

UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

Communicational Practices in Promoting Gourmet Products

A Case-Study on a Small-scale French Meat
Producer

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<p>Tutkielmassa tarkastellaan gourmet-elintarvikkeiden markkinointiin soveltuvia viestintäkäytäntöjä. Työn ensisijaisena tarkoituksena on selvittää, minkälaisia viestinnällisiä keinoja voidaan käyttää gourmet-elintarvikkeiden markkinoinnissa. Lisäksi halutaan kartoittaa, missä laajuudessa alkuperämaan ja eettisen tuotantotavan kaltaisia viestejä tulee sisällyttää markkinointiin. Kolmanneksi tarkastellaan, minkälaisia viestinnällisiä toimenpiteitä tulee ottaa huomioon vasikanlihan ja lihasäilykkeiden kaltaisten, suomalaiselle kuluttajalle vieraampien, tuotteiden markkinoinnissa.</p> <p>Teoriaosuudessa tarkastellaan ensiksi van der Veenin määritelmää luksusruusta (2003). Luksusarvon rakentaminen tuotteen ympärille on moniulotteinen prosessi, jota tarkastellaan Kotlerin markkinointiteoriaan (2005) pohjautuvan viitekehyksen avulla. Danzigerin (2005) ja Twitcellin (2001) näkemysten mukaan tarinankerronta on avainasemassa luksusarvon rakentamisessa. Tamagninin & Treagerin tutkimus (1998) osoittaa, että gourmet-brändien kannattaa harkita markkinoinnin ja sen ydinviestien kohdentamista tarkoin määritellyille kohderyhmille. Ranskalainen alkuperä näyttää teorian valossa olevan jonkinasteinen etu elintarvikkeelle, ainakin Luomalan (2007) sekä Leclercin, Schmittin ja Dubén (1994) tutkimuksien mukaan.</p> <p>Aineistonkeruussa käytettiin laadullista tutkimusmenetelmää. Tutkielmaa varten haastateltiin kahdeksaa suomalaista elintarvikealan ammattilaista, jotka edustivat neljää erilaista ammattillista profiilia. Heiltä tiedusteltiin teemahaastattelun avulla näkemyksiä gourmet-elintarvikkeiden markkinointiin liittyen.</p> <p>Tuloksien mukaan tarinankerronta on tehokkain viestinnällinen keino gourmet-tuotteiden markkinointiin. Pelkän yhtenäisen tarinan muodostaminen ei kuitenkaan riitä, vaan elintarvikebrändin tulee markkinoinnissaan keskittyä halutun kohdeyleisön tavoittamiseen tarinallaan. Sopivia menetelmiä tähän katsotaan olevan yhteistyö toimittajien, mielipidevaikuttajien ja jälleenmyyjien kanssa, maksullinen mainonta sekä brändin omien kanavien käyttö. Yksi viestintäkanava nousee kuitenkin ylivoimaisena esiin: reseptit. Tuloksien mukaan reseptit ovat kiistattoman tärkeä osa gourmet-elintarvikkeen markkinointiviestintää. Näiden lisäksi myös hinta, pakkaus sekä jälleenmyyntikanavat ja esillepano ovat oleellisia viestinnällisiä johtolankoja, jotka rakentavat arvoa tuotteen ympärille ja erottavat sitä ei-gourmet kilpailijoista.</p> <p>Sekä eettisen tuotantotavan että ranskalaisuuden katsotaan olevan pääosin positiivisia ominaisuuksia, joista kannattaa viestiä kuluttajalle selkeästi. Laajuus, joista näistä ominaisuuksista kannattaa viestiä, vaihtelee sen mukaan mitä kohderyhmää ensisijaisesti tavoitellaan.</p> <p>Vasikanliha ja lihasäilykkeet arvioidaan tuotteiksi, joiden markkinointiviestintä kannattaa suunnata tarkoin ennalta määritellyille kohderyhmille, kuten ruokaharrastajille. Vasikanlihan markkinoinnin ei arvioida vaativan erityistä varovaisuutta. Sen sijaan lihasäilykkeet nähdään hankalana tuoteryhmänä Suomessa. Asenteiden muuttamisen eteen tarvitaan tuloksien mukaan suuria markkinoinnillisia ponnisteluja.</p> <p>Koska tutkimus on laadullinen ja asiantuntijoiden esittämät mielipiteet henkilökohtaisia, ei saatuja tuloksia voida pitää yleistettävänä. Tutkielman ensisijaisena tavoitteena ei ole tuottaa valmiita tietoja gourmet-elintarvikkeiden markkinoinnista, vaan pikemminkin tuoda lukijan ulottuville tuoreita näkökulmia aiheeseen. Arvon rakentamiseen liittyvien prosessien ymmärtäminen on tärkeää paitsi markkinoinnin ammattilaisille ja ruuantuottajille, myös tavallisille kuluttajille. Kokonaisvaltaisen tiedon hankkiminen liittyen gourmet-elintarvikkeiden markkinointiin Suomessa edellyttää kuitenkin lisää monipuolista tutkimustyötä.</p>			
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<p>This thesis studies the communicational practices used in promoting gourmet products in Finland. Its purpose is to find out what kind of communicational practices can be used in promoting products belonging to the gourmet category; to establish if product attributes such as country of origin and ethical production should be used as key marketing messages; and finally to generate insight on the special communicational aspects that have to be taken into account when marketing more unfamiliar meat products such as veal and canned gourmet ready-meals.</p> <p>The theoretical part starts with van der Veen's definition on luxury foods (2003). Then, the phenomenon of building luxury value through marketing is addressed, with a theoretical framework constructed around Kotler's (2005) marketing mix. Danziger's (2005) and Twitcell's (2001) insights hint that storytelling has a key role in building luxury value. Tamagnini's & Tregear's (1998) model indicates that niche marketing can be a good approach in the delicatessen meat sector. Finally, the studies conducted by Leclerc, Schmitt and Dubé (1994) as well as Luomala (2007) indicate that French origins might to be an asset on the Finnish market.</p> <p>A qualitative approach was chosen to gather data. Eight Finnish food professionals, representing four different profiles, were interviewed about their opinions on communication practices in promoting gourmet products and meat.</p> <p>Results show that storytelling is deemed the most efficient way to market gourmet products. After having compiled a coherent story, a food brand needs to expose the story to the desired consumer group(s). Tools to do this can include collaboration with journalists, celebrities, trendsetters and retailers, paid advertising, and using the brand's own channels. However, the most important marketing channel for food is estimated to be recipes, and according to this study recipes should be an integral part of all marketing communication effort of any gourmet food brand. In addition price, packaging and placement are also essential communicational tools in building added value and differentiating the product from non-gourmet rivals.</p> <p>Both ethical production and French origins are seen as mostly positive product attributes that are worth communicating to the consumers. The degree in which these attributes should be highlighted depends on the segment(s) the product is primarily aimed at.</p> <p>Veal and canned gourmet ready-meals are seen as products that need to adopt a niche marketing strategy, aiming to commit food enthusiasts first. Veal is not seen as a product type that would demand particularly cautious communication measures. Canned gourmet ready meals, on the other hand, are seen as a very tricky product category because of the poor reputation similar products have in Finland. Strong marketing efforts should be placed to make the general attitude change.</p> <p>Because the approach is qualitative and the viewpoints presented by the experts are subjective, the results presented in this thesis cannot be generalized. The primary objective for this research is not to provide definitive knowledge on promoting gourmet products, but rather generate fresh viewpoints on how promoting gourmet products in contemporary Finland can be addressed. Understanding the process of adding value is important to marketers, food producers and regular consumers alike, but to gain comprehensive knowledge about the phenomenon further research is needed.</p>			
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1 Introduction

The objective of this thesis is to study the communicational practices used in promoting gourmet meat products in Finland. Although the scope of this thesis is very limited, it aims to give applicable knowledge on marketing luxury or gourmet products, and especially meat products, in Finland. I will approach the general research theme through my three research questions, presented below:

- 1) What communicational practices can be used to promote gourmet products?
- 2) Are country of origin and ethical production product attributes that should be used as key marketing messages?
- 3) What kind of special communicational aspects have to be taken into account when marketing meat products such as veal and canned ready-meals, if any?

In the following, I will try to provide answers to these questions basing myself on a comprehensive theoretical framework and qualitative themed interviews conducted among Finnish food professionals. Because marketing luxury food is such a vast theme, I have further delimited it and have chosen to focus more specifically on French products.

The research questions stem from the need of a case company, a French small-scale meat producer wanting to export its products in Finland. I will present the company more in-depth in part 1.1. Although some elements of this thesis directly mirror the needs of the case company, such as partly focusing on veal and canned ready-meals, I emphasize that this thesis aims to give more generalizable information. The primary objective is to provide information and insight that is valuable, on one hand, for all meat producers wanting to sell their products in Finland, as well as on the other hand to all communication and marketing professionals having to work with meat products or gourmet foods. I hope that the insights presented here are also valuable for all consumers in general, since the study presents processes and logic used in adding value and in marketing in general. Understanding these processes can help build a critical approach towards marketing.

It is important to highlight that even though this work uses the French meat company TVR as a case, it is first and foremost an academic work. I maintain an objective and neutral approach towards TVR and the products they manufacture. When I refer to their products as “luxurious” or “gourmet”, it is not a valorizing term, but a descriptive one that I use based on Marjike van der Veen’s theory of luxury food products, presented in chapter 1.2.

After having first presented TVR in chapter 1.1, I will move to defining luxury food products. Together, these parts serve as an introduction to my thesis. The first theoretical chapter presents the branding of luxury products. It is constructed around Kotler’s (2005) marketing mix. I use Pamela Danziger’s (2005) and James Twithcell’s (2001) theories for further insight on the marketing of luxury products.

In chapter 3, I focus on the marketing of luxury food brands, and particularly luxury meat products. I present a very interesting article by Tamagnini & Tregear (1998), where they assess the appropriateness of niche marketing in the delicatessen meat sector.

The final chapter of my theoretical framework is chapter 4, where I present an engaging article by France Leclerc, Bernd Schmitt and Laurette Dubé on the effects of foreign branding on product perceptions and attitudes. I also accord attention to the study by the Finnish Harri Luomala, where he compares attitudes of Finnish consumers towards Swedish, German and French food products.

Chapters 2,3 and 4 form the theoretical framework of this thesis. After the theoretical part, I will present in chapter 5 the methodology used, and after that I move on to presenting and analyzing results. In chapter 9, I sum-up all the relevant findings and present the answers to my research questions. But first, let me present the case company in question, the French meat company TVR.

1.1 Presenting the Case Company

TVR is actually the marketing name of the company whose legal name is SAS Prestatlantic. However, in my thesis I will use the marketing name when referring to the company, since it is the name they use in all other except strictly financial or legal contexts. All of the information presented below is gathered from informal interviews conducted in November 2014 with the CEO of the company Mr. Jean-Paul Couavoux. More information can be found on the company's web page (www1).

TVR is a company operating in Western France, in the countryside not far from the city of Nantes. It was established in 1995 and currently employs some 20 professionals of the meat industry. In 2013, it had a turnover of three million euros.

The main business is cutting and conditioning meat. Farmers have their cattle slaughtered in a professional abattoir. Then, the carcass is delivered to TVR's premises where the butchers cut and condition the meat according to the stockbreeders wish. The main business thus revolves around a service – TVR specializes in cutting stockbreeders' meat for them.

TVR wants to maintain an image of a professional meat company of exceptional quality. For instance, all the animals cut by TVR are French cattle of breed, like *Limousin*, *Charolaise* and *Blonde d'Aquitaine*. They have been raised according to ethical principles and are often, but not always, labeled as organic. TVR does not operate with mass-producing stockbreeders. All the meat comes within a 200-kilometer radius of the premises.

For a few years now, the CEO has been looking for new ways to generate income. Thus, he has developed a line of meat products that are manufactured from the meat the company has cut and then purchased from the stockbreeder. The products sold by TVR can be categorized in two: processed and un-processed meat products. Un-processed meat products include vacuum-packed cuts of veal and beef. Processed products include sausages, meat sauces, canned ready meals and pâtés, that are all transformed according to traditional French recipes by a local subcontractor. Canned ready meals include items

such as *boeuf bourguignon* (beef simmered in red wine) and *blanquette de veau* (a type of veal stew in a cream and mushroom sauce).

Before entering the Finnish markets, a marketing name as well as packaging design and visual brand identity need yet to be created. TVR will not be used as a marketing name to sell products in Finland.

This thesis is about marketing luxury foods and luxury meat products in general, and I will not be focusing solely on TVR's products. However, before I proceed any further, it is important to stop and justify what kind of products can be classified as luxury food.

1.2 Luxury Food Products

When can food be considered luxurious? To answer these questions I base myself on Marijke van der Veen's article "When is Food a Luxury". It is an interesting study actually published in an archeological journal, with elements useful for classifying meat products.

In a general way, van der Veen categorizes luxury food products as being food that is desired and hard to get, but that is not essential for human nourishment (2003 : 405). She maintains that luxurious foods are generally sophisticated in texture, taste, savor and richness (usually the high quantity of fat or sugar); or they are differentiated by their qualities such as price, complexity of the product, its origins (exoticism), its style or etiquette (2003 : 420). Luxury products are consumed out of *pleasure*, not out of necessity (2003 : 420) – they provide physical or sensory pleasure to those consuming them (2003 : 406).

What is also important, like van der Veen states, is that a luxury product cannot be accessible to all – otherwise it loses its higher status (2003 : 420). That is why throughout history and in today's world as well, luxurious products are often exotic foods coming from afar, unusual and desired because of their foreign origin (2003 : 405–406).

As meat can, in some ways, be thought of as a very common ingredient almost indispensable for human beings, it is by no means a luxurious ingredient *per se*. However, the meat used in TVR's product is not accessible to all because of its more elevated price. The price, in turn, is defined by the quality of the product; organic or small-scale produced meat from French cattle of breed. That makes it *inaccessible to all*, which was one of van der Veen's definitions for a luxury product (2003 : 420). Apart from price and quality, it is also distinguished from other meat products by a more limited access. It is not destined to be sold in your average small rural supermarket, but in fine grocery stores and deli shops.

One of the key factors highlighted by van der Veen in her article is that luxurious foods often have *foreign* origins (2003 : 408). According to her, foreign foods are more prestigious because fewer people are consuming them and also because generally, there is a whole know-how that is built around the foreign product (2003 : 408). People who are buying a food item with foreign origins know how to use the product – they thus possess knowledge not everyone has, and for this reason might be considered by some as having a higher social status. For instance Finnish consumers buying TVR's *boeuf bourguignon* might be aware that it is a dish traditionally served with red wine and consumed as such or accompanied by rice – and not, for instance, pasta. The factor of exoticism, especially related to French origins, is dealt with more profoundly in chapter 4.

TVR's meat products are obviously destined to be consumed out of *pleasure*, and not out of necessity, which was one of the criteria put forward by van der Veen (2003 : 420). Indeed, if it was just to fulfill a need in protein intake, consumers have a wide choice of cheaper products more easily accessible.

I hope to have here justified clearly why some meat products, and also those manufactured by TVR, deserve to be labeled as a luxurious product. I note that in this thesis, the term "luxurious" is used as a synonym for terms such as "gourmet" or "delicatessen", even though some may argue that there can be small variations in the meaning of these terms. The fact that I use these terms as synonyms comes from the themed interviews, where the experts spontaneously cross-used these terms and I wanted to mirror their terminology in the theoretical framework as well. The following

chapters are dedicated to examine how luxury brands, and especially food brands, can be marketed.

2 Theoretical Approaches to Building Luxury Value

As put forward by the American researcher Danziger, luxury is an element that is built on a product by adding value to it (2005 : 169).

To approach the phenomena of building a luxury brand, I have chosen to use as a framework the famous “marketing mix” as presented by Kotler *et al* (2005). The marketing mix consists of four different elements: product, price, placement and promotion (Kotler *et al*, 2005 : 34). The model is referred to later on as the 4 Ps model.

In the marketing of services, a wider range of ”seven Ps” can be used. In this enlarged model, focus is also placed on people, processes and physical evidence (Kotler *et al*, 2005 : 33). However, since TVR’s luxury meat products aren’t a service but an actual product, I shall use here the less extensive version.

Kotler’s marketing mix model is used here to provide a framework for a deeper analysis. I will inspect the 4 Ps through the work of two American researchers, James B. Twitchell and Pamela Danziger. But first, I want to stop for a while to contemplate on the reasons why people buy luxury products in the first place. This gives valuable information on the target group the marketing should be aimed at.

2.1 Why do consumers choose luxury products?

“We are what we consume “ (Solomon *et al*. 2010 : 35)

Why some people choose to buy luxurious products instead of settling for regular products? I will put forward three reasons for this, basing myself on the part A (3–115) of the book by Solomon *et al*. (2010). I found their book to be the most pertinent on all of my readings on the subject because of its fairly recent publication and the fact that it focuses on the European market. Furthermore, the basic understanding of psychological consumer behavior is important in figuring out the right target groups of communication efforts.

According to Solomon *et al.* (2010 : 33), the first reason for buying luxury products is the relation between consumption and personality – which inspired my opening quote. Food retailers offer a very wide range of different products, and as consumers, we even get a very wide choice *within* each product segment (*loc. cit.*). For instance in milks, we have different categories to choose from according to fat percentage, country of origin, producer, and many other criteria as well. Solomon *et al.* draw the conclusion that instead of buying a certain product for what it is or what it does, people buy it for the meaning it brings (*loc. cit.*). According to the same authors, buying luxury goods is a way for the consumer to define himself as a human being, and simultaneously it acts as a declaration for others on the way of life of the consumer choosing the luxury product (*loc. cit.*). A person might want to communicate his higher social status or his values when buying a luxurious product, instead of perhaps buying it solely for its better qualities (*loc. cit.*). And *not buying* luxurious product can also be a means to express values.

The second reason to buy luxury products is cultural symbolism. The meanings we attach on a product can influence physiological senses such as taste (2010 : 35). This is a very important ascertainment for my thesis, because it is directly related to my second research question on French branding. Solomon *et al.* note that when consumers share the values that are put forward by a brand, they will find these products more tasty (*loc. cit.*). In TVR's case it could mean that a person believing in ethical and organic meat production will find that TVR's veal stew actually tastes better than a regular one. It might also mean that a Francophile consumer can rate TVR's *boeuf bourguignon* better than a similar product made in Finland. This theme will be further elaborated in the chapter 4, where I present an American research regarding the effects of origin on perceived taste.

Solomon *et al.* also observe the connection between the brand's constructed values and the taste perceived by the consumer, when they note that: “the deeper meanings of a product may help it to stand out from other, similar goods” (2010 : 33). In TVR's case it would mean that being labeled as a responsible meat producer might be what will make the scale tip in favor of their product, when a consumer is facing a situation where he must choose between two otherwise similar products. According to the classification, this is the second reason for buying luxurious products.

As a final reason, Solomon *et al.* note that different industries (food, clothing etc.) offer a variety of different products to consumers, designed to serve in different moments (2010 : 35). This gives the consumer the possibility to differentiate, through his consumption choices, festive and ordinary moments, or free-time from work-time. For instance, we might have jeans that we wear to work, a gown for galas and leggings for yoga. With food, it is no exception. We have specific foods for specific occasions, and also food that is considered less casual than others. TVR's meat products, being in the category of luxury food products but perhaps not on the very top of the scale, could well be offered at a dinner party or other similar, non-mundane occasion.

Constructing your personality, the company's values and festive moments are all adequate reasons, but the reality behind the choices people make is a lot more complex than this and I do not pretend to have provided answers, just viewpoints. In the next four subchapters, I build an insight on the marketing mix of a luxury meat producer through Kotler's 4Ps: price, product, placement and promotion.

2.2 Price as a Communicational Clue

One of the key question for any manager seeking to expand business abroad is that of pricing. How much money are people willing to pay for a certain product? But, as we shall see below, pricing has a big communicational meaning as well. It is a key clue that indicates to the consumer the product belongs to the luxury category. As seen in part 1.2, a higher price is a means to keep the product *exclusive*. As the question about pricing is of major importance, many researchers have given it thought.

Some feel that high prices no longer are the intrinsic feature of luxury products. The American marketing researcher Twitchell even declares that "The democratization of luxury has been the single most important marketing phenomenon of modern times" (2001 : 29). Twitchell's main idea is that the prices of luxury products always come down, and what is now luxury will be at everyone's reach in some years (2001 : 29). So if the price is so low everyone can afford it, can it still be considered luxury? That is also a key question asked by Twitchell (2001 : 29).

However, even if the prices of luxury products have come down in the last decades, Pamela Danziger, another American researcher, states that price is a central communication method in transmitting the luxury feeling to consumers (2005 : 267). Then again, consumers need to have something in exchange of the higher price they pay. According to Danziger, brands need to add value to their product in order to justify a higher price tag (2005 : 169). The fact how much above the luxury product's price is compared to other similar products is a key hint in transmitting the value message. As Danziger puts it, "a product priced at a premium over the average signals greater quality, whereas pricing it close to, but slightly above, the average transmits a value message" (2005 : 267).

Danziger gives the example of candles. Cheap, plain white candles can be sold for a really low price at the local hardware store. But when scent, color, brand, a nice store display and marketing communication are added to this simple product, it becomes a tool for self-expression, pampering and home decoration that people are willing to pay a lot more for. (2005 : 169).

In the next part, we will look more closely how the value can be added to products such as gourmet meat. For products with a limited demand, such as gourmet food, the process of adding value can be crucial. Products that have a smaller turnover needs a higher profit margin in order for the business to be profitable. As Danziger puts it, this in turn comes from *adding value* to the products (2005 : 169).

But how to determine the price? "Triple the value but only double the price" is Danziger's advice (2005 : 169). Below is a quote from her that indicates how pricing should be defined by comparing your own product to similar ones on the market – and if you want for your customers to obtain the sense of specialness they are looking for, you should be careful about not pricing your product too low:

The challenge for luxury marketers is to find the range of prices that their target customers are used to thinking about and used to paying. Take that range as a starting point, plot out the specific product features, benefits, and values that those products deliver at each price point range, then find a place to pitch your specific product with a

vastly enhanced value proposition. You will want to price the product on the upward end of the competitive set but not necessarily too far out of bounds. The opportunity is to add three times the value but only double the price. That is how you can keep the pricing equation stacked in favor of the consumer but not too much in favor of the consumer or else the product loses its specialness. (Danziger, 2005 : 170).

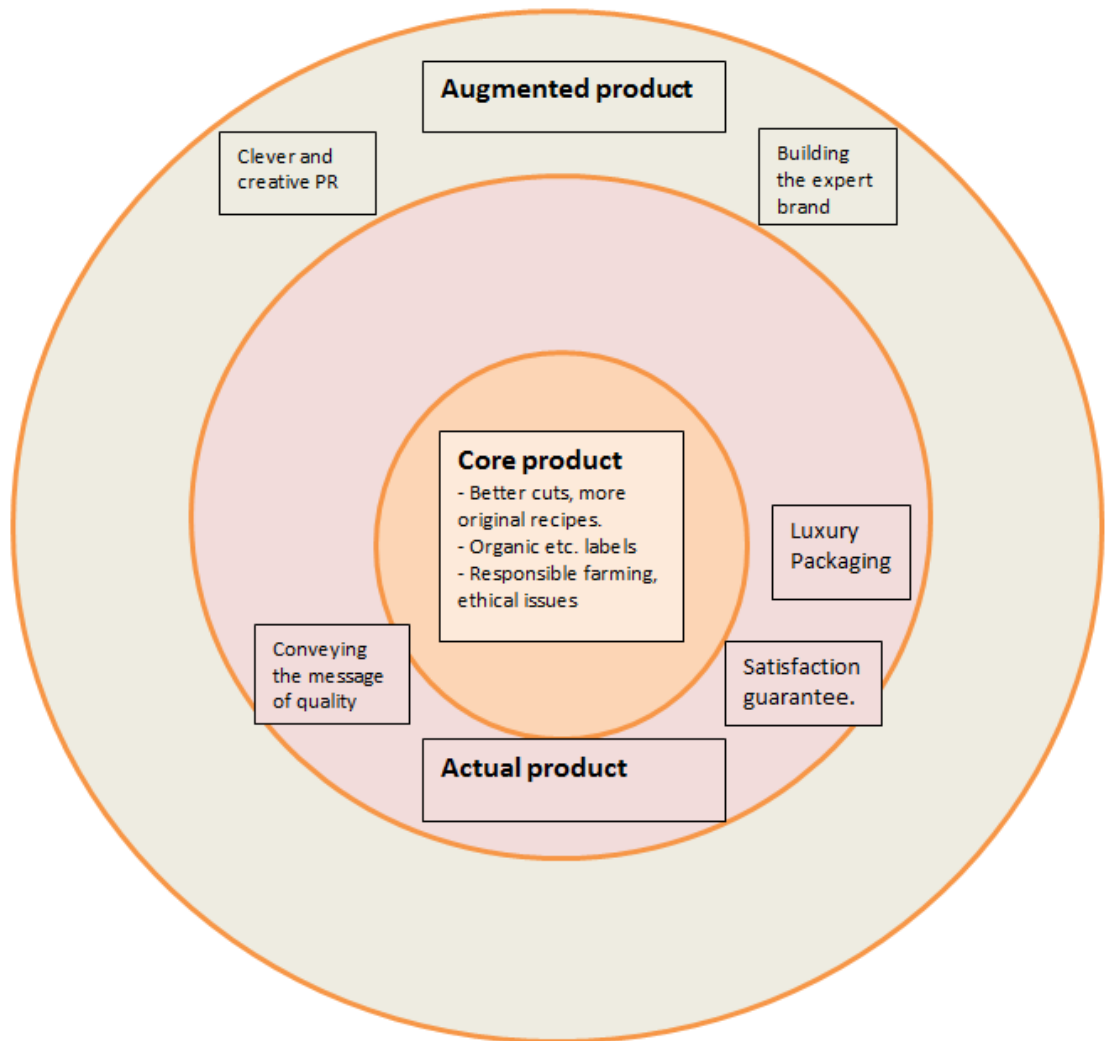
According to this information, a gourmet company could start by observing how similar products on the market are priced; then look for creative ways to add value for consumers; and then define the price significantly higher than a similar plain product but not too high to repel consumers.

I must highlight that different guidelines could be obtained when taking into account more versatile sources. I do not pretend to be exhaustive. My objective here is to give an insight on how to approach the pricing of a luxury product, and to establish that price is a major communicational clue in transmitting luxury value to consumers. This theme will be addressed in the analysis of the interviews as well, in chapter 6. Next, I will elaborate how value can be added to a product.

2.3 Product Layers Are Tools to Add Value

According to Kotler *et al.* (2009 : 506) products have different layers, and each layer is a possibility to bring more value to the consumer. These layers are the core product, the actual product and the augmented product (Kotler *et al.*, 2009 : 506). As previously seen, adding value is crucial in commercializing luxury products. In this subchapter I use Kotler's product layers to think how and what kind of value can be added to gourmet products and meat in particular. Figure 1 gives a general view on the process of adding value to gourmet meat products. Each level is further treated in the text part below.

Figure 1. Adding Value to Gourmet Meat Products at Different Product Levels.



Core product

The core product is the most basic level, and it is simply about the concrete benefits a consumer gets from buying the product (Kotler *et al.*2009 : 507). For instance for a camera, the core benefit can be the possibilities to take pictures and share them online. Here, value can be added by enhancing the core benefits, like in the case of a camera, by providing better technical features (Kotler *et al.*2009 : 507).

Depending on whether the meat is processed or not, it can have different core benefits. In un-processed meat, the core product can be for instance a particular cut of cattle of

breed. Value can be added by enhancing the quality of the cut, making it leaner, deboned, organic etc. In turn, processed meat products such as canned ready meals have been developed to answer the dilemma consumer face when purchasing ready meals. Fewer and fewer of us have time to cook nice meals from scratch, but then again many of the ready meal options in stores aren't perhaps of sufficient quality to bring home or let alone serve guests. There has been a lot of suspicious coverage in traditional and social media about the origin of the meat on the mass market, as well as the conditions beef cattle is subjected to. When consumers buy gourmet ready meals, they can be interested in core benefits such as better quality and taste, an original recipe or preparation method, or ethical matters related to meat production. At the core level, value can be added on these aspects.

Actual product

The actual product is everything the consumer gets when purchasing the core product – for technical equipment, this might be warranty (Kotler *et al*, 2009 : 507). The actual product consists of ways to differentiate the product from other similar core products and persuade consumers to choose this product instead of the competitor's (*loc. cit.*). According to Kotler, enhancing the actual product can comprise attributes such as ameliorating the level of quality, the product or service features, branding and packaging (*loc. cit.*).

As we shall see in upcoming parts as well, packaging is a crucial communication platform in transmitting luxury value. When adding value to the actual product, special care should thus be placed on packaging. It is important that the packaging gives enough details on the product, but then again it cannot be too cluttered or it will lose its luxurious feeling. Other means to add value here is, for instance, include information on the specific farm the cattle comes from or by using other creative means to convey the message of superior quality. Another mean used in the grocery sector is satisfaction guarantee: if the costumer is not satisfied with the product, he can return it and be reimbursed.

Augmented product

Augmented product comes from adding value to your actual product (Kotler *et al*, 2009 : 507). It is formed by non-tangible benefits, such as superior after-sales services or help

lines, fast deliveries and so on (Kotler *et al*, 2009 : 508). The augmented benefits usually demonstrate that the product is indeed better in quality (Kotler *et al*, 2009 : 508).

There are many creative ways for a food producer to add value to the augmented product. Clever communication can play a big role here. For instance, a company could have a recipe bank on their web page; a professional chef available online to answer cooking-related questions; or the company representatives can try to appear publicly in the role of meat experts in shows such as Master Chef. This kind of promotional activity might add to the feeling of quality consumers expect out of the meat products.

Small-scale producers could thus try to communicate the story of responsible farming and strong expertise in the meat sector. Promotional activities are treated further in the following part.

2.4 Promotion Through Storytelling

According to marketing experts, the key in marketing luxury goods is building a coherent and concise story around the brand or product. For instance, the American researcher James B. Twitchell claims that when someone buys any brand item, the person is actually buying the “story” built around the item through advertising (2001 : 156). A similar line of thought is adopted by Pamela Danziger (2005). She highlights how modern luxury is essentially an *experience*, and not a *thing* (2005 : 17).

Twitchell recounts the example of bottled brand water. He states that people are actually incapable of finding difference in taste and continues: “So if you want to separate your water, you do it not by taste but by telling a story” (2001 : 157). Danziger agrees and puts forward that instead of old-school advertising, luxury marketing should focus on storytelling (2005 : 181). Danziger also recommends that stories should be used to promote brand value (2005 : 244). For instance, if a food producer’s key values are responsible farming, or representing French finest gastronomy, these should be used as elements of the storytelling.

Ideally however, storytelling should be more than one-way communication – it should *involve* customers (Danziger 2005 : 244). And what is important is to “develop dialogue with consumers so they can tell stories to you” (Danziger, 2005 : 244). Being in a dialogue with consumers can also be an effective means to remain informed on how consumers feel about the product. As Danziger notes, people are likely to communicate good and bad experiences to their surroundings, to a point where word of mouth becomes extremely important in luxury purchases. According to Danziger, it comes in fourth in the ranking of what influences the purchase of luxury items, preceded by the brand reputation, retailer’s reputation and price–value relationship (2005 : 263). A clever marketer can learn how to use this in his advantage, and word-of-mouth is perhaps even more important when the products are more unfamiliar ones such as veal or canned ready meals.

This subchapter claims that storytelling is a primordial way to transmit the luxury value to consumers. Storytelling will be a major theme in the analytical part of this thesis, as all the interviewees spontaneously addressed the importance of storytelling to luxury marketing. Before we proceed further, there is still one key element to inspect regarding the building of luxury value: placement.

2.5 Placement Consolidates The Brand

Placement is a key factor in the success of any product. Furthermore, the environment where the product is sold acts as a strong quality-clue for the consumers. As Danziger points out, there is significant “synergy between product brand and the store“ (2005: 246). This was also put forward by the experts during the theme interviews. But how to choose suitable retailers and make sure to get the most out of this synergy?

Danziger claims that the consumers focus more and more on the shopping *experience* instead of the actual product they want to purchase (2005 : 214). According to her, the shopping experience should be enhanced to “deliver luxury throughout the buying cycle, from initial consideration through purchase to after the sale” (2005 : 214). Basically this means that a company may want to select retailers who can engage in excellent customer service, because that seems to be what luxury consumers are after.

And good customer service also plays another crucial role; ideally, the salesperson can repeat or enact the brand story to the consumer. A key point from Danziger is that “brand stories have to be part of the retail experience” (2005 : 244). In this way, placement and choice of retailer actually consolidates the brand story. For instance, if a key value is responsible farming, the producer might want to opt for retailer stores that are profiled as responsible and ethical. In addition, the producer could place special care in making sure that the salespersons are familiar with the brand story and can repeat it to the consumers.

In addition to traditional shops, more and more companies opt for the online option. According to Anita Radón’s doctoral thesis, shopping has become the fastest-growing use of the internet (2010 : 23). She claims that “the Internet offers a completely new type of community where influences and opinions from throughout the world” (*sic.*) (2010 : 25). Selling online is an interesting option for small-scale gourmet producers. It is a good platform for dialogue and adding value to the augmented product level. Then again, there are other types of challenges related for instance to the lack of face-to-face customer service, which was deemed crucial by the experts I interviewed.

But according to Radón, brands benefit from a so-called “halo effect” where offline brand power is likely to be transferable to the online environment (Radón, 2010 : 24). As the online environment is well-suited for adding value to the augmented product level, for word-of-mouth through peer review, and storytelling, a good mix might be to combine carefully selected, service-oriented retailers and a strong online community.

In this chapter, I hope to have generated some fresh ideas and perspectives on the different dimensions that need to be taken into account when transmitting luxury value to consumers. What is important to retain is the importance of story-telling in the process of added value – which in turn is primordial on the luxury market. Another key point is the importance of a high-class distribution network. The salespeople are the one facing the consumer and they can provide them service and information prior to purchase decision-making. Next, I will focus on the niche marketing approach suggested by two European researchers for the marketing of delicatessen meat products.

3 Niche Marketing in Promoting Luxury Meat Products

Vasco Tamagnini and Angela Tregear have conducted a very interesting study (1998) where they evaluate the use of niche marketing in the promotion of delicatessen meat products. According to Vasco Tamagnini and Angela Tregear, “by differentiating products and targeting specific consumer groups, small producers can take advantage of market opportunities that larger companies may be unwilling or unable to satisfy” (1998 : 228).

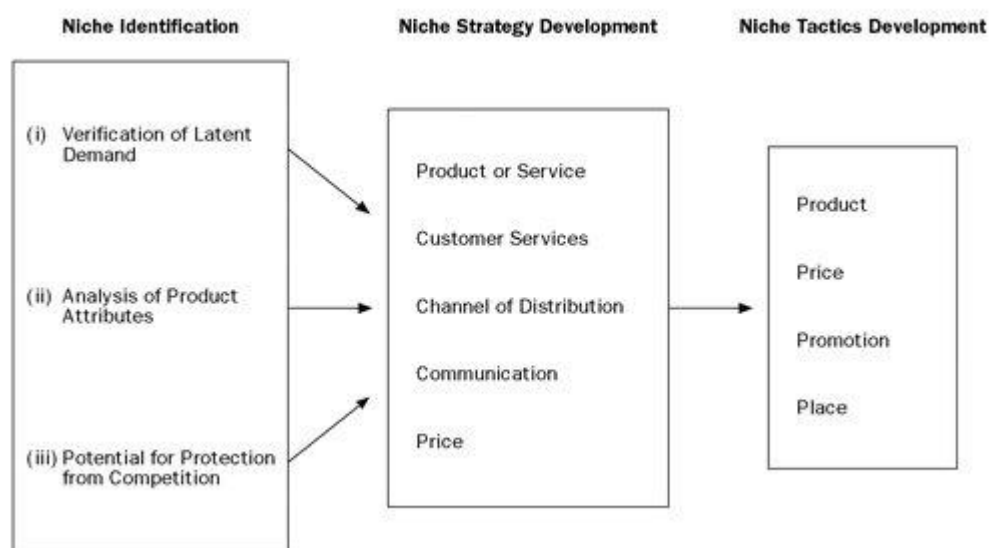
Small producer are unable to compete with large manufacturers, such as Atria or HK Scan. It seems natural that in order for such a small producer to be successful, it needs to differentiate from competitors, find its own niche, select key marketing messages accordingly and communicate them efficiently.

Tamagnini & Tregear used as a case a type of Portuguese dried-meat sausage and wanted to find out if it had potential market in the U.K. For this means, they conducted an interview among 15 delicatessen meat retailers. Their study is worth to be examined more in-depth here, as TVR is currently facing a very similar situation. Instead of thoroughly explaining the market potential for the Portuguese sausage, I shall rather use their theoretical framework to illustrate TVR’s case.

First of all it is important to establish a liaison between the Portuguese sausage and TVR’s meat products. According to Tamagnini & Tregear, the sausage they selected is ideal for niche marketing, because it is a “premium product designed to satisfy an emerging niche clientele”. Furthermore, the product has attributes that make it “very difficult to create similar product characteristics from cheaper raw materials or a faster manufacturing process” (1998 : 235). Both of these definitions can be used to describe TVR’s luxury meat as well, and that makes Tamagnini & Tregear’s study even more relative to my own research.

Tamagnini & Tregear present the steps for successful niche marketing in a compact figure (1998 : 229). I have reproduced their figure below (figure 2), and will use it as a basis for sketching how a small-scale luxury meat production company can ideally benefit from the niche marketing approach.

Figure 2. Niche Identification and Strategy / Tactics Development. Tamagnini & Tregear (1998 : 229).



According to Tamagnini & Tregear (1998 : 230), the first stage in developing a niche marketing plan is to successfully identify the correct niche. There might be several of them, as long as they are clear differences between the niches (Tamagnini & Tregear, 1998 : 230). The two researcher highlight that ideally, there is a strong link between niche identification and marketing / tactics development (1998 : 230), demonstrated by the arrows in figure 2. So basically identifying key marketing messages should begin with recognizing the correct niches.

Niche Identification

To identify correctly the niches, Tamagnini & Tregear suggest Kotler's (1991) three-step approach to be used (1998 : 229). I present Kotler's (1991) approach below with examples related to TVR.

1. Verification of the existence of latent demand in a particular position of the market.

Tamagnini & Tregear suggest that through market analysis, the company locates a niche that is preferably *accessible* and displays a *growth potential* (1998 : 230). Both of these factors form *latent demand* (Tamagnini & Tregear, 1998 : 229). This means that a company should automatically rule out niches that are out of reach or shrinking in size. For instance, inaccessible groups could be people who don't have upscale deli shops

within a convenient radius. Thus, marketing efforts should not be directed to people living in sparsely inhabited communities. There seems to be some growth potential for gourmet meat products, especially more infrequent ones such as French veal or canned ready meals, because there is a relatively narrow offering of these products on the Finnish market.

2. *Assurance that the product offered is sufficiently differentiated to trigger consumer response.* Tamagnini & Tregear state that it is important to ensure that the special product attributes that differentiate the product from others are understood by the brand and clearly communicated to the consumer (1998 : 230). A company such as TVR could start by thoroughly examining the similar or nearly similar products available, and then think of key differences between them and the competitors. These differences should form the basis for marketing communication.

3. *Evidence that the niche is capable of protection against competition.* According to Tamagnini & Tregear, a company needs to protect itself from competition through development of know-how “that is specific and unique to the company and which cannot be imitated or reproduced by others” (1998 : 230). They then suggest that this kind of attributes are communicated to the consumer (*loc. cit.*). I think that TVR’s key protection factor lies in the high-quality meat issued from French cattle of breed, and the know-how of making traditional French recipes with responsible farming as a background ideology. These are both factors that are difficult to copy, and if clearly communicated to the consumer, will help protect TVR’s niche from intruders.

After having correctly identified the right niche(s), the company needs to deploy the findings in its marketing strategy.

Niche Strategy Development

To develop a comprehensive niche marketing strategy, Tamagnini & Tregear suggest that a company focuses on promoting what differentiates it from competitors, and also the company’s own special skills (1998 : 231). A company like TVR could thus decide to focus on their products being authentic French (differentiation) and issued from locally and responsibly grown cattle of breed (own special skill).

Tamagnini & Tregear present Kotler's (1991) approach of the five different levels a company can try to differentiate itself at, and to come up with relative special skills aimed to attract the target niche. These levels are:

- Product or service
- Customer service
- Channel of distribution
- Communication
- Price

At each of these levels, the company should figure out ways to differentiate from competitors and put forward its own special skills. For instance in customer service, a small-scale company could have an online chat service where customers can ask questions about cooking the meat. But as most of these levels were already covered in the previous chapter, I will not deal with them here.

Tamagnini & Tregear highlight that “achieving distinction in all five areas is practically impossible” (1998 : 231). Yet, according to them, differentiation in only one of these areas is insufficient (1998 : 231).

The key is to find the right combination: depending on your product and your niche profile, different marketing approach will work for different niches. For instance in TVR's case, the strategic decision could be made to highlight that the meat is issued from small-scale, responsible production. This might be the single most important marketing message for a certain, eco-friendly niche. Yet, for another more gastronomic-type niche, the most important message could be that the food is typical French food that follows traditional recipes. For allergic people, it might be important to know that the product is made from all-natural ingredients and doesn't contain additives. These are all strategic marketing decisions that need to be made according to the identified niches and a clear vision on the consumers that belong to them (Tamagnini & Tregear, 1998 : 231).

Niche Tactics Development

Once a company has identified the niches and their strategic marketing messages, the next step is to develop communicational tactics to make sure the messages get across to the consumers in the niche (Tamagnini & Tregear, 1998 : 232). The suggested approach

by Tamagnini & Tregear to developing tactics is the use of Kotler's 4Ps (product, price, placement, promotion) (1998 : 231) that I presented in chapter 2. According to them, "The mix should be based on the combination of strategic specialisms identified in the previous stage, with successful implementation a consequence of the best blend of all the mix variables" (1998 : 231).

What should be retained from Tamagnini & Tregear's model is that niche marketing is especially appropriate for luxury food companies targeting one or more specific segment. What is crucial, is to correctly identify the niches. Equally crucial is to find the right key messages to each niche: what differentiation point or own skill should be highlighted?

Even though "niche marketing is often put forward as an option for success for small producers in the food sector" (Tamagnini & Tregear, 1998 : 235), I want to highlight that the purpose of this chapter was only to give one certain point of view on how a company manufacturing small-scale gourmet meat products could approach their marketing communication strategy. I am sure there are other researches that emphasize another type of approach, and that is why it is important to note that this chapter's purpose is to provide new insight on the theme, not to treat the matter exhaustively. I also want to highlight that even though niche marketing can be considered appropriate for some small-scale producers, as Tamagnini & Tregear point out "it does carry high levels of risk, emphasizing the need for accurate identification of a potential niche market" (1998 : 235).

In my introductory chapter I was interested in whether being a French brand is a positive differentiation factor. As it is a central theme in my research and a crucial part of one of my research questions, it is important to present what is the perception on French food in general. This is the theme of my next chapter.

4 How Finns Perceive French Grocery Products

In this chapter I contemplate the advantage that a French brand image can bring to a food company operating in Finland. This is a very central theme for my thesis, as directly linked to my second research question. I will approach this theme by first presenting and reviewing an article treating product perception on French products. Then, I describe the attitudes Finns have towards French grocery products, basing myself on a very interesting article by the Finnish Harri Luomala.

4.1 Client Perception on French Brands

The article by Leclerc, Schmitt and Dubé published in 1994 in the *Journal of Marketing Research* is very useful for my thesis, because it aims to clarify how a French-sounding brand name influences customer perception towards a product, compared to an English-sounding name. The authors did three different experiments on the theme, and they present the results of all three of them in this article. In this subchapter I explain briefly their most interesting findings.

4.1.1 Does a French-Sounding Name Influence Product Perception?

Before conducting the experiments the three researchers classified, with the help of the test subjects, products belonging to three different categories: hedonic (a product that's primary function is to give pleasure, like chocolate), utilitarian (like foil paper) and hybrid, a product that has features from both of the previous categories (like body lotion).

In their first experiment, Leclerc, Schmitt and Dubé had 40 students evaluating products from the three categories cited above. The researchers had made up product names such as Lariant, Orman and Massin, and had a bilingual person pronounce the names either in the French or American English way (1994 : 264). After having heard the fictional brand names, the students had to evaluate on a scale from 1 to 7 different aspects of the hedonic, utilitarian and hybrid products. They evaluated for instance how much pleasure they estimated they will get using the product.

By doing this experiment Leclerc, Schmitt and Dubé found out that students systematically evaluated getting more pleasure from products whose brand name was pronounced in French, compared to English – and this *regardless* of the product category in question. They also had more positive attitudes toward both the product and the brand when the name was pronounced in French, for products belonging to the hedonic category. (1994 : 265)

The results obtained by Leclerc, Schmitt and Dubé date from twenty years ago and they had a very small number of students in their sample. However, I believe that the results they obtained reflect a general attitude towards French products in Finland and elsewhere – a French-sounding name might indeed trigger positive attitudes towards the brand and the product. However, vaster studies would need to be conducted locally in order for this assumption to be validated. For a company that is pondering which marketing name to adopt, these results carefully hint that it is worth considering having a French-sounding name.

4.1.2 Which Is More Important, Real or Perceived Country of Origin ?

As Leclerc, Schmitt and Dubé point out themselves, there are numerous brands out there that are looking to build a brand image that reflects another country of origin than in reality (1994 : 263). As an example, I could state Estée Lauder cosmetics – it is an American brand with Made in USA products, yet it still strives to build a French brand image. Why is that? In the following part I try to clarify how country of origin, real or fictional, influences the consumer.

In their second experiment Leclerc, Schmitt and Dubé compared how 184 students reacted to brand name and country of origin. Their special interest was to find out how a discordance between these two (like in the Estée Lauder case) influences their perception. Their initial assumption was that country of origin and foreign branding should be equally strong influencers (1994 : 266).

They noticed that here too, students thought to receive more pleasure out of “French” products. It made no difference whether the cue on the origin was given by French branding or by the Made in France label – in any case, the subjects would give higher

points than to the “American” counterparts. Another finding was that if the foreign branding was in discordance with the country of origin, such as with Estée Lauder cosmetics, French-style products lose their advantage. When faced to this kind of discordance, the consumer will no longer think that the “so-called” French product will bring him more pleasure. (1994 : 265)

The results obtained here carefully suggest that a company such as TVR, whose products are all made in France, should opt for a French branding as well. When no discordance is present, a company can make the most out of a good country reputation (Leclerc, Schmitt and Dubé 1994 : 266).

4.1.3 Can A French Brand Image Alter Taste Evaluations ?

Can French branding actually change the way a product tastes? According to Leclerc, Schmitt and Dubé, it can.

Their third experience consisted of having 42 students evaluating a yoghurt (a typical hybrid product), having first listened to its name being pronounced either in French or English. The fictional name of the yoghurt was *Orman*. Half of the subjects tasted the product, while the other half had to evaluate it without sensory exposure. What they found out is extremely interesting: the product was systematically evaluated more hedonic *by both groups* when the name was pronounced in French. What is even more interesting is that the product was rated more hedonic within the group who actually tasted it. This means that a French pronunciation of a brand name can lead to the product being evaluated more hedonic *even and especially* after having tasted the product.

Although Leclerc’s, Schmitt’s and Dubé’s article dates from twenty years ago and was conducted in another country with a relatively small sample, it gives us a good general view on how French branding can influence customers’ perception of the product. What I think should be retained from this is that French-sounding products are estimated to generate more overall pleasure, and even tasting the product will not necessarily change this estimation among consumers.

4.2 Finns' Attitudes towards French Food

In popular culture, French food is often represented as a symbol of elegance, good taste and gastronomy. That is why I was so surprised to see how few academic publications there actually were on the reputation of French gastronomy. It definitely deserves more scientific attention. One really interesting article, however, is that of the Finnish Harri Luomala, published in the Journal of Business Research in 2007. He conducted interviews among Finns and wanted to find out their attitudes towards French, German and Swedish foods. His results are really interesting.

The method used by Luomala was to interview Finnish food professionals. Each interview lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. The focus was placed on the interviewees' attitudes towards Swedish, German and French food. Before presenting his results, Luomala explains his theoretical framework that he uses to analyze his results. Luomala uses a three-way categorization to label feelings that the country of origin evokes among consumers (2007 : 123). First, there are *cognitive aspects*. These are aspects that a consumer prefers in a certain product category (e.g. *sweet melons*). He uses prior knowledge to mirror whether a certain product meets these attributes: he might have a favorite brand of melons which he finds especially tasty. Or, he can use deduction in his decision making process: he knows that Spain is sunny, and that sun is needed to make fruits sweet, thus he will choose Spanish melon. (2007 : 123)

The consumer might also lean on *affective* or *normative* aspects in their decision making (Luomala, 2007 : 123). Affective aspects are the emotions and feelings consumers attribute to different regions, countries or peoples (*loc. cit.*). A typically affective aspect is to associate certain foods to certain regions, like pasta to Italy and croissants to France. Normative aspects, for their part, are made of the ethical considerations that buying products coming from a certain region evokes (*loc. cit.*). A typical example of this are boycotts. Luomala highlights that all these three factors (cognitive, affective and normative aspects) interact and do not operate independently of one another (*loc. cit.*).

So this forms the basis of Luomala's theoretical framework. For his qualitative analysis, he chose in advance 18 Finnish food professionals. He divided his interviewees into three groups: those focusing on comparing Finnish and Swedish foods

(7 persons), Finnish and German foods (8 persons), and Finnish and French foods (only 3 persons). I find it unfortunate that the French group had so much less participants than the two others, and the author failed to give any reasons for this uneven distribution (2007 : 124).

In the following, I present and develop a little further Luomala's findings.

Country Brand

Finns perceive Germans as systematic and precise, but also inflexible, rude and boring (127 : 125). Swedish, on their turn, are seen to be proud but on the other hand our friendly rivals (*loc. cit.*). Attributes related to France were high status, sophistication and historical importance; on the other side, French were seen as clannish, rude and overrated (*loc. cit.*). I note that for all countries, there are positive as well as negative attributes.

Cognitive Meanings

The cognitive meanings mentioned by the interviewees were that Swedish food is mundane, German food is unhealthy and French food is clean, which Luomala found surprising (2007 : 125). In Luomala's opinion, Finns must have such a positive attitude towards French food that it causes a bias in their way of thinking. According to him, this might be the reason why Finns claim French food to be clean, even though it is produced in very similar conditions than German food (2007 : 125). When Luomala conducted the interviews, the grocery store chain Lidl had recently opened its first stores in Finland, and at the time documentary films were shown on television that criticized German meat production. According to Luomala, these were all factors that influenced the interviewees into thinking German food is unhealthy (2007 : 126). One quote of the interviewee, put forward by Luomala in his article, attributes to French food small pastry shops, fields with cows grazing and small wine producers villages. These are all images that lead to the conception of French food being healthier and cleaner.

Affective Meanings

Affective meaning attributed to Swedish food was “uninteresting”, to German “primitive enjoyment” (simple and rustic meals with a lot of fat and salt), and to French “esthetic” (Luomala, 2007 : 125). According to the study, Finnish people view French food particularly suitable for festive occasions. Finns feel that French people are careful about the esthetic side of the food they offer and prepare (*loc. cit.*).

Normative Meanings

Finns have no moral issues that would stop them from buying Swedish food, but they did put forward some ethical reservations in regards of the purchase of German products. However, French food was not only seen as free of any moral constraints, but the interviewees also felt that buying it is a way to mark higher status: “Finnish consumers think that French food is most useful for impressing others, that is, to convey the image to guests that their host/ess is a quality-oriented and sophisticated person”. (Luomala 2007 : 126)

Reflections

Results obtained by Luomala show that the participants clearly favor French food over Swedish or German, and that French food has an excellent reputation among Finns (see table 1). I find it unfortunate that only 3 persons were interviewed regarding French food, because it makes me doubt the results can be thought as representative of the general attitudes. However, I find this study to give good indications on Finns’ view on French food.

Based on the two studies presented in chapter 4, it does seem that French food is appreciated by consumers in Finland and abroad. However, to answer my three research questions, I have interviewed Finnish food professionals on their views on French branding as well as the other topics central to this thesis. In the following chapter, I present the methodology used, and then I will proceed in presenting the results.

5 Methodology

The purpose of this study is to answer my three research questions:

- 1) What communicational practices can be used to promote gourmet products?
- 2) Are country of origin and ethical production product attributes that should be used as key marketing messages?
- 3) What kind of special communicational aspects have to be taken into account when marketing meat products such as veal and canned ready-meals, if any?

As all these questions are subjective by nature, they demand a qualitative approach. In order to answer the research questions, I chose to use themed interviews. It is the most common way to collect qualitative data in Finland (Aaltola & Valli, 2001 : 24), and I figured it is the best way to approach such wide and subjective themes. Nigel King, a specialist of the qualitative research method, uses the term “qualitative research interview” instead of “themed interview” (1994 : 14). Here, I use these terms as synonymous since they both describe the same phenomenon.

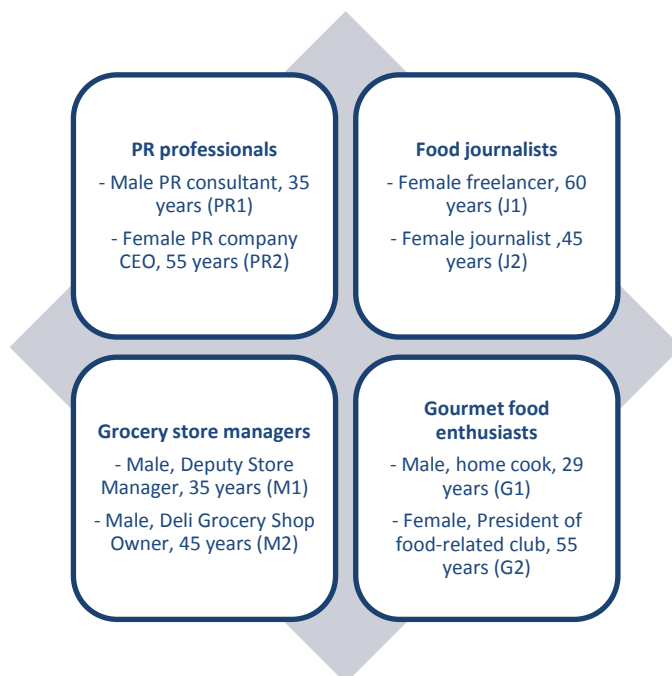
As Aaltola & Valli put it, a themed interview is a form of discussion (2001 : 24) that provides the interviewee the opportunity to give his opinions on a certain theme (2001 : 25) and perhaps share their own experiences related to it (2001 : 26). According to King, it is a highly flexible method for producing data “of great depth” (1994 : 14). It is characterized by “a low degree of structure imposed by the interviewer” and a “preponderance of open questions” (King 1994 : 14–15). Thus, I judged it suits particularly the wide and subjective topics I treat in this thesis.

Interviewees

To get the most adequate information and insight, I wanted to interview only people who are engaged in gastronomy either by profession or by strong personal interest. I figured these people have the most information that is relevant to my research questions. To get versatile viewpoints, I selected interviewees that had four different backgrounds: food journalists, food PR professionals, gourmet food enthusiasts and

grocery store managers. I interviewed two person from each of this group, so 8 person in total.

Figure 2. Interviewees grouped according to their profiles.



As shown in Figure 2, half of the interviewees are men and half of them women. The age of the interviewees varies approximately between 29 and 60 years, basing myself on my own evaluation. I will make no distinction based on age or sex in the analysis part, and I brought them up here only to give the reader a more comprehensive idea on the interviewees.

In figure 2 above, each person is followed by an identity code. Although age and sex are irrelevant factors for my study, it is important to distinguish the answers of each of the respondents. That is why I have indicated, after each quote, the identity code of the respondent. PR indicates the respondent is a PR consultant, followed by the number 1 or 2 to differentiate from the two respondents belonging to each category. J is short for journalist, M for manager, and G for gourmet enthusiast.

The interviews were conducted in November 2014 in Helsinki. Places such as cafés, stores and private homes served for the interviewing purposes. All interviews were conducted face-to-face, with a recorder recording the discussions. Permission to record

was asked and obtained by all the respondents. The recordings were then fully transcribed. All interviews were conducted in Finnish, but I note that for one of the interviewees Finnish was not his mother tongue, although he speaks it fluently. The parts I use in this research to illustrate my findings have been translated to English by myself. Each interview lasted between 30 to 55 minutes, with an average duration of 42 minutes. I chose to conduct the interviews individually, although it is also possible to conduct themed interviews in groups or pairs (Aaltola & Valli, 2001 : 27).

Interview guide

As the approach I chose are themed interviews, the interviewees could speak more or less freely on the topics I had chosen beforehand. No strict questionnaire had been prepared. Like King puts forward, the interview guide for a themed interview is more like a list of topics to be treated, instead of definitive questions (1994 : 19). With all interviewees, we spoke about these topics: food marketing; introducing new food products to the Finnish market; food trends; meat consumption trends; French food; ethical and organic issues in meat and other products; veal meat; canned meat products; gourmet foods; social media and other marketing/promotional channels.

According to King, a free and flexible approach to the interview guide suits best qualitative research interviews (1994 : 19). No particular order was followed in introducing my research themes to the respondents, and they were addressed in different lengths following the respondents background, profile, conversation manners and train of thought. I gave the general theme of the interview to the interviewees beforehand, but highlighted that no preliminary preparation was necessary.

According to King, there are three different legitimate source for determining the interview themes. These are “the research literature, the interviewer’s own personal knowledge and experience of the area; and informal preliminary work such as unstructured discussions with people (...)” (King 1994 : 19). The themes I treated with the interviewees, listed above, stemmed from all of these categories. While some were directly linked to this thesis’ theoretical background, such as promoting country of origin or marketing approaches related to gourmet food; others were not treated in the theoretical framework. For instance the usage of social media as a marketing tool was not treated in-depth in the theoretical part of this thesis, but I still judged it as an

important theme that can bring relevant information for my research questions. In addition, discussions I had with the CEO of the case company also influenced the themes I chose. For instance, based on these informal discussions, I asked questions related to the consumption of veal meat and canned food products.

Although the themes I presented above were treated with virtually all the respondents, I did alter the emphasis given to each theme. It is important to note that in addition to these themes, many other topics were addressed during the interviews as well. As King highlights, “the development of the interview guide does not end at the start of the first interview. It may be modified through use (...)” (1994 : 19). Thus, during the interviews I made sure that all of these common themes were treated but then let the conversation flow more or less spontaneously around the topic of marketing gourmet products. I felt it was important not to restrict heavily what the interviewees wanted to bring to my attention. And after all, as King points out, “flexibility and openness (...) are at the heart of qualitative research.” (1994 : 25).

Organizing and analyzing the data

When all the interviews were fully transcribed, I used a particular data analyzing method labeled as *editing* (King 1994 : 26, citing Miller & Crabtree 1992 : 20). In this analyzing method, the researcher searches and scrutinizes the data for meaningful segments and then cuts, pastes and rearranges the segments until “the reduced summary reveals the interpretive truth in the text” (King 1994 : 26, citing Miller & Crabtree 1992 : 20).

The segments I found form the structure of the analysis part, as can be seen in the division into chapters and subchapters. After I had divided all content under the relevant segment or theme, I started looking out more closely about the content to see if the respondents shared similar viewpoints or, in the contrary, there came up disagreements. I examined closely the opinions and stories they shared, in the aim to provide as comprehensive answers as possible to my research questions.

When presenting the findings, I rely mostly on the arguing technique labeled as *illustrative* by the qualitative research specialist Jennifer Mason (2002 : 176). Thus, I

strive to provide a meaningful illustration, in this case a quote, for each argument I make in analyzing the data.

In the following chapter, I present the key findings that arose from these eight interviews. The results presented here cannot be thought of as general since they reflect the subjective opinions of eight person. The results obtained might have been significantly different had the respondents had a different background; or had they been different individuals with a similar professional background. The fact that all respondents live and work in the capital region might also influence findings and make them difficult to generalize to the whole country. Despite these restrictions, I think that the interviews give valuable information and insight on the communicational practices related to marketing gourmet meat products.

6 Transmitting Gourmet Values

When discussing the communicational practices used to promote gourmet meat products, several aspects arose from the interview. In this chapter I present general insight given by the respondents on transmitting gourmet values. Altogether, the information presented here forms a core to the answer of my first research question:

1) What communicational practices can be used to promote gourmet products?

The experts seemed to adopt spontaneously a similar train of thought as presented in chapter 2. According to them, gourmet value is built on a product for instance through pricing, packaging and choice of retailers. These themes are all treated below. As niche marketing was presented in part 3 as a key marketing tactic, I have regrouped below also the viewpoints of the respondents on the correct niche and niche identification for small-scale gourmet meat producers. The last part of this chapter is dedicated to the description of current food trends in Finland. Although this is not directly linked to my research questions, I wanted to bring it up here because it provides valuable information on the environment any food producer and marketing professional operates in at the moment. But first, I wanted to know what could be considered as gourmet or luxury food by the respondents.

As seen in chapter 1.2, luxurious food can be defined by the following criteria: *sophistication* (in texture, taste, savor...) and *differentiation* by qualities such as price, exoticism, or packaging style /etiquette (Van der Veen 2003 : 420). In addition, luxury products are consumed out of *pleasure*, not out of necessity (2003 : 420). Interestingly, these aspects were also mentioned by the respondents when asked to explain what is luxury or gourmet food. I have regrouped below a summary on the viewpoint of Finnish experts on what is gourmet food.

6.1 Anything Can Be Gourmet

The traditional image of gourmet food tends to be something that is rather hard to get and expensive. But what is the opinion of food experts in contemporary Finland?

The respondents do not draw any line on what type of ingredient can be gourmet, and they even state that very ordinary products such as potatoes or ham can be gourmet. More important is the quality of the ingredients, freshness, presentation and packaging. Those can turn a simple product into a gourmet-one, as this comment illustrate:

”For me, the most important thing in gourmet food is the quality of the ingredients. They don’t have to be fancy, in my opinion, but they need to be first-class in quality. Another criteria of gourmet food is how they have been handled and prepared. That makes the combo. And thirdly I think gourmet food always needs to be presented beautifully.” –G2

This comment indicates that gourmet products are much more than the mere product itself and that visual esthetics can play a crucial role in leveraging a product to the gourmet category. Looks alone do not seem to be enough, since everyone agrees that gourmet food is essentially also better in quality. However, respondents were not unanimous on what makes an ingredient better in quality. Many cited freshness as one key factor, but quite surprisingly many viewed canned or processed products as capable of reaching a gourmet-level, even though they are preserved goods. Some, however, viewed that gourmet foods are always non-processed. Frozen foods divided opinions, some viewed them almost as good as the fresh ones, while others were not as benign. Below two comments illustrate these matters further:

“Something that has been frozen correctly, and thawed correctly, can in many cases be almost as good as the fresh product, like lean fish” –G1

“With frozen foods it happens often that the etiquettes and all are damaged by the storing, and they start resembling old and even though I can see it still has sales time it looks old and like it has been circling around and thawing from time to time, even if it hadn’t.” –G2

Apart from freshness, good quality and visual esthetics, another interesting criteria that came up was the *authenticity* of the product. I have transcribed below a rather long comment, because I think it illustrates well the link between authenticity and gourmet food:

“When you walk into a Finnish store, the first thing you see is many meters of “thinly sliced” cold cuts of processed meat (...) but it’s not genuine or authentic. In France,

Spain and Italy they have lovely air-dried sausages and hams. But in Finland it says on the packages “lovely thinly-sliced air-dried ham”, but it’s like from Snellman, and it’s like an imitation of the real thing. And this is actually a big part of my food philosophy and the core of this gourmet matter, and I actually just found it right now, the real high-quality ingredient that is presented as it is. And not turned into some kind of processed horror.” –G1

What is important to retain from all of these quite different opinions is that apparently there is no single definition on what gourmet food can or cannot be in today’s food scene. From all of these answers oozes the viewpoint that gourmet food has something more or extra compared to regular products, but what that something extra is, is not as clearly defined as perhaps some decades ago. Gourmet food can be fresh or preserved, fancy or ordinary, local or exotic; as long as the ingredients are first class, or perhaps *sophisticated* to use Van der Veen’s terminology (2003 : 420).

6.2 Price Is An Important Clue

According to Van der Veen’s definition, price is a way to differentiate ordinary food from luxurious food (Van der Veen 2003 : 420). Pamela Danziger agrees, by putting forward that price is a central communication method in transmitting the luxury feeling to consumers (2005 : 267). And the experts I interviewed felt the same about pricing.

During the interviews, many respondents stated that price is in fact a way to let the customer know that the product is supposed to belong to the gourmet category. The higher the price, the higher is the expected quality. Of course there were some exceptions that were mentioned, such as seasonal products, which usually cost less and are of better quality than non-seasonal; and gourmet foods made from cheaper ingredients, such as pulled pork.

“Maybe it [image of gourmet food] comes from the price. But it’s not always the price, for instance a gourmet menu can be cooked from cheap ingredients but on the other hand a single gourmet product can be really expensive.” -M1

According to the data I gathered, added value comes from a nicer purchasing environment, visual esthetics, better-quality service and a more informed purchasing experiment. These can be means to justify a higher price tag. Many respondent listed

presentation and packaging in being in a crucial role in creating the feeling of a gourmet product, and were ready to pay more for these attributes. Packaging will be dealt more thoroughly in part 6.4.

Another interesting aspect related to pricing is the following: the more specific information is at hand on a given product, the more value the consumer sees in it. A higher price could thus be justified by adding information next to the product, such as where the product has been grown, by whom and in which kind of surroundings. This kind of information is all related to the story-building, treated more in chapter 8, but below is a comment that illustrates the matter:

”It’s the same thing when there is a note next to the stack of carrots that indicates that they come from this and this farm, located here and there, this is the farmer and they have been plucked then and then. It gives me immediately the sensation wow, I know where these come from. Even a bulk product, let’s say a potato, if I go to K-market in the Fall and there is a note saying these basket potatoes are from Sipoo, wow, and I know that they are good on top of it, that brings value to it. And next to it are ordinary potatoes, and that just doesn’t feel as good, I’m ready to pay more for the potato from Sipoo.” –G2

Another important issue regarding price is *context*, as seen in part 2.1 through Solomon *et al.*’s theory on consumer behavior (2010). People are willing to pay different amounts in different situations, and as this comment shows, salespersons ought not to sell the most expensive or most gourmet product to the client, but the best product in relation to his current needs. This is very important, since as we shall see in part 6.5, what salespersons recommend can have a huge influence on the consumer’s purchasing decision, especially in the deli market context.

“(…)in the beginning of the customer service interaction one could start by asking what the client intends to prepare out of it and map out his needs and desires and ask what he is doing. Because it pays off to sell the *best* product to the client, not the most expensive, or the least expensive, but the best product to meet his needs.” –M1

Some are willing to pay more also to support their local entrepreneur, running a small-scale business.

“Many are ready to pay in order to support the small entrepreneur and keep his business running and it is also a way to show respect to the know-how of the shopkeeper.” –G2

Those who are especially seen as willing to pay higher prices are people who are interested in gourmet and quality food, or *foodies*. In opposition, the respondents felt there are always people who will go for the best price and base their purchasing criteria solely on that, and also people who try to get the best product they can afford, without necessarily seeking the gourmet experience.

Perhaps what is most important to retain on price-related matters is that price indeed is an important clue in positioning the product to the gourmet category. Thus a gourmet food producer needs to think clever ways to justify the higher price tag, and deliver a high-quality product. It was also stated that masses are likely to buy products with the best price. But then who are those people willing to pay extra? This is the theme of the next subchapter.

6.3 Gourmet Consumers Harder to Define

In part 3 we saw Tamagnini's and Tregear's study on using niche marketing in the context of gourmet meat products. Thus, I asked the respondents who they think form the main consumer group, and obtained interesting information.

As we all know the current economic situation in Finland is generally thought to be challenging, it is a legitimate issue to contemplate on whether gourmet products actually have potential clients.

According to the interviews, the general trend seems to be that people cook more at home. Almost all consumers have some special events, weekends, and festive moments when they like to splurge and treat themselves, their families and friends to more expensive foods. As interest towards food and cooking is increasing, it becomes increasingly difficult to define specific niches. Additionally, drawing a strict line between people who buy gourmet foods and people who do not becomes more difficult as more and more people are interested in cooking.

“I believe that the trend is so shattered that one day a person can be really stingy and only buy canned pea soup and then on the weekend starts cooking a gourmet dish out of duck (...) or a person can be in a hurry and grab a ready meal and then the next day he has six hours to spend on cooking something really elaborate. It is very difficult to segment consumers nowadays.” –J2

Other respondent also commented on the fact that cooking is a more and more unisex pastime and people of all ages take interest in it.

Even though segmentation is difficult, regional disparities remain evident. Respondent feel that the most potential clientele is in the big cities of Southern Finland, and that people in the countryside are less aware and less eager to try out new food trends. On the other hand, as one respondent accurately points out, farmers consume often fresh, local, organic and ethically produced food when they eat food grown in their backyards. It just has not been labeled or branded gourmet. In countryside, there might be fewer shops and a narrower choice of products, and people are less familiar with foreign products.

”It might be different around Helsinki and in Southern Finland, but even today something like feta cheese is not at all self-evident in other parts of Finland. Or it might begin to be but I don’t come up with any better example. But we can’t suppose that when we’re talking about tofu, I’ve just received inquiries on what is tofu. It was used in some recipe without first having explained what it was. So I would say people definitely are more aware here.” –J2

These viewpoints carefully hint that a gourmet food producer should perhaps not segment his products according to characteristics such as age or sex, since cooking is increasingly becoming everyone’s hobby. Instead, what can be pondered on is the possibility to target the products for special festive occasions or dinner parties. Thus a potential client can be anybody wanting to buy better food, with just perhaps a slight tilt towards urban dwellers of Southern Finland. However, the data used in this thesis is too narrow for any kind of generalization.

6.4 Packaging Speaks For Itself

Packaging is in a crucial role in creating the feeling of a gourmet product, and it serves as an important platform in communicating with the consumer. According to the respondents, it serves two main functions: to provide necessary product information, and to convey the message of luxury. It is also a communication channel between the brand and the consumer, and an effective means for telling the brand/product story or for sharing recipes. Recipes are in a crucial role in selling an uncommon food product, as we shall see in 8.3.1. As one respondent stated, packaging might be the only clue for the consumer to base himself on when making the purchasing decision.

What, then, is good packaging? There seemed to be many opinions on this matter. Some discussion arose on whether there should even be any, as many stated that a product seems more high-quality when you can choose it yourself from a service counter or a stack. Buying from a counter conveys the sense of higher quality, as the consumer gets to choose exactly which chunk of meat, cheese or other product he wants, and there is interaction with the salesperson which in turn seems to be very appreciated among food lovers.

This comment below highlights the wish for consumers to see the product itself:

“With food, there is always the challenge that both in ready meals and raw ingredients that it never looks good in the package. Studies show that the consumer wants to see what it is like, he must see what the product is like, otherwise he can’t make the purchase decision. That’s why they look like they do, when we have like chicken slices there. Of course it would be nicer that they would look a little more sophisticated but it is not possible.” –PR2

Based on the information that came up during the discussions, a food producer might want to consider whether his products are sold in a package or by weight.

If there is packaging, it needs to be attractive, neat, and give the correct product information set by regulations. Size is also a matter to be considered. Should gourmet products be sold in small packages, that might convey the image of exclusiveness?

Would the product lose its specialness if sold in large economy packs? There were different opinions related to package size:

“Of course it can [be sold in large packs]. Many might think it’s not possible, but why not. You can pack vendace caviar [*muikunmäti*] to packages of all sizes.” –G1

”Gourmet food... makes me think of something smaller in size. What comes to my mind is something small and pretty.” –M1

But whatever the size, if there is packaging around a gourmet product it needs to be thoughtful and convey the right impression. Two kinds of packaging types were mentioned especially: minimalistic packaging, where the product can speak for itself; and really well-thought, complex and decorative packaging. These comments illustrate the matter:

“Probably at the moment exclusivity can be built in a fun way through simplifying. It is no longer necessary to be gold-plated and ostentatious, in the contrary it can be even a little rugged and genuine or authentic feeling in the product, and that brings the exclusivity to it” –PR1

“[Gourmet products] Are usually packed in something expensive, expensive looking (...). A gourmet product might be for instance packed in cardboard and then re-packed in something else, in a way it’s almost like a present and it’s easy to offer as a gift to someone. So if something costs 10 euros, it better be packed four times (laughter).” –M1

These comments indicate that some kind of differentiation suits the packaging of gourmet products, either by being really complex or by being really minimalistic. In either way, the sense of exclusiveness should be conveyed.

However, matters related to packaging are not so simple. As one of the respondents noted, products tend to look very much alike. She illustrated her point by showing on her computer screen products of different brands: smartphones, magazines, cars and detergent. The products were visually so identical that the only way to recognize them was through reading the brand label. Why would strong brands create products that are almost the copy of the rival’s product? According to this respondent, it is not a matter of coincidence that brands make their products look alike: it evokes a sense of familiarity

for the consumer. She explains the difficult combination brands need to face in the food industry and elsewhere, where a selling packaging is innovative and fresh but not too much, either it will lose the familiarity points.

“When you look at these products [points to a photo of two almost identical detergent packs] and they are next to each other on the shelves of Prisma, the first thing that comes to mind is why the fuck they don’t make them look different. But they have their point in making them look alike, they look familiar. And it is quite an art to make people choose a certain product.” –PR2

Although it can be important that the product resembles others in the same category, differentiating a gourmet product visually from the non-gourmet category is important:

“If the product is French, it could have the silhouette of the village or a wine barrel next to it or a really juicy-looking Charolais cow, something special that makes it different from Pirkka or Extra products.” –G2

As seen above, packaging is a very complex issue that demands careful consideration. According to the discussions had with the food professionals, a food producer needs to consider at least the following questions regarding packaging: Should the product be sold by weight or should it be packed? How to evoke exclusiveness through the packaging? What is a good package size? Does the package contain all the right information according to current legislation? It is also wise to take a look on what rival products are sold on the market, so the producer can position himself correctly on the familiarity–differentiation axis.

6.5 Choice of Retailers

As observed in chapter 2.4, the choice of retailer is primordial in selling a gourmet product. Ideally, there is synergy between the brand and the store (Danziger, 2005 : 246). The shopping experience in itself needs to transmit the feeling of exclusiveness (Danziger 2005 : 214). The interviewees seemed to share Danziger’s views. Gourmet consumers seem to long for nice purchasing experiences. It was a recurrent theme in the interviews, as it was observed that gourmet is much more than the actual product. It was claimed to be about authenticity, visual esthetics, and a sense of unhurried leisure. These are all aspects where the retail store play an important role.

In addition to these facts, the choice of retailer might also directly influence product perception:

“The store environment creates the feeling of being in Lidl or in a deli shop. And I admit that the same product, if it is in Lidl or in the deli shop, I appreciate it differently. The environment, the nice display and personal customer service do matter.” –G2

If the product is sold in a deli shop, it can thus act as a signal to the consumer that the product is of higher quality. But are many consumers willing to take the detour and spend additional time grocery shopping, compared to conveniently grabbing everything from the closest supermarket? This is a theme many respondents pondered on, and the most recurrent answer was that on special occasions consumers might be willing to linger in deli shops, but if a product wants to actually be sold in larger quantities it needs to be accepted to the selection carried by the two largest supermarket chains, S or K.

As explained by one of the respondents, the supermarket chains need to have big enough volumes for a product to be accepted. For instance in S stores, a product catalogue is compiled in the Helsinki headquarters and sent out to all the S shop managers to choose the products that will be sold in the stores. Most of the products sold are those that have been accepted to the central catalogue, but some exceptions remain:

“If they [store managers] see that their area is special, for instance here in Helsinki region people might be more aware on certain things, they can order things that aren’t in the catalogue like rose salt for instance. Or they can take local products, bread from a local bakery, or something similar which might not have large enough volumes for the whole country.” –J2

A food producer thus needs to evaluate how much sales he ideally wishes to have for his product, since according to the interviews larger crowds will most likely be reached only by being sold in S or K chains, either as a part of the product catalogue or as a local specialty. However, being sold only in gourmet shops might contribute in creating the sensation of exclusiveness, as this comment indicates:

”Scarcity always sells. We are always drawn to limited editions or products only sold in some specific places.” –PR2

An interesting point of view that comes out a lot in the answers is the switch that has happened within the past few years, where the barrier between deli shops, normal supermarkets and even discount food stores has been blurred. Almost all respondents spontaneously evoked the fact that the discount food store Lidl is now selling products branded as gourmet products, and using one of Finland’s most recognized gourmet chef Hans Välimäki in their advertising. This comment illustrates this switch particularly well:

“Before gourmet foods and specialties were found only in specialized shops like market halls and Stockmann’s Herkku, but last couple of years when you think of Lidl, they have wanted to bring gourmet products alongside their ordinary product range, better products with better ingredients, plus in addition clearly more fish and meat products that come from Finland (...). They are not necessarily gourmet products as it is, but the purity, quality, that kind of good values are transmitted from these products, which aren’t necessarily attributed to the brand of Lidl, even though they are house brands.” –PR1

Regardless of where the products are sold, gourmet products usually carry a higher profit margin and are thus an interesting product category for shopkeepers as well. Because of the higher margin, shopkeepers usually have also in their own interest to get the product sold. This in turn means they are often placed in the best shelf places.

“In shops it is common to place most expensive products within eyeshot so at hand or eye-level. Because from there people take them the most. It makes sense to place expensive products there, where it is easy to take them. It would be pointless to hide expensive products, because then no one would buy them and they will expire and that would be expensive because the products are expensive.” –M1

But there is also another reason for a shopkeeper to take gourmet products into the product range, apart from higher margins. Many feel that carrying gourmet products, like in the Lidl case, increases also the store’s own brand value as it gives the customers the experience of wider selection.

“Gourmet products definitely add value, otherwise clients wouldn’t buy them. Let’s take service counters for instance, it brings the mental association of freshness for the store, and even though I’d never buy from it, it makes an invisible impression to the whole store that they sell fresh products.” –M1

Communication between salespeople and the customer has an important role in making the purchasing decision. Gourmet people lean a lot on tips and hints gotten from professional sales persons, and this was something cited by almost all the respondents. They appreciate a lot recommendations from salespersons, their suggestions for recipes and ideas for new product purchases. For a food producer, this means it is very useful to try and commit salesperson, get them familiar with the product, and provide them with all necessary material, recipes, etc. The salespersons are considered professional and honest by consumers, and professional salespersons seem to think alike:

“It is easy for us to sell even brand new products by just saying to familiar customers that hey, check out what we have, you should try it it’s really good. The consumer believes what we tell him, because we have this kind of trust that has been built in time, so if I say that a certain product is worth testing, then they have the courage to try it out.” –M2

To what retail is concerned, a food producer has many aspects to think about. Basically it all stems of the fact whether or not the producer has the capabilities to produce quantities large enough to cover the whole country. If not, the products are not fit for the S chain’s catalogue, for instance. Then remains fewer retail options: the deli stores or being a “local specialty product” in a chain supermarket. There is also the possibility to sell products online, which oddly was mentioned by only one respondent. She evoked that market share in online grocery shopping might be growing and in Britain are already relatively high, but noted also immediately that in Finland we have a culture of going to the store for purchasing food items. However, no matter where the product is sold, special care should be placed in keeping the store employees informed about the product and its usage, as they have a huge impact on consumers’ purchasing decisions, as this last comment illustrates:

“when somebody tells me that hey, this right now is particularly good, I buy it instantly. In that way I’m very suggestible.” –G2

6.6 Gourmet culture in Finland

In order to understand how to convey a message of luxury to Finnish consumers, I think it is important to build a comprehensive image on what are the current food trends influencing the gastronomic scene in Finland.

As briefly evoked in the previous subchapter, there are currently many interesting trends going on in the Finnish food scene. People seem to be cooking at home more enthusiastically than ever and cooking is no longer an activity dominated by females. Men take more and more pride in their cooking skills, and our most famous chefs are celebrated almost as national heroes.

In order to answer my research questions and especially the one on communicational practices used to promote gourmet meat products, it is important to understand the current context in which food brands in Finland operate. In this subchapter I present the viewpoints of food professionals on gourmet culture in Finland – both present and future.

Many respondents stated that in Finland, we are still in baby shoes as to what gastronomy is concerned. The general opinion seemed to be that we have evolved and will keep on evolving in a fast pace towards a goal that was seen to be “Central-European” gastronomy. Many used the term *Europeanize* (in Finnish *eurooppalaistua*) to describe how they wish food culture will develop in Finland, thus Central-European gastronomy seems to be a somewhat ideal gastronomic goal for the experts. This consolidates the view put forward by Luomala in his article (2007).

Food culture was seen to have evolved greatly within the last few decades, especially after the 80s. Compared to Central-European countries, our gastronomy was not seen to be as developed, although all the respondents were happy about recent evolving. When asked why Finland was dragging behind, reasons such as weather conditions were evoked. And also, perhaps quite surprisingly, political surroundings. As one respondent noted, stable monarchies, typical to Central-Europe, provided a stability that allowed for people to specialize in their professions and make a living out of food-related services.

Food is trendy

According to the interviews, gastronomy begun evolving fast after the 80s when gourmet restaurants first started appearing in Finland. Initially, it was an amusement reserved strictly to the elite:

“When finer foods started to be available, it started out as a gentlemen’s pastime. And if we think before that, gourmet was food served only in fancy restaurants (...). Places such as Palace and Kämp if we go back in time were places for rich people, where people ate sophisticatedly pheasant or something like that.” –J1

Nearly every food professional I interviewed had a similar viewpoint on what is perhaps one the major swifts in recent years’ food culture development: gourmet has stopped to be a luxury for the rich, it is increasingly everyone’s hobby. This could perhaps be described by the term *democratization* of gourmet. In the interviews this came out as an ever increasing interest of the masses towards cooking and food. Food altogether was seen as something that all people, not only elites or foodies, think about more and more. People go out more, they cook at home more, and they are more interested about the quality of the ingredients than before:

“my personal opinion, and this is not based on any research or study, is that cooking will grow even bigger as a trend, and especially gourmet cooking. I would say that an even bigger contrast will appear between weekdays and time off. We work so fucking much that when we have time off we really want to enjoy it and invest in it, both time wise and money wise.” –PR2

These views consolidates the fact that it is increasingly difficult to determine niche based on criteria such as age or gender. Instead, a wider approach could perhaps be adopted, where the gourmet products are targeted to everybody that have an interest towards good food, no matter income level, age or gender. Especially since cooking is no longer a female activity.

Men have entered the scene

As food seems to be increasingly on display in the media and on the internet, it is hard not to share the view of the respondents that food is indeed a real trend at the moment. And a trend that everyone seems to be hopping onboard – also youth, as the one

comment above indicates, but increasingly also men. According to the food professionals, men seem to pride themselves more and more about their cooking skills. This is interesting, since in the traditional household cooking was a duty reserved for the women still not so many decades ago.

”Men are more and more involved. Now it seems natural that men cook. In the 80s it would have been completely out of question to ask regular directors, men, to appear in an article about cooking or recipes. Now it’s like a polished badge on the chest to be a good cook. For instance a year ago [in the newspaper I worked for] we had the best recipes of game chefs and we had Jyrki Katainen’s recipe for game (...) and it would have been completely out of question in the 80s to have a Prime Minister’s game recipe.” –J1

This even further points out that niches should perhaps not be determined through demographic variables such as gender.

Cooks are celebrities

So cooking is increasingly everybody’s interest, and one factor that was estimated to have led to this is the media explosion around it. There is an unparalleled amount of cook shows, food blogs and recipe journals we are all subjected to. This has led to another major shift in the food culture: gourmet chefs are increasingly famous and enjoy a status of almost national heroes. According to one respondent, the explosion happened in the 90s, when all kinds of celebrities started to have their own cooking shows on TV, whether or not they had a professional cooking background or not. According to her, the phenomenon is now “bordering craziness”. Her comment below illustrates the shift in attitudes:

“on the list of popular professions *chef* or *cook* was still in the 90s perhaps something like the 320th, something like that. And after journalists began writing about them and food became popular (...)” –J1

The influence of recession

So cooking is increasingly popular, as are those who master the art – chefs. But respondents stated also numerous other trends that are currently influencing the food scene in Finland. One current phenomenon is the slow economic growth, some even speak of recession. Has it influenced food-related behavior? A few respondents saw that

now, like during the last major recession in the 90s, people are looking to return to their roots and local products are more appreciated:

“If I look at my childhood, it has been an era of mega gourmet food, but back then it was self-evident. We had our own pigs and chickens, we slaughtered them at home, made every possible dish out of them once the pig was killed. Now, if we lived the same era people would be like “wow, how wonderful, organic and home-made, fabulous!” Back then it was completely natural, and even in the 80s and 70s people were a little ashamed if they had this kind of roots.” –J1

A tight budget also forces people to be creative:

“in Finland recession might alter consumption, which is actually really good, because people... we have now this pulled pork craze, and people are rediscovering these so-called cheap parts, which actually are a lot better in animals, and are learning how to use them.” –G1

Thus, the tighter economic climate has driven people to appreciate local products and be more creative in their cooking, and this has led to a trend of using cheaper cuts for instance.

Ethical issues

Although people might have to be more considerate on how to use their money, quality still seems to be of major importance. According to the experts I interviewed, ethical issues are also something that interest people – although as most interviewees highlighted, most people are not in fact willing to pay more for organic products. But as to what gourmet products are concerned, there seemed to be a link between good-quality food and organic/ethical aspects:

“if we think of fine dining restaurants here in Helsinki, right now local and organic foods are a major trend. It is clearly coming, and actually is already here, it’s actually even no longer a trend but almost taken to be self-evident.” –PR2

Perhaps this is one of the reasons why vegetarian food was also seen as a growing trend – meat production is, as many respondent highlighted, highly energy consuming.

”(...) I’m sure that vegetarian food, it will no longer be the mandatory vegetarian dish on the restaurant’s menu, but (...) it will have an equal value as an option on the menu. I believe this, because it comes already from the viewpoint of sustainable development.” – G2

The quest for ethically produced food might have been flamed by the food scandals of the recent years. They have led to people being more sensitive to where the ingredients they consume come from, as noted also in Luomala’s article (2007).

”it’s really important for people to know where the food comes from. In my opinion it’s not so much about the fact that it has to come from Finland, but that people need to know where it comes from.” –PR2

This, in turn, reflects directly Leclerc, Schmitt and Dubé’s results (1994) on the importance of the label of origin. When the country of origin enjoy a good country reputation, such as France, it might be worth considering promoting the country of origin as a brand feature.

Special diets

There is also a clear trend of wanting to eat healthy – although what actually is perceived as healthy might differ greatly from one decade to another. Nowadays a healthy diet is closely linked to special diets like gluten or dairy free, increasingly popular among many Finns:

”special diets and especially the gluten-free diet are a real big trend at the moment. These change unbelievably fast these. A year ago everyone was talking only about carbs and low-carb diets, but now it’s clearly about the special diets.” –J2

Another trend that was mentioned was the high protein diet.

Opening up to foreign influences and eagerness to try new things

Another trend cited by many was the emergence of new ethnic cuisines that is likely to happen in the upcoming years. Several professional stated that since Finns travel more, they will be subjected to new kinds of influences and they will want to eat the foods they have tried in exotic places in Finland also. On the other hand, there is also immigration that will bring new influences to our gastronomy:

“people travel a lot more and that way they gain confidence to try different things. And thirdly Finland will become increasingly international on our domestic market and we have more foreign people than before (...)” –PR2

These comments indicate that Finns are opening to foreign foods and are more willing to experiment new things. Finns are now, more than ever, willing to try out new things:

“Well perhaps a big part of cooking and eating is this kind of willingness to try out new things. International flavors, those are one thing. Then there is a cross-kitchen type of approach, where different tastes and worlds are mixed. (...)” –PR2

Demographic changes

Finland is bound to face demographic changes other than immigration: as a country with low nativity rates, we will have more and more elderly people in the years to come. This is something that will undoubtedly cause changes in the food culture and especially food served in retirement homes and similar establishments:

”That is one thing to take into account, what kind of food our seniors and elderly persons eat. That’s a damn big issue actually. And it is not only that it should be something easy-to-swallow goo and tasteless, but in the recent study *Seniorisapuska*, they highlight stronger tastes because taste as a sense becomes more vague and that’s why it’s important how to cook and season food. Our elderly are in such a better shape, they even have their own teeth, which wasn’t the case 10 or 20 years ago when they all had false teeth.” –PR2

Undoubtedly, the demographic changes will thus alter the food scene in Finland in the years to come.

More grocery stores other than S or K

Another major change that might take place is that the highly polarized and monopolized grocery store scene in Finland might be scattering. Until recent years, there has virtually only existed grocery stores belonging to either the K or the S groups, with only a few exceptions. As respondents stated, it was previously thought to be almost impossible for a new grocery retail chain to establish itself successfully in Finland, because the market share was held almost exclusively by these two massive players. However, Lidl did what many thought to be almost impossible and is now conducting a seemingly blooming business and keeps on increasing market share. This was a fact stated by several respondents. And the fact Lidl made it, in turn, made some

of the experts think that there might be even further breaking up of the S and K monopolies in the near future. Apparently, people no longer want to get everything from the same supermarket, but are increasingly interested in other types of purchasing, such as buying meat directly from the meat producer or eggs from the chicken farmer.

Another prospect pondered on was the possibility that online food purchases will increase in the future, as people might start to get increasingly interested in ordering meat or other groceries directly online. All in all respondents mostly felt that there will be coming more purchasing options, and this change seems to be welcome, like can be read in this comment:

“Communes and that people order straight from the producers, we need a hell lot of more of that in Finland. It has been pure hell to have had two abominations: S and K, and an ABC or Lidl from time to time. That is what 95 % of Finnish gastronomy is from the consumer’s perspective.” –G1

The same respondent highlights how collective ordering and buying straight from the producer might be good ways to increase sales and offering especially in the domain of organic products:

“When a see a counter of organic products it makes me want to cry. First of all because it is so tiny, the items don’t circulate so everything is either overripe or rotten, and since they’re organic they don’t contain any preservatives so they spoil immediately. People don’t find their way to small deli shops and they don’t buy organic from supermarkets, so is there anyone who wants to eat that? (...) Is there then a good distribution channel or marketing channel for these, such as this collective ordering. I see this as a really big thing, this is a big thing to invest in and ponder on in Finland.” –G1

Trends change fast

In this subchapter I have presented the strongest trends that came up during the interviews with the food professionals. Perhaps the biggest one of these is the massive increase of interest towards cooking and food, that seem to touch everyone regardless of age, gender or income level. Ethical issues and foreign influences will undoubtedly grow stronger in the years to come, and the Finnish food scene will also be altered by demographic issues as well: the elderly population will increase as will that of foreigners. People travel more, which in turn makes them more open to try new foods in

Finland as well. Special diets are a big trend, despite the fact that recession might impose restrictions upon spending habits. It remains to be seen how much the S and K monopole will scatter, but experts seemed to welcome more versatile shopping environments and thought alternative shopping, such as communal orders directly from farmers and producers. From all of these trends can be concluded that there are many different phenomenon currently influencing and changing the Finnish food scene. However, as this last comment shows, nothing is permanent and these trends can change fast:

”(...) today actually we can't talk anymore about trends because the whole scene is so scattered. There can be like 10 different trends simultaneously (...)” –J1

Despite the fact that trends change fast and they are currently extremely scattered, I hope to have sketched here a somewhat suggestive picture on the surroundings any food producer or food professional have to face when operating and communicating in contemporary Finland. This is important for the research questions presented in this study, since for maximum impact, all marketing messages should be adjusted according to the current operational context.

The next chapter is dedicated to the communicational aspects related to marketing meat, and especially meat products that are considered somewhat challenging in Finland: veal, for ethical reasons, and canned meat products, for their perceived lack of freshness.

7 Marketing Specific Meat Products

As seen in chapter 3, Tamagnini and Tregear point out that “by differentiating products and targeting specific consumer groups, small producers can take advantage of market opportunities that larger companies may be unwilling or unable to satisfy” (1998 : 228). Interestingly, this idea of niche marketing came up spontaneously in the expert interviews.

The general opinion among the interviewees seemed to be that marketing unfamiliar products such as veal or gourmet canned meat products should ideally start by engaging food enthusiasts, and from there the excitement might spread to more traditional consumer groups. Both for veal and canned meat products, respondents felt that marketing should be focused in making peoples’ attitudes shift. This supports the view presented in chapter 3, where Tamagnini & Tregear state that niche marketing should start by niche identification (1998 : 230) and then by focusing marketing efforts to promote what differentiates the product from competitors and bring forward the companies own special skills (1998 : 231). I shall treat these phenomenon more deeply in the following. First, however, I brush quickly the general attitudes towards meat consumption in general.

Respondents felt that there were trends swiping the meat consumption of Finns. The most cited opinion was that because meat is a relatively expensive grocery product, it will keep its gourmet status. The experts felt that when people are buying meat, the trend is that they want to invest in good quality meat – even if it means eating meat less often. Many respondents believe that the use of cheaper cuts, such as entrails and meat that needs to be simmered until tender, will increase. Reasons for this were seen both in the economic and the ecologic climates that make people want to avoid wasting parts of a slaughtered animal. In any case, in the field of groceries, meat is differentiated from other items by its higher price:

”With meat, I think that because its production has a very big carbon footprint it will always be somewhat expensive. It will definitely remain a gourmet product, meat. The price defines it, really.” –G2

As the research questions set for this thesis call for a closer examination of specific attributes regarding veal and canned meat products, we shall further examine these matters in the following.

7.1 Veal

The experts were divided between those who saw that veal is a product that needs a rather careful marketing approach; and those who saw that it is a product long awaited on the Finnish markets.

My initial assumption was that veal meat can be a tricky product to market because of the contradictory feelings it awakens among Finnish masses. And indeed some of the experts stated that veal is a tough meat type for marketing:

“But my first reaction, if you want to target the big masses, is that veal is something a little weird for us. I won’t use it as a key marketing message that’s for sure.” –PR2

And it is true, as another respondent noted, that eating veal ends up having a much bigger carbon footprint than eating the meat of a full-grown animal. The vast majority of the experts, however, did not see an ethical problem in the production of veal meat. I must note that all of the experts are food professionals and thus are probably more open to new types of foods than average Finns. Be as it may, the vast majority felt that it is not worse to slaughter a veal than it is to slaughter a grown animal, and that ethical concerns belong to all meat production in general and not veal in particular:

”Of course when you have veal you are aware of it at some level, but on the other hand it can have the influence that you value more the ingredient and (...) it is a complex issue, veal, if it hasn’t been given the opportunity to live its life of mass production, then perhaps it is not so bad after all from an ethical point of view.” –G1

An interesting insight was also about what the names of different animals and their progeny evoke among Finns. One respondent had observed that in Finland almost all pig meat is marketed as “piglet” (*porsas* in Finnish), because it sounds much fresher and nicer than pig meat. Paradoxically, he claimed, is not the case with veal and beef.

All in all the respondents were not very concerned about ethical issues related to veal meat. Instead, what they wondered, was that why it is so difficult to find decent veal meat in Finland. Most seemed to think that there is and will be increasing demand, but

that demand is not currently met. They denounced that even though veal can be eaten in finer restaurants, it has yet to find its way to Finnish homes. The general opinion was that despite its poor availability, veal is a product with potential on the Finnish consumer market:

”Even chefs complain about it [the difficulty of finding veal in Finland]. And then when you once buy veal you can clearly see that it’s not actual veal, it is so dark that it’s just not veal anymore. So I believe there is demand.” –G2

The experts found it difficult to come up with reasons why veal is such a scarcely sold product in Finland. One respondent estimated that it was because it is more economical to slaughter the animal once it is full-grown, and that would be why traditionally there has not been veal meat or Finnish veal recipes, even though we have had cattle for many hundred years.

This last comment illustrates well the polemic around veal. The expert had had previously some concerns over veal meat, but once she got to witness the production process and understood the phenomena, her attitude changed completely. What is especially interesting for this thesis is the point of view she puts forward, that through telling the story related to veal production, consumers attitudes can change:

”Along with fellow food journalists I visited a veal farm a couple of weeks ago, the only one in Finland, called Eskola. We were a dozen of journalists (...). The feeling beforehand was that this is unethical and so on, but then when they told us more about veal meat production, well it wasn’t so un-ethical after all. And that would probably need the story behind it, about what would happen to the calves if they were not turned into meat. In Finland or at least on that one farm they would have been slaughtered straight away. They had something, I don’t remember exactly what it was but something in the crossing, that they can’t grow to full-size. (...) But it needs definitely to be opened, it’s a good place for story-telling.” –J2

To sum up the main points presented here, from the marketing perspective veal forms an interesting subject. Although the experts interviewed here seemed more concerned about the poor availability of veal than on the ethical questions related to its production, it is important to emphasize that especially in this context their views cannot be generalized to the whole population or even parts of it. The experts are all food-oriented people and thus are more likely to appreciate more unusual products such as veal.

However, what can be retained is that the experts felt there is demand for veal meat beyond current supply. The first and last comments presented here give us viewpoints on how to approach the marketing of this product type: by targeting it to the foodies and forerunners, and by storytelling to slowly shift attitudes. These are my personal interpretations on the comment of the experts, but it is interesting to note that they seem to fit Tamagnini's & Tregear's ideas about niche marketing (1998).

7.2 Canned Meat Products

Whereas veal has an image of being a more gourmet product, as pointed out by many of the respondents, canned meat products are far from that and have the quite opposite reputation. This was something all respondents agreed on, and a major point to be considered when dealing with the marketing of this product type. Finnish people are not used to gourmet, high-quality canned meat products. The most common mental image that was cited was *Nötkött*, a cheap meat product that is widely sold in Finland. The gourmet culture associated in France with *foie-gras* cans etc. is lacking in Finland, respondents stated.

"I know you can make really good food out of them, but they just don't appeal to me. The can doesn't appeal to me, even though I know there is something succulent inside, and you can make wonderful things out of it, but the thought of it having been inside the can for a year doesn't appeal to me." –G2

"I'm not very excited about them [canned meat products]. Somehow... I don't know. In Finland there isn't a lot of choice. You just have cans of mixed pork and beef. (...) I don't have a lot of experience, because meat isn't generally sold in cans. I guess price resolves the matter here as well. If the price is the same, I'd rather go for the fresh meat, and generally canned products are even more expensive than to buy fresh meat and then cook it." –M1

These comments indicate that attitudes towards canned meat products can be challenging. But, according to the experts, if a lot of hard work is dedicated to the marketing communication, they can be reversed.

"The attitudes towards the product are extremely difficult. I don't know any other way than to explain to people and advertising. Somehow try to alter the conception of it. But I'm sure at the basis the reputation is really bad among Finns. And then if it's sold somewhere on the shelf next to *nötkött*, especially if it's in a place where there isn't like a

proper gourmet department, it could work someplace where there is a gourmet shelf or in a deli store where they are separately. But there is no chance from between *nötkött* cans, if somebody even wanders there they would be looking for something completely else.” – J2

Undoubtedly, these comments paint a somewhat gloomy situation towards canned gourmet meat products. The road to an attitude shift seems to be long. However, it might not be impossible, as the comments seemed to suggest that through sufficient marketing efforts, tastings and advertising, and in the correct retail environment, there is a slight chance the product category can rise. Although *Nötkött* was for many one of the first things to come to mind when talking about canned meat products, for some, the mental image was more about other gourmet meat products such as duck *confit*. Here a much brighter image is painted about the possibilities for a gourmet canned meat products to succeed in Finland:

” There are some good products, like the ones that are preserved in their own fat, duck *confit* and similar. I don’t see any obstacle [for the canned meat product to become popular], as long as the price becomes affordable and there are recipes available.” –J1

Perhaps the most important thing to retain from these comments is that canned meat products undoubtedly form a challenging product category marketing-wise in Finland, as they seem to quickly evoke products with a really bad-quality reputation, like *Nötkött*. Luckily, as two respondents noted, there has been in the recent past the small breakthrough of duck legs that became a popular product among food enthusiasts. It seems to be a well-liked product, despite a higher price tag, at least among a certain niche of food enthusiasts. The last comment seemed to suggest that similar success can be found within a niche for another product as well, and that it is not hopeless to try enter Finnish markets with a gourmet canned meat product. But as the previous comments indicated, there is a lot of marketing to be done if the products wants to appeal to the masses. What is positive though, and that came up a lot in the responses, is that Finns are now more open to new types of foods than ever before.

“Finns now try more bravely new products and it doesn’t take so long anymore for them to taste or adopt some new products as compared to some time ago.” –J2

Communication and marketing efforts could perhaps be targeted to leverage the general opinion of the product category, or alternatively to try to commit food enthusiasts to trying the product. Currently there is a fairly good general climate for introducing new products on the Finnish markets, as seen also in part 6.2. But what are the marketing elements that need to be taken in account when marketing gourmet meat products in Finland, whether they are veal or canned or something else? That is the theme of the next chapter.

8 Communication And Marketing Practices in Promoting Gourmet

As established in subchapter 6.1, gourmet foods can be almost anything as long as there is some added value to them. This subchapter is how to communicate, or create the feeling of, the added value to the consumer – in other words, how to *market* gourmet products and gourmet meat in particular.

As stated in part 2.4, storytelling is one of the most important marketing aspects a gourmet food brand needs to concentrate on. Danziger puts forward that instead of old-school advertising, luxury marketing should focus on storytelling (2005 : 181). She also recommends that stories should be used to promote brand value (2005 : 244).

Interestingly, these views spontaneously came up very clearly in the interviews as well.

If I look at everything that came up during the interviews about marketing, it can be divided into two overly simplified main guidelines: telling a story, and then spreading it to your targeted consumers. In the first part of this chapter I focus on storytelling and present the different viewpoints the respondents gave about it. Then, I proceed by presenting the respondents ideas on how the brand can best use different marketing channels to propagate the story. There are many channels that can be used: paid-for advertising, earned media coverage, collaboration with bloggers, and the brand's or retailer's own channels such as social media, customer journal and website. These marketing means are all examined in this chapter.

8.1 Storytelling

As was established in part 2.5 through Twitchell's and Danziger's theories on marketing luxury products, one of the most important things is building a story around the luxury product. According to Danziger, it is the story that will differentiate the product from its competitors and add value to it to justify the higher price tag (2005 : 244). This thought was largely shared by the experts, as almost everyone highlighted the importance of a consist and clear story that can be told to the consumer. For instance, the American researcher Arch Woodside emphasizes through a more psychological approach how storytelling is an integral part of efficient marketing. According to him, "information is indexed, stored, and retrieved in the form of stories" (Woodside 2010 : 532). He goes on by explaining how stories help individuals to feel emotional connection with the sender, and this in turn is a source of satisfaction and pleasure (Woodside 2010 : 533). The psychological implications behind storytelling and how it affects our behavior are undoubtedly extremely complex. Although it is impossible to explain in detail this complex mechanism in this thesis, I think it is important to retain that storytelling can to some extent be a very powerful marketing tool.

The experts I interviewed saw that the story can and should be told through many different channels, and that at its best, it makes the consumer be a part of it. This is exactly what Danziger stated about storytelling also. According to her, storytelling should ideally *involve* customers (2005 : 244). Interestingly, many elements presented by Danziger (see part 2.4) came up spontaneously in the interviews I had with the experts. According to the respondents, it is crucial that the story is coherent even when multiple channels are used to diffuse it (such as packaging, stories in newspapers, in-store presentation). The story is seen to construct mental images and give the consumer the feeling he is buying quality products. The respondents think it is in fact important to involve the consumer, and also make sure that the brand story can be coherently repeated by store employees, for instance.

"So after it [the story] has been communicated and the marketing material is in good shape, it's good if the person that sells the product can take on, or tell or repeat the story that has already been told by all other means. And basically it's good if the consumer can also feel to be part of the story, he takes like part by preparing the gourmet food at home from the gourmet meat." –PR1

Some respondent stated that through storytelling and thus by adding knowledge, producers can also add value and enhance positive feelings of reliability and transparency. According to one expert, there has been new EU-wide legislation that has been initiated by meat farmers to have more precise explanations on the package on the producing conditions. According to him, it might have been partly in response of fairly recent scandals in the food industry, such as when in 2013 several cases emerged where meat sold as pork or beef was actually horse.

“I think it’s nice that a meat company as big as Atria has on every package, even the cheapest minced meat, it says that this is minced meat from the Rintala family’s farm in Ylistaro.” –PR1

Providing knowledge about the product seems to be an efficient way to add value to it and to provide content for the story. So it is important to include to the story, if possible, enough details to transmit values about transparency and reliability. But what tone to adopt? As the comment below suggests, the brand shouldn’t take itself too seriously. Another crucial element is to remain approachable and not brand the product “too fancy”:

“Communication shouldn’t be constructed in a way it makes the average consumer feel... if the goal is to sell the product to more than this insanely tiny group, it should be down-to-earth in a way that people don’t feel intimidated by buying the product, but they feel it is something for them as well. And not that it’s something for very fancy people, but not me. So to bring it down-to-earth but not too much, keeping the luxury there, but that it’s also approachable to normal people. To find that kind of balance there.” –G1

Telling a concise story with sufficient amount of information and the right tone is a great start, but as we shall see in the following chapters, it is not enough on its own. Luring consumers to purchase a new product is not an easy task. In any case, communication and PR activities play a crucial role, as this comment hints:

“[prior to purchasing the first time] the consumer has to have heard about the product in some way (...). Otherwise it can be difficult to spontaneously grab it from the shelf. So that he has seen an ad, or read an article or seen the product in a recipe, or something. Or that he has been offered to taste it, it has been recommended by a friend, and today it has

a very strong influence that somebody recommends or says it's not good, it's a sure thing that the consumer will not buy it if he hears it's bad" –J2

The importance of word-of-mouth was also highlighted by Danziger (2005 : 263). The following subchapter is dedicated to detailing marketing practices for marketing special product attributes such as origin and ethical features. This is important in order to answer my second research question.

8.2 How to Communicate Specific Product Attributes?

As previously seen, the successful marketing of a gourmet product lies in accurate, concise and clear storytelling. But is there specific messages that should or should not be included in the story? That is the question I try to answer in this subchapter. I focus on two particular attributes: French country of origin and ethical production. These were natural to choose here since they are directly linked to my research question number two:

2) Are country of origin and ethical production product attributes that should be used as key marketing messages?

Apart from the country of origin, I chose to focus here on the ethical aspects because it seems to be such an integral part of gourmet meat production, and yet there seems to be very little research on how ethical issues should best be promoted to Finns.

8.2.1 Is Being French An Asset for A Gourmet Meat Producer ?

All respondents seemed to agree that French food has the reputation of being gourmet. Not all, however, viewed this as necessarily a good thing. The general opinion was divided between those who saw that being French is definitely a positive attribute; and those who saw that French food might be experienced as too complicated and difficult by Finns.

Below is a short summary of the most interesting viewpoints being French evokes among the interviewed food professionals. As being French is linked to being foreign, as opposed to something produced nearby, it is legitimate to first contemplate shortly

what exoticism was seen to bring to a food product. After all, In Van der Veen's article exoticism is cited as being a key criteria for luxury food (2003 : 420).

For the food professionals interviewed for this thesis, the distinction is not so clear. For some of the respondents, gourmet is linked to being locally produced and domestic. Others had a different view on this matter, and viewed exoticism as an important criteria that adds value to a product. This comment further illustrates the matter.

"Who would be a prophet in his own land? (...) Foods need to go through a world tour before they can be presented as gourmet on Finnish markets." –J1

As we have seen in part 6.6, there is a trend for food produced locally which has emerged alongside the trends for organic and ethically produced foods. The trend for local production might have had a role in lowering the value of exoticism, although it is impossible to say based on such narrow data.

Whatever the value the respondents attached to exoticism, being French was seen as a largely positive attribute by some of the food professionals:

"In general food coming from France is better quality, because they have a much longer and finer gastronomic history, although we have really good gourmet products coming from Finland as well." –G1

Being French can thus add value to a product, and this even despite the fact that there is a current trend of local foods. It is interesting to note that France's long gastronomic history was also acknowledged here and thought to add value to the products.

However, French food can be perceived by some as being even too fancy, which can be intimidating for consumers. And when French food first arrived to Finland, it gained quickly a bad reputation of stiffness:

"If we think of the 1980s, that's when French cuisine was introduced to the Finnish gourmet scene. It was then widely criticized, this French cuisine, and for a reason. (...) Prices were really high, and there was in fact two peas and perhaps an asparagus, so the portions were really small." –J1

Even nowadays, it still has a reputation of being difficult to make at home, compared to other Central-European cuisines such as Italian.

”On the other hand French culture might have a reputation that’s even too high in Scandinavia, it is perceived as being out of reach even, and there is still going strong the impression that it’s all about frogs and snails and people don’t necessarily recognize that French cuisine has very simple flavors, simple and distinct ingredients and the most important thing is their good quality (...)” –PR1

Not all agreed, though:

”I would say that it [French food] is seen as positive and close, closer to us than very ethnic other food, and even better quality. (...) Perhaps Italian is a little bit closer to us Finns or average people but then France is a teeny bit fancier but still not far from us.” – J2

One respondent brought up the fact that France is such a big food producer country, that the scale of production might influence on the quality of the food produced. This is really interesting for us, as the Finnish researcher Luomala also stated that in fact French food is often produced in conditions similar to German ones, although it has a reputation of being higher in quality and more small-scale production (2007 : 125).

”On the other hand France is known as a big meat producer and producer of farmed goods in general. I could say that France even has a kind of American reputation, it is perceived as a mass-producing country and is a big country physically. And when you know that so many ingredients are produced there for the whole Europe’s food industry’s needs, I’m sure it brings a certain amount of criticism. “ –PR1

All of these statements tell us that the reputation French food has among Finns is not necessarily only beneficial for the products, as opposed to the findings presented in chapter 4. Although everyone recognized French food having a gourmet reputation, there was also negative aspects attached to this reputation. How, then should a brand communicate being French? Should it even be mentioned? Or can it be a key selling point that should be highlighted?

Once again, the food professionals were divided on these questions. There was unanimity on one point: being French should definitely be clearly mentioned on the product because of the positive attributes it evokes. But it was not so clear as to whether being French should be a product's key marketing message or whether it is more in the nice-to-know category. These two opinions show the two different viewpoints:

“I would see it as belonging to the nice-to-know category. Of course it depends a little on the product. If it is very French, this could be even highlighted some more, but I see that instead of painting a caricature image of French cuisine, the product should be rather brought to a modern frame (...).” –PR1

“France has a good reputation. It is linked with chic and luxury. (...) The most important thing for you [food producer] is to get food journalists interested and excited about your product (...) and being French is a big deal, it is something every woman's magazine or food media is drawn to.” –PR2

No one said that French origins should not be highlighted at all. The difference in opinions was related to the fact *how much* emphasis should be placed on French roots. And as this last comment shows, French origins might even be a key selling point for products:

“Sometimes when there has been a French-themed week [in a grocery store], it has brought in tons of clients when we've had gourmet products. That kind of seasonal goods sell really well.” –M1

French food is clearly gourmet, that can be said based on the food professionals' interviews. However, the comments presented here show that being French might not be as clear a positive distinction for Finns as presented in Luomala's or Leclerc's, Schmitt's and Dubé's studies. Gourmet foods can be perceived as being complicated, out of reach or only mastered by restaurant chefs. There is also the initial reputation French food had in Finland in the 80s, which was that of poor value for money, that might still play a role in consumers' perception. Food professionals themselves mostly felt these negative perceptions were false ones, as French food was stated to be relatively simple, but the majority viewed these opinions to live hard among certain Finns.

Although French origins were seen as a mostly positive thing that should clearly be communicated to the consumer, the extent to which this should happen divided opinions. Some saw it as being a marketing message of key importance, while others placed it in the nice-to-know category. If a careful conclusion can be made on such restricted data, I would cautiously suggest for food producers to think about ways to promote French origins without placing the food too much above the average Finn. Special care could be placed on highlighting French origins while making the consumer feel comfortable about the product and promote it as something approachable. This could be carefully concluded on how much being French should be emphasized in the marketing communication of a food brand.

8.2.2 Ethical Questions

In part 6.2 we saw that there is a trend for organic and ethically produced foods that is going strong especially in the gourmet food sector, whether it is in fine dining restaurants, deli shops, or ingredients for home cooks.

This trend is also recognized by the group of researchers that published their relatively critical paper on the effects of ethicality on product preference in the *Journal of Marketing* in 2010 (Luchs *et al.* : 2010). According to Luchs *et al.*, there is indeed currently a fairly strong ethical trend that might influence consumption patterns (2010 : 28). In their study, they present the link between ethical production and consumption as very complex, and they highlight that the effect of sustainability is not necessarily positive or negative, but rather that it is a product attribute that alters the consumers' judgment about the other product attributes (Luchs *et al.* 2010 : 28). Thus, according to them, ethical production can be a positive or a negative attribute depending on the value the consumer looks for in a certain product category (Luchs *et al.* 2010 : 28).

As this thesis is about the marketing of luxury products and meat in particular, I find it of crucial importance to further contemplate the matters related to ethical questions. Is the message of ethical production something that will attract consumers, or is it an attribute that is taken for granted in the gourmet meat sector? And what are the best ways to transfer the message of ethical production to the consumer?

As the marketing researcher Mark Alpert suggests, there are several ways to try to determine what product attributes should be emphasized in marketing efforts (1971 : 184). Although his study dates from the 70s, it seems to be even relatively widely cited in many contemporary research on promoting specific product attributes. According to Alpert, there are three main ways to approach the question of which attributes to promote over others: direct questioning; indirect questioning, including motivation research; and observation /experimentation (Alpert 1971 : 184). I chose to approach this matter through direct questioning, and asked each of the interviewees their opinion on using ethical production as a key marketing message. The results I obtained are presented below.

For clarity measures let me note that I use here the term *ethical production* in a broad sense of the term to designate food that is produced in a smaller scale (as compared to mass production), in respect of the animal and/or environment. In this study *ethically produced* food can be labeled organic or fair trade but the term encompasses also foods that haven't purchased these labels but are still issued from small-scale, respectful production.

Perhaps quite surprisingly, the majority of the respondents seemed to think that ethical production is not a key attribute in any product. It was viewed as being more important in meat products than other groceries, but still the most common response was that price actually matters more. The experts stated that although consumers say they want to buy organic or ethically produced foods, they actually make their purchasing decision largely based on the price.

However, there was also some divergence in opinions. Being ethically produced was even considered by some as a key selling point:

"if you have two packages of meat and the other one says it is ethically produced and the other one doesn't. On the other one you see that 50 pigs have been jammed on one square meter, of course you take then product of happy pigs and are ready to pay some extra also for it." –M1

But this view was not shared by the majority of the respondents, since most claimed that consumers are seldom willing to pay more for better production conditions. The general

opinion was that consumers liked the idea of ethical production, but when they see higher price tag they opt for the regular product instead. As one respondent pointed out, people tend to lie about their consumption habits frequently.

“It’s a completely different thing what people talk about and how they actually behave. For so long now people have been praising organic, but when they go to a store, what do they actually buy? They look at the price and buy the cheapest can and immediately forget about organic.” –J1

This comment seems to indicate that the food professionals have a somewhat skeptical attitude towards the willingness of people to buy ethically produced foods. However, there was one category of exception: meat, and especially gourmet meat. This comment states that production condition gain importance when related to meat as compared to other products:

”If you think of basic grocery items, such as butter, it is made of cream, water and salt. (...) Of course you think that [organic] butter is somehow better, but if you think more closely about organic and regular butter, you think that it’s such a simple product that it doesn’t matter much if it’s organic. But if we think of meat, that makes you think differently about the fact if it is organic or not. If it’s organic you know what has been fed to it. The more is written there or the more you know about it, the better.” –M1

For some, gourmet meat needs always to be ethically produced, because it is a key factor that leverages the product to the gourmet category in the first place. According to some of the respondents, being labeled as *gourmet* is in fact an indication to the consumer that the whole production span, right from the breeding to the slaughtering, packaging and selling, has been conducted in an ethical way. In this comment below, the link between ethical production, gourmet meat and storytelling is highlighted:

“I see it that quality meat is not mass produced, it’s more small-scale organic production. And this all strengthen the fact that the meat has a story and it can be shared for instance the farm’s traditions, it can be like a centuries old meat farm with their own ways of operating, and it can be opened up to the consumer so that it’s transparent how it works. And that is also ethical on the other hand.” –PR1

This comment gives us a lot of information on how food experts view gourmet meat and its marketing process. Here the ethical production is described as an interesting attribute that is worth sharing to the consumer, and it contributes to the production’s

transparency. As seen more in-depth in sub-chapter 6.4, successful storytelling is of crucial importance in marketing gourmet meat products. This comment hints that the ethical story could well be included in the storytelling. But what emphasize should be placed to the message of ethical production? Should it be aggressively highlighted or more subtle in the background?

The ethical issue should be brought up in different emphasis level according to the target audience. As this last comment indicates, ethical production is a good key message when the target niche is somewhat larger than only the fine-dining circles:

“I see that the whole story and image can be created around the luxury, if the product is clearly aimed at wealthier consumers (...) But if the product wants to attract larger crowds that also include young food enthusiasts (...) then perhaps the message of being organic comes first and exclusivity is built alongside it.” –PR1

When contemplating all of these comments and opinions as a whole, careful conclusions may be drawn. Most experts felt that although there is a trend of ethical/organic products, consumers are actually seldom willing to pay the difference in price. Meat, however was seen as some kind of exception as it was seen as a category where ethical/organic production had an increased value compared to other products. Although gourmet meat can be thought by consumers as being *de facto* ethically produced, the production conditions were seen as fairly relevant additional information to be included in the storytelling and marketing messages of the product. The degree of emphasize to attribute to the message of ethical production needs to be thought according to the specific consumer group(s) the product is targeted to.

I must emphasize that no definite guidelines can be concluded on the basis of eight interviews, and these conclusions presented here are nothing more than a general summary on the topics viewed in this chapter.

8.3 Spreading the Story

After establishing the importance of storytelling in the marketing of gourmet products, and having briefly contemplated communicating key product attributes within the story,

it is time to ponder on how to promulgate the story and make consumers want to buy the product.

Several communication means and channels arose from the expert interviews. I present here the ones that were cited the most often. Even though some of these communication channels are not directly linked in storytelling itself, they are all integral part of the products marketing communication and thus deserve to be treated in this chapter.

From what stemmed out from the interviews, there is one marketing communication channel that is more important than any other one: recipes. It was deemed even more crucial when the product is not a familiar one, like veal or canned meat product.

As the study by the Scandinavian research group suggests, there exists a link between food purchasing behavior and social promotion through recipe sharing (Svensson *et al.* 2001 : 341). They found out that people were more eager to purchase food items when they could see in what recipe the product can be used and how others had rated the product (*loc. cit.*). This is very interesting for my thesis, because it highlights both the role of recipes and peer review in promoting food items.

8.3.1 Recipes

Almost all the experts agreed on a crucial marketing communication element: people are not likely to buy a new product, unless they have a recipe they want to try it in. Recipes were cited as the most important marketing communication channel for any food producer, as this comment indicates:

“I’d say that I have definitely tried the most new products through recipes. (...) The interest towards the product needs to be awakened through a recipe so that way the consumer knows in what purposes he can use the product and he doesn’t have to figure it out all by himself from scratch.” –PR1

And especially if the product is relatively new on the market, it is important that the recipes provided are tested in Finnish kitchens and are as accurate as possible. One respondent emphasized how the recipes need to be extremely precise, and especially if the product is somewhat unknown like exotic meats. According to her, Finns need

“idiot-proof” recipes that they can follow to the letter. It is in the food producer’s interest to provide those, by preference right on the packaging of the product:

“You need to have reliable recipes, otherwise it is not possible to succeed. People will think “I would buy it but I don’t know what to make of it, is there anything else, okay I will take this product instead because it has the recipe written on it.” –J1

It is clear that tested and accurate recipes thus play a crucial role in the marketing communication of any product, and it becomes even more important when the product is expensive like meat. But what other marketing channels are there, beside recipes? The following part is about collaborating with journalists, as it was viewed as one of the best ways to spread the word about new products, alongside collaboration with bloggers and trendsetters.

8.3.2 Collaboration with Journalists

In addition to recipes, the second most important factor that emerged from the interviews was the importance of collaboration with journalists. Everyone seemed to agree that good PR is crucial. Food journalists were seen to have a key role in giving birth to new trends, as this comment demonstrates:

“If we as food journalists decide that lingonberry pie is the next big thing, if we made a pact like that and everyone starts writing about it and saying it is *in*. People will believe it, and it will be *in*. This is how they [trends] are born.” –J1

This comment indicates that journalists have a key role in spreading the word about a certain product. The respondents admitted that some trends are born completely spontaneously (pulled pork was mentioned as an example), but according to most of them journalists form an important target audience for marketing efforts.

But, as respondents noted, there is good PR and bad PR. Producers need to be engaging and send out recipes, samples and press-quality pictures to journalists and explain all relevant basic information on the product. A good way is also to launch the product for journalists in a special, dedicated event. Plain messages that just state that a certain product is available will not get noticed. It was also deemed crucial that journalists get

to taste the product, to see what the entity is and to figure out recipes where the product can be used:

”So if I just receive an email that this product is now available in the stores, I don’t really... I actually totally miss it.” –J2

Media can also comprise retailers’ own publications. In Finland we have a highly polarized retail network where the scene is largely dominated by S and K group stores. They both have their own consumer magazines, with several million readers each. That is a very interesting target media for any food producer. The criteria to appear in these magazines is to have food products sold in the chain in question. After that, the product features are done on a journalistic basis. Story-ideas come from customer feedbacks and current food trends.

“All of our communication is done on journalistic basis, so it is not that our purchasing or selection manager says to us to write about a certain product, but we do it journalistically which means we take in to account calendar, trends, and of course customer feedback but it’s always based on the selection we carry. (...) Then we plan what is in the air for next January, we look at Google’s search results and follow what people are googling.” –J2

PR efforts should thus be targeted also to the persons/journalists responsible for the consumer journal. A fortiori, because appearing in these magazines can have a direct and tremendous effect on sales:

“Each of our consumer magazine issue is printed in 2 million copies, and it’s about 70% of the readers that directly cook from it. Over 80 % reads it.” –J2

But apart from magazines, there is also another group that can, according to the interviewees, have a major impact in spreading the recipes and generating sales: celebrities and trendsetters.

8.3.3 Collaboration with Celebrities and Trendsetters

Online trendsetters, who can be celebrities or just ordinary social media users who have grown extremely popular in a given channel, have an influence that can be compared to the one of the traditional media. The clever usage of trendsetter was in fact a recurrent theme in the interviews:

“I’m sure that social media is the most important thing [in making a certain food trendy] (...) and what I have personally noticed is that there can be like a kind of less-known vegetable, (...) that suddenly becomes popular on Pinterest, on the international profiles, and everyone searches for it. Then it can take two to three weeks and the same product starts appearing for instance in the food section of Helsingin Sanomat. For instance this year butternut was widely featured on Pinterest towards the end of September and then in the large international cooking sites and soon you notice that Helsingin Sanomat has three or four different recipes with butternut.” –PR1

Many other experts as well stated that social media channels and international recipe sites are their source of inspiration. This can indicate that popular social media users can have an influence on the new food trends even in Finland, although no generalization is possible. For a marketing professional however, these testimonies can mean that it can be well worth to investigate the possibility to include social media trendsetters as a PR target group.

Using bloggers and trendsetters can ideally be an integral part of the whole marketing communication mix. According to the respondents, food enthusiasts follow tremendously blogs and social media, and that is why collaboration with bloggers is so important. However, it is important to choose carefully with which bloggers the brand starts collaborating with because it may influence the coherence of the brand story. Each blogger has their own voice and visual identity, and as was emphasized by one respondent, these should not be too far from the brand’s own story. The targeted niche should also be considered when choosing the bloggers.

“Of course there needs to be a credible channel for the product’s own brand, that is close to the target group it is sold at, and I could think it is a clear continuum for the blogs where the products are seen and (...) all visual aspects, the writing style, everything repeats the same line. So that the food enthusiast can see that there is something actually new there content-wise, something fun, fresh ideas, but the way it is presented to him it is not too different or... the guy needs to feel it is something close to himself.” –PR1

This comment indicates that bloggers can have a huge impact in the process of food enthusiasts first adopting the product. There needs to be in the same time the factor of familiarity, so that the environment where it is presented feels familiar to the food

enthusiast; but also that there is new ideas and something exciting. This is similar to the familiarity–differentiation axis seen in part 6.4.

Not all respondents however were sure that bloggers do have such an influence on food enthusiasts. This one professional denounced that food bloggers are very commercial, to a point where it can influence their credibility:

“so with bloggers we have this problem, and especially with food bloggers, that they are completely commercial advertising channels. (...) And people who follow food blogs, they know they are ads. Whatever is the degree of independence. And food bloggers have a lot of followers. But I don’t know how much they actually take hints from there.” –PR1

Be as it may, several respondents claimed that the highly influential people have a direct impact on the consuming behavior of normal Finns. There were also concrete examples given. The most cited examples were cases including Mutti tomato sauce and avocado pasta. The famous Finnish gourmet chef Henri Alén made a tweet that said his favorite tomato puré is Mutti. Several respondents affirmed that this had a direct impact in the sales figures of the Mutti tomato puré. The other example to be cited was the avocado pasta recipe, that was initially blogged by the food author Hanna Gullichsen, that was claimed having raised the sales of avocado. Another form of direct influence that came up was the work of celebrity chefs in their restaurants. One respondent admitted that if she tastes a good and cleverly prepared food in a restaurant, she will instantly want to make it at home.

And what Hans Välimäki did to Lidl, respondents said that it can be benchmarked: to use a celebrity to create or change a brand image around a brand.

“we have a lot [of celebrities] that could be profiled with your meat products. And I would break boundaries a little, and don’t go for the first easy choice, like a gourmet chef, like HK is using Tomi Björk and so on, so if you could get Cheek to eat your meat, or Elastinen, who is an ambassador for health and healthy habits...but Cheek is strongly linked to luxus.” –PR2

I note that Cheek and Elastinen are both popular Finnish rap artists.

This part presented different ideas on the influence online trendsetters and famous brand ambassadors can have. Although opinions were somewhat divided, it can be an interesting target group to be considered when planning PR activities for a brand, as the influence these people have can be remarkable. However, as respondents noted, PR is not enough. Paid advertising is still considered as a good way to gain popularity.

8.3.4 Paid Advertising

So far this chapter has been dedicated to activities that are not in the sphere of traditional, paid advertising. However, even in the era of social media and online content, also traditional advertising in magazines and television seem to be very important in the whole marketing process, according to the experts:

“so really strong campaigning, I mean like advertisement campaigns, it brings a certain level of awareness in a way that makes it even possible the product is tested” –PR2

Almost all experts agreed on the importance of advertising but there was one that claimed that too much advertising can have negative side effects:

“It is difficult to start advertising because you easily get labeled as an over-priced gourmet product that is only fit for fancy old ladies from Eira (...)” –G1

According to the experts, advertising has a direct effect in the purchasing behavior of the consumers. Some even admitted they had themselves changed their consumer behavior and started for instance shopping in Lidl after the celebrity chef Hans Välimäki started appearing in the ads. Whether in the television or print media, advertisement does matter:

“What’s on TV has an unbelievable influence on people. (...) also with the [celebrity’s] face alone tons are sold. What is on TV, it goes down extremely well for people.” –J1

Hans Välimäki and Lidl commercials were stated by surprisingly many of the respondents as being a very interesting marketing cooperation that was estimated to have led to very good results. Beyond the fact that one respondent stated to having started shopping in Lidl solely because of these advertisements, there were also others that estimated the cooperation had an even larger social influence:

“on the other hand I think that Lidl and Välimäki have taught to Finns the use of processed meat products. Because they sell prociutto and salami and these Deluxe items. For me it’s such an interesting combo that I think it’s hilarious. A bulk store and perhaps our most distinguished chef advertising it.” –G2

But why are the Lidl advertisement deemed so efficient? Is there some elements that can be benchmarked to other commercials as well? According to the experts, a good advertisement should awaken emotions and, again, convey the story. Telling the facts is nearly not as important:

“I think that we don’t have to think about should it be more informative or humoristic but here also I would highlight the importance of the story. (...) But it needs to evoke feelings, then I get interested. And if we’re talking about gourmet products the feeling needs to be positive (...). And if we are talking about meat products, I think the story should be forward ethical questions and similar things.” –G2

No matter whether in print or on television, paid advertising seems to have a crucial role in the marketing of gourmet food. What I find interesting, is that none of the respondents talked about paid advertising campaigns in social media, like Google Adwords or Display, or similar. But since the respondents spontaneously did not address these marketing channels, they will not be dealt with here. Instead, what came up was the using the retailer’s communication channels. This interesting phenomenon is addressed in the following part.

8.3.5 Using the Retailers’ Channels

As previously seen, store personnel is crucial in selling the product especially if it belongs to the gourmet category. But apart engaging the personnel, a food brand can contemplate also on other possibilities for transmitting their marketing message inside the retailers’ channels. These include point-of-sale material, tastings, and online channels. As consumer journals were treated in the previous part I have left them out from here, although they are of course a crucial part of the retailers’ channels.

Point-of-Sale material (commonly abbreviated POS material) seems to be seldom used by retailers. Typical POS materials are banners, stickers and leaflets that highlight the presence of a certain product inside the supermarket or store. A few respondents stated

that although the producers do frequently provide such material, it is seldom if ever used in stores. Most typical reasons for this were that it easily creates an untidy patchwork effect within the store, or that POS usage is against concept definition.

”I rather keep my store POS free. Let the products speak for themselves. Less banderols, posters and placards. That’s own our policy, our own thing.” -M2

Retailer’s premises should also be used for the very important marketing effort: tastings. Especially when the product is new, tastings form a crucial component in familiarizing the ingredient to the consumer:

“With food, the most important thing are tastings. People don’t buy. We are so used to our own habits that we don’t buy unless we taste first.” –PR2

This view was largely shared by the respondents.

Apart from consumer magazines, the retailers can have other marketing channels that can be used to promote a certain brand. Although some of the respondents and especially those working directly in the retail sector claimed they still have a lot to do in developing their online channels, some stated they already use social media as a tool to communicate with clients on product-related info and recipes for instance:

“(…)we often put on our Facebook if we have new product arrivals and communicate it that way to clients. That hey, now we have this kind of product available and here’s a recipe you can try. We have found this to be efficient.” –M1

In designing an efficient marketing mix for a product, the possibility to appear in the retailers’ online and social media channels can be worth considering. In this chapter it was also established that POS materials are not used frequently in many stores. However, tastings are a marketing tool definitely worth investigating. The following part is dedicated to the brands own channels.

8.3.6 Own Channels

The interviewed experts did not seem to be very excited about using the brand’s own channels as a marketing communication tool. Many claimed that online presence, i.e. a

web page and perhaps a Facebook account, need to exist, but they were not stated as major marketing tools. The general opinion was that consumers seldom visit online channels of an individual food brand, and the paid-for or earned channels were seen as much more effective. Below are two different comments that represent both the consumer perspective as that of a retailer. Both claim that instead of inviting the consumer to visit the producer's website, it is more natural that relevant information is given directly in the purchasing situation:

“I don't really go looking for information from the brand's own site. I may go there if I get interested about something then I can go check it out, but the [information] should come there [during the purchasing situation]. When I'm here and I see it and I should make the purchasing decision, that is when it would be the most effective.” –G2

”We try to give all the information then and there. Now that we all have iPhones in our pockets it's really quick to google something (...). We try to give the service then and there.” –M2

Perhaps the best comment to sum up the respondents attitudes towards the matter of own channels is this one, which highlights that a brand should focus on be seen in places where people are already at:

“All in all the online world is of course a huge possibility, but people need to understand that in the online world today you get results by going where the people are and not try to make them come on your own website, whatever is the place where people will see your message.” –PR2

This supports the views presented in previous parts of this chapter, that for instance be seen in the channels of popular social media users or in the major Finnish newspapers can be hugely influential. And as noted by one respondent, if a brand does want to be active in Facebook, the best way might be to fade out the product and make the whole profile more about an ideology. She cited that brands that have done so and have currently vibrant Facebook accounts are *Varustelevka*, a Finnish online store specializing in second-hand army goods, and *I fucking love science*, the profile of a science magazine. This, she claimed, could be benchmarked by a meat producer as well, by having a profile with the ideology of “gourmet food at least once a month” as a given example.

8.4 Reflections

In this chapter we have established that the marketing communication of gourmet products could ideally include storytelling. The story should then be spread to the targeted consumers via different channels. Fruitful collaboration forms were seen to be likely with traditional journalists, but also with celebrities, bloggers and online trendsetters. In order for this kind of collaboration to succeed, producers need to be engaging and send out recipes, samples and press-quality pictures and explain all relevant basic information on the product.

In addition to PR, advertising was seen to have an important role in the marketing communication of gourmet products. Many stated it has a direct effect in the purchasing behavior of the consumers. Some even admitted they had themselves changed their consumer behavior and started for instance shopping in Lidl after the celebrity chef Hans Välimäki started appearing in the ads. According to the experts, a good advertisement should convey the story and also awaken emotions. Product facts were not seen as important a content.

In designing an efficient marketing mix for a product, the possibility to appear in the retailers' online and social media channels can also be worth considering. It seems that POS materials are not frequently used. However, tastings were deemed a powerful marketing tool definitely worth investigating.

The interviewed experts did not seem to be very excited about using the brand's own channels as a marketing communication tool. Many claimed that online presence, i.e. a web page and perhaps a Facebook account, need to exist, but they were not stated as major marketing tools. The general opinion was that consumers seldom visit online channels of an individual food brand, and the paid-for or earned channels were seen as much more effective. And as a general guideline for Facebook presence, it was claimed that the best way might be to fade out the product and make the whole profile more about an ideology.

As to what communicating specific product attributes is concerned, respondents felt that French origins are a mostly positive thing that should be, to some extent, communicated to the consumer. Special care should be placed on highlighting French origins while making the consumer feel comfortable about the product and promote it as something

approachable. Most experts felt that although there is a trend for ethical/organic products, consumers are actually seldom willing to pay the difference in price. Meat, however was seen as some kind of exception. In gourmet meat products, the production conditions were seen as fairly relevant additional information and the general opinion was that it should be included, to some extent, in the storytelling and marketing messages of the product. The degree of emphasize needs to be thought according to the specific consumer group(s) targeted.

I must emphasize that the insights presented here are just a summary of the subjective views of eight individuals. Significantly different content would probably have been obtained by interviewing different individuals. The purpose of this study is to give a viewpoint on how the marketing of gourmet meat products can be approached. It is not aimed to provide definitive answers.

9 Discussion And Conclusion

The purpose of this final chapter is to provide concise answers to my three research questions and present the key findings of this thesis. For clarity measures, I have regrouped the answers into three separate subchapters.

As the answers presented in chapter 6.6. indicate, general interest towards food is growing in Finland. People go out more, they cook at home more, and they are more interested about the quality of the ingredients they consume. I think that in this socio-cultural climate, it is increasingly important for consumers, producers and marketing professionals alike to understand the communicational practices in promoting gourmet foods.

As we have seen for instance in part 2.3 through Kotler's product layers and Danziger's theory, the gourmet aspect is built by adding value to the product itself. As clearly stated by the respondents, gourmet products need to be of better quality (see part 6.1). However, quality in itself not enough. There are a variety of communicational practices that were deemed crucial by the respondents. In the following, I summarize the essential insights regarding communicational practices in promoting gourmet food.

9.1 What Communicational Practices Can Be Used to Promote Gourmet Products?

I chose to approach the promotion of gourmet products through Kotler's framework of 4Ps: product, price, placement and promotion. As seen for instance in part 6.1, a gourmet product can be anything as long as it transmits a stronger feeling of quality, or *sophistication* to use Van der Veen's terminology (2003 : 420). Value can be added at each of the three product levels to differentiate the product from non-gourmet rivals (Kotler *et al.* 2009 : 506).

Apart from promotion, there are several other important communicational elements that tell the consumer that the product is gourmet. Price, placement and packaging were

perhaps the most important of these according to the respondents. The main points regarding these communicational practices are briefly summarized below.

Packaging

Packaging is in a crucial role in creating the feeling of a gourmet product, and it serves as an important platform in communicating with the consumer. Because of the major role packaging has in transmitting luxury value, it demands careful consideration from the producer.

As claimed by the respondents, packaging at its best evokes a feeling of exclusiveness. But there were no single established way how to do it. On the contrary, exclusiveness can come from really well-thought, elaborate packaging, or from rugged and “authentic-like” solutions. Exclusiveness can also be transmitted by being *unpacked*, as several respondents stated. If the product is packed, then it is important the package contains all the right information according to current legislation and that the size of the package doesn’t diminish the sense of exclusiveness, as can happen with products sold in bulk. It is also important to position the product correctly on the familiarity–differentiation axis; ideally, it should be differentiated from non-gourmet rivals, but not too different from similar gourmet competitors.

Price

As established through Danziger’s theory in part 2.2, price is a major communicational clue that tells the product belongs to the luxury category. This view was largely shared by the respondents. According to Danziger, the higher price tag of gourmet products needs to be justified by added value (2005 : 169). As established in part 2.2, a gourmet company could start by observing how similar products on the market are priced; then look for creative ways to add value for consumers; and then define the price significantly higher than a similar plain product but not too high to repel consumers.

The respondents saw that good tools to add value are for instance a nicer purchasing environment, visual esthetics in packaging and presentation, better-quality service in the store and additional information regarding the product. Additional information was deemed especially important; the more specific information is at hand on a given product, the more value the consumer sees in it. A higher price could thus be justified

by adding information next to the product, on its packaging, and/or by training store staff to provide information about the product.

Those who are especially seen as willing to pay higher prices are people who are interested in gourmet and quality food, or *foodies*. It was also stated that masses are likely to buy products with the best price. These insights are linked to the theory of niche marketing by Tamagnini & Tregear, presented in chapter 3, because they give an insight on who the gourmet products should be targeted at.

Placement

As seen in parts 2.5 and 6.5, the environment where the product is sold acts as a strong quality-clue for the consumers. The store personnel plays a crucial role in recommending certain products and can directly influence the purchasing behavior of people. Special care should thus be placed in keeping the store employees informed about the product and its usage.

What is also important to retain from placement issues is the degree in which the producer wishes for the product to be sold. If the producer has the capabilities to produce quantities large enough to enter the S or K chains, products can be sold nationally and can reach much higher consumption figures. If production is small-scale, suitable retail channels were seen to be deli shops. Additionally, being sold only in gourmet shops might contribute in creating the sensation of exclusiveness.

Promotion

According to the marketing experts Twitchell (2001) and Danziger (2005), the key in marketing luxury goods is building a coherent and concise story around the brand or product. Interestingly, this view was spontaneously brought up by virtually all the interviewees. Thus, it can be carefully concluded that the marketing communication of gourmet products could ideally include storytelling.

The story should then be spread to the targeted consumers via different channels such as traditional media, paid-for-advertising, celebrity ambassadors and collaboration with online trendsetters. However, if a single most important promotion channel should be named, in the light of the interviews it is clearly recipes. Tested and accurate recipes

play a crucial role in the marketing communication of any product, and it becomes even more important when the product is expensive like meat. They are an integral part of successful promotion activities for any gourmet product.

Apart from media and trendsetter collaboration and advertising, the possibility to appear in the retailers' online and social media channels can also be worth considering. It seems that POS materials or food brands' own channels are not frequently used. However, tastings were deemed a powerful marketing tool definitely worth investigating.

Niche marketing

The last aspect of the communicational practices regarding the promotion of gourmet products is niche marketing. In chapter 3 we reviewed Tamagnini & Tregear's study where niche marketing was deemed especially appropriate for luxury food companies (1998). According to them, the crucial element is to correctly identify the niches. Equally crucial is to find the right key messages to each niche: what differentiation point or own skill should be highlighted? (Tamagnini & Tregear 1998).

With the narrow data gathered for this thesis it is of course impossible to determinate correct niches or differentiation points. However, in the light of the interviews, it seems that respondents agree that marketing efforts should be targeted to specific consumer groups, and the group that was seen the most interesting was food enthusiasts or *foodies*. Respondents also claimed that it is increasingly difficult to determine niche based on demographic criteria such as age or gender. Instead, a wider approach was suggested, where the gourmet products are targeted to everybody that has an interest towards good food, no matter income level, age or gender.

Summary

In promoting gourmet products, it is important to realize that price, packaging and placement are essential communicational tools. They seem to hold a major role in building added value and thus differentiating the product from non-gourmet rivals.

Storytelling was deemed the most efficient way to market gourmet products. After having compiled a coherent story, a food brand needs to expose the story to the desired

consumer group(s). Tools to do this can include collaboration with journalists, celebrities, trendsetters and retailers, paid advertising, and the brand's own channels. However, the most important marketing channel for food was estimated to be recipes, and according to this study recipes should be an integral part of all marketing communication effort of any gourmet food brand.

I must emphasize that the insights presented here are just a summary of the subjective views of eight individuals. The purpose of this study is to give insight on how the marketing of gourmet products can be approached, and the results presented here cannot be generalized. The next subchapter is dedicated to communicating about product-specific attributes.

9.2 Are Country of Origin And Ethical Production Product Attributes That Should Be Used As Key Marketing Messages?

I chose to examine more closely two product attributes: country of origin and ethical production, and ponder on the degree these attributes should be communicated to consumers.

The results obtained by Leclerc, Schmitt and Dubé presented in chapter 4 reflect a general positive attitude towards French products – French-sounding products are estimated to generate more overall pleasure, and even tasting the product will not necessarily change this estimation among consumers (1994 : 265). Results obtained by the Finnish Luomala are somewhat similar – in his study, the participants clearly favor French food over Swedish or German, and French food is deemed to have an excellent reputation among Finns (2007 : 123).

These results inspired me to try and find out if French origins are indeed likely to appeal to Finnish consumers. The other attribute, ethical production, was chosen because of the current trend for organic and ethical production regarding especially meat products (see part 6.6).

French origins were seen as a mostly positive thing that should clearly be communicated to the consumer. However, the extent to which this should happen divided opinions. Some saw it as being a marketing message of key importance, while

other placed it in the nice-to-know category. According to the interviews, food producers could think about ways to promote French origins without placing the food too much above the average Finn. Special care could be placed on highlighting French origins while making the consumer feel comfortable about the product and promote it as something approachable.

Most experts felt that although there is a trend of ethical/organic products, consumers are actually seldom willing to pay the difference in price. Meat, however was seen as some kind of exception as it was seen as a category where ethical/organic production had an increased value compared to other products. Although gourmet meat can be thought by consumers as being *de facto* ethically produced, the production conditions were seen as fairly relevant additional information to be included in the storytelling and marketing messages of the product. The degree of emphasize to attribute to the message of ethical production needs to be thought according to the specific consumer group(s) the product is targeted to.

Thus, it can be concluded that both ethical production and French origins were thought to be mostly positive product attributes that are worth communicating to the consumers. The degree in which the attributes should be highlighted depends on the segment(s) the product is primarily aimed at.

9.3 What Kind of Special Communicational Aspects Have to Be Taken into Account When Marketing Meat Products Such As Veal And Canned Ready-Meals, If Any?

My third research question deals with the marketing communication of specific meat products such as veal and canned ready-meals. These two product types were chosen because they represent food that is fairly unfamiliar for Finnish food consumers, and I wanted to know whether they would be trickier to promote.

Some of the experts considered veal is a tough meat type for marketing because of the un-ethical images it can evoke. However, the vast majority felt that it is not worse to slaughter a veal than it is to slaughter a grown animal, and that ethical concerns belong to all meat production in general and not veal in particular. The comments presented in part 8.2 suggest that the marketing of this product type should be targeted to foodies and forerunners. Another important element was, again, storytelling, as it was seen as a

powerful tool in changing people's attitudes towards veal meat production. All in all, the experts seemed far more concerned about the poor availability of veal than on the ethical questions related to its production. The experts felt there is demand for veal meat beyond current supply. This, perhaps, could be integrated in the marketing communication of new veal products that are introduced on the Finnish market.

What was seen as far more trickier a product type to promote were canned ready-meals. The gourmet culture associated in many countries with canned meat products (i.e. *foie gras* in France) is lacking in Finland. Canned meat products undoubtedly form a challenging product category marketing-wise in Finland, as they seem to quickly evoke products with a really bad-quality reputation. Things might be slowly changing, as few respondents evoked the small breakthrough of duck leg preserves that have become a popular product among food enthusiasts. Similar success could perhaps be found for other canned meat products as well, and the general opinion was that it is not hopeless to try enter Finnish markets with a gourmet canned meat product. However, as respondents put forward, this product category demands a lot more marketing efforts to make general attitudes tilt.

I must note that all of the experts are food professionals and thus are probably more open to new types of foods than average Finns. Significantly different viewpoints would probably been put forward had the interviewees been traditional food consumers.

9.4 Reflections

As the method I chose was qualitative, the results presented here cannot be generalized. The biggest advantage of gathering data through themed interviews is that it permits me to gain deep insight on the topic I wanted to study. The fact that I had eight people with four different professional background provided me versatile viewpoints on the phenomenon of marketing gourmet products.

However, there are important limitations that need to be acknowledged. The viewpoints presented by the experts are all subjective, which means that I would probably have ended up with different types of opinions if different individuals had been interviewed. Another main concern with qualitative research is the presence of the researcher. Although I strived to maintain a neutral and non-valorizing attitude towards the answers, face-to-face interviewing is always a complex psycho-social situation where

many things, including the researchers unconscious beliefs and manners, may interfere with the willingness of the respondents to elaborate certain points. Although I consciously tried to avoid letting personal biases and idiosyncrasies interfere with the interviews, it is important to acknowledge that this type of phenomenon may indeed alter the results. This means that even though the same professionals would be interviewed by someone else, there is a chance that the results would be somewhat different. This, in turn, makes it even more challenging to generalize the findings presented here.

Despite these obvious challenges related to the chosen method, I believe that the answers and analysis presented here provide the reader with interesting viewpoints on the communicational practices related to promoting gourmet products in contemporary Finland. I believe that the insights are valuable for consumers, food producers and marketing professionals alike, because they help understand how value is constructed and how higher price-tags are justified. Understanding these processes is important in coping in today's consumption-driven world.

As marketing gourmet foods and especially meat products is a phenomenon that has not been studied to a wide degree in Finland, there remains interesting research topics to be inspected in the future. It would be extremely interesting to approach the same research theme through different research methods to gain wider insight. For instance, another qualitative method that could be used in future research are surveys. Regular consumers could answer questions about where they search for recipes, what type of food advertisements they remember and whether they interact with food brands on social media channels, for instance. Adopting a quantitative method could also provide interesting new data on marketing gourmet products. It would be interesting to study in a laboratory setting how different types of food images influence hunger or other brain functions. These kind of researches would significantly increase what we know today about marketing gourmet products in Finland.

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