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Did you read the label?

An exploratory study on grocery shoppers'
brand loyalty and purchase intentions

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Abstract

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Title

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Abstract

Due to the rise of the internet, the mislabelling of food products has turned into a well-known phenomenon. There is an unsolved paradox concerning how the act of mislabelling may influence brand loyal grocery shoppers' loyalty and purchase intentions towards their favourite food brands. To investigate the area of mislabelling and brand loyalty, four in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted in a qualitative setting. The participants were handpicked based on a purposive and convenience sampling method, where individuals with experience in the catering industry were requested. The findings suggest that the outcome of mislabelling is highly individual as it may be perceived differently depending on the shoppers' level of involvement as well as the strength of the initial brand loyalty. The present study contributes new theoretical insights concerning the concepts of branding and brand loyalty, suggesting that trust is an essential element. Also, this study contributes to practical implications that may limit the loss of consumer trust from a firm's perspective. For future research, this study suggests that a cultural or gender-centric investigation concerning mislabelling and brand loyal grocery shoppers would be appropriate.

Keywords

Branding, Brand loyalty, Unethical marketing, Mislabelling, Level of involvement, Purchase intentions, Word-of-mouth

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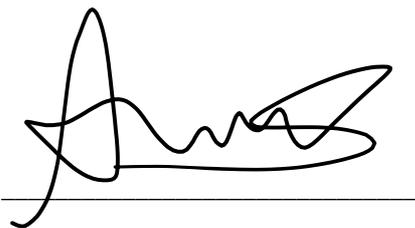
Friends and family

For their continuous motivation and constructive feedback.

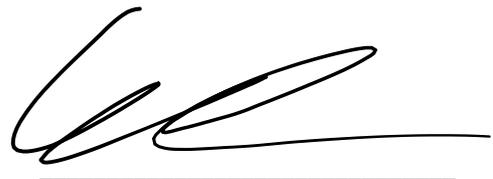
The participants

For cooperating and having a strong brand loyalty, which made this thesis ever so worth the fight.

Kristianstad 29th of May 2020



Anders Mohammad



Christopher Lundquist

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1. Introduction

The first chapter begins with a background explaining the role of the internet in the context of marketing, brand loyalty and unethical marketing behaviour. It follows with a problematisation of the issue, the purpose of the study and concludes with the research question.

1.1 Background

The rise of the internet and e-commerce have changed the way firms operate and the form that their marketing actions take. The world of marketing is undergoing a rapid change due to the increased use of social media and other forms of communication. Carlson, Petty and Skiba (2019) state that consumers nowadays are flooded daily with tons of messages in several forms, while some information is explicit advertisement, others are disguised as a means of 'cutting through the noise', also known as "advertising clutter". Consequently, word-of-mouth (WoM) communication in all forms has become essential when it comes to influencing consumers' purchase decisions, as a rumour of a firm's behaviour and actions tend to spread quickly (Jang, Kim, Lee, & Song, 2017).

Dissatisfied consumers tend to express negative electronic word-of-mouth (e-nWoM) on firms' websites, social media channels or other online review sites (Jen-Hui Wang, Kim, Malthouse, & Maslowska, 2015). However, not all of the information that spreads on social media is accurate. Due to the advancement of information technology, such as software bots and news apps, it is possible to create fake news and false rumours intending to hurt a brand or a firm. For example, in 2005, a female customer at the restaurant chain Wendy's in California claimed that she had found a human finger in her food. This turned out to be false, and the woman was arrested shortly after the incident. However, the false claim led to a drop for Wendy's stock with almost 10%, and local sales fell by 30% (Jang et al., 2017). As another example, the restaurant chain KFC sued several Chinese companies in 2015 for spreading false rumours accusing it of using genetically modified chickens. Consequently, the Chinese companies had to pay a compensation of approximately \$245,000 each and apologies openly to the firm (The Wall Street Journal, 2015).

Nevertheless, some of these allegations are not always false or considered 'fake news'. This exemplifies how crucial it is to be critical when reading about these 'online rumours'. As an example of a real scandal, in 2013, the company Findus was in serious trouble after the Food Standards Agency (FSA) had found out that its frozen lasagne contained about 60% to 100% of horsemeat, and not 'beef' as the label said (BBC, 2013). According to DeVries, Moyer and Spink (2016) sales of frozen beef plunged with 43%, and the number of frozen meals sold fell with 13% after the horsemeat scandal was revealed. Consequently, the internet contains both true and false information, and therefore it creates new demands of credibility for marketers all around the world, which makes the environment difficult to navigate (Pizzi, Visentin, & Pichierri, 2019).

In order to promote positive word-of-mouth communication, marketers need to be credible when advertising their brands and products. Suppose a firm discloses information on the label with false information. In that case, it is considered an unethical marketing behaviour, which is more broadly defined as any behaviour within a firm's marketing function that is either illegal or morally unacceptable by the larger society (Garg, Govind, Singh, & Vitell, 2016). What is considered unethical may differ from a consumers' perspective because people have different values and morals. While some consumers might find NIKE's use of sweatshops in Bangladesh as unethical behaviour, others might argue that it creates job opportunities for the unemployed (Garg et al., 2016). However, in this thesis, we will look closer at the mislabelling of food products as an area of unethical marketing behaviour.

According to Brenkert (2008), products are a bundle of promises and responsibilities that firms need to handle with care. The packaging and labelling of those products should provide sufficient and appropriate information to the final consumer. Consumers' trust in the accuracy in details of the labelling plays a crucial role in their process of decision making; thus, if a product is mislabelled, it may have a severe impact on consumers' brand loyalty (Byun & Dass, 2015). Bertilsson and Rennstam (2018) claim that branding generates value by building positive associations to a brand in a way that imbues trust or a stamp of quality, which in turn facilitates the consumers' choice in the decision-making process. Which degree of attachment a consumer has for a brand is often defined as brand loyalty, in other words, the resistance to switching to another firm's brands or products (Johnson, Leckie, & Nyadzayo, 2016; Oliver, 1999). Although brand loyalty is a crucial variable in marketing literature, the definitions vary across several studies

(De Villiers, 2015; Gordon, Fujiwara, Nakazawa, Shibuya, & Yoshida, 2018; Nenycz-Thiel & Romaniuk, 2011), which will be further discussed in the following chapters.

1.2 Problem Statement

Previous research in the area of mislabelling and consumer purchasing intentions have been focusing on fair trade products and green goods, with a narrow focus on consumers' concern of health and animal welfare (Hoffman, 2010; García, Morillo-Santander, Mutoro, & Parrett, 2019; Gaus & Müller, 2015). Further research has investigated the relationship between the corporate image and negative publicity, as well as the ethical judgement of food fraud in the U.S food industry and the effect on consumer purchase behaviour (Chang & Zhu, 2012; Einwiller, Lis, Ruppel, & Sen, 2019; Hernández & Kaeck, 2019; Jung & Lee, 2018).

When it comes to the results of these studies, there is a mixed perception of what consequences unethical marketing behaviour has on consumers' brand loyalty. On the one hand, in a study conducted by Jung and Lee (2018), consumers with a strong brand loyalty ("brand fans") towards brands such as Apple, Samsung and Adidas, were tested by cluster analysis to discern whether negative publicity affected their purchase intentions of a chosen brand. The results showed that consumers with a strong brand loyalty did not change their attitudes after exposure to negative publicity, and therefore continued to repurchase the brand's products. On the other hand, in a study conducted by Gaus and Müller (2015), consumers were exposed to negative information, regarding manipulation of organic food products, which resulted in adverse effects on their behavioural intentions, leading to lower trust in organic food labels. However, the study solely investigated the manipulation of organic food products and the effect on general consumers. Therefore, there is a lack of knowledge concerning the behavioural impacts that the act of mislabelling may have on brand loyal grocery shoppers.

Hernández and Kaeck (2019), claim that consumers nowadays are not just more aware of what type of food they buy, but they are also more concerned when it comes to healthy and organic products. According to Marshall (2005), food products and brands have a general strong attachment as: "*Consumers choose everyday food to build their own social and individual identities*" (Marshall, 2005, p. 80). In other words, consumers are increasingly becoming more conscious of the environmental and social consequences of their consumption, and as a result

behaviours and attitudes are modified accordingly (Christodoulides, Gillani, Kutaula , & Leonidou, 2019).

However, at the same time as consumers are increasingly more aware and concerned of ethical values, the change in behaviour seems less apparent. This phenomenon is known as the *attitude-behaviour gap*. In a study conducted by Futerra (2015), it was found that around 30% of consumers claimed that they would purchase ethical and environmentally friendly products, but the result showed that only 3% actually did. This argument is supported by Carrington, Neville and Whitwell (2010), who argue that ethically-minded consumers rarely *walk their talk*.

As of today, consumers may have limited knowledge regarding what their consumed products actually contain (Liu, 2016). Previous research indicates that consumers are lured and misled by false claims on food labels (Cawthorn, Hoffman, & Steinman, 2013; Hirogaki, 2013; Liu, 2016), and product labels are frequently aimed to make the product appear of higher quality than what it actually is (Hernández & Kaeck, 2019). In other words, there is a lack of knowledge concerning how brand loyal grocery shoppers may perceive the act of mislabelling, and how it might influence their future purchase intentions.

In order to ensure transparency and to protect grocery shoppers from misleading information, The Swedish National Food Agency (NFA) states that product labelling must not be designed in a way that the consumer may be misled (Livsmedelsverket, 2020). Despite this, product labels are not always accurate and trustworthy. A Swedish non-profit organisation called “Äkta vara” (The Genuine Product) was founded in 2005, and it drives questions about better food quality and accurate product labelling. In the year of 2006, it introduced its own label, and since 2015 it arranges a yearly contest with an “anti-price” rewarding the food fraud of the year. By doing so, it wants to put pressure on food manufacturers who sell and market products in an unethical way, in other words, products that do not live up to what they promise (Äkta vara, 2020).

Consumers seek and utilise facts relating to a specific product, by interpreting the label of the product, when making a final purchase decision (Coveney, Meyer, Tonkin, Webb, & Wilson, 2016). Hernández and Kaeck (2019) argue that the food industry has taken advantage of this concern by labelling grocery items in a way that makes them more appealing to consumers. In recent years, health claims in the food industry have become attractive cues when it comes to luring consumers into a purchase decision; thus, companies use them as promotion tools (Hirogaki,

2013). According to an EU regulation (2011), the information on labels should be accurate and correct following the content of the product: “*The food producer is responsible for ensuring that the information on the content is correct and accurate according to legislation and requirements in the applicable national regulations.*” (EU, 2011, p. 27)

Despite national regulations and increased public attention concerning mislabelling, the issue remains. Previous research has investigated the behavioural impacts on general grocery shoppers when exposed to misleading health claims with a narrow focus on green goods and animal welfare within the U.K. and U.S market (Gaus & Müller, 2015; Hernández & Kaeck, 2019; Hoffman 2010; Jung & Lee, 2018). On the one hand, these studies suggest that some shoppers tend to continue as usual without any notable changes in either loyalty or purchase intentions. On the other hand, studies show a significant shift concerning consumers' trust towards a specific product category (Hernández & Kaeck, 2019). However, these studies were solely based on quantitative data, and therefore, a qualitative exploration is exceedingly lacking. In other words, there is a lack of knowledge when it comes to an understanding of how brand loyal grocery shoppers react to the mislabelling of their favourite food brands within the Swedish food industry. To the best of our knowledge, no other studies have investigated how brand loyal grocery shoppers perceive the act of mislabelling following their favourite food brands. Therefore, this study aims to contribute new insights within the unexplored field of brand loyal grocery shoppers and the mislabelling of food products.

1.3 Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study is to explore how the act of mislabelling, within the Swedish food industry, may influence brand loyal grocery shoppers' loyalty and purchase intentions towards their favourite food brands. Thus, we believe that an in-depth investigation is required to gain a deeper understanding and knowledge concerning the issues related to the act of mislabelling and what consequences it may have. This was done by answering the following research question:

RQ: *What happens to consumers' brand loyalty and purchase intentions when a grocery item is mislabelled?*

2. Theoretical framework

This chapter aims to cover previous literature within the field of branding, brand loyalty, level of involvement, unethical marketing behaviour, mislabelling, the decision-making process and word-of-mouth. It begins with an explanation for each of the concepts and concludes with our conceptual model.

2.1 Branding

The term brand seems to suffer from a lack of agreement in the world of academia; thus, scholars tend to define the concept differently. However, a recognised definition by Armstrong, Harris, Kotler and Piercy (2017), is that a brand is made up of three different elements: a *name*, *term* and a *symbol*, and all of these three elements together make up for a brand. Brands are used as a tool for firms to stand out from competitors by creating value for its consumers, which could be done by establishing and maintaining a good reputation and adding extra value to the three concepts (Iglesias, Rodolfo, & Rio, 2002; Meshrekia, Mourada, & Sarofimc, 2019). The field of brand management has received various research attempts on how a firm could develop, measure and manage what is called the *brand equity*, that is, the value created by having a well-known brand name (Cliqueta, Hair, & Troivillea, 2019). However, there are contradictions between the different theoretical models used to measure it. For example, Aaker (1991), along with Keller (1993) focus on four dimensions of brand equity: *brand loyalty*, *brand awareness*, *perceived quality*, and *brand associations*.

Aaker (1991) argues that brand equity is a combination of these dimensions, as they are linked in favour of a product or brand. Although this definition may be out-of-date, it has been utilised in various modern empirical studies within the field of brand management (Bidiwala & Liu, 2019; Meshreki et al. 2019). Furthermore, scholars argue that the brand name itself is an essential asset and that it could contribute to the firm's financial growth (Iglesias et al., 2002). Keller (1993) describes brand equity as the effect the brand has on consumers' response towards marketing activities related to a specific product. The lack of shared academic consensus indicates that brand equity is a multi-dimensional concept (Meshreki et al., 2019). The focus of the present study is on the dimension of brand loyalty, which is further explained in the following section.

2.1.1 Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is a term within the field of business which has been in focus among various previous studies and past works of literature (Arslan, Barutçu, Dinçer & Yildirim, 2018; Garg et al., 2016; Gordon et al., 2017). Despite this, there seems to be a lack of academic agreement in the definition of the term. Nevertheless, there is a mutual understanding of a repetitive purchasing behaviour, and Oliver (1999) defines brand loyalty as:

“a deeply held predisposition to repatronize a preferred brand or service consistently in the future, causing repetitive same-brand purchasing despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour.” (Oliver, 1999, p. 34)

Rosenbaum-Elliott, Percy, and Pervan (2018) claim that a strong brand loyalty tends to lead to numerous advantages in the marketing function; thus, it may help to sustain the brand’s position and contribute to higher financial returns. Bianchi (2015) agree with this statement and add that marketing costs can be vastly reduced by consumers who are already loyal and confident in purchasing a brand, since it may reduce the need for sales promotion compared to brands with a lower degree of loyalty. Furthermore, loyal and satisfied customers tend to become advocates for the brand by spreading positive word-of-mouth communication (Bianchi, 2015). The concept of word-of-mouth will be further discussed in the present chapter, as it plays a crucial role in building and maintaining a strong brand loyalty.

Moreover, brand loyalty is usually split into two categories, namely attitudinal- and behavioural brand loyalty (Bala & Chahal, 2010; Johnson et al., 2016). Attitudinal brand loyalty refers to the level of involvement, and the commitment a consumer has for a specific brand and can, in some cases, give the consumer a sense of ownership (Johnson et al., 2016). When consumers have a high involvement in a specific brand, they tend to have a strong conviction about the brand, which positively influences the loyalty towards the firm itself (Johnson et al., 2016). On the other hand, behavioural brand loyalty refers to the frequency of consumer purchases from a firms’ perspective (Nenycz-Thiel & Romaniuk, 2011).

In a study conducted by Psomas and Vouzas (2018), it was found that the country of origin was of importance when it comes to ensuring trust towards the food manufacturer as it could aid the consumer to develop a strong brand loyalty, and consequently influencing the consumer to make a future purchase. Furthermore, consumers consider branding as a sign of quality and safety when considering various food brands (Banerjee, 2018). According to Cavol and Levy-Mangin (2016), consumers tend to view large food manufacturers as a much safer alternative compared to private-label brands, that is, brands that are sold by the retailer itself.

Negative information about a brand may be interpreted in various ways, depending on how strong the initial brand loyalty is towards the brand. For example, a consumer with a strong brand loyalty may have a feeling of self-brand connection (SBC), which is an outcome of consumers incorporating a brand into their self-concept (Chaplin, Cheng, & White, 2012). In a study conducted by Brady, Giebelhausen and Wilson (2017), it was found that negative information about a product or a brand may be interpreted as a threat to the 'self', thus resulting in a self-defence process where the consumer tries to combat the threatening message leading to an even stronger connection towards the brand than before. However, the strength of the initial loyalty is often determined by how committed the shopper is in the decision-making process, which leads us to the concept of level of involvement.

2.1.2 Level of Involvement

The level of involvement is considered an important variable in marketing, and explanations vary depending on the author. However, a common explanation is the level of intensity a consumer has towards a product or a brand (Vebrová, Venclová, & Rojík, 2016). Furthermore, Kuo, Lin and Lin (2017), defines product involvement as of how important a product or a brand is to an individual and argue that it is associated with how consumers perceive a brand in accordance to their personal needs, ego and moral value.

According to Jung and Lee (2018), consumers use a different decision-making process, depending on the level of involvement. For example, products that are characterised with low involvement may not be relevant to consumers' personal beliefs which leads the consumer to invest less time and effort in the decision-making process. On the contrary, products that are characterised with high-involvement are highly relevant to consumers' personal values, and therefore, they tend to invest a significant amount of time in the decision making process (Kuo, Lin, & Lin, 2017).

Jung and Lee (2018), argue that involvement is associated with brand loyalty, as it may influence a consumers' future purchase intentions. For example, in a study conducted by Brandão, Cordeiro, Ponchio, Strehlau and Yamada (2016), it was found that a product recall, that is, when a product is removed from the shelf because of a defect, had a more negative impact on consumers' brand loyalty when the level of involvement was high compared to when it was low. In their study, they categorised low involvement products vs high involvement products and used condoms and automobiles as an example.

According to previous research, the level of involvement tends to be low when it comes to grocery shopping, as shoppers, in general, tend to spend less time searching and evaluating various food brands (Hamlin, 2010). However, Conlin and Labban (2019) argue that involvement could be higher for some groups of grocery shoppers and in their study, they categorised involvement based on *functional* and *symbolic* involvement. Functional involvement involves the consideration of perceived health and safety risks, as well as the differences in quality among alternative brands and products being evaluated. They argue that the higher the functional involvement is, the more likely it is that the consumer seeks product information and input from others to ensure the quality of the product. On the other hand, symbolic involvement refers to the social aspects and personal importance to a grocery shopper. Consumers with a high symbolic involvement may perceive the brand as a reflection of themselves. In symbolic involvement, the brand name tends to play a critical role, and it was found that brand name shoppers usually show little to no interest in the store's private-label brands (Conlin & Labban, 2019). To conclude, the level of involvement may differ from a shopper's perspective, and is a crucial element in the decision-making process, which leads us to the following section.

2.2 Purchase Decision Making

The purchase decision-making process has been a discussed topic throughout the history of marketing, and there are both opportunities, as well as challenges, that marketers face when influencing a consumer's buying behaviour (Chih, Hsu & Liou, 2014; Chylinski, Hilken, Keeling, Mahr & Ruyter, 2020). Researchers agree that the knowledge on what criteria consumers evaluate when purchasing a product, may help firms to improve their marketing strategies, thus resulting in higher profits (Heitmann, Katzenstein & Schamp, 2019; Stankevich, 2017). Therefore, marketers are left with the challenge to influence consumers' purchase decisions to increase profit and

achieve higher financial growth (Stankevich, 2017). Furthermore, marketers strive to reach out to consumers at the moment that influences their decisions the most. This space of time is related to "the moment of truth" or "touchpoints" (Stankevich, 2017).

According to Stankevich (2017), marketers have been trying to identify these "touchpoints" through the traditional funnel metaphor, that was developed in early 1989 by Elias Lewis. The model is divided into five steps: *awareness*, *familiarity*, *consideration*, *purchase* and finally, *loyalty*. The funnel metaphor suggests that consumers start with a variation of brands to choose between, and as the marketers guide them towards their specific brand, the number of choices reduces. Finally, as the consumer reaches the end of the funnel, they will be left with the one product or brand that will be purchased (Stankevich, 2017). However, the funnel model does not consider various purchase factors that have developed from the change in the modern market. As of today, the numbers of brands and products to choose from, digital channels and well-informed consumers have increased a lot since Lewis model was first introduced, resulting in the model losing its relevance (Court, Elzinga, Mulder, & Vetvik, 2009). In other words, the decision-making process is complex, and in reality, consumers' purchase intentions are seldomly based on solely rational choices, as there are other factors involved in this process. This has led to the development of a theory that studies consumers' purchasing behaviour from a cultural, as well as from a social point of view, which is explained in the following section.

2.2.1 Consumer Culture Theory

In 2005, Arnould and Thompson (2005) introduced a framework called consumer culture theory (CCT), which is a collection of studies that define the dynamic relationship between consumers' actions on the marketplace. The consumer culture theory argues that consumers actively modify and translate different symbols, such as brands and products, to shape their personal identity. CCT emphasises that the motive for any purchase is the communicated social messages, rather than the function of the product itself (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). This claim is supported by Witt (2010), who argues that consumption should be viewed as a social process of expressing the 'self-image', rather than the old rational decision-making process.

As the market has shifted, new trends in consumer behaviour and purchase evaluations have evolved. Walsh (2016) argues that consumers tend to care more about the exploitation of global resources, and they often want firms to engage more in social responsibility. Walsh (2016)

continues to argue that firms nowadays tend to consider environmental and social issues to meet these needs in order to gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace. These arguments are in line with the study conducted by Hernández and Kaeck (2019), as they claim consumers' purchase behaviour is determined by environmental, health and ethical factors.

However, as mentioned before, even though consumers nowadays tend to be more ethically aware (Hernández & Kaeck, 2019), ethicality does not always affect their purchase decision. This phenomenon is known as the *attitude-behaviour gap*, as attitudes do not reflect the actions made (Crane & Matten, 2016). Carrington et al. (2010) support this argument stating that: "*Despite their ethical intentions, ethically minded consumers rarely purchase ethical products*" (Carrington et al., 2010, p. 139). Previous studies in the area of consumer behaviour argue that factors such as cost and quality are of greater concern when making a final purchase decision (Carrington et al. 2010; Gruber, Schlegelmilch & Öberseder, 2011). Furthermore, lack of knowledge regarding ethical, or unethical, marketing behaviours were found to be a barrier when evaluating a purchase decision (Gruber et al., 2011). For example, in a study conducted by Gruber et al. (2011), it was found that when consumers have limited knowledge about a firm's behaviour, good or bad, it is unlikely to be evaluated as a purchase criterion.

Another critical factor in the decision-making process is word-of-mouth communication, as it may act as an influential source when purchasing a particular grocery item or brand. Thus, as mentioned before, loyal and satisfied consumers may act as advocates for the brand by spreading positive word-of-mouth communication. Therefore, it is highly relevant to include this concept as the purpose of this study was to investigate the outcome that mislabelling may have on brand-loyal grocery shoppers within the Swedish food industry, which leads to the following section.

2.2.2 Word-of-Mouth

Word-of-mouth communication can take several forms, and it is considered a powerful tool when it comes to influencing consumers purchasing behaviour. Word-of-mouth is described as interpersonal communication about a specific product or brand (Lee & Youn, 2015). This type of marketing activity is considered one of the most influential sources on consumers' decision-making process. Due to the rise of the internet and e-commerce, this phenomenon has become increasingly more important and efficient, hence electronic word-of-mouth (e-WoM) has grown over the past decades. E-WoM is either a positive or a negative message, or online statements,

about a firm communicated through the web, and due to the easy accessibility, it is a crucial form of social influence that impacts consumers behaviour and trust towards a product or a brand (Jen-Hui Wang et al., 2015; Lis, 2013).

According to a report by The Nielsen Company (2013), these online statements are more trusted compared to other mass advertisements. Online statements are other consumers' opinions, and experiences on various products posted online. Several digital channels allow consumers to communicate and share their opinion with each other, such as retailers' websites, product review websites or social media platforms. This type of product information is considered more trustworthy, because it originates from real consumers and not the actual company producing the products. For example, around 70% of American consumers seek online opinions before making the final purchase decision (O'Donnell, 2015).

Consumers may obtain information about a product or brand from various sources, ranging from commercial websites to the neighbour next door. According to Brent, Diane, Paul and Stefanie (2015), the most effective source of information is often received from personal sources such as friends and family members. For example, commercial sources may inform the consumer about a specific product being displayed, whereas a personal source legitimises the product for the consumer. In other words, the commercial source aims to attract potential consumers for economic gain, while personal sources are usually perceived as more trustworthy as it is delivered without bias. Consequently, consumers are more likely to trust a source which may have nothing to gain from the offering, compared to someone who does (Brent et al., 2015).

Word-of-mouth communication does not only involve recommendations of a specific product or a brand, but it also involves the spread of a firm's behaviour. Thus, if a firm acts unethically, it may have a severe impact on the shopper's loyalty and trust towards the food manufacturer and consequently, his or her future purchase intentions. Therefore, the concepts of unethical marketing behaviour and mislabelling will now be further discussed.

2.3 Unethical Marketing Behaviour

Unethical marketing behaviour is a broad term, and the definitions vary across several studies. Gaski (1999) claims that the key ethical guidelines of marketing are either when a firm "obeys the law" or "acts in its self-interest". Jones, Cunningham, and Gallagher (2010) argue that

organisations should not act in a harmful way, that they should regard all stakeholders with respect, and be honest when advertising, meaning they should not mislead or act fraudulently. Smith (2001) claims that all firms are obliged to act ethically and follow these guidelines, and by doing so is the best for their long-term interest. This statement is also supported by Ingram, Skinner and Taylor (2015), stating that ethical marketing is essential for the firm's long-term benefit. Unethical marketing behaviour can take several forms, ranging from food safety issues, like contaminated Coca Cola cans (Cowell, 1999), to environmental issues, like the Volkswagen Diesel emissions scandal (Hotten, 2015).

The rise of the internet and e-commerce have, as mentioned before, created new demands on marketers and firms all around the world, as it presents ethical issues in this new environment for unethical marketing behaviour, such as misleading prices or mislabelled products (Agag, 2017). If a firm engages in unethical marketing behaviour, it may cause consumers to associate negative attitudes towards a specific brand, which may lead to negative word-of-mouth communication (Cinelli, Kashmiri, & Zhang, 2017). Consequently, understanding the consequence that unethical marketing behaviour may have on brand loyal grocery shoppers is essential, since consumers tend to be more susceptible towards negative, rather than positive information spreading on the internet (Jang et al., 2017). Negative information may cause negative word-of-mouth not only about a specific product or a brand, but consumers may also become sceptical towards the firm itself (Jang et al., 2017). In addition, Banerjee (2018) argues that when negative publicity about a brand spreads, the consumer may develop a negative attitude not only towards the brand itself, but it may result in a spillover effect on associated brands as well. In this thesis, we explored how the act of mislabelling might influence brand loyal grocery shoppers' loyalty and future purchase intentions for their favourite food brands. In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the issues related to unethical marketing behaviour, the concept of mislabelling will now be further explained.

2.3.1 Mislabelling

Food fraud is an area of unethical marketing behaviour, and the most common approach is the mislabelling of food products, such as selling ordinary food as organic or using misleading statements about a specific product (Bimbo, Bonanno, & Viscecchia, 2019). According to Moyer and Spink (2011), mislabelling is an intentional act, conducted by firms, aimed to deceive consumers without considering their health, nor their requirements (Moyer & Spink, 2011). Researchers agree that firms engaging in mislabelling of food products do so for economic gain

despite the risk they are taking (Liu, 2016; Bimbo et al., 2019). However, Charlebois, Henn, Huck and Schwab (2016) argue that the act of mislabelling could also be unintentional as it may be challenging for the firm to recognise at what level of the supply chain the altering might have occurred.

In light of the recent horsemeat scandal (BBC, 2013), mislabelling has become a widespread issue in today's society and may appear in several forms. For example, the product label might remain the same, while unreported changes have been made in the production process. Moreover, the country of origin may have been changed to promote local products, although it might have been produced in another country not stated on the label. There are also cases of mislabelling concerning underreporting of ingredients such as allergens which may lead to serious negative consequences for the end consumer (Charlebois, et al, 2016).

As mentioned before, previous research indicates that consumers are increasingly more aware of what type of food they buy and that the label is accurate following the content (Hernández & Kaeck, 2019). Nevertheless, between the years 2011 and 2014, over 150 lawsuits were filed in America as a result of unethical food labelling practices (MacDonald, 2018). Food manufacturers attempt to design the label in a way to attract potential shoppers and consequently, to trigger a purchase decision (Hirogaki, 2013). According to a study conducted by MacDonald (2018), the author claimed that food manufacturers falsely advertised their products as “all-natural”, meaning that no artificial substances were added. In other words, consumers may believe that they are consuming all-natural food products, which may not always be correct. For example, it was found that a specific type of parmesan cheese, which was labelled as “100% parmesan cheese”, turned out to contain cellulose, which is a substance found in wood (MacDonald, 2018).

Although mislabelling of food products has been around since advertisement itself, statistics and data indicate that this act of unethical marketing behaviour is a growing phenomenon (Bogue & Lotta, 2015; Hernández & Kaeck, 2019). Mislabelling is also believed to damage the brand image if exposed (Bimbo et al., 2019), yet firms continue doing so. For example, in a study conducted by Covatti, Delpiani, Deli Antoni, Diaz de Astarloa, Fischer and Lucifora (2020), a DNA testing of 164 different seafood products was conducted. The results showed that almost 30% of the tested products were mislabelled and turned out to contain endangered species not stated on the label. Furthermore, in a study conducted by Cawthorn et al. (2013), it was found that almost 70% of

processed meat products in South Africa contained species of animals not showing on the label, such as rabbit, donkey, horse meat, among others. Following various religious dietary laws, such as Islamic (Halaal) and Jewish (Kashrut), consumers with these dietary restrictions rely on the accuracy of product labelling as it may compromise their beliefs. This exemplifies that the mislabelling of food products is not only violating national regulations, but it also poses ethical, religious, health and environmental issues (Cawthorn et al., 2013). Lastly, a conceptual model was used to investigate the issues related to the act of mislabelling within the context of brand loyalty and purchase intentions, which is illustrated in the following section.

2.4 Conceptual Model

To the best of our knowledge, past research has not investigated the area of mislabelling and grocery shoppers' loyalty and purchase intentions within the Swedish food industry, and therefore, we have constructed our own conceptual model (see figure 1). The model was used as a guideline and a tool, as we sought to explore how the mislabelling of food products may influence brand loyal grocery shoppers' loyalty and purchase intentions towards their favourite food brands. The various concepts of the model include *brand loyalty*, *the level of involvement*, *purchase intentions*, *word-of-mouth* and *mislabelling*. Brand loyalty is viewed as a central concept in the present study and refers to the resistance to switching to another competing brand. The level of involvement involves the importance of a brand following a grocery shopper's preferences, and to what extent the grocery shopper is involved in the decision-making process; in other words: purchase intentions. Furthermore, word-of-mouth is described as interpersonal communication and is of importance when it comes to building and maintaining a strong brand loyalty. Last but not least, mislabelling is a form of unethical marketing behaviour, conducted by firms, that may damage grocery shopper's loyalty and purchase intentions towards their favourite food brands.

The conceptual model is an illustration of the interrelationship between the concepts of brand loyalty, the level of involvement, purchase intentions and word-of-mouth, which all together form a so-called "brand loyalist". In other words, a brand loyal grocery shopper. Since these elements correlate with each other, they are all coloured in blue. Firstly, brand loyalty is the central phenomenon in the present study, and it is, therefore, larger compared to the other concepts and located in the centre of the model as the core element. Secondly, the level of involvement is placed to the upper right of brand loyalty, as it may act as a gatekeeper for the brand loyalist; thus, it controls the flow of information. The level of involvement is illustrated as a smaller concept

compared to brand loyalty and purchase intentions, because it tends to be low in the food industry. However, as this study focused on brand loyal grocery shoppers, it may be of greater importance, compared to the concept of word-of-mouth. Thirdly, the concept of purchase intentions is located to the outside left of brand loyalty, as it is the final action made by the brand loyalist, and its size indicates the relevance for the present study. Fourthly, word-of-mouth is illustrated as a smaller concept in the model as it may influence a future purchase decision but is limited concerning the other concepts. Lastly, mislabelling is illustrated as an independent concept, placed to the right as an external factor. The different shape and its red colour represent mislabelling, almost like a contagious virus ready to infect the brand loyalist. In other words, the model was used to investigate "the symptoms" of a brand loyalist – that is, how the act of mislabelling may influence brand-loyal grocery shoppers' loyalty and purchase intentions towards their favourite food brands.



Figure 1. Conceptual Model

3. Methodology

This chapter discusses the research approach and the empirical design used in the present study. It starts with an explanation to the different research philosophies, approaches and strategies. It follows with the data collection, the selection of participants, the interviews and concludes with the data analysis.

3.1 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy refers to a combination of beliefs of how data should be gathered, analysed and used within the field of research (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Knowledge of research philosophy may guide the researcher towards the choice of the most suitable design within the given context of the study (Gray, 2016). Bryman and Bell (2015) state that there are different philosophies when conducting business research, and these are realism, positivism and interpretivism. The realistic research philosophy believes in the existence of a phenomenon or an object regardless of the human mind. In these types of studies, the researchers tend to investigate objects that impact humans, rather than investigating humans as objects. Positivism is associated with quantitative data and refers to the belief that knowledge can only derive from our senses, such as objects that can either be seen, smelled or touched. The purpose is to generate hypotheses and theories that can be tested to generalise and explain the results. Interpretivism is a research philosophy which is associated with qualitative data and focuses on exploration, rather than a generalisation, of the results (Lewis, Saunders, & Thornhill, 2019). Since this study aimed to explore how the act of mislabelling may influence brand loyal grocery shoppers' loyalty and purchase intentions towards their favourite food brands, interpretivism was more suitable in this context. When the decision of research philosophy is made, the appropriate research approach must be considered, which leads us to the following section.

3.2 Research approach

According to Gray (2016), the research approach determines the choice of theory, and there are three different approaches to consider when conducting research. The first one is the deductive approach which starts with a theory and moves towards a hypothesis testing by collecting relevant data. This approach is typically used to provide new insights to the studied object. The second one

is the inductive approach, where the researcher starts by collecting data, such as interviews, which is then analysed to look for any specific patterns. Inductive research is a “data-driven” manner linked to *grounded theory*, a method used to generate theories and *explore* a subject to provide new insights. This approach is considered suitable when conducting social research (Denscombe, 2018). The last one is called the abductive approach, which starts with an observation and seeks to find a simple explanation of the studied object (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Denscombe, 2018). Therefore, an inductive approach was most suitable since this study aimed to explore the consequences that mislabelling may have on brand loyal grocery shoppers’ loyalty and purchase intentions. After deciding the most appropriate approach, the orientation of the research plan must be developed, which is presented in the following section.

3.3 Research Strategy

The research strategy is the overall plan when conducting business research and takes either a quantitative or a qualitative approach (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The research question is the first and most crucial step when conducting business research. Furthermore, the basic principle of scientific methods is empiricism; in other words, the idea that knowledge originates from observations and that the data collected is used to answer that question (Cozby, 2018). “*Research methods can be the way to satisfy our native curiosity about ourselves, our world, and those around us.*” (Cozby, 2018, p. 4).

There are two types of research approaches: quantitative and qualitative. According to House (2018), the primary function of a qualitative approach is to *understand* human behaviour, whereas the function of a quantitative approach is to *explain* human behaviour. Bhakoo, Köhler and Smith (2019) argue for the strength of using qualitative methods as it may allow for adjustments according to the needs of the data and the sample. Lind (2014) argues that qualitative data are expressed in verbal form and that it may provide a multidimensional *description* of the studied phenomenon. Therefore, this study had a qualitative approach, where in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore how the act of mislabelling may influence brand loyal grocery shoppers’ loyalty and purchase intentions towards their favourite food brands.

The research process began with a search for scientific articles with the help and support from the search engines *Summon*, which is provided by Kristianstad University, and Google Scholar. We used key terms as '*Unethical Marketing*', '*Mislabelling*', '*Word-of-Mouth*', '*Negative Publicity*', and

combined these with terms like '*Brand Loyalty*', '*Purchase Intentions*', '*Level of Involvement*' in order to narrow down the results to find as relevant articles as possible. To conclude, all the articles used in this thesis have been peer-reviewed and published in a journal article.

3.4 Data Collection Method

According to Bryman and Bell (2015), data collection serves as a basis of any research project, and there are several methods to consider. There are two ways of collecting data, either through a primary data collection or a secondary data collection. The relationship between the researcher and the data determines if it is considered primary or secondary data. For example, if the researcher derives data from interviews, it is considered primary, but if data is collected from another researcher, it is considered secondary (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In this thesis, the main data collection was primary as we conducted a total of four semi-structured interviews and constructed an interview guide in advance (see appendix 1 & 2), which is further discussed in the present chapter.

3.4.1 Selection of Participants

As qualitative research tends to focus on an in-depth *exploration*, a small but diverse sample is favoured. Therefore, we decided to employ a *purposive sampling*, which is when participants are handpicked based on their relevance for the studied subject (Denscombe, 2018). Before we selected the final participants, we collected several potential individuals which we conducted a short interview with to find out their relationship to food, their occupation, as well as their preferences and purchasing criteria when it comes to various food brands. By doing so, it allowed us to sort out and choose the most relevant participants for the present study as well as to create case questions suitable to each of the participants. We based the relevance on a high level of interest in food and cooking, as well as having a strong loyalty towards various food brands. Strong brand loyalty refers to the resistance to switching to another brand, despite the marketing efforts from a competing brand (Oliver, 1999). Furthermore, each of the participants was asked to write down three of their favourite food brands that they always keep at home. This was an entry ticket for participation in the study and to ensure that all participants were considered brand loyal.

Another criterion that we took into consideration when we selected the participants was their occupation. Since individuals with experience in the catering industry tend to have a high interest in food and are usually well aware of the various food brands available on the market, this segment

was highly preferred in the present study. However, a potential downside by selecting individuals with experience in catering could be that they do not represent the general grocery shopper. For example, the participants might be biased when choosing their favourite food brands as they might associate them with past working experience or prior purchasing contracts. Nevertheless, as this study depended on brand loyal grocery shoppers, the authors claim that these participants were highly representable.

The characteristics of the participants include age, occupation, favourite food brands, dietary restrictions and purchasing criteria, summarised in *Table 3.1 Participants*. All of the participants were selected by *convenience*, as we asked people in our network that would fit in our requirements (Ahrne & Svensson, 2015). Furthermore, the participants were given fictitious names to ensure anonymity and to facilitate the analysis. The downside of using a convenience sampling method is that it may have low credibility, and therefore, it may not be possible to generalise the results (Gray, 2016). However, the primary aim of this study was an exploration, rather than a generalisation.

Table 3.1 Participants

| Participant (Fictive names) | Age | Occupation | Favourite Food Brands | Dietary Restrictions | Purchasing Criteria |
|--|------------|-------------------|--|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| James | 26 | Chef | Mutti, Skånemejerier and YES | None | Eco-friendly and Organic |
| Ali | 35 | Self-employed | Arla, Hans & Greta and Lipton | Gluten intolerance and Muslim | Quality and Taste |
| Robert | 62 | Self-employed | Arla, Felix and OLW | None | Eco-friendly and Quality |
| Omar | 29 | Chef | Red Bull, Skånemejerier and ZETA | Muslim | Quality and Price |

3.4.2 Presentation of Participants

All of the participants were selected based on their various purchasing criteria, personal preferences, as well as dietary restrictions. We chose a total of four participants and will now give a brief presentation of each of the individuals. Firstly, James is 26 years old and works as a sushi chef in Malmö and has a strong relationship with food and cooking. He claimed that his relationship with food began at an early age and has developed over time. James favours eco-

friendly and organic products, he does not have any dietary restrictions and gave the impression of being environmentally aware. Secondly, Ali is a 35-year old self-employed restaurant owner in the south of Sweden and argues that quality and taste is superior to price concerning various food brands. Ali is gluten intolerant and strictly follows dietary restrictions regarding his religious belief (Muslim). Thirdly, Robert is a 62-year old self-employed with experience in the catering industry. He claims to have a great passion for food and broad knowledge when it comes to various food cultures. Robert favours qualitative and eco-friendly products and has no dietary restrictions. Lastly, Omar is 29 years old and works in an Italian restaurant in Ystad and considers price and quality as his main purchasing criteria. Omar also strictly follows a religious dietary restriction (Muslim) and likes to experiment with different ingredients from all over the world.

3.4.3 Interviews

There are several ways to structure an interview, and the optimal structure depends on the given situation and the purpose of the research. Denscombe (2018) highlights three methods when conducting an interview. The first one is the structured interview and relates to when the interviewer has full control over the process and prepares questions with limited options. The second one is the unstructured interview and refers to a situation where the interviewer has little to no control over the process. Instead, a topic is introduced, which allows the respondent to speak more freely. The third one is a semi-structured interview and is a mix of both the structured and the unstructured interview. During this scenario, the interviewer has control over the process, yet respondents are allowed to speak more freely (Denscombe, 2018). During a semi-structured interview, questions tend to be open, and the interviewer may ask follow-up questions which may allow for a deeper understanding of the studied subject (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

We believe that a semi-structured interview was the most suitable method since the aim of this study was to understand what happens to consumers' brand loyalty and their purchase intentions when their beloved brands engage in the act of mislabelling. Therefore, a semi-structured approach allowed us to ask follow-up questions, which resulted in more detailed answers. The interviews lasted between 40 and 65 minutes each and were audio-recorded with the approval of the participants. Since all of the participants had different preferences and food habits, each interview was customised in order to fit each of the specific purchasing criteria concerning their various choice of food brands and dietary restrictions.

Interviews as a tool for data collection comes with both advantages, as well as disadvantages that the researcher should take into consideration. The use of semi-structured interviews may allow the researcher to keep an open mind so that theories and concepts can emerge from the data (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This is known as the inductive approach and was referred to earlier in the text. Ahrne and Svensson (2015) argue for the benefit of conducting interviews as it may allow the researcher to collect a considerable amount of information in a short period. If the objective of the research is exploratory and involves an examination of feelings, attitudes or behaviours, interviews may be one of the best alternatives (Gray, 2016). Gray (2016) argues for the advantage of semi-structured interviews as it may allow the researcher to probe for more detailed answers where the respondent may be asked to clarify or elaborate on the questions asked.

However, there are some downsides related to the use of interviews in business research. One disadvantage is the "*interviewer effect*", that is when the identity of the interviewer might influence the participant and compromise the credibility of his or her response. This situation may occur when the questions are considered sensitive or may be perceived as personal to the respondent (Denscombe, 2018). As a result, respondents may provide answers that they feel are expected of them or responses that may be viewed favourably by others, also known as *social desirability bias* (Denscombe, 2018). In order to overcome this disadvantage, we decided to use a face-to-face approach in order to minimise self-representation and to ensure open and honest answers.

3.4.4 Pilot Interview

A pilot interview was conducted to test if the length was appropriate and to ensure that the questions were understandable and relevant for the present study. When we conducted the pilot interview, it ended up being too short, approximately 20 minutes. A possible explanation might be that the particular participant answered shortly and did not express her thoughts on a deeper level. Another explanation could be that the questions were formulated in a way that did not allow for more in-depth discussions. Therefore, we decided to add and reformulate some of the questions to make room for more in-depth discussions during the interviews. For example, instead of asking one question that concerned all of the three chosen brands, we divided the first ten questions by focusing on one brand at a time. This allowed the participants to elaborate further, resulting in a deeper understanding of their purchasing intentions and loyalty towards each of their favourite food brands.

The participant in the pilot interview was chosen because she had working experience in the food industry, as she worked as a food distributor for a state-owned company. A convenience sampling method was used, as she was a part of our social network. The participant claimed to be well aware of various food brands available on the market because of her working experience. Nevertheless, the participant in the pilot interview turned out to have a different relationship to the chosen brands than requested. The participant expressed a love-hate relationship to the brands as she associated them with corruption and unethical behaviour. Although she claimed to consume the products daily, she did not express the typical signs of brand loyalty as requested in the present study. Therefore, as this study aimed to explore brand loyal grocery shoppers who act as advocates for their favourite food brands, she was omitted.

3.4.5 Interview Guide

With the help and support from our conceptual model we constructed an interview guide with the various concepts, conceptualised in figure 1, in mind. Each of the questions were categorised based on the elements in the conceptual model (see appendix 1 & 2). Before we conducted the interviews, we asked the participants to write down three of their favourite food brands which they always keep at home and are the most valuable to them. Furthermore, we asked the participants about their purchasing criteria as well as if they had any dietary restrictions. By doing so, it allowed us to create possible scenarios that would be appropriate concerning each of the individual's preferences and their chosen brands. In other words, we prepared scenarios, in the form of case questions, to investigate what happened to their brand loyalty and purchase intentions when one of their favourite brands was mislabelled (see appendix 3).

The first part of the interview guide contains a couple of warm-up questions to make the participants feel comfortable and to gain a deeper understanding of their relationship to food and cooking. For further investigation, we continued by asking ten general questions to determine the level of loyalty towards each of the chosen brands (see appendix 1 & 2). After that, we asked the prepared case questions which started gently, and then we gradually increased the level of severity to investigate how far the participants were willing to go before their loyalty towards the specific brands and consequently their purchase intentions were damaged. For example, we began one interview by asking the participant how he would react if his favourite brand mislabelled its

product claiming that the amount of sugar was lower than the actual content. Furthermore, we increased the severity and asked a question which either concerned their individual health or raised an environmental issue. Each of these case questions was customised based on the four participants purchasing criteria and dietary restrictions (see appendix 3).

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis is a crucial step when it comes to analysing the empirical data, and there are several methods to consider. When conducting qualitative research with interviews as the primary data collection method, the interviews tend to be audio-recorded and transcribed. In this study, we used a method called thematic analysis which aims to identify and analyse different themes and patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Braun and Clarke (2006) developed a step-by-step guide which consists of six phases to consider when conducting qualitative data analysis. The first phase is called “*familiarising yourself with your data*” and refers to the process of transcribing the interviews, reading the transcripts multiple times and taking notes of fundamental ideas. The second phase is called “*generating initial codes*”, which refers to when the data is assembled into different codes for further analysis. The third phase is called “*searching for themes*” and relates to assembling the data into different themes. The fourth phase involves reviewing themes, that is generating a thematic map and clarifying the different themes. The fifth phase is called “*defining and naming themes*”, which is when the researcher defines and refines the data in order to generate clear definitions of each theme. The sixth and final phase is “*producing the report*”, which refers to the final analysis of the data concerning the research question and theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While this approach may be a tool of moving the research process forward, it is essential to keep reflecting, reading and re-reading the material, so that nothing is missed or as Kierkegaard states: “*Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards*” (Kierkegaard, 1844, p. 188).

According to Bryman and Bell (2015), thematic analysis is a common approach in qualitative research. The purpose of this approach is, as mentioned, to reduce the content of the data in various phases, to analyse and interpret and to illustrate specific themes within the data. Since this study aimed to understand consumers behaviour and attitudes, rather than predict them, we believe that this approach was most suitable. We divided the data into five different themes based on brand

loyalty, level of involvement, purchase intentions, word-of-mouth and mislabelling. We also included a separate category which included other interesting facts that were found during each of the interviews. Each theme was given a colour which allowed us to search for relevant patterns within the data (see Appendix 4). When the data is analysed, it is highly relevant to establish credibility of the empirical material to ensure trustworthiness of the study, which leads us to the following section.

3.6 Trustworthiness

According to Bryman and Bell (2015), studies are evaluated differently depending on the research approach, that is, qualitative or quantitative. There are four different criteria to consider to establish validity and to ensure trustworthiness when conducting a qualitative study. Firstly, *credibility* is arguably the most important criteria to consider; thus, it allows the researchers to demonstrate the credibility of the study by linking findings to the social world. In other words, to what extent the findings are acceptable to others and applicable to the outside world. In the present study, a technique called *respondent validation* was used to establish credibility. During the interviews, open-ended questions were asked, which allowed the participants to clarify their responses, and to minimise any misrepresentation. Secondly, *transferability* refers to what extent the findings may be generalised and relatable to similar settings. However, qualitative research typically aims to provide an exploration of the studied object, rather than a generalisation. Therefore, as mentioned, the focus of the present study was on gaining an in-depth understanding by selecting a small number of participants based on their relevance for the present study. Thirdly, *dependability* involves the researcher to keep and continuously analyse the empirical material, such as interview recordings, transcripts, colour coding, as well as other empirical data related to the present study. All of the material was stored online, as well as offline on personal devices. Finally, *confirmability* refers to whether the researchers have acted in good faith by objectively interpreting the data. In the present study, the data was analysed objectively as no personal beliefs or values were applied.

3.7 Theory in use

The various concepts in the theoretical framework all together bring essential knowledge concerning the behavioural elements of a brand loyal grocery shopper. In the present study, *brand loyalty* is interpreted as the attachment a grocery shopper has towards his or her favourite food brands. In other words, the resistance to switching to a competing brand, despite the marketing efforts made. However, there are other essential elements that form a brand loyal grocery shopper.

For example, how important the brand is to the grocery shopper concerning personal needs and moral values, that is, *the level of involvement*. The level of involvement is a crucial element in the decision-making process, as it may influence the grocery shopper's future *purchase intentions*. In the present study, a brand loyal grocery shopper is characterised with all the mentioned concepts, as well as whether the shopper spreads positive *word-of-mouth* communication. In other words, if the shopper acts as an advocate for his or her favourite food brands. Lastly, *mislabelling* is the most common form of food fraud conducted by firms and aims to lure the grocery shopper into a buying decision. To conclude, the four concepts of brand loyalty, level of involvement, purchase intentions and word-of-mouth together form the brand loyal grocery shopper. In the analysis, each concept will be further analysed in order to explore how the act of mislabelling may influence brand loyal grocery shoppers' loyalty and purchase intentions towards their favourite food brands, which leads us to the final chapter.

4. Results and Analysis

This chapter covers the empirical findings from the interviews and the analysis based on our conceptual model and theoretical framework. The chapter begins with an identification of each of the participants' brand loyalty, their level of involvement and word-of-mouth communication. It follows with a discussion and analysis concerning how the act of mislabelling influences brand loyal grocery shoppers' loyalty and purchase intentions for their favourite brands. The chapter concludes with a summary of the empirical findings.

4.1 Brand loyalty

Brand loyalty is characterised by the attachment an individual has towards a brand, a repetitive purchasing behaviour, and the resistance to switching to a competing brand (Oliver, 1999). Furthermore, brand loyalty may be divided into two separate groups, namely attitudinal and behavioural loyalty. In general, all of the participants indicated a strong brand loyalty towards their favourite food brands and demonstrated resistance to switching to a competing brand. For example, when we asked James and Omar about their relationship towards the brand Skånemejerier, they described it as:

“I always keep at least one product from Skånemejerier at home, and if I am planning to buy any dairy products, Skånemejerier is the first brand that comes to mind.” – James

“For me, Skånemejerier is an important brand. I am used to it, and I remember drinking it every day when I went to school as a child.” – Omar

Both James and Omar expressed a strong brand loyalty towards Skånemejerier as it was the obvious choice for them. James indicated that he has a strong relationship, not only towards his chosen product from Skånemejerier, but also for the brand itself. He argued that if he considers purchasing any other dairy products, Skånemejerier is the only brand for him. On the other hand, Omar indicated that he associates Skånemejerier solely with its milk products. He argued that Skånemejerier has always been around him since he was a child and that drinking its milk has

turned into a habit. Furthermore, when we asked both participants what, if anything, would make them switch to another brand, they stated:

“If a new brand would appear on the market that could compete with its localness, I would probably think about switching, but most likely not.” – James

“The only reason for me to switch from Skånemejerier would be if I moved to another country, or if the firm stopped its production.” – Omar

Even though James tends to purchase a wide variety of Skånemejerier products, he indicated a lower resistance to switching to another brand compared to Omar. As previously mentioned, James favoured eco-friendly products and gave the impression of being environmentally aware. For him, localness seemed to be of great importance and might be the only reason for him to switch. However, even if he would consider switching to another brand, it seemed unlikely to happen. Omar indicated a stronger resistance to switching to another brand and claimed that the only reason would be if he moved away or if Skånemejerier stopped its production. This indicates that his relationship to Skånemejerier is deeply embedded in his life, as he does not want to break the bond at any cost.

When Ali and Robert were asked about their relationship towards their favourite food brands, we identified some similarities between both participants. For example, both Ali and Robert stated that quality is an essential criterion when purchasing a grocery item, and they gave the impression of being well aware of various food brands available on the market. Furthermore, the price was not an important criterion when making a purchase decision. When we asked them why they chose the specific brands and what they meant to them, they described it as:

“Hans & Greta is the obvious choice for me. I have tried gluten-free bread from other brands, but unfortunately I am equally disappointed every time.” – Ali

“In my world, OLW’s peanuts are by far the best peanuts with the highest quality, considering the competing brands.” – Robert

Ali began to describe his relationship with the gluten-free bread Hans & Greta stating that it is the obvious choice to him. Ali expressed a strong connection towards the brand and mentioned that it is superior to the other brands available on the market. Furthermore, Robert seemed to share the same idea concerning his favourite brand OLW and also emphasised on the quality of the product concerning the competing brands. When we asked them what, if anything, would make them switch to another brand, they were on the same page stating that nothing could make them switch.

The resistance to switching to a competing brand indicates that all of the participants had a strong brand loyalty which is in line with Oliver's (1999) definition of a brand loyal consumer. All of the participants expressed both satisfaction as well as an engagement when talking about their favourite brands. Furthermore, when we asked the participants if they have had any negative experiences associated with the various brands, they were all very definite in their replies, stating no negative thoughts at all. This supports Bianchi's (2015) theory that loyal and satisfied consumers tend to become advocates for the brand, which may result in positive word-of-mouth communication.

During the interviews, another interesting aspect appeared when Omar and Ali were asked about their relationships towards the brands Red Bull and Lipton. Omar described Red Bull as a part of himself and stated that he has consumed its energy drink for over ten years. When Ali described his relationship to the tea brand Lipton, he gave an impression of being passionate about the brand and stated that he has consumed it since he was a child. Even though they did not know much about the brands themselves, they felt strong connections to them, stating that:

"I want to consume Red Bull; I want to sponsor them. It is almost like a community that you want to be a part of." – Omar

"I would say that I am not only a tea drinker; I am a Lipton drinker." – Ali

Omar described Red Bull as a community, almost like a family that he wanted to be a part of. He continued by explaining that the brand generates him a feeling of "being cool" or "a part of the gang" as he associates the brand with adrenaline and extreme sports. Furthermore, Ali explained that Lipton is a brand that has followed him since a young age, and he stated that he always carries at least one tea bag on him. When Ali described his relationship to Lipton, it was almost like he

worked for the company. He explained how Lipton has managed to expand and grow into a multinational company with operations all over the world. This may be in accordance with Johnson et al. (2016), who claim that a strong attitudinal brand loyalty may give the consumer a sense of ownership.

During the interviews, it was found that when it comes to ensuring trust towards the various brands, there are several factors to consider. For example, Robert indicated that trust is something that takes time to develop and stated that his brand loyalty has grown over time. This was also in line with James, saying that his brand loyalty has improved since he was a child, adding that localness is an essential factor to him as it generates a feeling of trust. This is in accordance with the study conducted by Psomas and Vouzas (2018), where it was found that the country of origin is an essential element when it comes to ensuring trust towards the brand. Furthermore, it was also found that the size of the brand itself may influence the feeling of trust. For example, Ali stated that he valued the size of the company and argued that firms need to produce and maintain good quality in order to grow and expand on the market. He continued by claiming that both Arla and Lipton are firms with great experience, which has resulted in their strong position on the market as of today. Omar indicated similar associations when it came to the size and added that Skånemejerier is of much higher quality compared to other retailers' private label brands. This is in line with Cavol and Levy-Mangin (2016), indicating that consumers, in general, view large food manufacturers as a safer alternative compared to private labelled brands.

4.2 Level of involvement

According to previous research, the level of involvement is defined as how important a brand is following the consumer's personal preferences and moral value (Vebrová et al. 2016). In general, the level of involvement tends to be low when it comes to grocery shopping, but it could be higher for some groups of shoppers. Furthermore, involvement may be divided into two separate categories, namely, functional and symbolic involvement (Conlin and Laban, 2019). When we conducted the interviews, we found tendencies towards both functional as well as symbolic involvement among the participants. For example, when Robert was asked about his favourite food brands and if he usually reads the label when grocery shopping, he stated that:

“I chose these brands mainly because of the high quality compared to what is available on the market in general. I find it important to know what the product actually contains, like the amount of fruit in relation to other ingredients or whether the oil is palm oil or sunflower oil.”

Robert gave the impression of being well aware of the various brands available on the market and argued that the quality was his main purchasing criterion. Robert expressed deep concerns about health and safety risks when evaluating alternatives to find the most qualitative product. For example, Robert indicated that the content of the product is of great importance, concerning both his individual health as well as environmental impacts. It was also found that Robert was the only participant who frequently reads the label when grocery shopping which may indicate a tendency towards functional involvement. This is in accordance with Conlin and Laban (2019), stating that functional involvement involves an evaluation of perceived health and safety risks as well as ensuring high quality of the purchased product or brand.

On the other hand, Omar demonstrated tendencies toward symbolic involvement. As mentioned before, Omar gave the impression of having a strong connection towards his favourite energy drink, Red Bull, as it was almost like a family to him. When we asked Omar about his associations with Red Bull, he described it as an image and a more luxurious brand compared to its competitors. Furthermore, he even stated that he wanted to put stickers with its logo on his car, something he would not consider doing with his other favourite brands. This might also be in line with Conlin and Laban (2019), arguing that symbolic involvement may be of great personal importance to the consumer as the brand name tends to play a critical role in the relationship towards the brand.

4.3 Word-of-Mouth

When it comes to influencing consumers purchasing behaviour, word-of-mouth plays a critical role. Word-of-mouth may be described as interpersonal communication concerning a specific product or brand. Word-of-mouth communication can take several forms, ranging from commercial sources to friends and family members. As mentioned before, none of the participants had heard of anything negative concerning their favourite food brands. However, all of the participants expressed willingness for further recommendations and in some cases, others had

recommended them. For example, when Ali and James were asked how they discovered their favourite brands and what makes them important, they described it as:

“I actually heard about Hans & Greta from a friend who is also gluten intolerant. He liked the bread and recommended it to me. He told me that their products taste excellent and are of high quality. Today I am very happy that I chose to listen to his advice.” – Ali

“My father used to work in the cheese factory at Skånemejerier many years ago. He told me that things “went right” at that time and that it maintains good working conditions. That is a reason why I trust this brand.” – James

During the interviews, it was found that the source of information is critical following the credibility. For example, Ali had been recommended the brand Hans & Greta by a friend who was also gluten intolerant. Ali argued that it was a close friend of his which made the source more trustworthy, thus resulting in a purchase decision, and since that day, his loyalty towards Hans & Greta has developed. James expressed similar tendencies and argued that one of his reasons for trusting Skånemejerier is because of what he has heard from his father. This is in line with Brent et al. (2015), who argue that consumers, in general, are more likely to trust friends and family members as the information is delivered without bias. Another interesting fact that appeared during the interviews occurred when James was asked how he would react if he heard something negative concerning one of his favourite brands, as he stated:

“It depends on what source the news originates from. For example, if I watch the news on television, say SVT, then I would believe it. But, if I would read it on the internet, I mean online somewhere, I probably would not have trusted it. It has to do with the credibility of the source as I trust more established media sources. Nowadays, there is a lot of fake news spreading on the internet.”

It was found that James has a critical mind when it comes to informational sources, as he argued that some sources tend to be biased or even fake. He continued by claiming that some online newspapers could be written or edited by anyone, which made him a bit sceptical towards the digital world. This exemplifies how crucial it is to be critical when reading about 'online rumours'.

4.4 Mislabelling and Brand Loyalty

Mislabelling of food products is a form of an unethical marketing behaviour conducted by firms and aims to deceive consumers without the consideration of their health nor their preferences (Moyer & Spink, 2011). During each of the interviews, we asked prepared case questions to determine how far the participants were willing to go before we noticed any change in their loyalty towards their chosen brands. In other words, how the act of mislabelling may influence brand loyal grocery shoppers' loyalty and purchase intentions towards their favourite food brands. Furthermore, the case questions were customised to fit each of the participants various purchasing criteria and dietary restrictions (see appendix 3). The reactions differed among the participants, while some seemed to be more concerned about their own well-being compared to the others. For example, when we asked Ali how he would react if one of his favourite products was mislabelled and turned out to contain more sugar than stated on the label, he responded laughing:

"I am not a diabetic so it would not change my opinion about the brand. As you might have noticed, as long as it does not affect me or my health, it does not matter."

Ali seemed to be determined when he responded that as long as his health was not jeopardised, he would still hold the same opinion concerning the brand. Furthermore, when Ali was asked how he would react if one of his favourite brands advertised an environmentally friendly production which turned out to be false, he interrupted the interviewer stating that it would not matter to him. Ali explained that although he was aware of the issue, he expressed no changes in his opinion towards the brand as it did not affect him personally. The same tendencies were found when Omar was asked how he would react if one of his favourite brands mislabelled a grocery item, thus resulting in a young girl ending up in the hospital due to an allergic reaction. Omar stated that he has no allergies himself and would therefore not be affected or change his opinion about the brand. On the contrary, the other two participants indicated a much stronger reaction when their favourite brands engaged in the act of mislabelling. For example, when we asked James and Robert how they would react if one of their favourite products turned out to contain more sugar than labelled, they stated:

"I would have been disappointed, actually. If I found out that they are lying to me as a consumer just to make the product taste better, or appear of higher quality than it is, it would affect my view about the brand negatively." – James

"If the label does not match the content, I do not want to buy the product at all." – Robert

James and Robert showed a significant change in their behaviour and loyalty towards their favourite brands without the need for any personal harm. James expressed a feeling of disappointment and claimed that if the brand would intentionally mislabel its products, it would affect his trust and consequently the loyalty towards the specific brand. Furthermore, Robert gave the impression of being strict when it came to the accuracy of the product label. As mentioned earlier, Robert favoured quality and showed tendencies towards functional involvement. In other words, he emphasised that the label should strictly follow the actual content and if the label is incorrect, he would lose all of his trust towards the brand.

A possible explanation to the different reactions among the participants may be in line with Garg et al. (2016), who argue that what is considered unethical and what is not may be perceived differently simply because people have different values and morals. Another example that might emphasise on the different attitudes considering what is right or wrong was the response from Omar when asked why he does not consider environmental impacts when making a purchase decision. Omar explained that although he was aware of the environmental issues, it was not an important aspect for him to consider as he is not from "that school". This is in accordance with Ali's reflections concerning environmental issues. Although we identified patterns that might indicate a cultural difference, it was not included in the present study as it focused on an exploration of grocery shoppers brand loyalty and purchase intentions, rather than including cultural aspects.

The mislabelling of food products may be perceived differently depending on how strong the initial brand loyalty is. For example, when Omar was asked how he would react if one of his favourite brands turned out to be mislabelled containing a harmful substance, he expressed a significant change concerning his brand loyalty. On the other hand, when Ali was asked how he would react if the tea bags from Lipton turned out to contain dangerous microplastics without showing it on

the label, the reaction was unexpected and differed from the other three participants. Ali expressed strong emotions and was almost angry when stating that:

“I do not want to lose this product, it is a part of me, but if it becomes life-threatening or it may damage my health then I have no choice but to stop consuming it. Therefore, I do not want to imagine such a scenario.”

As mentioned before, Ali expressed a strong loyalty towards the brand Lipton, as it had been a part of his life since he was young, and he did not want to stop consuming its products at any cost. Furthermore, Ali explained that he does not believe that such a successful multinational company would mislabel its products intentionally, and it was almost like he defended the brand. This is in line with the study conducted by Brady et al. (2017), where it was found that negative information about a brand may result in a self-defence process where the consumer defends the brand against a negative message which may lead to an even stronger bond towards the brand than before.

When a grocery item is mislabelled, it may damage the trust not only towards the brand itself but affecting associated brands as well, and this is known as the spillover effect (Banerjee, 2018). During the interviews, this effect was confirmed by James as he was asked how he would react if one of his favourite brands, Skånemejerier, which is labelled as organic, turned out to be a false statement. Further, James expressed a doubtfulness not only towards the brand in question but also towards other brands producing organic products, as he explained it as:

“Organic products are important to me and if it turned out to be mislabelled, I would lose trust towards the brand itself and if they are lying, why would not everyone else do it? I would probably question other organic products as well.”

As mentioned before, James favoured eco-friendly products as it was his main purchasing criteria, and if he would find out that one of his favourite brands turned out to be lying on its label, he would question the honesty of other brands as well, which may indicate a spillover effect. However, in this case, it was found that the spillover effect goes even further, not only affecting associated brands but also the level of trust regarding any organic products within the food industry. This might be in line with the study conducted by Gaus and Müller (2015), where

consumers lost their general trust in organic food labels as a result of a manipulation of organic food products.

Consumers with various dietary restrictions, such as gluten intolerance or Islamic dietary laws (halal), strictly rely on the accuracy of the product label concerning the content of the product. During the interviews, it was found that if the label turned out to be mislabelled and contained ingredients that might compromise these dietary restrictions, the results would be devastating. For example, although Ali indicated a strong loyalty towards his gluten-free bread brand Hans & Greta, he claimed that if it turned out that the product was in fact not gluten-free, he would lose all of his trust towards the brand. Furthermore, when we asked Omar how he would react if Skånemejerier included a hidden substance, like alcohol, in the production process, he responded anxiously:

”I would feel really, really bad. After all, I’m a Muslim and I’m not allowed to consume alcohol at all. I think that it should be stated clearly on the label, and if not, I would lose all of my confidence, and my opinion on the brand would definitely change completely. If they can lie about such a serious thing, they can lie about a lot.”

Consumers that live with dietary restrictions, both concerning health as well as religious aspects, are strongly dependent on the honesty of the various food brands. For example, Omar argued that despite his strong loyalty towards Skånemejerier, it might not be possible for the firm to regain his trust as his religious belief is superior to his brand loyalty. This exemplifies the severity of mislabelling, as it may pose religious issues (Cawthorn et al., 2013), and consequently damage the consumers brand loyalty permanently. Furthermore, when we asked the participants why they think that firms intentionally mislabel their products, they all agreed that the main reason was due to financial gain. However, Ali argued that large and well-established firms have too much to lose, and therefore, the mislabelling could be unintentional. Ali stated that the act of mislabelling could simply be a mistake due to the long production chains that these products usually pass through, which is in line with the arguments by Charlebois et al. (2016). He continued by addressing the horsemeat scandal, claiming that it was a mistake and that consumers, in general, tend to forgive. However, Robert also mentioned the horsemeat scandal, but he was anything other than forgiving as he claimed that since the scandal went public, he has not bought any Findus-related products.

Towards the end of the interview, the participants were asked what they would say to their favourite brands if they found out that they intentionally mislabelled their products. All of the participants agreed that the firm in question should make an apology and correct its mistakes, and if this was not to be done, they would turn to another competing brand. In other words, their brand loyalty would be damaged permanently if there would be no actions taken by the firms to prevent it.

4.4.1 Mislabelling and Purchase Intentions

Consumers purchase intentions are strongly connected to the concept of brand loyalty, as it may cause a repetitive same-brand purchasing behaviour (Oliver, 1999). During the interviews, it was found that the participants' willingness to repurchase their favourite brands changed, and in some cases, more drastically than others, as a result of the mislabelling. For example, all of the participants showed a significant change considering their purchasing intentions when the mislabelled product could jeopardise their health. On the one hand, James and Robert drew the line before the other participants and argued that if the label does not match the content, they would not consider making a future purchase decision. On the other hand, Ali and Omar seemed to be more accepting as they claimed that they would not change their opinion on the brand in question, nor stop consuming its products, as long as the mislabelling did not concern their health nor dietary restrictions.

There might be several explanations of the differences concerning the participants' purchase intentions. One possible explanation of the differences could be found in the level of involvement. For example, Robert indicated a high level of functional involvement as he continually sought for product information by reading and interpreting the product label. On the other hand, Omar indicated a high level of symbolic involvement as he favoured attributes like the brand name and logo prior to the actual content. This might suggest that the functional consumer might be more rational in the decision-making process, thus resulting in a stricter evaluation of the perceived quality concerning what the product actually contains concerning its label. On the other hand, the motive for a symbolic grocery shopper might be to shape the personal identity, rather than evaluating the actual content of the product. This might be in line with Arnould and Thomson's (2005) theory of consumer culture theory (CCT). Furthermore, another explanation might be that James and Robert were environmentally aware as they favoured eco-friendly and locally produced products. Therefore, if the label did not match their criteria, they would not consider repurchasing

the brand in question. In other words, the purchasing criteria seemed to be of great importance when it comes to the evaluation of the severity concerning mislabelling of food products.

However, even though James and Robert claimed to be environmentally aware and that they would not consider repurchasing the specific brand in the future, that may not be the actual case as attitudes do not always reflect the actions made, known as the attitude-behaviour gap (Crane & Matten, 2016). Furthermore, during the interviews, James mentioned that if the firm in question would intentionally mislabel its product without being caught, it would not change his purchase intentions. This is confirmed in the study conducted by Gruber et al. (2010), where it was found that if the consumer has limited knowledge concerning a firm's unethical behaviour, it is unlikely to be evaluated as a purchase criterion.

4.5 Summary of Findings

The empirical findings suggest that all of the participants expressed a strong brand loyalty towards their favourite food brands as they all indicated resistance to switching to a competing brand. For example, Ali expressed a strong brand loyalty towards his favourite tea brand Lipton and argued that it was the only choice for him. When Ali was asked how he would react if it turned out that Lipton intentionally mislabelled its tea, he responded defensively, and it was almost like he defended the brand against the negative message. The empirical findings also suggest that there is a clear difference concerning how brand loyal grocery shoppers evaluate and interpret the content of a grocery item. For example, Robert was leaning towards functional involvement, meaning that the actual content of the product was of great importance, and if the label did not match the content, he would refuse any future purchases. On the other hand, Omar indicated tendencies towards symbolic involvement, meaning that he prioritised the brand name and its logo prior to the actual content. In other words, it was found that the more functional the grocery shopper is, the more likely it is that the brand loyalty and purchase intentions are damaged as a result of the mislabelling. Another interesting finding suggests that the act of mislabelling and its consequences may differ simply because what is considered unethical may be perceived differently from individual to individual. For example, Omar and Ali explained that although they were aware of the environmental issues, they did not consider it unethical to consume unethical products, claiming that they were from another school. In other words, moral values and personal judgements are different depending on the individual background. Furthermore, Robert and James stated that if the content does not match the label, they would lose trust towards the brand and not consider

future purchases. On the other hand, Ali and Omar stated that as long as it did not harm their health or jeopardised their dietary restrictions, they would continue to repurchase the brand in question. It was also found that the act of mislabelling may not only damage the loyalty towards the brand itself, as other brands may also be affected. This is known as the spillover effect. All in all, the empirical findings indicate that the act of mislabelling have severe consequences as it may damage the brand loyal grocery shopper's trust, loyalty and willingness to repurchase the brand.

5. Conclusion

This concluding chapter provides a summary and conclusion of the thesis in accordance with the purpose of the research. It follows with theoretical and practical implications, limitations and concludes with suggestions for further research within the field of brand loyalty and mislabelling.

5.1 Summary of the Thesis

Due to the rise of the internet, the act of mislabelling has become a well-known phenomenon. Mislabelling of food products is a form of unethical marketing behaviour, and Hirogaki (2013) argues that food manufacturers design the product label to make it more appealing to the end consumer, that is, the grocery shopper. The Swedish National Food Agency (NFA) states that the product label must be designed in a way that the consumer may not be misled. Therefore, credibility is a crucial factor in marketing, as information about a firm's behaviour tends to spread quickly. Despite national regulations and increased public awareness concerning the act of mislabelling, the issue still remains. Negative publicity concerning a firm's unethical behaviour may be perceived differently depending on various circumstances, such as the grocery shopper's brand loyalty. A grocery shopper with a strong brand loyalty is characterised by repetitive same-brand-buying behaviour and the resistance to switching to another competing brand (Oliver, 1999). Past research has investigated behavioural impacts on general consumers with a focus on green goods and animal welfare. However, these studies were solely based on quantitative data, and therefore, a qualitative exploration is lacking. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate how the act of mislabelling may influence brand loyal grocery shoppers' loyalty and purchase intentions towards their favourite food brands within the Swedish food industry.

To investigate the area of mislabelling concerning brand loyal grocery shoppers' loyalty and purchase intentions, we searched for previous research and relevant theories, which resulted in a theoretical framework. With the help and support from the theoretical framework, we constructed a conceptual model which was used as a guideline and a tool throughout the investigation (see figure 1). Through a qualitative approach, we conducted a total of four in-depth semi-structured interviews in order to obtain relevant data and to gain new insights within the unexplored field of brand loyal grocery shoppers, and the mislabelling of food products. With an inductive approach,

we conducted a thematic analysis to analyse the empirical data in order to search for relevant themes and patterns. The participants in this study were selected based on purpose and convenience as we handpicked individuals with a high interest in food and experience in the catering industry. In addition, we designed prepared case questions based on the participants' favourite food brands, purchasing criteria, dietary restrictions and the conceptual model (see appendix 3). All in all, this allowed us to investigate how the act of mislabelling influenced brand loyal grocery shoppers' loyalty and purchase intentions towards their favourite food brands.

5.2 Conclusion

The results of this study suggest that the act of mislabelling may be perceived differently depending on several factors. Firstly, it was found that when the mislabelling concerned the grocery shoppers personal preferences and moral value, their brand loyalty and purchase intentions were severely damaged. In other words, the shoppers indicated a lack of trust and a resistance to repurchase the brand in question. In addition, it was found that if a grocery item is mislabelled, it may not only damage the loyalty towards the brand itself, but might result in a spillover effect on associated brands as well. Secondly, it was found that a consumer with an initial strong brand loyalty may develop a sense of ownership towards the brand. In other words, when exposed to a negative message in the form of mislabelling the shopper acted in self-defence, thus resulting in an even stronger bond. Thirdly, this study concludes that the functional grocery shopper is much stricter when it comes to judging the severity of the mislabelling. Meaning that it is of great importance to the functional grocery shopper that the label matches the content of the grocery item, and if not, the brand loyalty and purchase intentions are severely damaged. On the other hand, the symbolic grocery shopper tends to be more accepting and draws the line where the mislabelling jeopardises the individuals' health and dietary restrictions. To conclude, this study claims that the level of involvement is a crucial aspect when it comes to determining the outcome that mislabelling has on brand loyal grocery shoppers loyalty and purchase intentions towards their favourite food brands. Nevertheless, the reported behaviour of the grocery shoppers may differ from their actual actions, as consumers, in general, rarely *practice what one preaches*.

5.3 Theoretical Contribution

From a theoretical point of view, this study mainly contributes two new insights within the field of mislabelling and brand loyalty within the Swedish food industry. This study sought to explore how the act of mislabelling may influence brand loyal grocery shoppers' loyalty and purchase

intentions towards their favourite food brands. It was found that the level of involvement is deeply associated with brand loyal grocery shoppers, and in the study conducted by Conlin and Laban (2019), they categorised the level of involvement as either functional or symbolic. This study claims that the level of involvement is a crucial element when it comes to determining the outcome of mislabelling, suggesting that the symbolic grocery shopper is less strict than the functional. Secondly, Psomas and Vouzas (2018) argue that the country of origin tends to play a critical role following consumers' trust and consequently, their brand loyalty. While this is in line with the findings of this study, it also suggests that the element of trust may be of greater importance than stated in previous research. In other words, the results of this study provide new insights within the field of branding and brand loyalty, suggesting that trust is an essential element.

5.4 Practical Implications

The results of this study suggest that if brand loyal grocery shoppers find out that one of their favourite brands engages in the act of mislabelling the trust might be compromised. In other words, the shopper's brand loyalty and purchase intentions may be damaged. In order to regain the shopper's trust, it is essential for the firm to act responsibly by making a public apology and to correct its mistakes as soon as possible. Otherwise, the grocery shopper might turn to a competing brand, thus resulting in permanent damage concerning the brand loyalty. From a practical point of view, this study suggests that to avoid any unintentional mislabelling, the firm in question should implement stricter controls of the supply chain. Thus, if there is a lack of control, it may lead to an unintentional fault which might damage the shopper's loyalty and trust towards the firm itself.

5.5 Limitations

The present study suffers from a limitation which is commonly found when conducting qualitative research; that is, the results may not be generalised due to the small sample. However, the purpose of this study was an exploration of brand loyal grocery shoppers' loyalty and purchase intentions, rather than a generalisation. Another limitation might be that the study solely included male participants. However, the purpose of this study was not to investigate any gender differences.

5.6 Future Research

For future research within the field of brand loyalty and mislabelling, this study suggests using other methods, such as observations and field studies, to investigate whether the reported behaviour of the participants correspond with their actions. Furthermore, another suggestion for future research might be a cultural investigation to determine whether the results may differ in a cultural setting. Another interesting aspect could be to assess whether gender might generate a different outcome following the results.

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Appendix 1 – Interview guide (English)

*Before the interview we asked the participants to write down at least three brands (grocery items) that they feel are the most important to them and which they “cannot live without”. Furthermore, we asked the participants to send the names of these products before we conducted the interview. The questions are flexible, and we used follow-up questions when we felt the need.

***Case questions were developed to create scenarios customised to the specific brands chosen by the participants.

1. Introductory questions: Why is food / cooking important to you? Can you tell us about where this interest comes from? (**The level of involvement**)
2. What criteria are important to you when you go grocery shopping? (**The level of involvement & Purchase intentions**)
- Healthy/Organic? How come? Can you elaborate on that?
3. Can you tell us a little why [insert brand name] is important to you? (3 questions) (**Brand loyalty**)
- How come? Can you elaborate on that?
4. What do you associate [insert brand name] with? (3 questions) (**The level of involvement & Brand loyalty**)
- How does it make you feel? How come? Can you elaborate on that?
5. What do you know about [insert brand name]? (3 questions) (**Word-of-mouth & The level of involvement**)
- How come? Can you elaborate on that? How does it make you feel?
6. What do you think other people associate [insert brand name] with? (3 questions) (**Word-of-mouth**)
- How come? Can you elaborate on that?
7. If a person close to you were to question your choice of [insert brand name] and argue that one of the competing brands is better, how would you respond? (3 questions) (**Brand loyalty & Word-of-mouth**)
- In what way? How come?
8. How frequently do you consume [insert brand name]? (3 questions) (**Brand loyalty & Purchase intentions**)
- How come?

9. What, if anything, would make you switch to another brand other than [insert brand name]? (3 questions) **(Brand loyalty)**
 - *How come? Can you elaborate on that?*
10. How would you react if you are in the store and are going to buy [insert brand name] and find that it is out of stock? (3 questions) **(Brand loyalty & Purchase intentions)**
 - *How come? Can you elaborate on that?*
11. Would you recommend [insert brand name] to a friend or family member? (3 questions) **(Word-of-mouth)**
 - *How come? Can you elaborate on that?*
12. Have you or anyone you know experienced any bad experience with [insert brand name]? (3 questions) **(Word-of-mouth)**
 - *How was it? Can you elaborate on that? How did it make you feel?*
13. Do you usually read the label when you are out grocery shopping? **(The level of involvement)**
 - *How come? Why is it important? Why is it not important?*

*****INSERT CASE QUESTIONS*****

14. Imagine a scenario where you watch news and hear about a young girl who ended up in the hospital because one of your favourite brands turned out to contain an allergy-causing substance, not showing on the label. How would you react? **(Mislabelling)**
 - *How come? Can you elaborate on that? Would it affect your future purchase of the brand in any way?*
15. Why do you think that firms mislabel their products? **(Mislabelling)**
 - *Can you elaborate on that? How does this affect your view of brands in general?*
16. Can you explain how your trust in your favourite brands would change (of change) if they intentionally mislabel their products? **(Mislabelling)**
 - *How come? What can they [the companies] do to win back your trust?*
17. To conclude, what you would say to these brands and companies if you find that any of your favourite products is mislabelled? **(Mislabelling)**
 - *How come? Can you elaborate on that?*

Appendix 2 – Interview guide (Swedish)

1. Introduktionsfrågor: Varför är mat/matlagning viktigt för dig? Kan du berätta lite om vart detta intresse kommer ifrån?
2. Vilka kriterier är viktiga för dig när du går och handlar matvaror?
 - *Ekologiskt/miljövänligt? Varför? / Varför inte?*
3. Kan du berätta lite varför (infoga varumärke) (3 frågor) är viktigt för dig?
 - *Hur kommer det sig? Vill du vara snäll att utveckla vad du menar med det? Hur upptäckte du dessa produkter/varumärken? Hur länge har du konsumerat de här produkterna/varumärkena?*
4. Vad associerar du (infoga varumärke) med? (3 frågor)
 - *Hur kommer det sig? Hur känns det för dig? Kan du utveckla ditt svar?*
5. Vad vet du om (infoga varumärke)? (3 frågor)
 - *Hur kommer det sig? Hur får de dig att känna? Kan du utveckla ditt svar?*
6. Vad tror du andra personer associerar (infoga varumärke) med? (3 frågor)
 - *Vill du vara snäll att utveckla vad du menar med det?*
7. Om en person i din närhet skulle ifrågasätta ditt val av (infoga varumärke) och menar på att ett av de konkurrerande varumärkena är bättre, hur hade du svarat? (3 frågor)
 - *På vilket sätt? Varför det?*
8. Hur ofta konsumerar du (infoga varumärke)? (3 frågor)
 - *Hur kommer det sig?*
9. Vad, om något, hade fått dig byta till ett annat varumärke än (infoga varumärke)? (3 frågor)
 - *Varför? Kan du utveckla ditt svar?*
10. Hur hade du reagerat om du står i butiken och ska köpa (infoga varumärke) och upptäcker att den är slut på lager? (3 frågor)
 - *Hur kommer det sig? Vill du vara snäll att utveckla det?*
11. Hade du kunnat rekommendera (infoga varumärke) till en vän eller familjemedlem? (3 frågor)
 - *Av vilken anledning? Varför? / Varför inte?*
12. Har du eller någon du känner upplevt någon dålig erfarenhet med (infoga varumärke)? (3 frågor)
 - *Hur var det? Vill du vara snäll och berätta mer? Hur fick det dig att känna?*
13. Brukar du vanligtvis läsa innehållsförteckningen på dessa matvaror när du ute och handlar?

- *Varför det? Varför är det viktigt för dig? Varför är det inte viktigt för dig?*

*****INFOGA CASE FRÅGOR*****

14. Föreställ dig ett scenario där du tittar på nyheterna och hör om en liten flicka som hamnat på sjukhuset på grund av att ett av dina favoritmärken innehåller ett allergiframkallande ämne, som inte är angivet på etiketten. Hur skulle du då reagera?
 - *Hur menar du nu? Skulle det påverka dina framtida inköp av produkten/produkterna på något sätt?*
15. Varför tror du att företag felmärker deras produkter?
 - *Kan du vara snäll och utveckla ditt svar? Hur påverkar det din syn på varumärken generellt?*
16. Kan du förklara hur ditt förtroende för dina favoritvarumärken skulle ändras, om de medvetet felmärker sina produkter?
 - *Varför? (Om någon förändring i förtroende) Vad kan de (företagen) göra för att vinna tillbaka ditt förtroende?*
17. Avslutningsvis, vill du vara snäll och berätta vad du hade sagt till dessa varumärken om du skulle upptäcka att någon av dina favoritprodukter är felmärkta?
 - *Vill du vara snäll att utveckla?*

Appendix 3 – Case Questions

Case questions - James

Ekologisk creme fraiche (Skånemejerier)

1. The label for the organic crème fraiche promises to contain a nutrient content of 4.1 grams sugar per 100 grams. How would you react if you found out that the actual amount of sugar was 20 grams?
 - *How come? Can you please elaborate? Would you still purchase the product?*
2. The product you have chosen is organic and, on the label, Skånemejerier guarantees that all of the ingredients are organic. How would you react if this turned out to be a false statement and none of the ingredients are organic?
 - *How come? Can you elaborate? Would you still purchase the product?*
3. Skånemejerier is a brand which labels their products with milk from farms in southern Sweden with great care towards the animal. How would you react if this turns out to be a false statement and that the milk actually comes from industries in Eastern Europe with poor animal care?
 - *Can you elaborate? Would you still purchase the product?*
4. Now imagine that all that has been said is true and that Skånemejerier intentionally mislabels their products. How would you look at the other products under the same brand?
 - *How come? Would you still purchase this brand?*

Tomater Hela Skalade EKO (Mutti)

1. On the label of Mutti whole peeled tomatoes indicates a nutritional content of 3 grams of sugar. How would you react if this turned out to be false and that it contains 10 grams of added sugar which is not indicated on the label?
 - *Can you elaborate? Would you still buy the product?*
2. According to the label, this product contains only Italian organic tomatoes. How would you react if you found out that the tomatoes come from Spain and are in fact not organic at all?
 - *How come? Can you please elaborate on that? Would you still purchase the product?*

3. According to the product label, your favourite Mutti product contains organic peeled tomatoes and organic tomato juice. How would you react if you found out that they included a harmful chemical to keep costs down, which is not stated on the label?
 - *How come? Can you elaborate on that? Would you still purchase the product?*
4. Now imagine that all of this is true and that Mutti intentionally mislabels their products. How would you feel regarding the other products under the same brand?
 - *How come? Can you elaborate on that?*

Diskmedel (YES)

1. On the label of YES washing liquid, the brand claims that one bottle lasts up to 13 weeks. How would you react if this statement is false and that it does not last as long as the label promises?
 - *How come? Can you elaborate on that? Would you still purchase the product?*
2. On the label of YES washing liquid, it states that the packaging is 100% recyclable and is sorted as plastic. How would you react if this turned out to be a false statement and that the packaging is in fact not recyclable at all?
 - *How come? Can you elaborate on that? Would you still purchase the product?*
3. The label for YES states that the product is approved by the Nordic Swan Ecolabel, which indicates that the product is classified as durable and environmentally friendly. How would you react if this turned out to be false and that the product is in fact harmful to the environment?
 - *How come? Can you elaborate on that? Would you still purchase the product?*
4. Now imagine that all this is true and that YES intentionally mislabels their products. How would you look at the other products under the same brand?
 - *How come? Can you elaborate on that?*

Case questions - Ali

Grov Havrefralla (Hans & Greta)

1. Would your opinion on the Hans & Greta (Grov havrefralla) change if the production took place in another country not stated on the label?
 - *Why? Can you elaborate on that? Would you still purchase the product?*
2. If the bread, which is labelled as 100 % oat bread, turned out to not contain any oat at all, but Sorghum (also gluten free), how would you feel?
 - *Why? Can you elaborate on that? Would you still purchase the product?*
3. How would you feel if the bread from Hans & Greta, which is labelled as gluten and lactose free, turns out to contain both milk and wheat?
 - *Why so? Can you elaborate? Would you still purchase the product?*
4. How would you react if your favourite bread turned out to contain meat broth, which is not labelled on the product?
 - *How come? Can you elaborate? Would you change your habits concerning the choice of bread?*
5. Now imagine that all of this is true, and that Hans & Greta intentionally mislabels this product. How would you view the other products under the same brand?
 - *How come? Can you please elaborate?*

Yellow Label Tea (Lipton)

1. The label of the tea that you prefer promises 100 tea bags per package. How would you react if you only received 80 tea bags instead?
 - *How would that make you feel? Why so? Would you still purchase it?*
2. One of Lipton's promises is that it only uses tea leaves from Rainforest Alliance certified plantations. How would you feel if you found out that this was not true, and the production in fact is harmful to the environment and the people working there?
 - *How come? Would you still purchase the product? Why so?*
3. How would you react if you found out that the tea bags contain a harmful substance, not labelled, that could possibly damage your health (for example micro-plastic)?
 - *Why? Would you still purchase it?*

4. Now imagine that all of this is true, and that Lipton intentionally mislabels this product. How would you view the other products under the same brand?

- *Can you please elaborate?*

Prästost Mellanlagrad (Arla)

1. How would you feel if the Prästost Mellanlagrad contained more fat than the 31% stated on the label?

- *Why so? What if the sugar amount would be higher? How come?*

2. Your favourite cheese brand claims to be made of 100 % Swedish milk. How would you feel if the milk was in fact from another country, not stated on the label?

- *How come? Would you still purchase it?*

3. How would you react if the cheese production included a fermentation process, which is not labelled on the product, causing the cheese to contain alcohol in it?

- *Why is that? Can you elaborate? Would you still purchase this product from this brand?*

4. Now imagine that all of this is true, and that Arla intentionally mislabels this product. How would you view the other products under the same brand?

- *How come? Can you please elaborate?*

Case questions - Robert

Peanuts (OLW)

1. Your favourite peanuts contain 95% peanuts, sunflower oil and sea salt. How would you feel if you found out that instead of sunflower oil, as stated on the label, it contained palm oil which is considered to be a major cause of deforestation in some parts of the world?
 - *How come? Can you elaborate on that? Would you still purchase the product?*
2. How would you react if you found out that your favourite peanuts contained a highly toxic substance called cadmium, which is not stated on the label?
 - *Can you elaborate on that? Would you still purchase the product?*
3. Now imagine that all of this is true and that OLW intentionally mislabels this product. How would you view the other products under the same brand?
 - *How come? Can you elaborate on that? Would you purchase the other products knowing this?*

Rårörda lingon (Felix)

1. On the label of Rårörda Lingon it states a nutrition content of 44g sugar per 100g. How would you react if you found out that the amount of sugar was actually 70g per 100g and exceeds the amount of berries, which is not stated on the label?
 - *How come? Why is it important, why is it not?*
2. On the label of Rårörda Lingon it says, "Swedish berries only". How would you react if you found out that the berries were grown in another country with poor working conditions, not stated on the label?
 - *How come? Would you still purchase the product?*
3. Now imagine that all of this is true, and that Felix intentionally mislabels this product. How would you view the other products under the same brand?
 - *How come? Can you elaborate on that? Would you purchase the other products knowing this?*

Yoggi Frukyoghurt (Arla)

1. On the label of Yoggi Frukyoghurt it is stated that it contains a total of 8% berries and pasteurized milk. How would you react if you found out that it only contains 2% berries and that the milk was in fact not pasteurized, as stated on the label?
 - *How come? Can you please elaborate on that? Would you still purchase the product?*

2. On the label of Yoggi Fruktyoghurt it says that the package is 100% recyclable and that the packaging is sorted as paper packaging. How would you react if this turned out to be a false statement and that the packaging is in fact not recyclable as stated on the label?
 - *Can you please elaborate on that? Would you still purchase the product?*
3. Now imagine that all of this is true and that Arla intentionally mislabels this product. How would you view the other products under the same brand?
 - *Can you please elaborate on that? Would you still purchase the products?*

Case questions - Omar

Penne Rigate (ZETA)

1. Would your opinion on the Penne pasta, which is labelled as Italian, change if it turned out to be made somewhere else, for example in Asia?
 - *How come? Is there a country of origin that would completely change your opinion of the brand? How come?*
2. The pasta promises to only consist of 3 grams of sugar (per 100 grams). How would you react if the pasta contained much more sugar, for example 20 grams?
 - *How come?*
3. How would you feel if it were told on the product that a certain amount of the revenue would go to charity as a misleading lie?
 - *How come? Would I change your purchase intention?*
4. On the label of the pasta it says that the product is made of 100 % durum wheat, with traces of soya. How would you feel if it also contained broth from vegetables, which is not stated labelled?
 - *Why? What if the broth was from meat? Can you elaborate on that?*
5. Would your opinion on the brand ZETA change if you found out that the pasta contains harmful chemicals that could cause cancer and other diseases, which is not labelled?
 - *Can you please elaborate on that? Would you still purchase the products?*
6. Now imagine that all of this is true, and that ZETA intentionally mislabels this product. How would you view the other products under the same brand?
 - *Can you please elaborate on that? Would you still purchase the other products?*

Mellanmjölk (Skånemejerier)

1. Your favourite milk brand (Skånemejerier) is labelled with 1,5 % fat. How would you feel if the milk is much fatter, not stated in the label?
 - *How come? Would your purchase intentions change?*
2. How would you feel if Skånemejerier spreads the milk with water, in order to make more profit which is not labelled on the product?
 - *Would this change your purchase intentions? How come?*
3. Would your opinion on Skånemejerier change if it contained palm oil or other substances that are hazardous for the environment?
 - *How come? Can you elaborate on that?*

4. How would you feel if the production of your favourite milk included a fermentation process, which is not labelled on the product, causing the milk to contain alcohol?
 - *Why? Can you elaborate? Would it change your purchase intentions?*
5. Now imagine that all of this is true, and that ZETA intentionally mislabels this product. How would you view the other products under the same brand?
 - *How come?*

Energy Drink (Red Bull)

1. On the label of Red Bull, it says that the can itself is made out of 100 % recycled material. How would you react if this is a false statement, and the can is not recyclable?
 - *How come? Can you please elaborate?*
2. The energy drink is supposed to contain caffeine, which increases your energy level. How would you feel if the drink only contained sugar and no caffeine, not stated on the label?
 - *How come? Would you still purchase the product?*
3. Would your opinion on Red Bull change if the product contained gelatin (pig fat), not stated on the label?
 - *How come? Would you still purchase the product?*

Appendix 4 – Colour Coding

Brand Loyalty – ORANGE

Repetitive same-brand-buying behaviour. The resistance to switching to another brand. Frequency of consumer purchases. Self-Brand Connection (SBC).

Level of Involvement – BLUE

How important the brand is according to their personal needs, ego and moral (preferences). Consumers actively modify and translate different symbols to shape their personal identity. Knowledge of the brand itself.

Mislabelling - RED

Food fraud, misleading statements, lying on the label and so forth. Conducted by firms, aimed to deceive consumers without considering their health, nor their requirements.

Purchase Intentions - PURPLE

Intentions to make a future purchase decision. Purchase behaviour may be determined by environmental, health and ethical factors. Knowledge about a firm's behaviour, good or bad, may influence consumers' purchase intentions.

Word-of-Mouth – GREEN

Significant sources on consumers' decision-making process, such as messages in several forms. May impact consumers behaviour and trust towards a brand or a product. Reviews from real consumers. Influence others, in the form of recommendations.

Other Interesting Facts – DARK YELLOW

Other interesting facts that were found during the interviews.