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**THE TREND OF CONSUMING OAT MILK AND THE FACTORS
AFFECTING THE DECISION: THE CASE OF FINNISH
CONSUMERS**

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I hereby declare that I have compiled the thesis independently and all works, important standpoints and data by other authors have been properly referenced and the same paper has not been previously presented for grading. The document length is 11942 words from the introduction to the end of conclusion.

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ABSTRACT

Consumption of oat milk has grown rapidly and oat milk is rising to become one of the main competitors for dairy milk. Oat milk products have occasionally run out of stores in Finland as they have been so desirable by consumers and the use of dairy milk in Finland has decreased steadily during last few years. Reasons behind the consumers' decision to switch from dairy milk to oat milk and the habitual use of oat milk are not well known and worth researching. The objective of this research is to provide an extensive outlook on the factors influencing the consumers' decision to switch from dairy milk to oat milk and the reasons why consumers habitually use oat milk instead of dairy milk in everyday life among the interviewees of this study and therefore provide background on the opinion of these consumers. A qualitative research method, a self-selection sampling method and a qualitative content analysis have been used in this research. The research data was collected with the help of six semi-structured interviews with six interviewees. Finally, findings of the analysis are that the factors influencing interviewees to switch from dairy milk to oat milk and to use oat milk habitually instead of dairy milk are reference groups, personal branding, health factors, sustainable and ethical beliefs, brand or product image and flavour.

Keywords: milk, oat milk, oat milk consumers' motives

INTRODUCTION

Oat milk is a plant-based milk derived from whole oat grains by extracting the plant's substance with the use of water (McHugh 2018). It can be used as an alternative for dairy-milk in cooking and baking along with other plant-based milks and it has gained popularity as a dairy-milk alternative for custom coffees among baristas (Stone 2019). Oat milk was originally developed by Swedish food scientist Rickard Öste in the early 1990s, who also later founded oat milk producing company Oatly in 1994 (Hitchens 2018). At first, oat milk did not gain much attention but eventually in 2010s the popularity of oat milk has increased strongly (Ibid.)

Consumption of oat milk in Finland has grown rapidly and oat milk is rising to become one of the main competitor products for dairy. Many consumers are switching their consumption from dairy to oat milk and the proportion of oat based milks compared to all dairy or plant based milk products is increasing (Kallunki 2018). Oat milk products have run out of stores as they are so desirable by consumers and the consumption of oat milk is estimated to increase in the following years in Finland (Ibid.). The largest Finnish grocery seller S-Group has declared that the sales of oat milk have risen 60 percent in 2017-2018 and the second largest Finnish grocery seller Kesko has announced that oat milk has had the strongest growth compared to other plant-based milk alternatives with more than 50 percent increase in sales in 2017-2018 (Kallunki 2018; Laakkonen 2019). Also, one of the most popular oat milk brands in Finland, Oatly has grown their sales in Finland market approximately 50 percent per year in 2015-2018 (Pelli 2019). At the same time the consumption of dairy milk has decreased steadily in Finland in 2010-2018 (Laakkonen 2019).

The reasons why consumers have changed their consumption from dairy milk to oat milk and why they are habitually using oat milk instead of dairy milk are not well known and they are worth studying as the results can be useful when planning the marketing content and methods for a similar product. The aim of this study is to provide an extensive outlook of the factors influencing the consumers' decision to switch from dairy milk to oat milk and the reasons why consumers continuously use oat milk instead of dairy milk. However, the results and conclusions of this study

cannot be generalised to the Finnish population as a whole as the sample size of the qualitative study is small. This research aims to give a voice to the people who have switched from dairy milk to oak milk, to deliver insights into the background of their opinion. Thus, the thesis delivers a glimpse into the motives resulting consumers to switch from dairy milk to oat milk. It is possible and desired that this research will encourage future students to conduct further research on this subject in order to back up the opinions with quantitative studies that cover larger populations. The present study gives a good background and starting point for that.

The research questions “What factors influence consumers’ decision to change from dairy milk to oat milk” and “What factors influence consumers to habitually use of oat milk instead of dairy milk” will be studied in this research.

The thesis is divided into three main sections: The theoretical framework, the empirical framework and conclusions. Qualitative methods of data collection and analysis have been used in the empirical part of the thesis.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The following section offers the theoretical framework about oat milk, consumer trends, factors affecting consumer behaviour, consumer generations and consumer decision journey. The information was gathered from academic literature, academic research papers and reliable online resources.

1.1. Oat milk

Oat milk is a plant-based milk derived from whole oat grains by extracting the plant's substance with the use of water (McHugh 2018). It can be used as an alternative for dairy milk in cooking, baking or as a drink along with other plant-based milks and it has gained popularity as a dairy milk alternative for custom coffees among baristas (Stone 2019). Oat milk was originally developed by Swedish food scientist Rickard Öste in the early 1990s, who also later founded oat milk producing company Oatly in 1994 (Hitchens 2018). In 1990s and 2000s, oat milk did not gain much attention but eventually in 2010s the popularity of oat milk has increased strongly (Ibid.).

Plant-based milks have a profound history in many cultures around the world. Among all plant-based milks, coconut milk has the longest history of use. Coconut milk originated from India and Southeast Asia and it was used both as a drink and as an ingredient for nutrition and ceremonial use. Soy milk has a long history as well, as it was discovered in 1365 in China. Soy milk was originally used in Chinese cooking, but later consumer as a drink as well. The first soy milk factory was based in Paris 1910 and around the same time the first soy milk patent was granted. (McHugh 2018)

The popularity of soy milk increased significantly throughout the world during 1970s and 1980s, but it was still mainly consumed by vegans and health-enthusiasts (McHugh 2018; Berenstein 2018). Eventually in the 1990s, stories about soy's miraculous health benefits started to circulate in the media (Berenstein 2018). Soy protein usage was linked to lower levels of "bad" LDL cholesterol and to higher levels of "good" HDL cholesterol and other health benefits like reducing

the risk of breast and prostate cancers and weight-loss (Ibid.). In previous decades, soy milk producers had had a hard time convincing consumers that the taste of soy milk was not repulsive, but in 1990s soy milk producers introduced many different flavours including vanilla, eggnog and chai mocha, which lowered the bar for consumers to give soy milk a chance – as a result, soy milk went main stream and the soy milk sales began a dramatic rise (Ibid.).

Later, subsequent research was conducted which eventually launched different fears regarding soy. The research results revealed that soy's isoflavones are phytoestrogens, which are plant-derived molecules that bear a structural resemblance to oestrogen, which is also known as the “female hormone”. Consumers started to worry that soy was an endocrine disruptor, which was causing early puberty in girls and increasing the risk of cancer. Also, soy was thought to have a “feminizing” affect, which scared off part of the male consumers. Soy was also connected to industrial agriculture problems, including monoculture, cutting rain-forests and GMO's, which lowered the demand for soy among eco-conscious consumers. Soy milk had led the way to other plant-based milks to go mainstream among consumers and there was starting to be many other plant-based milk alternatives on the market to choose rather than soy milk. Eventually after reaching its sales peak in 2008, soy milk sales started a steep decline and has not recovered since. (Ibid.)

Soy milk acted as a trailblazer for other non-dairy milk alternatives around the world (Ibid.). Today, we can see a steady increase in sales of different plant-based milk alternatives globally, as Statista estimates the value of plant-based beverages market worldwide to increase from 11,2 billion in 2018 to 19,6 billion in 2023 (2019).

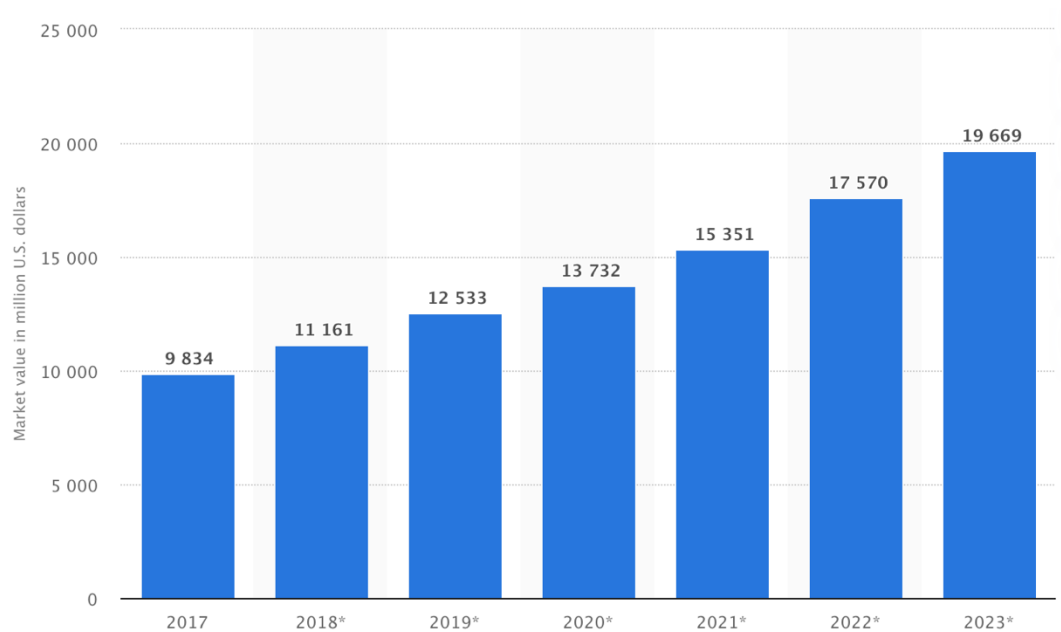


Figure 1: Estimates of plant-based beverages market value worldwide during the years 2017-2023. Source: Statista, 2019.

While oat milk still has a small global market share compared to other plant-based milk alternatives like almond milk or soy milk, it is experiencing serious growth in the United States market and especially in markets like Great Britain and Finland. (Statista 2019; Franklin-Wallis 2019; Alkula 2019)

1.2. Consumer trends

Consumers change as their values and their interests change as well. Most values are quite universal, but what makes the difference is the importance or ranking of these values (Solomon 2019). This has an effect on what consumers want, how they want it and when and where they want it (Highman 2009, 10). These are matters that drive consumers towards certain products or pull them away from some products and the ranking of these values drive consumer trends (Solomon 2019). The ranking of values need to be changed for a longer period than a short period of time to be considered as a consumer trend instead of a fad, therefore a consumer trend can be explained as a long-term change in consumers attitudes, values and behaviours (Highman 2009, 16).

To be able to develop right kind of products and know the right ways of communication to consumers, it is crucial for marketers from all fields of business to stay on top of consumer trends. A brand that represents and aligns with dominant values have a greater chance of being successful than other brands. When developing a product, it not only important to know what are the current consumer trends, but what might be the consumer trends in the future. (Solomon 2019)

Consumer change has always been a significant factor that drives social and economic change. In the course of history, we can see that is has affected every nation worldwide. On a smaller scale, it has made impact on company profits, strategies and the creation of brands and even whole markets. In a larger or worldwide scale, we have seen consumer change and values have stopped wars, started religions and fought against governments. Changes in consumers' attitudes and ways of thinking can dramatically help to change the world. (Highman 2009, 11)

Or, how Highman has put it, "Modifications to consumers' circumstances and environments can radically change their attitudes and behaviours, which in turn drives political and commercial change". The Swinging Sixties, the student protests of 1968 and the inward focus of the 1970s Me Generation were all catalysed by fluctuations in birth rates and income levels. Changes in attitudes among the Russian people encouraged reformist policies that ultimately led to an ending of the Cold war. Shifting consumer attitudes to global warming are today forcing governments and industries alike to alter their environmental policies." (Ibid.)

Consumer behaviours can change dramatically in short periods of time. For example in personal technology usage, we have seen a dramatical change in consumer trends inside the last 15-30 years. 30 years ago, most of the people did not have an interest to own a computer. Around 25 years ago mainstream consumers were introduced to the internet and they started to buy home computers. Today in 2010s, more and more people are using internet with their smartphones wherever they are and not only from home. The effect of all of the changes in technology use has been significant, and it has altered not only the way consumers behave but the way they think. (Ibid., 11-12)

Today in 2019, we can see many consumer trends that are connected to a same issue; conscious consuming. In case of conscious consuming, consumers try make more mindful and positive decisions and avoid the negative impacts that consumerism has to the environment and the world. Conscious consumers make purchasing decisions that respect other humans, animal and the environment. We can relate the trends of veganism and sustainable consumption to conscious consuming. (Angus, Westbrook 2019)

1.3. Factors affecting consumer buying behaviour

In this chapter, I will look closely what are the main characteristics that influence the resulting purchase decision. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2018, 159), consumer buying behaviour is affected by four main factors: cultural, social, personal and psychological factors. Next, I will look at these characteristics more closely.

Cultural factors

Cultural factors affecting consumer buying behaviour consist of culture, sub-culture and social class (Ibid.).

Culture

Solomon, Bamossy and Askegaard describe culture as “accumulation of shared meanings, rituals, norms and traditions among the members of an organisation or society (2013, 498-499).” Culture includes both abstract ideas like values and ethics and material objects like cars, food and clothing (Ibid., 499). Kotler and Armstrong define culture as the most basic cause of person’s wants and behaviour (2018, 159). Growing up in a society, a child learns abstract ideas like values and perceptions from his or her family and other sources (Ibid.). For example a child in Finland is often exposed to the following values: humbleness, educational valuation and punctuality. Every group or society has its own culture and the influence of the culture to the buying behaviour of a consumer can vary greatly depending on the culture (Ibid.).

Subculture

Kotler and Amstrong define subculture as “a group of people with shared value systems based on common life experiences and situations” (2018, 159). Subcultures include nationalities and racial groups, geographic regions and religions. Examples of subcultures can be minorities like Finnish Gypsies in Finland.

Social class

Social class is described as “relatively permanent and ordered divisions in a society whose members share similar values, interest and behaviours” by Kotler and Amstrong (2018, 162). Social class is measured by a combination of factors including occupation, income and education. In some systems your social class cannot be changed as a result of your own activity. (Ibid.)

I will not focus on cultural factors in the empirical study of this research, as the interviewees in the sample are all from the same culture, subculture and social class.

Social factors

Social factors affecting consumer buying behaviour consist of groups and social networks, family and roles and status. (Ibid.)

Groups and social networks

Reference groups are groups that influence consumer as direct or indirect points of comparison of reference in forming a person’s attitudes or behaviour (Kotler, Amstrong 2018, 162). Reference groups are an important factor influencing consumer decision making (Jin, Miao 2018, 1068). People can be affected membership groups to which a person belongs or non-member groups to which a person does not belong (Turner 1991, cited in Jin 2018, 1068). Membership groups are groups such as friends or colleagues, whereas non-member groups are such as a sports team that a person admires. An admired sports team can be categorized into aspiration reference group. Non-member groups can be categorized to aspiration reference groups, dissociative reference groups and neutral reference groups (Turner 1991, cited in Jin, Miao 2018, 1068).

Word-of-mouth influence can have a strong impact on the buying behaviour of a consumer (Kotler, Armstrong 2018, 162) Word-of-mouth has been described as “informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage or characteristics of particular goods and services and/or their sellers” (Westbrook 1987, cited in De Matos, Rossi 2008, 578). The recommendations from membership groups or other consumers tend to be more credible than information received from advertising or sales people (Kotler, Armstrong 2018, 163). Most of word-of-mouth influence happen naturally without the effort of marketers, but also marketers can help to create positive conversations about their brands (Ibid.).

Online social networks are scenes for interaction between consumers and business and consumer. Online social networks include different social media platforms Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, communal shopping sites like Amazon and message boards like Craigslist. In online social networks, people share experiences, socialize and exchange information. This creates possibilities for marketers to build closer customers relationships and promote their products and services. (Ibid.)

Family

Family members can influence buyer behaviour significantly and is the most important consumer buying organisation (Kotler, Armstrong 2018, 164).

Individuals in families often have different roles in decisions, some individuals are information gatherers or influencers and some individuals are decision makers. Influencers often have a great influence on the decision making, as they may selectively pass on information to the decision makers that favours their chosen alternatives. They ultimately do not have the power to make decisions in the family, but they make their wishes known. Decision makers have the power to decide the following: Whether to buy or not, which product to buy, which brand to buy, where to buy it and when to buy. (Chandrasekar, Vinay 2013, 18)

Roles and status

An individual is often included in many groups for example family, club, organisation or online communities. A role for the individual consists of the expectations than other individuals form for them inside the group. Each role has its own status formed by the society. For example a man can

play a role of a father in a family, a role of CEO in a company and a role of a fan in a football match. As a CEO he might buy a suit to wear for work and as a football fan he might buy the shirt of his favourite team. (Kotler, Amstrong 2018, 166)

Personal factors

Personal factors affecting consumer buying behaviour consists of occupation, age and stage, economic situation, lifestyle and personality and self-concept. (Ibid.)

Occupation

A person's occupation affect what product or services he/she is willing to buy. Individuals who work in a law firm or a large business tend to buy more business suits than individuals that work in a construction site. It is possible, that a company even specializes in producing products needed by a certain occupational group. For example, Caterpillar, the world's leading manufacturer of construction machinery, has developed a mobile phone can withstand water and dust, can withstand extreme drops and has an enhanced audio quality for noisy places. This mobile phone has been developed for individuals, who work in extreme circumstances and in challenging work environments. (Ibid.)

Age and Stage

A consumer does not buy the same products or services when they are 20 years old compared to when they are 70 years old as tastes in food, clothes, furniture and recreation are usually age related (Ibid.). According Herve and Mullet, 35-50 years old middle-aged adults put the greatest weight in products on suitability and 65-90 years old elderly people on durability (2009, 306). In contrast, 18-25 years aged young people gave more weight on price than other factors (Ibid).

Buying is also related to family life-cycle and the stages which families pass as they mature over time. Changes in life-stages are often a result of demographics and important and life-changing events including marriage, mortgage, possible divorce, children going to college and possible changes in personal income. (Kotler, Amstrong 2018, 167.)

Economic Situation

An individual's or family's economic situation affect his/her purchase decisions (Ibid.) or as Kumar and Kumar described it, "individual's financial gain determines to an awfully nice extent the kind and quality of merchandise he buys" (2019, 110). People with low income are forced to spend most of their money of essentials including food, rent and clothing (Ibid.). In commercial sector this leads to companies producing and marketing cheaper and lower-quality products and a focus on "pay less" message (Hemsley-Brown, Oplatka 2016). Smartphone developers, who once offered only premium priced smartphones, are now offering lower-priced models for consumers as for example Microsoft's Nokia division recently targeted emerging markets with lower-end Lumia models priced well under 100€ (Kotler, Armstrong 2018, 168). As individuals become more affluent, they tend to purchase higher quality items and more non-essentials (Kumar, Kumar 2019, 110) People earning the same salary might be spend it in different ways depending on other factors (Ibid.).

Lifestyle

"Individuals coming from the same subculture, social class and occupation may have quite different lifestyles" (Kotler, Armstrong 2018, 168). Lifestyle can be described as person's pattern of living as expressed in his or her psychographics (Ibid.). Lifestyle can also be described as issue that is based on people's thinking, beliefs and attitude towards the society (Young 2010, cited in Mohiuddin 2018, 12). These attitudes, mindsets and beliefs affect significantly on the day-to-day decisions the individuals make related to their personal or professional life (Mohiuddin 2018, 12). Kotler and Armstrong describe lifestyle capturing something more than the person's social class or personality, as it profiles a person's whole pattern of acting and interacting in the world (2018, 168). When it comes to products, consumers do not only buy the products itself, they buy the values and lifestyles those products represent (Ibid.). Companies can utilize this aspect in their marketing. A fine example of this is The Body Shop, as it markets much more than only beauty products, it strongly includes social and environmental commitment to their marketing (Ibid.). The Body Shop brand stands for fighting exploitation of animals, the planet, and people by fighting animal cruelty, protecting endangered creatures, preserving the rainforest and supporting fair trade (Ibid.).

Personality and self-concept

Kotler and Armstrong describe personality as “the unique psychological characteristics that distinguish a person or group” and each individual’s distinct personality influences his or her buying behaviour (2018, 168). Personality can also be described as a “person’s consistent pattern of responses and an internal structure in which experience and behaviour are related in an orderly way” or as “set of distinguishing human psychological traits that lead to relatively consistent and enduring responses to environmental stimuli” (Agbo, Akhimien, Orji 2014, 232; (Mullin 2010, cited in Agbo, Akhimien, Orji 2014, 232).

Brands also have personalities and individuals are likely to purchase brands and products that represent their own personality (Kotler, Armstrong 2018, 169). Brands personality is a mix of human traits that have been attributed to a particular brand (Ibid.). Marketers can recognise potential personality traits that the population of the target market has and use these traits in the advertising campaigns of their products to enhance the personality of the target group (Onu 2000, cited in Agbo, Akhimien, Orji 2014, 232). Marketers use also a concept related to personality – a person’s self-concept or self-image (Kotler, Armstrong 2018, 169). Self-concept describes the aspect of how a person views himself or herself. Self-concept is being used in marketing with the idea that personality are being used as marketers try to recognise self-concept traits in the target group and use them in their marketing campaigns (Kotler, Armstrong 2018, 169).

Psychological factors

Psychological factors affecting consumers buying choices consists of motivation, perception, learning and attitudes (Ibid.).

Motivation

Kotler and Armstrong describe motive or “drive” as “a need that is sufficiently pressing to direct the person to seek satisfaction”. Some of these needs can be biological and some can be psychological. Biological needs can arise from hunger, thirst or discomfort and psychological

needs can arise from the need for recognition, esteem or belonging. Two of the most popular theories for human motivation have been developed by Freud and Maslow.

(Kotler, Amstrong 2018, 169)

Sigmund Freud thought that people are largely unconscious about the psychological factors shaping their behaviour. According to his theory, individual's buying decisions are being affected by subconscious motives that the buyer might not even understand. Thus, an older consumer might explain the purchase of a sports car that he wanted to feel the wind in his hair. At a deeper level, he may be trying to impress other people. At a still deeper level, he might be buying the sports car only to feel young and independent again. Consumer might not always know why they make the buying decisions that they do and many companies try to reach these subconscious motivations by carrying out motivation researches. (Ibid.)

Abraham Maslow sought to explain why people are driven with different certain needs at certain times than others. Maslow arranged a hierarchy of human needs, from the most pressing needs to the least pressing. Starting from the most pressing, Maslow arranged the needs in psychological needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem needs and self-actualization needs. A person will try to satisfy the most pressing or important needs first. When that need is satisfied, it will no longer be a motivator and the person will then try to satisfy the next most important need. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is described in Figure 1 below. (Ibid.)

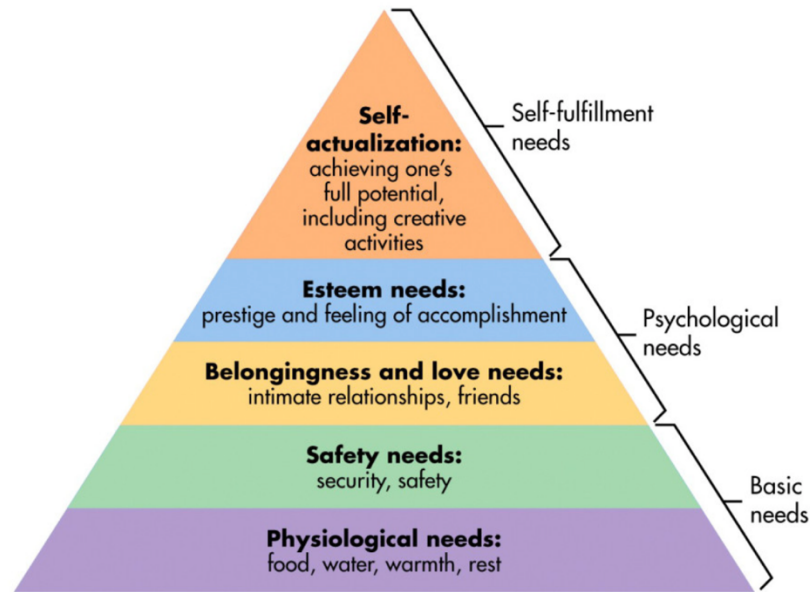


Figure 2: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Source: McLeod, Saul. (2018) Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Simplypsychology.

For example a person who is starving and does not have enough food, will not be concerned about the latest happenings in the art scene nor how they are viewed by other people. People will have to satisfy the bottom needs first to move to the next most important need. (Ibid.)

Perception

Once a person has the motivation to act, perception is what influences how the person acts. All people learn by the flow of information through our five senses: sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste. However, everyone receives and organises this information in an individual way, depending on their perception. Kotler and Amstrong describe perception as “the process by which people select, organize, and interpret information to form a meaningful picture of the world”. (Kotler, Amstrong 2018, 172)

Individuals form different perception of the same stimulus mainly because of three different perceptual processes: selective attention, selective distortion and selective retention. People are exposed to extremely large amounts of stimuli in today’s marketing environment and it is not possible to pay attention to all thousands of competing stimuli they see every day. *Selective attention* happens when a person screens out most of the information they are exposed to and only gives attention to small part of the information. (Ibid.)

It is possible that even if a person gives attention to the information of a marketer, the message does not come across in the intended way as each person fits incoming information into an existing mindset. *Selective distortion* describes the tendency of individuals to interpret information received in a way that will support their mindset and what they already believe. Also, people tend to retain only the information received that supports their attitudes and beliefs and people will also forget much of what they learn. *Selective retention* means that individuals are more likely to remember good information or points received considering their favourite brand, compared to information received from a competitive brand. (Ibid.)

Learning

Learning describes the changes in individual's behaviour as a result of experience and it occurs through the mix of drives, stimuli, cues, responses and reinforcement. *Drive* is an internal stimulus, that is calling a person for action. A drive becomes a motive, when the drive is directed to a certain *stimulus* object. For example, a person's drive for freedom might motivate him or her to look into buying flight tickets to Indonesia. *Cues* are small stimuli that determine when, where and how the person responds. The same person than in previous example might run into cheap flights to Indonesia in the internet and these cues might influence the person's *response* to his or her interest in buying the flights. If the person decides to fly to Indonesia and the experience is rewarding, it is possible that the person might fly there next year as well. This way his or her response will be *reinforced*. It is important for marketers that they can build demand for product associating it with drives, using motivating cues and providing positive reinforcement. (Ibid., 173)

Beliefs and attitudes

Individuals acquire beliefs and attitudes through doing and learning and they influence the buying behaviour of individuals (Ibid.). Kotler and Amstrong describe belief as a descriptive thought that an individual holds about something and they can be divided to positive beliefs, negative beliefs and neutral beliefs (2018, 173) (Pande, Soodan 2015, 284). Beliefs can be based on real knowledge, opinion or faith and they can be emotionally charged (Kotler, Amstrong 2018, 173). Beliefs are what make up product and brand images that affect the purchasing decision of a person and if the beliefs are negative and affect purchasing decision badly, marketers can try to correct them. (Ibid.)

Kotler and Armstrong describe attitude as “a person’s relatively consistent evaluations, feelings and tendencies towards an object or an idea” (2018, 173). Hawkins instead described attitude as “an enduring organization of motivational, emotional, perceptual and cognitive processes with respect to some aspect of our environment” (2001, cited in Pande, Soodan 2015, 285). Individuals can have attitudes regarding religion, politics, clothes, food and almost everything else (Kotler, Armstrong 2018, 173). Attitudes affect individuals buying behaviour significantly, as they put people into frame of mind of liking or disliking things, of moving toward or away from them (Ibid.). Consumers attitudes can be difficult to change for a marketer as a person’s attitude towards something is related to attitudes towards something else (Ibid.)

1.4. Consumer generations

Consumers are born in different eras and different eras can have different cultural environments, even though the area or geographical location is the same, meaning that different generations grow in different cultural environments (McCrindle, Wolfinger 2009, 2-3). They also share mutual experiences, for example historic events or changes in the economy (Solomon, Bamossy Askegaard 2013, 456). Consumers that belong to the same generation and have shared the same experiences, can be also referred to as age cohorts (Ibid.). Age cohorts are a result of the events, developments and trends of their times (McCrindle, Wolfinger 2009, 2). As consumers grow older, their preferences and needs vary (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard 2013, 456). Their individual demand towards different products shift, when they move on from being a child to being a teen or an young adult, and later to being an older consumer and these preferences and needs often are most similar with other consumers that are included in the same generation or same age cohort (Shifman, Kanuk, Hansen 2012, 354). “The era in which a consumer grows up, creates for that person a cultural bond with the millions of others born during the same time period” (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard 2013, 456). There are few different age subcultures and they share variable characteristics as individuals an as consumers.

Generation Z

Generation Z is the ‘newest’ or the ‘youngest’ generation that has been named and categorized. The age cohort of Generation Z includes individuals born between years 1996-2010. Generation Y had time to grow up in a relatively peaceful world and steady environment, before the start of terrorist attacks in 9/11 and economic crashes in 2000 and 2008. Instead, Generation Z has witnessed the war against terror and the Great Recession since they were young. (Williams, Alex 2015)

They have been born and raised in the time of mobile phones and social media and they use everything related to them effortlessly (Ibid.). Generation Z are considered new conservatives embracing traditional beliefs, as they value family unit and safety considerably (Williams, Page 2011). Generation Z has had to deal with endless options but limited personal time and as a result, they are used to sorting through enormous amounts of information and assessing it, whether it is worth their time or not (Finch, Jeremy 2015). “They have only known a wireless, hyperlinked, user-generated world where they are only few clicks away from any piece of knowledge. The world is an open book for Gen Z” (McCringle, Wolfinger 2009, 66). Individuals in Generation Z create an ideal image of themselves or personal brands in social media and they use lots of time nurturing it and they also appreciate the idea of working for themselves as entrepreneurs (Finch, 2015).

Generation Y

The age cohort of **Generation Y**, includes individuals born between years 1977-1994 and they can also be noticed as the children of the age cohort “Baby Boomers” (Schiffman, Kanuk, Hansen 2012, 355). Generation Y was the first age cohort to take technology like computers, internet and mobile phones for granted and they have grown up in a media-saturated environment (Williams, Page 2011; Schiffman, Kanuk, Hansen 2012, 355). They are often labelled as social, innovative, energetic and smart (Ordun 2015, 40). Over the years, they have changed their time spending from watching TV to browsing the internet and they read a lot less newspapers than previous generations (Schiffman, Kanuk, Hansen 2012, 355). They are able to work many tasks at the same time, without stressing and they are more result-oriented than process-oriented generation (McCrindle, Wolfinger 2009, 65). Generation Y is the first generation that did not have restrictions in information search and communications and they are used to a globalised world, where anything

is possible (Williams, Page 2011). They have a greater need for peer-acceptance and fitting in than earlier generations and they are image-driven (Ibid.). According to statistics, Generation Y has characteristics of wanting to delay factors of adulthood (marriage, having children, career) (McCordle, Wolfinger 2009, 3). Members of Generation Y are often socially and environmentally aware and often described to be more open minded to new experiences than the previous generations (Schiffman, Kanuk, Hansen 2012, 355).

As consumers, Generation Y selects and buys products that help them to define who they are and help them to support their values. They are knowledgeable about trends that are happening around them. Generation Y also wants to express their personal image with their buying behaviour and they want to make good investments for future. (Ordun 2015, 44)

Generation X

Individuals born in the Generation X are often also referred to as Xers, busters or slackers and they are born approximately between the years 1965-1979 (Schiffman, Kanuk, Hansen 2012, 355). In some countries older generations think, that Generation X has never had any real difficulties in life, but still they are known for complaining; for example in Finland, the Xers are derogatorily called 'Pullamössösukupolvi', meaning 'The Bun Mash Generation' (McCordle, Wolfinger 2009, 20).

Generation X has matured in the time of increasing divorce rates and they can often be referred as more cynical than other generations. Generation X was the first generation after Baby Boomers that did not want to rush to marriage and family life and held work satisfaction as a more important factor than salary, also Xers do not share the values that earlier generations might have had, neglecting their families for a secure and long term career in a single firm. Generation X is more known to "work to live", not "living to work", they do not seek for a long and steady career in a single firm, but instead they seek to work for a company that offers flexibility and fun aspects into their lives. Freedom and flexibility are stronger values for Generation X than for earlier generations. (Schiffman, Kanuk, Hansen 2012, 355-356)

As consumers, Generation X is likely to look for discounts and low-cost items rather than the best possible investment for future (Ordun, 2015, 44). They do not like labels and to be marketed to and they might not be materialistic, but still may purchase solid brand name – products for example from Sony, but not designer labels (Schiffman, Kanuk, Hansen 2012, 355-356).

1.5. Consumer decision journey

Consumer decision journey refers to the time where consumer is initially considering different variables of products to the post-purchase experience of the product. Earlier the consumer decision journey has been described with the traditional marketing funnel -metaphor, but it does not capture all the touch points and key buying factors anymore as there are significantly more product choices and digital channels in today's world of business. Also, consumers are more and more discerning and better informed. Consumer Decision Journey-model developed by McKinsey & Company has been discovered to be more incisive when describing the consumer decision journey in the present day business environment. McKinsey's Consumer Decision Journey -model is a circular journey and it includes four phases: initial consideration; active evaluation or the process of researching potential purchases; moment of purchase; and post-purchase, when consumer experiences the product. (McKinsey & Company 2009)

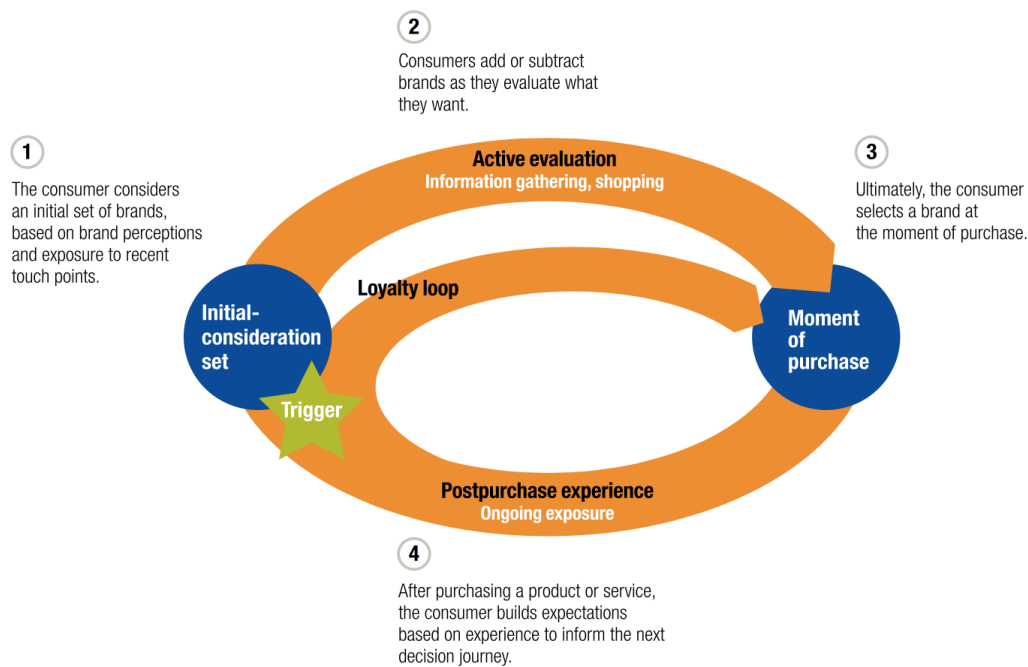


Figure 3: McKinsey & Company Consumer Decision Journey Model. Source: McKinsey & Company. (2009) The consumer decision journey.

In consumer decision journey, everything starts with a trigger that triggers the consumers impulse to buy the product that they need. This is the moment, when the need to buy a product is born. After the trigger, the consumer starts to consider an initial set of brands, based on their personal

brand perceptions and exposure to recent touch points. The consumer might have been reached through the right channel and the right time by a marketer, and this can be considered as an effective touch point. As the consideration part moves on, it moves to a more active evaluation phase, where the consumer evaluates different options for the purchase. In this phase, consumers add and subtract brands as they are evaluating what they want. During this time, the consumer gathers information continuously by receiving and seeing advertising or other marketing communication. In today's business environment consumers are receiving enormous amounts of information continuously through many marketing channels, including digital marketing channels. Using this information, consumers add and subtract potential brands to buy. Afterwards, when making the final purchase, the consumer selects the brand. After selecting the brand, comes the post-purchase experience. In this phase, the consumer builds expectations for the next consumer decision journey, while being continuously exposed to marketing information. At this point, the consumer can start a loyalty loop with the brand or they can start the consumer decision journey again, with the initial consideration of the brands. (McKinsey & Company 2009)

1.6. Consumer trends today

Sustainability

“Sustainable consumption aims to satisfy the basic needs required for improved quality of life while minimizing the environmental and social impacts over the life cycle of a product” (Happonen 2016, 7). Sustainable consumption has become more popular in the past few decades, as people have become more aware of sustainability related issues in consumer goods (Ibid.). As an increase in awareness and interest in environmental aspects, consumers and especially millennials tell, that they want brands that embrace purpose and sustainability (White, Hardisty, Habib, 2019). According to a recent report, certain categories of products with sustainability claims showed twice as much growth than their traditional equivalent, however, some part of consumers who want to buy sustainable products, still don't actually buy them (Ibid.).

In today's digital communication environment, facts and news about environmental problems and climate change are spreading faster than ever before and this in one of the main reasons sustainable consumption is gaining more popularity (Happonen 2016, 8). Also, social influence is a major factor in sustainable consumption trend as consumers are strongly influenced to buy or use sustainable products, when they know their peers use them as well (White, Hardisty, Habib 2019). Especially millennials find consumer products important for building a personal image (Happonen 2016, 26).

A study shows, that telling university students that other students were using sustainable transportation methods like bicycles, led them to use sustainable transportation five times more when simply informing the students about sustainable transportation options. Also, when informing online shoppers that other people were purchasing sustainable products, led to a 65 percent increase in customers buying at least one sustainable product. (White, Hardisty, Habib 2019)

Veganism

“Veganism is a way of living that seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose” (The Vegan Society, 2019). Veganism is one of the fastest growing global consumer trends today and it is adopted by a wide-range of people all over the world, often because they want to be more environmentally friendly or animal-friendly (Angus, Westbrook 2019, 18). Veganism is no longer seen as a lifelong obligation to seclude yourself from animal-based products, instead it is seen with a more flexible approach, each individual deciding how isolated they want to be from meat-products, do they want to be totally vegan or maybe “flexitarian”, which means mainly eating plant-based food but sometimes meat or fish as well. (Angus, Westbrook 2019, 18)

People around the world are changing their diets to more plant-based diets as for example during the years 2006-2016 in Great Britain, the amount of vegans grew from 150 000 to 540 000 people (The Vegan Society 2016). Not only people in developed countries are switching their diets to more plant-based diets, also in developing countries we can see a significant change as the three countries with the most increased vegetarian population during the years 2016-2018 were Nigeria, Pakistan and Indonesia (Angus, Westbrook 2019). With the help of internet and social media,

people are starting to be more aware of the unnecessary suffering of the animals in the factory farms and slaughterhouses that produce the majority of meat that they consume; also, reducing meat and dairy-products can prevent our most common diseases caused by high-saturated fat and cholesterol (Barclay, 2018).

Vegan business is doing extremely well around the world and more and more people are showing interest or changing their diet to a vegan diet; large food- and fast-food -companies like McDonalds and Kentucky Fried Chicken with a history of offering meat-products only are offering vegetarian burger-patties as well in their selection of products (Angus, Westbrook 2019, 22). An American company called Beyond Meat producing vegan burger patties and vegan sausages went public on May 2019 and the stock price increased from approximately 65 dollars to 145 dollars in less than six months (Investing.com 2019).

Social media and Netflix has had a significant influence in the spread of the vegan trend, with the help of channels like Instagram and Youtube (Barclay 2018). In Instagram alone, the hashtags #vegan, #govegan and #plantbased have almost 120 million publishes (Instagram 2019). In Youtube, many popular Youtube-vloggers are showing their interest and support to plant based diet and influencing millions of viewers to do so as well (Barclay 2018). Also, there is an increasing amount of popular documentaries available online and Netflix -streaming service that support health and environmental side of plant based eating (Ibid.).

2. EMPIRICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Research methods

Introduction

The objective of this research was to identify what factors influence consumers' decision to switch from consuming milk to consuming oat milk and what factors influence consumers to habitually

use oat milk instead of milk among the interviewees of this study. In order to find that out, a qualitative approach was chosen as the common objective of qualitative research is to find or reveal facts rather than authenticate already existing claims (Hirsjärvi 2003, 152). Qualitative methods are often used to explore, describe or explain social phenomenon and to unpack the meanings people ascribe to activities, situations, events or artefacts (Leavy 2014, 2). The purpose of this research is to identify the theoretical framework that relates to oat milk, consumer trends and buying behaviour through secondary sources and try to provide answers to the research question by using qualitative semi-structured interviews to collect the data and to analyse the thus generated text with the help of a systematic content analysis.

Data collection

The empirical data for this research was gathered by carrying out semi-structured qualitative interviews. The semi-structured interviews were chosen as a data collection method because they allow following up on whatever angles are deemed important for the interviewees and at the same time the interviewer has a power to focus the conversation on issues that he or she sees important in relation to the research (Brinkmann, cited in Leavy 2014, 286). The subjects and questions for the semi-structured interview in this study were shaped based on the theoretical framework of this research.

Six interviewees took part in this research with two interviewees from each consumer generation covered in the theoretical framework of this study. All the semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face in different locations. The criteria for the interviewee selection were based on active usage of oat milks in everyday life and past-usage of milk. The gender of the interviewees made no difference when the interviewees were picked for this research.

The interviews were carried out between 10th of November and 29th of November 2019 and each of the interviews took around 20-30 minutes. All of the interviewee were native Finnish speakers, therefore the interviews were conducted in Finnish language. The interview sessions began with a clarification of the anonymity of the interviewee and the purpose of the research. After that, the semi-structured interview was carried out following the subjects and questions shaped based on the theoretical framework of this study. All of the interviews were recorded using a mobile phone

and transcribed within 7 days of the interview. Both the interviewing and the transcribing were done by the author in order to guarantee minimum losses of information.

Data analysis

The empirical data collected is qualitative in nature, meaning that it is based on meanings expressed through words. This non-standardised data requires classification into categories and the analysis is conducted through the use of conceptualisation. Therefore, content analysis was chosen to be the analysis method for this research. (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill 2016, 569)

Structuring the data for analysis was done by using qualitative content analysis, specifically thematic analysis, as it helps to comprehend large amounts of qualitative data and identify key themes or patterns from data set for further exploration (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill 2016, 579). The procedure of thematic analysis starts with the researcher first becoming familiar with the data and then coding the data (Ibid., 580). In this study, codes in the data were derived by using the combination of deductive and inductive approach. When using a combination of deductive and inductive approach, the researcher commences analysis with theoretically-derived themes from the theoretical framework of the research which are then modified or added to as the researcher explores the data set (Ibid., 579).

The analysis process in this research started with deriving themes to be examined based on the theoretical framework of this study including the theoretical framework for factors affecting consumer buying behaviour as well as the interview questions used in the empirical part of the study. After this, the transcripts were read several times to become familiar with the data. After that the themes for coding were modified according to the recognised meanings and perceptions of participants in the data. When the themes for coding were satisfactory, the data as a whole was coded according to these themes. After coding, a search for patterns and relationships started. This part involved making judgements about the data and seeing what seemed to be recurring in the codes, what seemed to be important regarding this research and which codes appeared to be related. Finally, before making conclusions about the data, the themes were refined for the last time to be able to answer the research question of this study. Lastly, it was possible to draw conclusions from the data and report the findings.

Validity and reliability

“The lack of standardisation in semi-structured and in-depth interviews can lead to concerns about reliability/dependability”. The concerns about reliability in these types of interviews can also be related to issues of potential bias. There are different types of potential bias including interviewer bias, response bias and participation bias. Interviewer bias occurs when the comments, tone or non-verbal behaviour of the interviewer influence the responses of the interviewee. Response bias occurs when an interviewee may not reveal and discuss an aspect of the topic that the interviewer wishes to explore, because they would not like to reveal sensitive information considering this topic for some reason. Participation bias may result from the nature of the participants or organisational participants who agree to be interviewed, also because the amount of time required for an interview may result in a reduction of willingness to take part in the interview. (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill 2016, 397)

Credibility

As a self-selection sampling method was used in this research, the likelihood of sample being representative to the population as a whole is low, as the cases are self-selected and the sample size is small (Ibid., 298). Thus, this research only delivers unfiltered insights into the opinions of the interviewees and the generalisations can only be made to theory rather than about a population (Ibid., 297). The results and conclusions only give information about the sample in this study, not about the Finnish population as a whole. It delivers insights and a starting point for further research.

2.2. Findings of the empirical analysis

In this part of the thesis, findings of the empirical analysis are discussed. The six interviewees in this research are named X1, X2, Y1, Y2, Z1 and Z2 for the purpose of citing the comments from the interview transcripts. The results are categorised according to the main themes and patterns derived from the qualitative content analysis.

Results

Category 1: Reference groups – family and friends

Reference groups and more precisely membership groups were identified to be a significant social factor in creating the first experience of drinking oat milk and influencing the decision to switch from milk to oat milk among the interviewees in this study. The first recommendation or the first experience to oat milk was mostly a result of actions of the interviewee's friends or family. The interviewees describe the first time they tasted oat milk the following way:

“I think it was about three years ago, my wife had tasted it and bought it to our home for the first time. I tasted it with my coffee in the morning, if I remember correctly. For me it was not a significant change or experience first, but I knew that my wife is going to start buying it so I thought I could start to drink it with my coffee.” (Interviewee X1)

“It is several years ago, I think someone bought it to our home and I tasted it. I think it was my daughter. I assume, it went like this. First step was not for me to decide, my daughter had bought it to our home without asking me. It just appeared to our home and I tasted it.” (Interviewee X2)

“I think it was at a friend's apartment when we were drinking coffee. I'm not totally sure, but I remember the first times I had oat milk and there were two of my closest friends also, they revolutionized my coffee experience.” (Interviewee Z1)

“I think it was 2016. I tried it at my friends' place then, I already had tasted soy milk with my coffee before, but this time I tasted oat milk. It was a lot better than soy milk. It was the only milk my friend had then and that is why I tasted it.” (Interviewee Z2)

“I had picked up my studies recently in 2016 and I tried oat milk at my girlfriend's apartment or my brother's apartment, I'm not sure which one it was. I tried it without blending it to anything, as someone offered it to me. Someone was drinking oat milk there and offered it to me, that I remember.” (Interviewee Y1)

Reference groups can also be seen as a factor influencing the habitual use of oat milk among the interviewees. Especially with the interviewees from Generation Z and Generation Y, all the individuals that are included in their social circle seem to be habitually using oat milk. Membership groups can be seen as a factor that encourages the interviewees for continual use of oat milk among the interviewees. The interviewees talk about their family or friends drinking oat milk like that:

“Yes. I don’t think any of my close friends or family use dairy milk with coffee, I don’t believe that anyone drinks milk either. I think couple people at my work use milk with coffee.” (Interviewee Y1)

“Yes. My friends use [oat milk] with coffee and also in food and in baking.” (Interviewee Z1)

“Yes, everyone uses it. I’d say that from my close friends and family at least 90 percent use oat milk.” (Interviewee Z2)

A pressure to use oat milk inside the membership groups of the interviewees can be recognised, as especially interviewees from Generation Z considered oat milk usage self-evident inside their social circles, instead the usage of dairy milk was seen as something to be ashamed of mainly because the serious effects that milk production has for the environment. Based on the interviews, the younger interviewees especially seem to seek acceptance and belongingness inside the membership group with the use of oat milk. This factor can be seen influencing the decision to use oat milk habitually among the interviewees of this study and also an encouraging factor to switch from dairy milk to oat milk in the first place.

“I’m sure there is some sort of social pressure, inside the social circles that I spend my time. For example, I could be ashamed to buy dairy milk, because in my social circles people are very aware of the effects of milk production to the environment. It simply is not acceptable.” (Interviewee Z1 on what guides her to use oat milk.)

“Nowadays, we don’t talk about it much anymore because it is considered self-evident. It is a part of our life that is self-evident, so we don’t talk about it much anymore.” (Interviewee Z1 on if they talk about oat milk among friends.)

“... but I think I wouldn't even have the nerve to buy dairy milk anymore, if my friends were there. I wouldn't want to either, but if I wanted to, I wouldn't have the nerve to do it. It is so self-evident that you act according to green values.” (Interviewee Z2 on what factors affect her use of oat milk.)

Among the interviewees, people in their membership groups that use dairy milk, are seen as narrow-minded individuals and tedious exceptions inside the group:

“Yes, most of my friends use oat milk or other vegan options, but then there are these bad exceptions also.” (Interviewee X2)

“Surely ... [friends who drink dairy milk] are more narrow-minded in some way. Or then they simply don't care.” (Interviewee X1)

Category 2: Personal Brand

The effects of oat milk usage to your personal brand are among the strongest factors influencing the switch from milk to oat milk and the habitual use of oat milk among the interviewees. All of the interviewees thought that oat milk usage brings many aspects to your personal brand and how others see you, including sense of awareness, sense of friendliness to the environment and sense of urbanity. Instead, the usage of dairy milk was attached to a narrow-minded image of a person. These aspects have encouraged the interviewees to switch from milk to oat milk and use oat milk habitually in everyday life:

“Also there is an image that if you use oat milk, you are a good person. /---/ I would say that the friends that use oat milk are more from the urban area of Helsinki.” (Interviewee X1 on what factors are attached to using oat milk)

About drinking oat milk affecting the personal brand:

“In a way, for example if I see in some courses that I attend that a person has the choice to use milk or oat milk, it tells me that you are more aware if you choose oat milk instead of dairy milk.”
(Interviewee X2)

“It boosts environmental friendliness. /---/ I mean, with the usage of oat milk, you can express that you are educated and aware of environmental issues.” (Interviewee Y1)

“Yes. It creates a sense that you are aware. That you know, that you can make a difference with your choices. It does affect.” (Interviewee Y2)

“It would affect [the personal brand], if someone would drink dairy milk. In a way, it creates a dumb image of the person, because you have given a chance to choose an environmentally better product and in other ways also.” (Interviewee Z1)

“The usage of oat milk represents some kind of awareness and some kind of urban way of thinking. It represents green values. /---/ It is terrible, but I work in a café, and if I ask a customer that does he or she want oat milk or dairy milk with their coffee, I categorize this person in my head based on the answer. If the customer chooses oat milk, I categorize him or her to be a good person.”
(Interviewee Z2)

Category 3: Health

A psychological factor that was recognised to have influenced some of the interviewees in this study to use oat milk habitually was that they feel that oat milk is healthier than dairy milk and in some way better for their bodies. Some interviewees name actual health reasons and some only have thought that oat milk was better for their bodies than milk, but they did not exactly know why. The interviewees speak about the benefits attached to oat milk:

“...it has positive effects to the environment and apparently to your health as well. Personally, I haven't delved into the health aspects that much.” (Interviewee X1)

“I remember almost always to ask for oat milk with my take-away coffee instead of dairy milk. Once I forgot to ask for oat milk and I got dairy milk instead. I got a stomach ache and I instantly connected that to the dairy milk. It can be that there was a connection.” (Interviewee X2)

“It has health reasons attached to [consuming vegan products in general, i.a. oat milk]. My stomach works better. /---/ I feel that it is better for my body and for example my intestine.”
(Interviewee Y2)

“I don’t think we need cow’s milk to survive. I feel that dairy products don’t match with my body well. I feel a lot better after using oat based products.” (Interviewee Z2)

Category 4: Sustainable and ethical beliefs

Among the interviewees of this study, oat milk is clearly believed to be more sustainable, representing sustainable values and more ethical than dairy milk. This can be seen as a clear psychological factor influencing the choice to switch from milk to oat milk and also continual use of oat milk in everyday life. Among the interviewees, the beliefs about dairy milk as a product are that it has more negative effects to the environment and for animals than oat milk had. All of the interviewees in this study have strong sustainable values and they think that it is important to act according to them.

“I’ve started to attach sustainable values to oat milk also. We recycle a lot and do a lot of environmentally friendly choices.” (Interviewee X1 on the values that are attached to oat milk.)

“I didn’t start to use oat milk for the taste, but instead for the sustainability of the product. If dairy milk was more environmentally friendly than oat milk, I would probably use dairy milk.”
(Interviewee X2 on how she started to use oat milk)

“It is an environmentally friendly decision to use oat milk. /---/ I get better conscience... /---/ because of the sustainability of oat milk.” (Interviewee Y1 on the benefits he receives from using oat milk)

“Climate related aspects. I might not think of the climate every time I buy oat milk, but it is definitely a plus.” (Interviewee Y2 on the benefits she receives from using oat milk)

“Environmental reasons. Animal living conditions came later also, but mainly environmental reasons. /---/ Ethical reasons because of animals and environmental friendliness. /---/ After I heard how cows are treated and how their space of living is being restrained, only that humans could get nutrition from them.” (Interviewee Z1 on what reasons and values she connects to the usage of oat milk and why animal rights are important)

“I feel, that it is a choice to make for the sake of the climate.” (Interviewee Z2 on if she attaches environmental aspects to the usage of oat milk.)

Category 5: Brand Image of oat milk

Advertising and media have clearly created a certain brand or product image for oat milk that has affected most of the interviewees in this study by especially encouraging to use oat milk habitually instead of milk. Especially the marketing of oat milk producer Oatly has created a certain brand image for oat milk inside the interviewees mind as all of the interviewees praised Oatly’s marketing in some way in the interviews. The brand or product image formed by most of the interviewees is pleasant, desirable, trendy, sustainable and strong. It can be recognised in some of the interviews that media has also raised the desirability of oat milk, as it has written news and articles about the war between milk and oat milk as well as oat milks popularity and how it has run out in some stores in Finland.

“Later as I have used their products, I have noticed that Oatly does their marketing very well. They are somehow fearless and execute the marketing with a bit of humour. It is really inviting for consumers.” (Interviewee X1 on the visibility of oat milk in media and social media)

“I was not product loyal right after when I had tasted oat milk. Probably the more media wrote and talked about oat milk, it seemed more important and the right choice for me. /---/ It also has a pleasant and responsible brand image. /---/ Image of Oatly’s brand is strong. They have done their branding extremely well and they have become a herald of oat milk.” (Interviewee X2 on if she became brand or product loyal after first time tasting it and why she uses Oatly’s oat milk.)

“In advertising you can see it, Oatly has very strong marketing campaigns and altercations with milk industry. They have demanded milk industry to reveal their emissions etc.” (Interviewee Y1 on the visibility of oat milk in the media and social media)

“Oatly’s marketing has attracted my attention, and I know that Oatly’s marketing example is being used as a benchmark in the marketing business.” (Interviewee Y2 on the visibility of oat milk in the media and social media)

“Oatly’s marketing is very powerful and creates a pressure, but in a good way. Good pressure. When you know, that in some stores Oatly’s oat milks have run out because the demand is so strong, it creates even more significant desirability to it.” (Interviewee Z1 on what guides her to buy oat milk.)

“I think people attack against soy products often in emission based questions and in other contexts. Not that much against oat milk. I think oat milk is considered as being the “good guy”.” (Interviewee Z2 on the visibility of oat milk in the media and social media.)

Category 6: Flavour

The perceived flavour of oat milk compared to dairy milk can be seen as a psychological factor that has influenced the switch from milk to oat milk among several interviewees in this study. Many interviewees name that at first oat milk, especially Ikaffe from Oatly tasted better specifically with coffee and that affected their choice.

“There is some feature in the flavour that is really good. It is also very fluffy. If you shake the carton before putting it to the coffee, it becomes really fluffy. You can feel the foam in your mouth, kind of like drinking a cappuccino.” (Interviewee X1 on what makes Oatly Ikaffe good)

“Oatly’s Ikaffe just tasted so much better with coffee than dairy dairy milk.” (Interviewee Y1 on what created the interest to use oat milk)

“...because Oatly was the best oat milk to blend with coffee. The only product that worked with coffee was Oatly’s Ikaffe. Because of the taste and the structure, it didn’t sediment.” (Interviewee Y2 on if she became product loyal right after trying oat milk.)

“Flavour. Coffee simply tastes so much better with it than with anything else. /---/ The flavour was addicting and the thing, that it wasn’t made out of milk.” (Interviewee Z1 on what benefits she gets from drinking oat milk and if she became product loyal right after trying oat milk)

“Oat milk is a hundred times better.” (Interviewee Z2 on the difference of flavour of oat milk compared to dairy milk)

After a certain time of using oat milk, the interviewees thought that the taste of dairy milk started to feel either bit compelling, flat, boring and heavy compared to oat milk. This factor can be recognised to have affected the habitual use of oat milk instead of milk among the interviewees in this study:

“Like I mentioned already, dairy milk now feels flatter than oat milk. Maybe just flavourless as well. Through mental images I have developed a compelling image to the flavour of dairy milk.” (Interviewee X1 on the flavour differences between oat milk and dairy milk.)

“What comes to mind from dairy milk is that it is more stodgy.” (Interviewee X2 on the flavour differences between oat milk and dairy milk)

“Dairy milk started to feel “heavy” and really compelling for example with coffee. Even the thought of drinking dairy milk continuously creeps me out. I don’t know if it is the fat that compels me or what it is.” (Interviewee Z2 on the flavour differences between oat milk and dairy milk)

Discussion of results

The objective of this research was to identify what factors affect consumers to switch from dairy milk to oat milk and why consumers use oat milk habitually instead of dairy milk. The aim was also to deliver insights on the background of the opinion of people who have switched from dairy to oat milk and who are using oat milk habitually. The objective of this research included answering to following research questions:

“What factors influence consumers’ decision to change from milk to oat milk?”

“What factors influence consumers’ to habitually use oat milk instead of milk?”

Based on the results of the data analysis, I was able to recognise factors influencing consumers to originally switch from using milk to using oat milk and factors influencing consumers to habitually use oat milk instead of milk among the interviewees of this study. Therefore, I can deliver answers to both of the research questions with the results of this research and fulfil the objective of the research.

The factors recognised to have influenced the interviewees in this study include reference groups, personal branding, health factors, sustainable and ethical beliefs, brand or product image and flavour. Some of these factors could have possibly been predicted before conducting the research, but some factors were unexpected. Especially the strong influence of personal branding on the interviewees in this study was unexpected and truly interesting.

Only a few generational differences can be seen in the results. The only recognized difference between generations that this study reveals is the difference in the membership group that influence the switch from dairy milk to oat milk. With Generation Z and Y it is friends and with the older Generation X it is family. However, albeit it is interesting to notice that difference among the interviewees, the generational differences cannot be generalized because of the limitations of the study.

The results are a truly valuable insight to the motivations of the interviewees in this research and they give a voice to people who have switched from dairy to oat milk and continued to use oat milk habitually. However, they cannot be generalised to the Finnish population as a whole because of the limitations of the study. The limitations of the study include small sample size, self-selection sampling method and the limitations attached to the qualitative research method used.

These results provide a good background knowledge and starting point for further research to back the opinions with quantitative studies using larger samples. These results can also be used by marketers of similar products when planning brand image and advertising campaigns, keeping in mind that the results can only be generalised to the sample population of this research.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this research was to recognise what factors influence consumers' to switch from dairy milk to oat milk and why consumers use oat milk habitually instead of milk among the interviewees in this research. The aim was also to deliver insights on the background of the opinion of people who had switched from dairy milk to oat milk and who are using oat milk habitually.

The objectives of this research were achieved, as after processing the data obtained from the qualitative semi-structured interviews with the use of thematic content analysis, many findings were found on the factors influencing consumers to switch from dairy milk to milk and consumers decision to use oat milk habitually instead of dairy milk. These results can be used to encourage students for executing further research in this topic or to guide marketers when planning marketing content regarding a similar product than milk or oat milk. However, these results cannot be generalised to the Finnish population as a whole, as the sample size is small and sampling techniques have its limitations considering the credibility of the research. The results only give information about the sample in this study.

The results of this research presented that the factors affecting consumers' to switch from dairy milk to oat milk and consumers' to habitually use oat milk instead of dairy milk include reference groups and more precisely membership groups, personal branding, health factors, sustainable and ethical beliefs, brand or product image and flavour.

Membership groups were identified to be a significant social factor in creating the first experience to oat milk. The first recommendation or experience is often a result of the actions of a friend or a family member. A social pressure could be recognised in the social circles of the interviewees towards using oat milk and the usage of oat milk is considered to be self-evident inside the social circles of several interviewees. These aspects could be recognised as factors encouraging interviewees to drink oat milk habitually.

Personal branding was seen to be another strong factor affecting the choice to switch from dairy milk to oat milk and to use oat milk habitually. The interviewees think that the usage of oat milk brings many aspects to your personal brand including sense of awareness, sense of friendliness to the environment and sense of urbanity. Instead, usage of dairy milk is attached to a narrow-minded image of a person.

Health factor was recognised to be a psychological factor that has influenced some of the interviewees in this study to use oat milk habitually instead of dairy milk. Some of the interviewees feel that oat milk was healthier than dairy milk and better for their bodies including intestine.

The interviewees have sustainable values and consider oat milk is clearly to be more sustainable product representing sustainable values and more ethical than dairy milk. Sustainable and ethical beliefs are seen as a psychological factor influencing the choice to switch from milk to oat milk and also influencing the continual use of oat milk in everyday life.

Brand or product image of oat milk could be noticed as a factor that has influenced most of the interviewees to use oat milk habitually instead of dairy milk. Advertising and media have created a certain brand or product image for oat milk that is pleasant, desirable, trendy, sustainable and strong according to the interviewees.

Finally, the perceived flavour of oat milk compared to dairy milk could be recognised to be as a psychological factor that has influenced the interviewees to switch from milk to oat milk. According to the interviewees, especially Ikaffe from Oatly tastes better especially with coffee and that affected their choice to start using oat milk significantly. Also, after a certain time of using oat milk, dairy milk has started to feel either a bit heavy, compelling or flat. This can have influenced the interviewees decision to use oat milk habitually.

Based on these results, recommendations can be made for marketers of similar products keeping in mind that these results only can be generalised to the sample population of this research. When planning marketing campaigns for a similar product, sense of sustainability and ethical production of the product should be included. The product can be marketed as a choice of a person who has a sense of awareness and environmental friendliness in the self-image, and as a choice for urban people. Aspects about “feeling good” could be used in the marketing campaigns as well, as the interviewees consider oat milk to be better for the body than dairy milk. Slogans related to words “light” and “fluffy” can be used especially with products used with coffee. I hope students take my thesis as a basis to carry out wider studies on the topic to hopefully confirm my findings.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1.

URL source for interview data can be found below.

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1OtkteWn8BQkmumTlp1D6tROanw9vusb2NcrtutWsp_Y/edit?usp=sharing

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