store, and observed that this messiness sometimes made it difficult to assess what was actually available. Other described a similar experience, noting that some dedicated near-expiry shelves felt as though items had simply been discarded there without care, an impression that subtly shaped their perception of the products themselves.

Participant K: *“I feel like most of the shops that have like... a shelf just for those products... They tend to be quite messy. Like they just place everything that's about to expire, put a sticker on and just throw them in the shelf. There's no organization, no care, no, like its, its very messy.”*

The contrast between organised and disorganised near-expiry sections illustrates that the

store's material investment in how near-expiry products are presented carries meaning beyond simple logistics, it communicates to the shopper whether these products are considered worthy of attention or merely being disposed of, and that communication shapes the atmosphere in which the decision to engage is made.

Aschemann-Witzel et al. (2020) found that in some retail contexts, selling near-expiry or imperfect products could be perceived as a sign of a careless or low-quality store. The present findings suggest that this perception operates not at the level of the store as a whole but at the level of the near-expiry section specifically, and that the way the section is maintained communicates something about how the retailer values these products and the shoppers who buy them. A tidy, organised near-expiry section signals that the retailer has invested care in making these products accessible and trustworthy. A disorganised one signals the opposite, that the products are being disposed of rather than offered, and that the shopper who takes them is doing the store a favour rather than being served.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1. Near-Expiry Food Shopping as a Collectively Reproduced Practice

The analysis revealed that the meanings associated with near-expiry products are not fixed, but socially constructed. The meanings assigned to such products can be shared by different people. For instance, if a consumer views these products as an opportunity to save money, they may influence others to do the same. The same applies to sustainability: if a consumer considers a product to be sustainable, they may influence others to do the same. Furthermore, consumers may alter their own interpretation of a product's meaning due to the influence of others. For instance, someone who initially views the product solely as a cost-effective option may come to see it as sustainable after interacting with someone who shares this view. These socially constructed meanings therefore shape how value is perceived, and this perception can change according to context or personal experience.

What emerges from the data is a picture of a practice that sustains and enriches itself through a cycle of experience and sharing. Shoppers who complete a near-expiry purchase, whether it results in a good deal, a discovery, a disappointment, or a newly learned strategy, often extend that experience into digital spaces. They go through the appreciation stage by posting photographs of discounted products on their social media pages, share stock updates in community groups, tag friends who might be interested, or contribute storage tips and recipe ideas in comment threads. These digital contributions then become the prior knowledge that shapes their own or other shopper's acquisition stage, which is the beginning of the shopping cycle, influencing the way they shop discounted near-expiry food.

The findings point out that this cycle is iterative rather than linear. Competences obtained through individual experience, knowing where near-expiry fridges are, how to read a particular label design, when restocking happens, or how far a product can safely be stretched, are not simply kept by the original shopper. They circulate through families, friendships and online communities, where they are adapted, combined with other tips, and applied in new contexts. Over time, this circulation of competences and meanings supports the development of dedicated apps, store-specific pages and local groups that exist precisely to share information about near-expiry offers, storage methods and recipes, further extending and stabilising the practice.

Kulikovskaja and Aschemann-Witzel (2017) were among the first to frame near-expiry shopping as part of everyday household practice rather than an isolated purchase decision. The present findings extend this observation in an important direction. Where Aschemann-Witzel et al. (2017) situated the practice primarily within individual household routines, the data here show that the practice is also embedded in collective community networks across social relationships and digital spaces. The practice does not only reproduce itself through repeated individual performance, but more through the community that maintains it. While Martin (2025) has shown how near-expiry products are incorporated into household food provisioning practices, the present data suggest that the cycle does not end at the household level. The cycle is iterative, and it is collectively reproduced.

Thus, a further implication of the findings is that meanings, competences and material conditions do not operate in isolation, but support and compensate for one another in the performance of the practice. When one element is weak or missing, another can temporarily carry the practice: clear signage or a well-placed discount section can help shoppers with limited prior experience to find near-expiry products, while strong competences in label reading, cooking and planning can help individuals cope with confusing layouts or inconsistent labelling. At the same time, when several elements fail at once – for example, when near-expiry sections are hard to find, discounts are not applied correctly at checkout, and shoppers have little shared knowledge to rely on maintaining the practice becomes more difficult, and some consumers simply withdraw from near-expiry sections. The stability of near-expiry shopping thus depends on a shifting balance across meanings, competences and materials, rather than on any single factor alone.

Chen et al. (2024) and Song et al. (2021) both observed that previous studies on near-expiry food shopping have focused primarily on individual characteristics, price sensitivity, and label perception, while paying less attention to how the broader shopping process shapes behaviour. The present findings respond directly to this gap. By treating near-expiry shopping as a practice shaped by meanings, competences and material conditions that are sustained through collective networks of knowledge sharing, this study offers a picture of near-expiry shopping in Sweden that is not only a practice performed in food retail settings. It is a practice that a community builds, maintains and continuously enriches through the loop of experience and sharing. Understanding it in this way opens up new possibilities for how

retailers, policymakers and researchers might approach the reduction of food waste at the point where it is most preventable.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 Research overview

The thesis set out to explore the practice of shopping for discounted near-expiry food in retail stores across Sweden, considering the meanings and values involved, consumers' knowledge and skills, and the in-store shopping environment. Although previous studies have identified many factors that affect willingness to buy near-expiry and other categories of suboptimal foods, they have tended to frame shopping as an individual choice, often in retail settings outside Sweden, leaving open how this practice is actually carried out by consumers in retail stores across Sweden.

The main research question, how is shopping for discounted near-expiry food performed in retail stores across Sweden, called for an approach that could capture the complexity of the practice. To address the main research question, the three sub-questions were structured around the three core elements of practice theory: meanings, competence, and materials. Each sub-question directed attention to one dimension of the practice, which is that shoppers value and feel, what they need to know and do know, and how the material elements including the store environment shapes the practice. Together, the sub research questions allowed the main research question to be answered in a way that reflected how the practice works and how these elements interact.

Several participants described growing up in households where frugality, non-waste, and careful food management were not explicit lessons but taken-for-granted ways of living. One participant described this as a cultural inheritance. The analysis suggests that the practical knowledge and dispositions that support near-expiry shopping, the willingness to assess rather than dismiss, the comfort with products close to their date, the orientation toward avoiding waste, can be rooted in cultural backgrounds that predate the specific practice. Competence, in this sense, is not only built through repeated engagement with near-expiry products in store but can arrive partly pre-formed through the values and habits of earlier life. This is consistent with Shove et al. (2012) understanding that competences depend on prior knowledge and that the conditions for acquiring them vary significantly depending on the context and background of the individual.

The analysis shows that shopping for near-expiry food in retail stores across Sweden is not only a personal choice, but is also influenced by social norms, family, social groups and marketing. Repeating this shopping practice establishes a routine that becomes part of daily consumption activities, manifested in various ways. The meanings attributed to shopping for near-expiry food usually include saving money, reducing food waste and finding good deals. However, while price is often the main motivation for many consumers, it does not have the same meaning for all. Some consumers say that low prices enable them to save money, while others only buy such products if the discount is substantial, and some are willing to accept lower quality for these types of products due to the low price. We also found that there are still stigmas associated with shopping for near-expiry food. However, some consumers are also motivated by several other things, such as gratification and the element of surprise.

In regard to competence, the analysis shows that shopping for discounted near-expiry food requires a specific set of skills that develop over time through repeated experience rather than being present from the beginning. These include a range of accumulated skills including store navigation, signal recognition, reading and interpreting label information, sensory assessment, discount evaluation, and household planning. Some shoppers had also developed skills for gathering information before entering the store, such as checking retailer social media pages, following community groups that shared real-time stock updates, or navigating digital booking systems for near-expiry products. The skills are not the same for everyone since it is shaped by the familiarity with the stores, their personal background, and how often they gain updated information from others.

When it comes to the store environment, the analysis shows that the store environment is not a neutral backdrop to the practice of shopping for near-expiry foods. Placement of products along the natural shopping route, shelf height, lighting conditions, signage clarity, display organisation, and the social atmosphere created by the spatial arrangement of near-expiry sections all influence whether products are noticed, whether they can be comfortably examined, and whether the purchase can be completed without difficulty. The data also shows that small material adjustments can have meaningful consequences for consumers. Simultaneously, when the material system failed, through unclear signage, inconsistent labelling, or checkout errors, the burden of managing that failure fell entirely on the shoppers requiring its own set of learned strategies to be responsible to manage the issue that comes with it through their own competence.

Together, these findings show that meanings, competences and material conditions do not operate in isolation but work together to sustain the practice of near-expiry shopping. When one element is weak, another can temporarily support the practice. However, when several elements fail at once, the practice becomes fragile and some shoppers can withdraw from near-expiry sections altogether. The study also shows, as discussed in the previous chapter, that the practice is collectively reproduced through a cycle of experience and sharing, in which individual shopping experiences circulate through families, social networks and digital communities and become prior knowledge for others. Overall, the thesis answers the main research question by showing that shopping for discounted near-expiry food in Sweden is a socially learned practice, organised through shared meanings, learned competency and additionally shaped by the material organisation of the store environment.

7.2 Implications

This thesis makes significant theoretical contributions mainly to the practice theory. In this study, practice theory is applied to consumption, specifically the shopping of near-expiry products, illustrates the interlinking of its three elements, materials, competences and meanings. This research refines the understanding of how the practice of shopping for near-expiry products are linked to what is socially expected in each practice, with actions and interactions shaping what individuals wish to consume.

The findings of this research also carry several practical implications for retailers. One key finding is that price is particularly important when it comes to near-expiry products and consumers often have a specific discount in mind that they consider acceptable. However, price cannot be analysed without considering other factors. In this case, location is also important, as a product with a 50% discount placed on a lower shelf in a poorly illuminated corner of a busy store will probably be seen by fewer customers than a product placed at eye level or conveniently located, regardless of the discount size. Retailers who invest in the spatial and communication conditions surrounding such products, rather than just the level of discount, are more likely to reach a wider range of potential customers, including those who are willing but not yet skilled enough to navigate poorly designed sections for these products.

Findings regarding near-expiry shopping competence, which develop gradually and depend on consistent material organisation, also have implications for how retailers manage store layouts. Moving the location of the near-expiry sections confuses regular shoppers who have

become familiar with the layout over time, effectively treating them as first-time visitors again. The stability of placement itself is a material condition that enables this practice to develop and deepen. Lastly, the finding regarding the iterative shopping process for such food, whereby individuals' shopping experiences circulate through digital communities and become collective knowledge, suggests that retailers who actively invest in social media communication around near-expiry products are contributing to the maintenance of a broader community practice, as well as informing individual shoppers. Contrasts observed in the netnographic data between cities with active, engaged store communities and those with a minimal digital presence suggest that this investment is unevenly distributed, and its potential has yet to be realised.

7.3 Limitations and further research

Regarding data collection, this thesis looked at near-expiry shopping through all three stages of Warde's framework: acquisition, appropriation, and appreciation. All three stages are present in the analysis, but the acquisition stage, which covers what happens during the store visit itself, received the most attention. This is because it was the stage most directly visible through observation and interviews. The other two stages, how shoppers incorporate products into their household routines after the purchase, and how they reflect on and evaluate the experience, were addressed but in less detail. A study that gave equal attention to all three stages would provide a fuller picture of how near-expiry shopping unfolds from before the store visit to after it.

There is also a geographical limitation: although the thesis refers to near-expiry shopping in retail stores across Sweden, all in-store observations were conducted in Skåne. Other counties were included through in-depth interviews and virtual ethnography, and observations were limited to four retail chains. Future research could explore how near-expiry shopping differs across cities, store formats, and population groups.

This thesis found that the meanings shoppers attach to near-expiry shopping are not static. Rather, meanings are dynamic since they can shift as shoppers gain more experience, go through different life stages, or become part of social circles where the practice is more accepted and familiar. However, this study could only capture these meanings at one point in time. A study that followed the same shoppers over a longer period would offer a better understanding of how the practice and its meanings develop and change over time.

Finally, future studies could examine the retailer perspective, including how store managers decide where to place near-expiry products, how discounts are communicated, and what organisational changes would be needed to respond to customer expectations in Sweden.

8. REFERENCES

- Aschemann-Witzel, J., De Hooge, I., Amani, P., Bech-Larsen, T., & Oostindjer, M. (2015). Consumer-Related Food Waste: Causes and Potential for Action. *Sustainability*, 7(6), 6457–6477. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su7066457>
- Aschemann-Witzel, J., De Hooge, I., & Normann, A. (2016). Consumer-Related Food Waste: Role of Food Marketing and Retailers and Potential for Action. *Journal of International Food & Agribusiness Marketing*, 28(3), 271-285. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08974438.2015.1110549>
- Aschemann-Witzel, J., Jensen, J. H., Jensen, M. H., & Kulikovskaja, V. (2017). Consumer behaviour towards price-reduced suboptimal foods in the supermarket and the relation to food waste in households. *Appetite*, 116, 246-258. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2017.05.013>
- Aschemann-Witzel, J., Giménez, A., Ares, G. (2018). Consumer in-store choice of suboptimal food to avoid food waste: The role of food category, communication and perception of quality dimensions. *Food Quality and Preference*, 68, 29-39. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodqual.2018.01.020>
- Aschemann-Witzel, J., Hooge, I. E., & Almlí, V. L. (2019). 12 - Suboptimal food? Food waste at the consumer–retailer interface. *Saving Food*, 347-368. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-815357-4.00012-2>
- Aschemann-Witzel, J., Giménez, A., & Ares, G. (2020). Suboptimal food, careless store? Consumer's associations with stores selling foods with imperfections to counter food waste in the context of an emerging retail market. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 262. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2020.121252>
- Basu, R., Paul, J., & Singh, K. (2022). Visual merchandising and store atmospherics: An integrated review and future research directions. *Journal of Business Research*, 151, 397-408. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.07.019>
- Bernard, H. R., Wutich, A., & Ryan, G. W. (2017). *Analyzing Qualitative Data: Systematic Approaches* (2nd ed.). SAGE.
- Chang, H., Lu, L., & Kuo, T. (2024). Are discounts useful in promoting suboptimal foods for sustainable consumption and production? The interaction effects of original prices, discount

presentation modes, and product types. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 79. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2024.103881>

Chen, B., Hua, W., & Wu, S. (2024). Examining the impact of the packaging design of nearly expired food on consumer purchase intentions. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-04175-y>

Cicatiello, C., Secondi, L., & Principato, L. (2019). Investigating Consumers' Perception of Discounted Suboptimal Products at Retail Stores. *Resources*, 8(3), 129. <https://doi.org/10.3390/resources8030129>

Clark, T., Foster, L., Sloan, L., & Bryman, A. (2021). *Bryman's social research methods* (6th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Collart, A. J., & Interis, M. G. (2018). Consumer Imperfect Information in the Market for Expired and Nearly Expired Foods and Implications for Reducing Food Waste. *Sustainability*. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su10113835>

De Hooge, I. E., Oostindjer, M., Aschemann-Witzel, J., Normann, A., Loose, S. M., & Almlí, V. L. (2017). This apple is too ugly for me!: Consumer preferences for suboptimal food products in the supermarket and at home. *Food Quality and Preference*, 56, Part A, 80-92. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodqual.2016.09.012>

Flick, U. (2023). *An introduction to qualitative research* (7th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Fuentes, C., Cegrell, O., & Vesterinen, J. (2021). Digitally enabling sustainable food shopping: App glitches, practice conflicts, and digital failure. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 61. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2021.102546>

Fuentes, C., & Samsioe, E. (2021). Devising food consumption: complex households and the socio-material work of meal box schemes. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 24(5), 492–511. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2020.1810027>

Gagarin, C. P., Salisse, J. N. Q., Segismundo, E. A., Talavera, V. H. D., Rejas, L. A., & Verzosa, J. M. (2025). *Impact of Visual Merchandising on Consumer Buying Behavior*. Aloysian interdisciplinary journal of social sciences, 1 (9). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17234078>

- Gauri, D. K., Jindal, R. P., Ratchford, B., Fox, E., Bhatnagar, A., Pandey, A., Navallo, J. R., Fogarty, J., Carr, S., & Howerton, E. (2021). Evolution of retail formats: Past, present, and future. *Journal of Retailing*, 97(1), 42–61. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2020.11.002>
- Gregson, N., Crewe, L., & Brooks, K. (2002). Shopping, Space, and Practice. *Environment and Planning D Society and Space*, 20(5), 597-617. <https://doi.org/10.1068/d270t>
- Grönlund, F., Gelebo, N., & Darpö, O. (2024, October 22). A Challenging Economy Forces Swedish Consumers to Spend Wiser. <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2024/challenging-economy-forces-swedish-consumers-to-spend-wiser>
- Haijema, R., Duijvestijn, L., Akkerman, R., & Cruijsen, F. (2026). Dynamic expiration date-based discounting of fresh food products. *International Journal of Production Economics*, 292. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijpe.2025.109824>
- Hagström, R., Stenius, M., & Eriksson, N. (2025). Online grocery shopping (OGS) as scripted behavior: insights on shopping routines of households with children. *British Food Journal*, 127 (13), 484-499. <https://doi.org/10.1108/BFJ-12-2024-1297>
- Kavanaugh, M., & Quinlan, J. J. (2020). Consumer knowledge and behaviors regarding food date labels and food waste. *Food Control*, 115. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodcont.2020.107285>
- Kök, A. Gürhan, Fisher, M. L., & Vaidyanathan, R. (2008). Assortment Planning: Review of Literature and Industry Practice. In N. Agrawal & S. A. Smith (Eds.), *Retail Supply Chain Management* (pp. 99–153). Springer. https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1007/978-0-387-78902-6_6
- Kulikovskaja, V., & Aschemann-Witzel, J. (2017). Food waste avoidance actions in food retailing: The case of Denmark. *Journal of International Food & Agribusiness Marketing*, 29(1), 328-345. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08974438.2017.1350244>
- Liang, Y., Yin, Y., & Xu, Q. (2024). Decoding consumer resistance to near-expired products: The role of social stereotyping. *Journal of Retailing*, 100(4), 618–634. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2024.09.005>

- Lim, W. M. (2024). What Is Qualitative Research? An Overview and Guidelines. *Australasian Marketing Journal*, 33(2), 199-229. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14413582241264619>
- Lee, J. Y., Choi, K. J., & Kwack, S. Y. (2023). Effects of online shopping channel and price discount on near-expiry food sales. *International Journal of Market Research*, 65 (6). <https://doi.org/10.1177/14707853231173222>
- Martin, R. M. (2025). *The consumption of discounted close-to-date foods in the contexts of food provisioning and waste*. [Degree project, Uppsala University]. Epsilon Archive for Student Projects. <https://stud.epsilon.slu.se/21105/1/martin-r-m-250611.pdf>
- Naturvårdsverket (2021). *Good Examples from Sweden on Reducing Food Waste*. https://www.naturvardsverket.se/contentassets/97d8bccd2e974e9d99fde98d8071ab86/good_examples_from_sweden_on_reducing_food_waste.pdf
- Naturvårdsverket. (2025, March 3). *Reduced food waste*. <https://www.naturvardsverket.se/en/international/research/the-environmental-research-fund/research-efforts-community/reduced-food-waste/>
- Pandey, A., Bohl, A., Favari, V., Mora, P., Phuyal, S., Sojková E., Budhathoki, M., Thomosen, M. (2024). Consumers' willingness to buy meat and seafood products close to the expiry date: An exploratory study from Denmark. *Frontiers in Nutrition*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnut.2024.1371634>
- Reckwitz, A. (2002). Toward a theory of social practices: A development in culturalist theorizing. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 5(2), 243–263. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13684310222225432>
- Seo, J. (2024). An Empirical Investigation of Online Grocery Shopping Behaviors Based on Different Generations. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 19(1), 185–200. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v19n1p185>
- Shove, E., Pantzar, M., & Watson, M. (2012). *The dynamics of social practice: Everyday life and how it changes*. SAGE.

Song, M., Zhao, Y., Li, X., & Meng, L. (2021). The Influence Exerted by Time Frames on Consumers' Willingness to Buy Nearly Expired Food. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.790727>

Stangherlin, I. C., Ribeiro, J. L. D., & Barcellos, M. (2019). Consumer behaviour towards suboptimal food products: a strategy for food waste reduction. *British Food Journal*, 121 (10), 2396–2412. <https://doi.org/10.1108/BFJ-12-2018-0817>

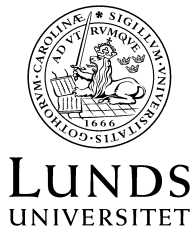
Štulec, I., Petljak, K., & Kukor, A. (2016). The Role of Store Layout and Visual Merchandising in Food Retailing. *European Journal of Economics and Business Studies*, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.26417/ejes.v4i1.p138-151>

Warde, A. (2005) Consumption and Theories of Practice, *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 5(2), pp. 131–153. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540505053090>

Warde, A. (2014). After taste: Culture, consumption and theories of practice. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 14(3), 279-303. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540514547828>

9. APPENDIX

9.1. Consent form



Consent to participate in a Master Thesis at the Faculty of Social Sciences

We are Mary Thalia Travelita Pasaribu and Matilde Agostinho Simão, students at Lund University in the Faculty of Social Sciences. As part of our Master's programme, we are writing our final thesis. Our thesis will focus on the practice of purchasing discounted near-expiry products in supermarkets located in Sweden. To deepen our knowledge of the subject, we will conduct semi-structured interviews with people who have experience of shopping for such products. These interviews will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes and can be conducted either in person or online.

Information on the processing of personal data

The following personal data will be processed:

As a participant in our study, you will need to share your name, age, occupation, city and region of residence in Sweden as well as your shopping experiences.

Personal data will be processed in the following ways:

With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded for transcription and subsequent analysis.

All information collected during this study will be handled confidentially. Information shared during the interview may be used in the final thesis, but it will be anonymised. Only the researchers and, where necessary, the academic supervisor and the examiner will have access to the identifiable material.

Pseudonymised transcripts, notes and signed consent forms will only be kept for as long as is necessary for the examination of the thesis. After this, they will be deleted in accordance with Lund University's procedures.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may decline to answer any question and you may stop the interview at any time without giving a reason and without any negative consequences. You may also request to withdraw your participation after the interview. If you withdraw before the material has

been fully anonymised and incorporated into the final analysis, the personal data collected from you will be deleted.

We do not share your personal data with third parties.

Lund University, Box 117, 221 00 Lund, Sweden, with organisation number 202100-3211 is the controller. You can find Lund University's privacy policy at www.lu.se/integritet

You have the right to receive information about the personal data we process about you. You also have the right to have inaccurate personal data about you corrected. If you have a complaint about our processing of your personal data, you can contact our Data Protection Officer at dataskyddsbud@lu.se. You also have the right to lodge a complaint with the supervisory authority (the Data Protection Authority, IMY) if you believe that we are processing your personal data incorrectly.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact us through the following email addresses:

- ma7524pa-s@student.lu.se (Mary Thalia Travelita Pasaribu)
- ma0503ag-s@student.lu.se (Matilde Agostinho Simão)

Consent

Please tick the boxes below to indicate your agreement:

- ☐ I confirm that I have read and understood the information above.
- ☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw without negative consequences.
- ☐ I understand what data will be collected and how it will be handled.
- ☐ I agree to the interview being audio-recorded.
- ☐ I agree that anonymised quotations from my interview may be used in the final thesis.
- ☐ I agree to participate in this study.

Participant name:	Researcher name:
Signature:	Signature:
Date:	Date:
Location:	Location:

9.2. Interview guide

Introduction

Good morning/afternoon,

My name is (Mary Thalia Travelita Pasaribu/ Matilde Agostinho Simão) and together with my colleague (Mary Thalia Travelita Pasaribu/ Matilde Agostinho Simão) we are conducting this study as a part of our Master's thesis in the Master of Service Management Programme at Lund University.

The Purpose of this study is to understand how people shop discounted near-expiry products in Swedish supermarkets.

The interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes and your participation is completely voluntary. You may choose not to answer any question and may stop the interview at any time without giving a reason.

With your permission, this interview will be audio-recorded so it can be transcribed for later analysis. The recording will only be used for research purposes and will be deleted once the research is completed.

All information you provided will be treated confidentially and it will not appear in the thesis or will be replaced with pseudonyms or codes when quoting from the interview.

If you have any questions at any time during the interview please feel free to ask.

Background information

- Age
- Occupation
- City and region of residence in Sweden

1. Shopping Practice

1.1. In which supermarkets in Sweden do you usually shop?

Follow up: Supermarket chain A/ B/ C or D?

Follow up: How often do you usually shop there?

1.2. Could you describe your typical grocery shopping experience?

1.3. Could you describe your most recent grocery shopping experience?

1.4. When you enter a supermarket, do you normally have a particular route?

Follow up: Could you please describe your route?

1.5. What type of products do you usually buy while grocery shopping?

1.6. Do you change your shopping habits when you see discounted products?

Follow up: In which way?

1.7. At what point during your shopping do you usually encounter these products?

Follow up: (early / in the middle / near the check out)?

1.8. Do you actively look for discounted products in the store?

Follow up: Could you please describe how?

1.9. Would you still buy near expiry products if it is not discounted?

1.10. How do you interpret the expiration information in the product?

Follow up: Do you check the expiration date?

Follow up: Do you also see the production date?

1.11. Do you compare the near-expiry products with the normal priced products with a longer expiration date?

Follow up: If so, can you please describe why and how?

Follow up: What type of near-expiry products do you usually buy? (e.g. fruits, vegetables, bread, ready-to-eat meals, dairy products, meat, fish, others)

Follow up: When was the last time that you bought a near-to-expire product?

Follow up: How often do you buy these products?

Follow up: Can you describe one of your experiences buying nearly expired products?

1.12. Do you actively look for near-expiry discounted products when shopping?

Follow up: Where do you usually look for them?

Follow up: Are these products easy to find?

1.13. Could you describe the whole process from when you first come to the store to when you decide to purchase the near-expiry product

1.14. Does it matter whether you find the product early or late in your shopping trip?

Follow up: If so, please explain why.

2. Materials

2.1. Where in the store do you usually *find near-expiry products*?

Follow up: Are they usually located in the beginning / middle / back of the store, near the cashier or in another location?

Follow up: What do you usually do when you pass by that area?

Follow up: Have you ever encountered this product after check out? What do you usually do?

2.2. Do you usually go to this section intentionally or do you notice it as you are moving through the store?

2.3. How are the products displayed?

Follow up: Are they grouped together on a special shelf or section, mixed with regular products, or displayed in another way?

Follow up: When you see these displays, how do you usually interact with them? (products arranged tidily / random products all bundled together)

Follow up: When you recognise the display, has their placement hinder you to go further in researching the products? (e.g. products put in the bottom shelves)

2.4. What makes you recognise that a product is close to its expiration date?

Follow up: Is it the color? The label? Signs? Location? Or is it something else?

Follow up: What do you do when you notice these signals?

Follow up: Can you describe your experience in finding out the expiration date?

Follow up: Can you describe your experience in interpreting the expiration date?

2.5. During a shopping trip, do you typically check the discounted near-expiry product and decide what to buy or return to it after comparing with other products?

2.6. Does the packaging of a product matter when it comes to deciding whether to buy it?

Follow up: If so, how?

2.7. Do you ever touch, inspect, or closely examine the product before deciding to buy it?

Follow up: If so, what are you usually checking?

2.8. Have you had any trouble when checking out the near expiry food product? (e.g. Checkout experience, checkout failure)

Follow up: Was there any particular condition where you needed help?

3. Meanings

3.1. How do you feel about buying products that are close to their expiration date?

Follow up: Are there situations that make you feel reluctant?

Follow up: Does being physically present in the supermarket affect whether you notice or trust these products?

3.2. Are there any near expiration products that you would never buy?

Follow up: If so, could you explain why?

Follow up: Could you describe any bad experience with the product?

3.3. How do you decide if it is worth it to buy these products?

Follow up: How does the product discount enter into your decision when considering buying products?

3.4. When you are shopping do the near-expiry products ever become your first choice?

Follow up: What leads to you prioritizing them or not prioritizing them?

3.5. Is purchasing these products part of your original shopping plan, or did you decide in the store?

Follow up: What made you plan to buy it / what made you decide to buy it?

3.6. How do you usually fit the products into the rest of your groceries?

Follow up: Do you ever adjust the rest of your shopping after buying a near-expiry product?

Follow up: Do you ever adjust the plan for your meal after buying a near-expiry product?

3.7. Have you ever bought a near-expiry product that later ended up being wasted?

3.8. What does buying these near-expiry products mean to you in your everyday shopping?

Follow up: If you had to, how would you rank the following reasons: saving money, reducing food waste, finding good deals, or something else?

3.9. Do you see buying near-expiry products as connected to your personal values or priorities?

Follow up: If that is the case, please explain.

3.10. Do you prefer to check the discounted near expiry products when the area is less crowded?

Follow up: If so, what are the reasons?

3.11. Have you ever bought them from a digital app?

Follow up: Why? / Why not?

Follow up: Which apps have you used?

Follow up: Do you feel that you need to see these products in person before buying?

Follow up: What do you want to check physically?

Others

- Is there anything else you would like to add that could be helpful for our research?

Those were all the questions we had for today. Thank you for taking the time to share your experience with us. Your answers are valuable for our research.

And as a reminder all of your responses will remain confidential and will only be used for the purpose of this master's thesis.

Thank you for your participation!

9.3. Observation guide

1. Shopping Practice

- 1.1. Do shoppers seem to follow a particular route during the store visit?
- 1.2. Are shoppers actively looking for discounts in the store?
- 1.3. Are shoppers actively looking for near-expiry products in the store?
- 1.4. Which near-expiry products are shoppers buying?
- 1.5. Are there any problems when checking out near-expiry products?

2. Materials

- 2.1. Where in the store are near-expiry products located?
- 2.2. Is it easy to find near-expiry products in the store?
- 2.3. What types of near-expiry products are available?
- 2.4. What discount is offered on near-expiry products?
- 2.5. How are near-expiry products displayed?
- 2.6. Are these near-expiry products linked to any specific messages?
- 2.7. Are the tags on near-expiry products different from those on products with a regular expiry date?
- 2.8. How is the expiry information available for near- expiry products?

3. Competences

- 3.1. Are shoppers able to immediately recognise where the discounted near-expiry products are located?
- 3.2. Do shoppers closely examine near-expiry products before deciding to buy them?
- 3.3. Do the shoppers put near-expiry products back on the shelf after examining it?
- 3.4. Do shoppers compare near-expiry products with those that are full price?

4. Meanings:

- 4.1. How do shoppers react when they find the near-expiry product? (e.g. hesitation, suspicion, surprise)
- 4.2. Do shoppers make any comments about near-expiry products?