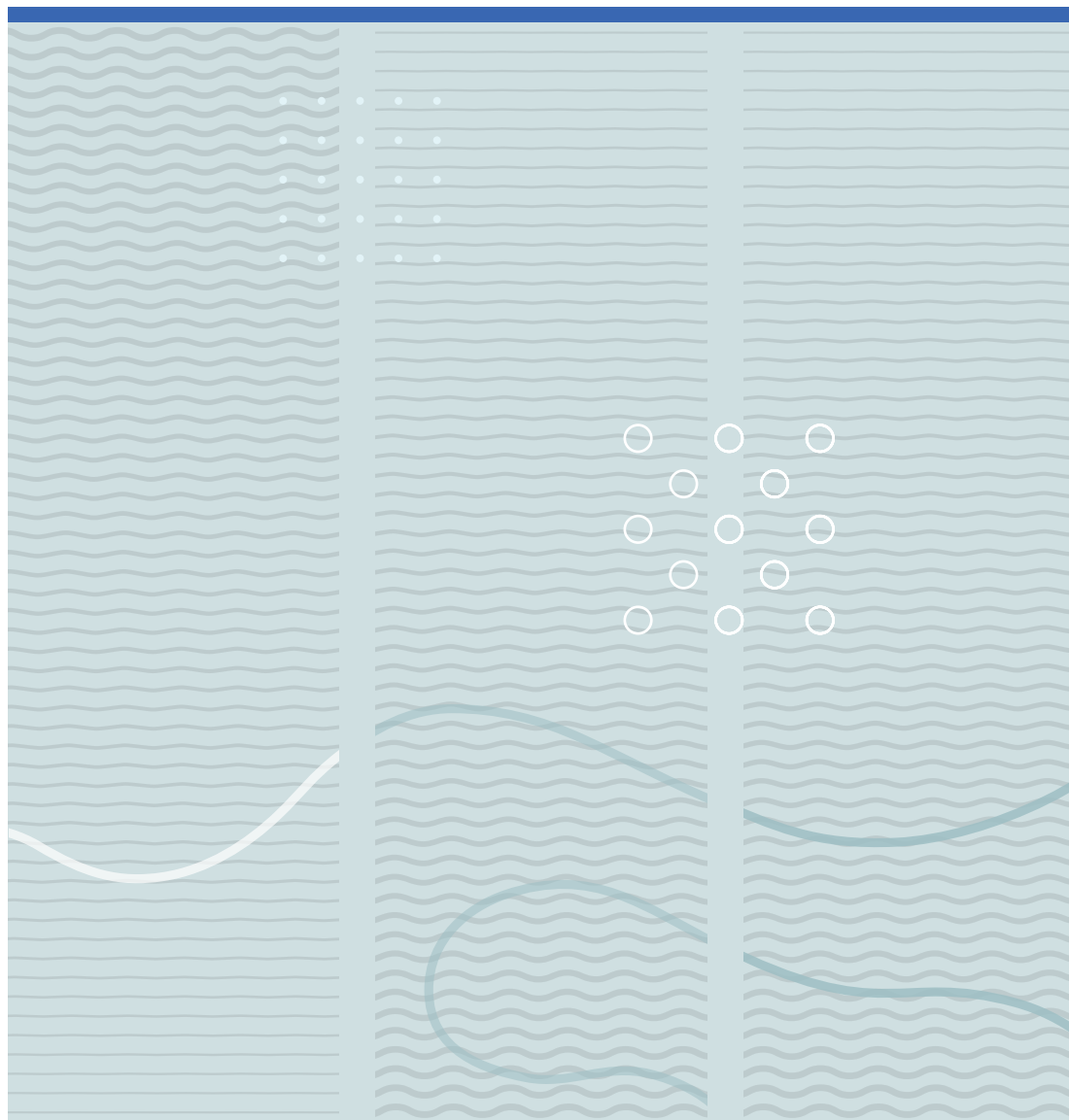


Kristin Bentsen

Three Essays on Market Shaping Dynamics in Digital Local Food Markets





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**Three Essays on Market Shaping Dynamics in
Digital Local Food Markets**

A PhD dissertation in
Marketing Management

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USN School of Business
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“Break a leg”

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Kristin Bentsen

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Horten, February, 2021

Abstract

The overall purpose of this research was to investigate how and why markets emerge, change and vary. In traditional consumer and marketing literature, adoption models, such as the theory of planned behavior and the diffusion of innovations, explain why consumers choose to adopt products and services developed by producers and providers. However, a growing number of studies have sought to reveal how consumers both generate and shape markets. One such approach currently unfolding in the marketing literature is the market system dynamics (MSD) perspective. This perspective suggests a contrasting view on traditional consumer adoption theories, one that is centred around understanding markets as social, multilevel systems that are co-created between consumers and producers. This dissertation argues that such a perspective may help shed light on the complexity of how and why multiple stakeholders shape, and are shaped by, markets. The research context is the fast-growing Scandinavian local food phenomenon of REKO markets. A literature study and a nearly three-year-long ethnographic investigation provide the data for the three complementary essays covered in this thesis.

The thesis overview is written to reflect the emergence of the research question and the complementary articles. I first started this study with exploring how traditional perspectives on what may be regarded as the local food phenomena, often in the traditional literature was explained with theories on adoption and diffusion of innovation. Through addressing RQ 1: *How are traditional perspectives on consumer adoption and diffusion applied in research in order to understand local food markets, and how is consumer adoption of local food markets understood from an MSD perspective?* I found that they fell short in explaining how contemporary markets such as alternative local food

markets, emerge, change and vary. I found that by applying the novel MSD approach, these limitations could be addressed. In the course of my ethnographic journey, the market shaping phenomenon of moral policing emerged. My emergent focus is articulated in RQ 2: *How are markets shaped by the moral principles by which they are animated, and how does moral policing affect dynamics in digital local food markets?* Addressing RQ2 inspired me to further investigate the complexity of market-shaping dynamics in contemporary local food markets to develop insights on how digital platforms can support the moralization of markets. Abductive inferences developed from extant research on morality in contemporary markets is explored in RQ3: *How do particular digital affordances influence the moralization of digital local food markets?*

As such, the first essay takes the form of a literature review article entitled “Consumers in Local Food Markets: From Adoption to Market Co-creation?” It explores whether traditional models of adoption and diffusion can still be applied to understanding new phenomena, such as local food markets. This study identifies three main challenges within the literature on the adoption and diffusion of local food: the lack of a clear definition of what constitutes local food, divergent market assumptions and disparate consumer assumptions. These challenges highlight the need for new perspectives on consumer adoption and diffusion of local food. The second essay takes the form of an empirical research article entitled “Should You Be Doing That? An Exploration of Moral Policing by Everyday Market Participants.” It investigates one particular aspect of how markets are shaped: the policing of the moral principles undergirding them. This study identifies three inter-related questions regarding the phenomenon of moral policing: What triggers moral policing? How does moral policing vary in markets? And what consequences are likely to be precipitated by moral policing? Finally, the third essay takes the form of a

conceptual article: “Can Digital Platforms Support Moralized Markets? An Analysis of Affordances that Matter to Moralization.” This article examines how the affordances offered by digital platforms may support the formation and maintenance of markets with explicit moral principles (moralized markets) guiding the interactions between market actors. This article identifies moralizing affordances that support the moralization of contemporary digital markets.

Keywords: consumer culture, market shaping, market innovation, local food markets, market system dynamics, consumer adoption, moral policing, moral affordances

List of Papers

Paper 1

Bentsen, K., and P. E. Pedersen. 2020. “Consumers in Local Food Markets: From Adoption to Market Co-creation?” *British Food Journal*, 123, no.3: 1083-1102.

Paper 2 Omitted from online publication

Bentsen, K., E. Fischer, and P. E. Pedersen. “Should You Be Doing That? An Exploration of Moral Policing by Everyday Market Participants” (Submitted to *Journal of Consumer Research*).

Paper 3 Omitted from online publication

Bentsen, K., “Can Digital Platforms Support the Moralization of Markets? An Analysis of Affordances that Matter to Moralization” (To be submitted to *Marketing Theory*).

Article Abstracts

Article 1:

Consumers in Local Food Markets: From Adoption to Market Co-creation?

Kristin Bentsen and Per Egil Pedersen

The purpose of this paper is to explore the consumer adoption literature on local food. We explore whether or not the traditional models of adoption and diffusion can still be applied to understand new phenomena such as local food markets. This paper conducts a systematic review of the literature on the adoption and diffusion of local food. This study identifies three main challenges within literature on the adoption and diffusion of local food: a lack of a clear definition of what constitutes local food, divergent market assumptions and divergent consumer assumptions. In addition, this study points to the need for new perspectives on consumer adoption and diffusion of local food. This paper provides an overview of current streams in local food research and contributes to literature on consumer adoption and diffusion of local food.

Article 2:

Should You Be Doing That? An Exploration of Moral Policing by Everyday Market Participants

Kristin Bentsen, Eileen Fischer and Per Egil Pedersen

This paper elaborates on the largely neglected phenomenon of moral policing, defined as “actions by market participants aimed at ensuring that others are adhering to the moral principles they believe undergird the market.” Developing insights from an inductive analysis of ethnographic and interview data collected from participants in local food markets (REKO markets) in Norway, it examines how actors such as consumers and producers – as opposed to regulators or governments – engage in moral policing of the markets in which they interact. It identifies several triggers of moral policing, the variability in the forms that moral policing takes, and a range of outcomes associated with it. This paper extends our understanding of moralized markets and of market governance.

Article 3:

Can Digital Platforms Support Moralized Markets?

An Analysis of Affordances that Matter to Moralization

Kristin Bentsen

This article examines how the affordances offered by digital platforms may support the formation and maintenance of “moralized markets” – defined as markets that are undergirded with explicit moral principles that guide the interactions between market actors. Using illustrations from a digital local food market REKO, this article identifies digital platform affordances that support the moralization of markets. This article argues that the interactions and dynamics between low-level affordances and high-level social media affordances enable what may be regarded as “moral affordances” – affordances that matter in the moralization of markets. The article concludes by considering possible outcomes of the increasing use of digital platforms for the moralization of contemporary markets.

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Abbreviations

REKO: Rejält Konsum

CSA: Community-supported agriculture

LF: Local food

FA: Food assembly

AFN: Alternative food networks

LFS: Local food systems

AMAP: Association pour le Maintien d'une Agriculture Paysanne

SFSC: Short food supply chain

SPG: Solidarity purchasing groups

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Introduction

*“The days were taken up with work on the soil, ever more work; he cleared new parcels of roots and rocks, plowed, manured, harrowed, chopped, and crumbled lumps of dirt with his hands and heels – always and everywhere the tiller of the soil who turned the fields into velvet carpets. He waited a few days, until it looked like rain, then he sowed the grain.” (Knut Hamsun, *Growth of The Soil*, 1917, 23)*

The Nobel Prize winning novel *The Growth of the Soil* (1917) by Knut Hamsun illustrates, at its heart, an inclination towards localism and the agrarian lifestyle. In recent years, local food has once again become more popular among those consumers who want a better understanding of food and a stronger connection to their food. This shift in consumer preferences is demonstrated by the growing number of shoppers who are willing to pay for food about which detailed information is known concerning its production and origin. Engaged consumers share their knowledge, tastes and opinions, participate in teaching others to eat healthily, and throw away less food; they are thereby affecting the food industry in various ways.

Even though opportunities to buy local food have long existed (e.g., farmers markets and roadside stands), alternative ways for consumers to access local food are currently unfolding. Various alternative local food networks, such as community-supported agriculture (CSA), *Association pour le Maintien d’une Agriculture Paysanne* (AMAP) and solidarity purchasing groups (SPG), in addition to various boxed food options and food assemblies (FA), represent new patterns of consumers and producers working together in direct producer–consumer cooperatives (Schermer 2015). Digital local food markets are emerging, suggesting a solution to the challenges small farmers and traders

face in competing with large-scale producers and global food systems in gaining market access. Among these currently developing digital local food markets are the Scandinavian REKO markets.

A REKO market is an online local food market co-created by producers, consumers and facilitators (termed *administrators*), through a process of facilitated transaction and interaction. In this way, REKO markets may be understood as a new form of market that is composed of multiple practices, beliefs and rule systems (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2015) as they emerge and unfold in various ways. As of January 2021, there are around 430 active REKO markets in Nordic countries, with approximately 1.9 million active food buyers and sales nearing 260 million NOK (20 million USD).¹ REKO markets draw inspiration from many different models of direct food distribution and alternative food networks (AFN) based on the belief that local communities should be able to influence the ways that food is produced, traded and consumed.

Research on local food systems (LFS) and AFN (Feagan 2007; Tregear 2011) has, since the early 1990s, grown into an extensive body of literature (partly theoretical and partly empirical). Common concerns within studies of LFS and AFN, as noted by a variety of scholars from different disciplines, include the inconsistent use of terms and concepts (e.g., Bentsen and Pedersen 2020; Feagan 2007), the conflation of the characteristics of various systems/networks (e.g., Hinrichs 2000; Renting, Marsden, and Banks 2003), and the continued lack of consumer perspectives applied by researchers to understanding the

¹ Sales estimates are based on accounting data from three different rings through 2020, and are aggregated on a sales-per-member basis for the other markets.

developments and changes of local food markets, systems and networks (e.g., Triegar 2011; Goodman 2003).

Markets are fundamental to managerial thought and practice, mainly because they present the domain of action for firms (Sprong et al. 2021). The foundational conceptualization of markets is built on the primacy of dyads: producers who produce (value creators) and consumers who consume (value destroyers; Baker et al. 2019; Kristensson, Pedersen, and Thorbjørnsen 2020). Researchers in many disciplines, especially in marketing, have long desired to understand, describe, explain and predict how markets (consumers and producers) respond to innovation (Hauser, Tellis, and Griffin 2006). According to Schumpeter's (1934) theoretical type of innovations, the "opening of markets" (generally termed "market innovation") covers all types of market activities in existing or new markets. Consequently, the complex challenges related to the emergence, change and transformation of markets, has received a lot of scholarly attention.

The conventional understanding of market innovation has centred around firms' quest for developing markets as part of their long-term strategies (Maciel and Fischer 2021), and often views firms as the source of innovation (Hauser, Tellis, and Griffin 2006). In this traditional perspective, market innovation is about how well-established companies initiate and sustain market innovation processes through market power and economies of scale (Branstad and Solem 2021). This view is characterized by consumer adoption of offerings that are initiated and marketed by firms, and, as such, this view quite fittingly explains why consumers choose to adopt products and services developed by producers and providers. Ground-breaking individual-level adoption models, such as the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen 1991), and aggregate models, such as the diffusion of

innovations (Rogers 2003), are examples of traditional theories explaining the latter. Developed during a time when innovations were thought of as new products and standardized services, these individual-level adoption models, often applied to understanding the adoption of innovation, assume that consumers make well-considered decisions when adopting products developed and marketed by producers (Kristensson, Pedersen, and Thorbjørnsen 2020).

This thesis argues that it is particularly important from a marketing management perspective to explore whether the traditional perspectives on adoption and diffusion can be applied to understanding recent developments in contemporary markets, especially because traditional adoption and diffusion concepts have been highly instrumental in the management of innovations. Should these models lose their managerial relevance due to a lack of relevant institutional presumptions, the alternative theories are much less developed and lack formal models that can be applied to support managerial decision making in present-day markets.

One strand of research exploring marketplace dynamics departs from the neoclassical view that a market is an objective given of reality (Sprong et al. 2021, 450), questions presumed institutions, and investigates the mechanisms through which consumers shape markets (i.e., Giesler 2008; Giesler 2012; Humphreys 2010; Martin and Schouten 2014; Sandicki and Ger 2010; Scarabato and Fischer 2013; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007). This stream of research provides empirical evidence of market shaping and evolution, demonstrating how actors involved in markets influence, redefine, co-create and ultimately shape the institutions of markets that, in the traditional perspective, are termed adoption (individual level) and diffusion (market level). In this research, in

contrast to the traditional dyadic view of markets, markets are understood as social, multilevel systems that are co-created between consumers and producers, in which market actors shape their business landscape rather than only reacting to it (Maciel and Fischer 2020, Nenonen, Storbacka, and Windahl 2019).

Within contemporary consumer and marketing research, a market system dynamics (MSD) perspective, originating from consumer research and consumer culture theory (CCT), is, as this dissertation advocates, particularly positioned to provide a more comprehensive, systems thinking–grounded framework for increasing the understanding of the emergence and transformation of contemporary markets by viewing them as complex systems. In applying an MSD lens, we find that the literature on the consumer adoption of local food (Bentsen and Pedersen 2020) reflects how adoption and diffusion often have been conceptualized to describe empirical phenomena in markets in which institutions are stable. By stable institutions, we refer to the values, beliefs, logics and (foremost) *roles* of participating actors that are well established (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2015) and consequently we find that the dominant literature on the consumer adoption of local food tends to be cognitive, instrumental and individualistic.

The question of whether recent local food phenomena are co-created practices rather than consumers adopting suppliers ‘predefined offering, can be argued to emerge naturally at the intersection between market system dynamics literature and the alternative local food market adoption and diffusion literature (Bentsen and Pedersen 2020). For instance, particular moral norms are attached by local food market proponents to the term “local” and ultimately how it is interpreted. Because there are various understandings of what constitutes “local” and “small scale”, market creation

and development of the local food phenomena, can be argued to be the result of discursive negotiations of market practices amongst multiple stakeholders (Giesler and Fischer 2016), illustrating that local food markets are dynamically shaped, and not predefined and adopted.

In other words, the traditional literature on adoption and diffusion is found insufficient for explaining how and why consumers are increasingly changing a complex consumer practice in interaction with producers and regulators over time, nor can it fully account for their implications for marketing theory and practice.

In accord with the observation of the need for studying markets as social systems, there is an increasing recognition within the research on AFN and LFS of the important role played by moral principles (e.g., Cucco and Fonte 2015; Goodman, DuPuis, and Goodman 2012; Hinrichs 2000; Leiper and Clarke-Sather 2017; Renting, Marsden, and Banks 2003). Investigations of the role played by moral principles in LFS and AFN have addressed various issues, such as the ways in which affect and emotion are instrumental in the creation of moral values in alternative food economies (Bryant and Garnham 2014), consumer preferences regarding production, fair trade and food waste (Feenstra 1997; Goodman, DuPuis, and Goodman 2012; Seyfang 2008), and the emergence and evolution of direct local food markets (Schermer 2015).

However, by applying an MSD perspective to the LFS and AFN literature, it is evident that scant attention has been paid to the process by which markets and associated actors emerge, develop and dissipate (Bentsen and Pedersen 2020) In particular, the boundaries between markets, marketplaces, market actors and time within this body of research has not been sufficiently problematized. One consequence of understanding change and

development processes is that light is shed on what happens when market actors engage in governance efforts aimed at ensuring that other market actors adhere to the moral precepts that the former believe undergird the market. Conceptually speaking, the definition of moral policing covers these issues as it explores what factors may shape market evolution. Despite empirical evidence concerning how market participants may bring what they regard as salient moral principles to the attention of others and may attempt to engage in some form of moral policing (cf. Gollnhofer, Weijo, and Schouten 2019; Luedicke, Thompson, and Giesler 2010; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013), this phenomenon has not been systematically explored in either the LFS or AFN literature or consumer research on MSD.

In contrast to traditional consumer and marketing literature, which often applies the traditional firm–consumer terms, as noted earlier, an MSD perspective recognizes that markets are social, multilevel systems that are co-created between consumers and producers (Giesler and Fischer 2016). Nonetheless, investigations of LFS and AFN from both the production (e.g., Hooker and Shanahan 2012; Toler et al. 2009) and consumption perspectives (e.g., Hughner et al. 2007; Krystallis, Fotopoulos, and Zotos 2006) have paid little attention to questions concerning through whom and with what concrete exchange structures arise and evolve between consumers and producers (Giesler and Fischer 2016). Although research on AFN, such as short food supply chain (SFSC) and FA (De Bernardi and Tirabeni 2018; Sellitto, Vial, and Viegas 2018), has addressed emergent exchange structures, such as the digital aspect of local food markets, less is known about how market-shaping actors influence, and are influenced by, the digital affordances offered through technological platforms and digital social communication.

The overall purpose of this dissertation is to shed light on the complexity of how and why markets emerge, change and vary by identifying market-shaping dynamics within local food markets. Towards this end, the phenomena of consumer adoption, moral policing and the digital platform affordances in local food markets are explored. Illustrated in Figure 1 is the interplay between the positioning of this dissertation and the development of the research questions. This thesis argues that it is important to address these research questions in order to develop our understanding of the market-shaping dynamics of social, multilevel systems, in which market creation and development are the result of discursive negotiations of market practices amongst multiple stakeholders, including market-shaping consumers. In this way, this dissertation aims to address some of the important gaps in the consumer and marketing literature.

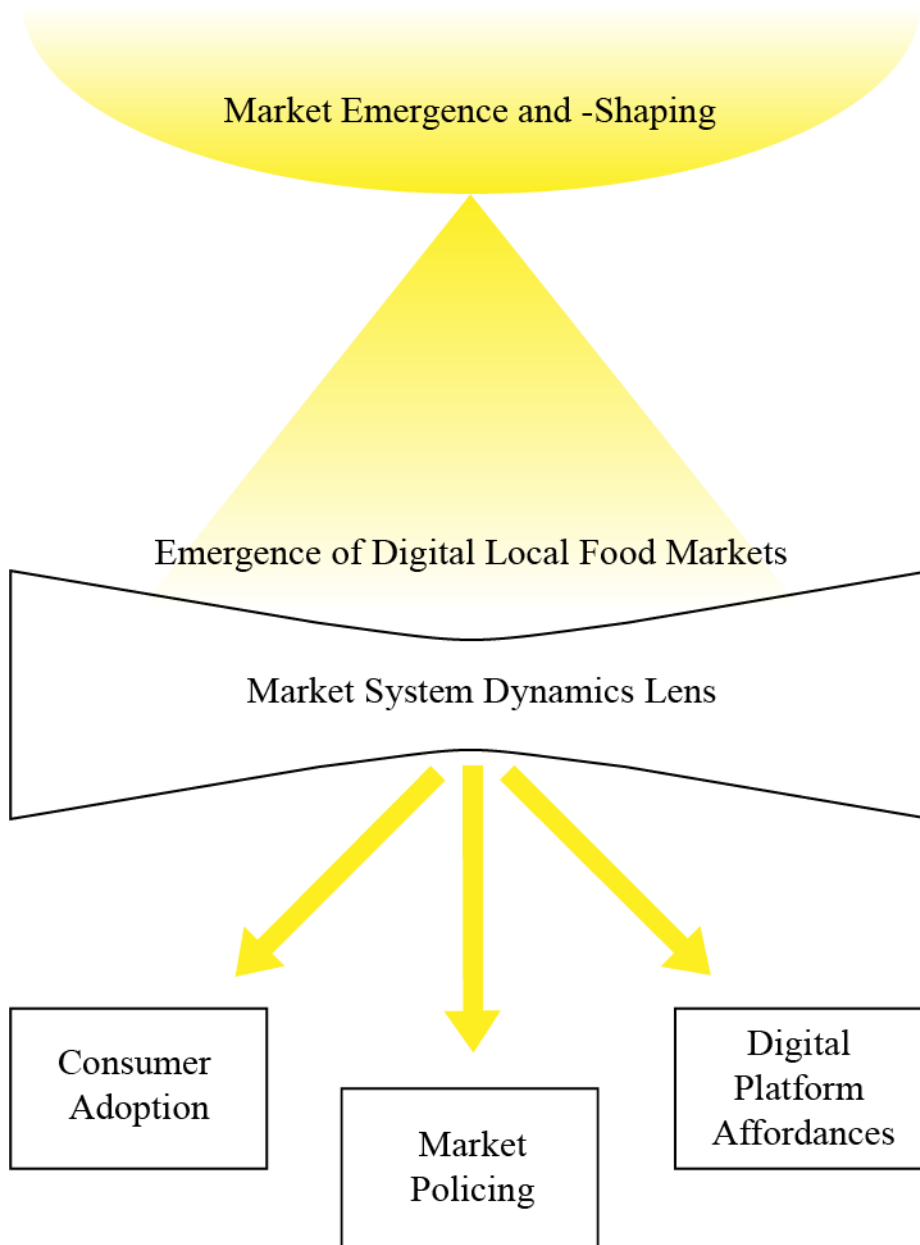


Figure 1. Dissertation positioning and development of research questions.

This thesis seeks to fill the gaps in the research via three complementary studies. In the first study, we ask whether an MSD perspective can offer guidelines for how to redefine or further develop the adoption and diffusion concepts through a review of consumer adoption literature on local food. In the second study, the limited attention that has been paid to understanding how markets are shaped by the moral principles by which they are

animated is highlighted. To do so, we explore the concept of moral policing through an empirical study of digital local food markets (REKO markets). Finally, the third study addresses the limited attention that has thus far been paid in the LFS and AFN literature to the potential implications that digital platforms may have for the moralization of contemporary markets.

Provided below are the research questions driving this thesis as well as an overview of the three papers developed based on this work (Figure 2).

Research questions

- 1) *How are traditional perspectives on consumer adoption and diffusion applied in research in order to understand local food markets, and how is consumer adoption of local food markets understood from an MSD perspective?*
- 2) *How are markets shaped by the moral principles by which they are animated, and how does moral policing affect dynamics in digital local food markets?*
- 3) *How do particular digital platform affordances influence the moralization of digital local food markets?*



Figure 2. Overview of papers.

The paper overview is illustrated in Figure 2. The first article involves a systematic literature review of 251 scientific works on local food published over the past 20 years. This work was accepted for publication in the *British Food Journal* in August 2020 and was ultimately published in November 2020. The second paper presents an empirical study of how REKO markets are shaped by the moral principles undergirding them. An extended abstract of this article was accepted as part of a special session at the CCT conference, June 2019 (Bentsen and Fischer, 2019). Developed into full article, this paper was submitted to the *Journal of Consumer Research* in February 2021. The third article explores how digital platforms may support moralized markets. An extended abstract was accepted as a conference paper for the Association for Consumer Research conference (ACR), October 2020 (Bentsen, Fischer, and Pedersen 2020). Developed into full article – a conceptual study of how digital platforms may support moralized markets – it is to be submitted to *Marketing Theory*.

Dissertation structure

This dissertation is structured as follows: The first section serves as an introduction to the study, written to reflect the emergence of the research questions, their significance, as well as an outline of the three complementary studies covered within the dissertation. The second section provides the overall theoretical framework and the perspectives applied in the study. The third section explains the empirical context of the research, the choice of methods used and the procedures involved in the application of these methods. This section also describes how the data were analyzed. The fourth and fifth section outlines the key findings, provides a general discussion of the theoretical, methodological and practical implications of these findings, and discusses both the limitations of and potential

future research directions afforded by the present study. Finally, in the sixth section, the three complementary studies are presented.

Overall theoretical perspectives

The overall theoretical perspectives (market emergence and shaping and the market system dynamics [MSD] perspective) that interconnect the content of all three articles included in this dissertation are presented next. An introduction to the complementary theories provided for unpacking the market-shaping dynamics within markets is also presented. The extensive quantity of available literature in each of these areas precludes a comprehensive review of the literature, but neither would this be useful for the purpose of this dissertation. Therefore, I provide synopses of the literature in each of the areas that are most relevant to my study.

Market emergence and shaping

“How do markets change? What becomes valuable and virtuous, what worthless and immoral? Why do some consumer identities and experiences become more widespread than others? And why can some of the most passionate consumers cause the greatest harm to a successful market whereas some of the most critical observers contribute to a market’s stability over time?” (Giesler and Fischer 2016, 1)

Researchers attempting to answer questions similar to those in the above quote have, within marketing literature – and particularly within the growing body of research on market systems – explored various market-emergence and market-shaping phenomena under different labels. Market innovation (Kjellberg, Azimont, and Reid 2015; Nenonen, Storbacka, and Windahl 2019), market development driving (i.e., Jaworski, Kohli, and

Sahay 2000), collaborative market driving (i.e., Maciel and Fischer 2020), market formation (Press et al. 2014), and market creation (Humphreys 2010a) are some examples of these phenomena. Overall, there is an increasing interest in how diverse groups of actors shape markets as a form of market innovation (e.g., Fehrer et al. 2020; Maciel and Fischer 2020; Nenonen, Storbacka, and Windahl 2019). Aligning closely with the focus of this thesis is conceptualizing market innovation as a broad phenomenon where market actors exercise their agency to influence market formation and transformation (including changing existing market structures, introducing new market devices, altering market behavior, and reconstituting market agents; Sprong et al. 2021). One thing that scholars investigating market shaping have in common is that they view markets as complex adaptive systems that can be the subject of innovation; thus, market shaping may be understood as an empirical phenomenon (Diaz Ruiz and Makkar 2021, 38).

Recently, dissatisfaction with traditional approaches to understanding how markets emerge, change and vary has catalyzed the emergence of perspectives and fields of scholarship that seek to carve out a space for markets in contemporary marketing theory (Nøjgaard and Bajde 2020). For example, one stream of research within industrial marketing and purchasing (IMP) focuses on a constructivist market systems perspective (Harrison and Kjellberg 2010); in a similar vein, research on consumer culture theory (CCT) (in which this dissertation is situated) has developed the MSD perspective (Giesler and Fischer 2016). These research streams place markets as social systems at the centre of their analysis, examining how markets are created and changed through the discursive negotiations and practices of various market stakeholders. This research argues that it is particularly important to examine markets through this lens in order to develop theoretical insights on what leads to the creation of new markets. The market-shaping literature

challenges the notion of the market as one single entity, focusing instead on underlying organizing practices. This perspective emphasizes the *doings* of markets, thus characterizing markets as unfolding or continuously in the making (i.e., Kjellberg et al. 2015; Mele et al. 2015; Nenonen et al. 2019). Following this perspective, this thesis argues that the diverse subfield of market research, MSD, is particularly positioned to challenge some of the imbalances (biases) that are argued by Giesler and Fischer to be “plaguing marketing scholarships” (Giesler and Fischer 2017, 1).

Market system dynamics perspective (MSD)

Market system dynamics (Giesler 2003, 2008; Giesler and Fischer 2017) explores how markets are constituted as complex social systems. MSD comprehends markets as adaptive systems, investigating how actors and institutions actively shape and are shaped by markets. Consumer and market research is currently demonstrating a growing interest in understanding various market shaping dynamics, and, as such, has explored various market place dynamics. For example, a common investigation involves examining what leads to the creation and/or change of (new) markets (e.g., Humphreys 2010; Giesler 2012; Gollnhofer et al. 2019; Luedicke, Thompson, and Giesler 2010). Another common theme is research investigating consumers’ roles in relation to those consumers who want to challenge the market based on unmet needs (e.g., Martin and Schouten 2014; Scarabato and Fischer 2015), or market change as a consequence of interactions between connected consumers who seek neither to establish a new market, nor to wreak systemic changes to an existing one (Dolbec and Fischer 2015).

Expanding our knowledge and offering immeasurable market-level insights, a major driving force for the MSD perspective has been a shared interest in the market-level

analysis of marketplace meanings as socially negotiated in a multi-actor system across time (Nøjgaard and Bajde 2020, 5).

This field of MSD scholarship points to three problematic biases found within traditional marketing literature: (1) the economic actor bias, (2) the micro-level bias and (3) the variance bias. Below, following Giesler and Fischer's (2017) work on market system dynamics, each bias is briefly described.

The economic actor bias is defined as "... the tendency of conventional marketing scholarship to focus almost exclusively on the actions of (and relationships between) two types of actors, 'consumers' (who consume) and 'producers' (who produce), to the exclusion of those of many other individual and institutional actors" (Giesler and Fischer 2016, 3). This bias concerns which actors marketing scholars choose to investigate and advocates theorizing markets as more complex social systems.

The micro-level bias is defined as "... the tendency of conventional marketing scholarship to reduce macro-cultural, historical and market-level structures and forces to mere contextual variables in favor of more specific micro-level theoretical questions and concerns" (Giesler and Fischer 2016, 4). This bias refers to the lack of theoretical attention paid to the relationship between marketplace actors and their specific historical, economic, social and cultural contexts. The MSD perspective proposes unpacking the co-constitutive relationship between micro and macro marketplace realities.

The variance bias is defined as "... the tendency of conventional marketing scholarship to privilege variance questions dealing with covariation among dependent and independent marketing variables to questions of change, development and decline"

(Giesler and Fischer 2016, 5). This bias points to the lack of investigations into the marketplace reality not only within, but also across, time and space.

Scholars devoted to addressing these challenges have clearly highlighted the generative roles of consumers in the creation of new markets. For example, Martin and Schouten (2014), who study the mini-moto industry, shed light on a market that develops with neither active participation nor interference from mainstream industry. Scaraboto and Fischer (2013) show how marginalized consumers mobilize to seek greater choice and mainstream market inclusion, thereby changing the market through a collective consumer identity. Dolbec and Fischer (2015) illustrate how unintended market changes take place when consumers who are enthusiastic about a field connect to share ideas with one another. Ertimur and Coskuner-Balli (2015) offer an additional perspective on market dynamics by emphasizing the complexity of markets, showing how change within their institutional logic and competitive structure can explain market evolution.

Recently, there has been a growing interest among those who subscribe to the MSD perspective in broadening our understanding of market dynamics by attending to a wider range of phenomena that may shape day-to-day interactions and longer-term market changes. For example, Castilhos, Dolbec and Veresiu (2017) point to the overall absent geographic explanations and the only tangentially analyzed interactions between space and markets. Huff, Humphreys and Wilner (2021) and Parmentier and Fischer (2015) apply assemblage theory to theorize how marketplace objects and their properties facilitate market legitimacy in the cannabis market, and how fans of a brand can contribute to the value enjoyed by other members of its audience. Another example is research that apply an assemblage theoretical view of creativity to investigate how

collective creativity organizes and expresses collective identity and precipitates movements, thus inducing market change (Castilhos, Dolbec, and Veresiu 2017; Gollnhofer, Weijo, and Schouten 2019; Huff, Humphreys, and Wilner 2019; Nøjgaard and Bajde 2020; Parmentier and Fischer 2015; Weijo, Martin, and Arnould 2018).

This dissertation contributes to the MSD line of inquiry by applying theoretical perspectives that may expand our knowledge about market shaping. Accordingly, the three complementary papers presented here expand our theoretical knowledge and contribute to the comprehension of contemporary markets. Within this dissertation, the literature on consumer adoption and diffusion of local food is investigated in order to explore whether or not the traditional models of adoption and diffusion can still be applied to understanding new phenomena such as local food markets (Article 1). This thesis applies a moralizing markets lens in order to investigate how markets are shaped by the moral principles undergirding them (Article 2). In order to explore whether or not digital platforms can support moralized markets, an affordance lens is applied (Article 3). Below are introductions to and brief reviews of the theoretical perspectives of the three articles.

Three areas of complementary theory (to which the MSD lens is applied)

Consumer adoption and diffusion

The concept of markets themselves, that is, the context in which adoption and diffusion of innovation takes place (Schumpeter 1934; Rogers 2003), is undergoing a fundamental change in the nature and understanding of the relationship between the consumer and the firm (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004). Market innovation, as a particular form of

innovation, was acknowledged by Schumpeter (1934) some decades ago, but although firms are no longer considered the only source of innovation (Chesbrough 2003; Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004), there is still a long tradition of viewing the firm as the source of innovation in market innovation (Schumpeter 1934; Hauser et al. 2006). Although adoption and diffusion models, such as influential individual models (e.g., the theory of planned behaviour; Ajzen 1991) and aggregate models (the diffusion of innovations; Rogers 2003), were developed at a time when markets were considered to consist of individuals, or stable segments of consumers, and innovators were considered to be single firms with considerable control over the content of the innovation (Kristensson et al. 2020, 522), these models are still applied in order to describe and explain how something new comes into use, or gets used, across various user groups within product and market innovation (e.g., Hauser et al. 2006; Kristensson et al. 2020). In these models, consumer innovativeness is perceived as the propensity of consumers to adopt new products (Hauser et al. 2006). That said, although the original adoption and diffusion theories and models have evolved, following, I point to some underlying assumption that are incompatible in the context of contemporary innovations (Kristensson et al. 2020).

Directly relevant to this dissertation, Kristensson et al. (2020) point to four challenging aspects wherein the empirical contexts of contemporary innovations often seem to deviate from the assumptions of the original adoption and diffusion models. First, innovations – the objects of adoption and diffusion – have become increasingly more complex over time. Second, the subject of adoption and diffusion involves not just individual users but often households, communities and ecosystems. Third, temporality (the process of when adoption and diffusion take place) is increasingly blurred, and fourth and finally, is contextuality – the sensitivity of adoption and diffusion to the context of innovation

(Kristensson et al. 2020, 522-523). A natural question that arises from this analysis is whether the traditional perspectives on adoption and diffusion have lost their relevance because the presumptions underlying their meaning have been questioned and partly proven wrong in contemporary markets (e.g., Branstad and Solem 2020; Kristensson et al. 2020). Recently, empirical evidence of market creation and evolution has demonstrated how the actors involved in markets influence, redefine and co-create the institutions of the markets themselves (e.g., Fehrer et al. 2020; Maciel and Fischer 2020; Nenonen, Storbacka, and Windahl 2019). One example illustrating this last point, is the changing role of the market-shaping consumer in consumer-driven innovation processes. The traditional image of the market is being challenged by the emergence of connected, informed, empowered and active consumers (e.g., Dolbec and Fischer 2015; Parmentier and Fischer 2015; Weijo et al. 2018). For instance, the emerging digital local food phenomena, characterized by networks of producers, consumers, and administrators who facilitate producer-consumer interactions, have been co-created by stakeholders over time without traditional intermediaries. As such, in this paper we explore whether the growth of the local food phenomenon can be better understood as being co-created by multiple stakeholders, including engaged consumers, rather than as merely a growth in consumer adoption of producers' predefined offerings (Article 1). This study illustrates how traditional marketing scholars often apply firm-centric theories in order to explain how consumers react to market innovations such as emerging local food markets, and that contemporary market research may benefit from instead studying markets as social, multilevel systems in which value is co-created between consumers and producers (Bentsen and Pedersen 2020).

Moralized and moralizing markets

A multidisciplinary body of literature is drawing increased attention to “moralized markets” (e.g., Fourcade and Healy 2007; Stehr and Adolf 2010). Viewing markets as cultural phenomena and moral projects in their own right, this literature suggests that markets can be understood as sites of moral conflict between actors who are committed to different justificatory principles and interests (Fourcade and Healy 2007, 302). Scholars have begun to uncover how market actors explicitly justify production, distribution and other market practices with reference to a set of moral principles (Balsiger 2019; Suckert 2018). This perspective argues that markets are best understood as moralizing entities of their own accord, and that explicit morality should be seen as a key principle of market formation and continuance. In an effort to shed light on this phenomenon, the fields of sociology, economics and critical theory have particularly focused on the mechanisms and techniques by which moralized markets are constituted (Balsiger 2019; Fourcade and Healy 2007; Stehr and Adolf 2010). What these fields have in common is that they all contribute to the understanding of how moralized markets work and evolve.

Within the field of marketing, studies have examined how consumers may act more or less morally in market contexts that are not intrinsically moral. For instance, focusing on responsible consumption through the understanding of moralistic governance regimes (Geisler and Versesiu, 2014), or the case of the responsible consumer in community supported agriculture (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007), or the responsible consumer movements fighting food waste (Gollhofer et al. 2019). These studies aid in illustrating the dynamic nature of market moralization.

Consistent with this observation, moral principles have been revealed to be important factors influencing dynamics in markets as varied as music (Giesler 2008), casino gambling (Humphreys 2010b), fashion (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013) and food (Gollnhofer, Weijo, and Schouten 2019). Moralistic factors are particularly salient in markets that are relatively more “moralized”; that is to say, in more moralized markets, moral principles feature as relatively explicit (versus relatively tacit) precepts guiding interactions between market actors (Suckert 2018).

Within the field of research on moralized markets, there is interest in how economic markets become moralized. Literature on moralizing markets highlights that markets can become more (or less) moralized as specific moral principles become more explicit (or more tacit). This helps to explain why, even in markets that might not normally be regarded as moralized, some degree of moralization can begin to occur should market participants’ awareness of specific moral principles become heightened. So far, economic sociologists have primarily studied these processes at the macro (society) or meso (market field) levels, focusing on driving forces such as prosperity and knowledge (Stehr 2006; Balsiger 2020), whereas micro-level processes of moralization have been more often noticed in markets studied by consumer researchers (cf. Giesler 2008; Gollnhofer, Weijo, and Schouten 2019; Luedicke, Thompson, and Giesler 2010).

In Article 2, we point to one phenomenon that has been implicitly acknowledged but not explicitly investigated in prior consumer research on morality in contemporary markets: “moral policing.” We define the concept of moral policing as “market participants engaging in actions aimed at ensuring that others are adhering to the moral principles they believe do – or should – undergird the market.”

Digital platform affordances

The concept of affordances (Gibson 1977) was first used to refer to a specific kind of relationship between an animal and the environment. The key insight was that we do not perceive the environment as such, but rather perceive it through its affordances, and the possibilities for action they may provide. Digitalization is by now well known to create potent digital affordances that likely have a transformative effect upon market innovation (Nambisan et al. 2017). The concept of digital affordances, often applied in research on human-computer interactions (e.g., Gaver 1991), is a key term for understanding the relationships between technology and its users. In this regard, the increasing importance of digital platform affordances and how they may shape markets is undisputed (Hein 2019; Kartemo and Nystrøm 2021)

Within work on platform affordances (see Ellison and Vitak 2015), one line of inquiry implements an affordance approach to focus on the features of technology (e.g., Graves 2007; Mao 2014); this is often referred to as paralinguistic digital affordances (Hayes et al. 2016), and this stream of work focuses on technical tools of digital platforms, and in particular social media, that enable user activity.

Another stream of research focuses on the new dynamics/types of communicative practices and social interactions that various features afford (e.g., Barns 2019). In a similar vein, recent work suggests linking the materiality of social media platforms to the processes of users (Bucher and Helmond 2017, 15). Illustrating how people themselves understand affordances in their own encounters with technology, these researchers focus on understanding affordances in relation to complex dynamics at multiple levels and across platform boundaries (Mcveigh-Schultz and Baym 2015). Consequently, because

there are multiple members and multiple features available for use, multiple affordances may be enacted when different actors use a technology. Affordances are often conceptualized at either an abstract high level (i.e., the kinds of dynamics and conditions enabled by technical devices, platforms and media as the communicative practices and habits that they enable or constrain) or at a more concrete, feature-oriented low-level (i.e., technical features such as clicking, sharing and liking; Bucher and Helmond 2017).

Digital platforms mediate interactions and relations between multiple actors, and, in this regard, digital platforms may be understood as socio-technological environments (Bucher and Helmond 2017). Social media platforms can be characterized as digital intermediaries because they draw together various stakeholders, each of which comes with its own aims and agendas (Bucher and Helmond 2017; Majchrzak et al. 2013). Social media platforms that are web-based technologies make it possible for all users to create, circulate and share multiple types of content (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010; Vaast et al. 2017). The use of these social media technologies, such as blogs, wikis, social networking, social tagging and microblogging, is rapidly increasing (Treem and Leonardi 2013; Vaast et al. 2017). Contributing to the call for “research investigating the increasingly blurry boundaries between consumer entrepreneurship, consumer activism, and consumer collaboration with marketers that digitalization affords” (Gollnhofer, Weijo, and Schouten 2019, 479), in Article 3, this dissertation draws on the concept of affordances to explore the ways in which, and the extent to which, digital platforms may support market moralization.

Method

Assuming a socially constructed reality, I thus assume multiple, apprehendable, and equally valid realities (Ponterotto 2005). My scientific approach is inductive and interpretive, while the corresponding ontological assumptions are based on the emergent character of reality, as well as on the need to study markets in the making (Langley et al. 2013).

Figure 3 illustrates how the interactive process between theoretical perspectives and methodological work evolved over time.

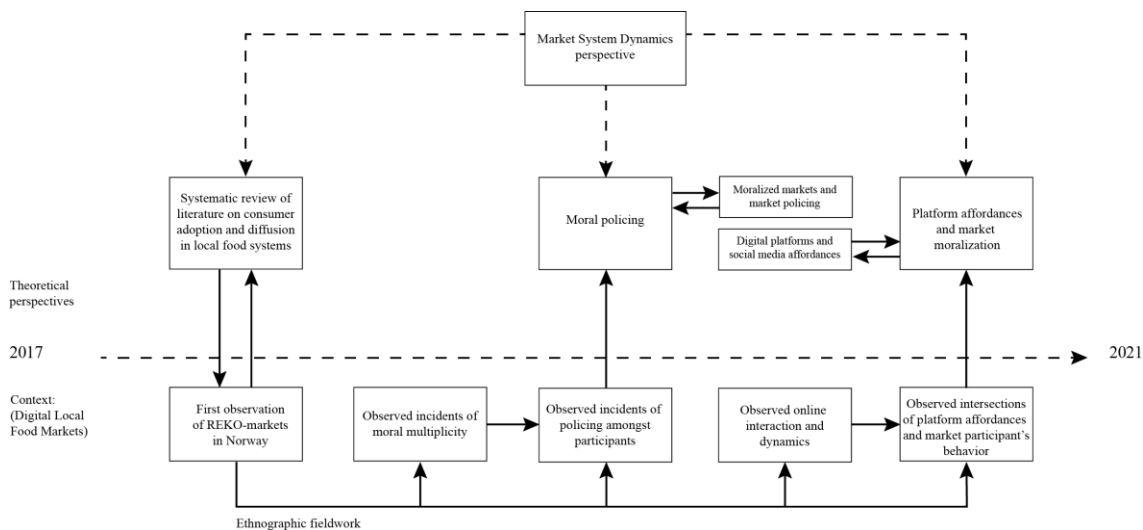


Figure 3. Methodological process model

This investigation began in late 2017 – early 2018 (see dotted timeline in Figure 3) with the exploration of the local food phenomenon. The top dotted line in the model represents the overall theoretical perspective (market system dynamics [MSD]). Applying this perspective, a systematic review of studies on consumer adoption in the literature on local food markets was performed. As depicted in Figure 3, ethnographic field work was conducted simultaneously as I immersed myself in multiple REKO markets. As such,

certain peculiarities found in the literature review and manifested in the markets under study, drove the research agenda. The first peculiarity was the role of social and cognitive proximity (the extent to which actors have friendly relationships and the extent to which actors share the same knowledge base) and how this role can be attributed to understanding local food. Proximity here refers to interactions between economic actors, but also between actors and objects (Boschma 2005). However, it is possible to distinguish between various forms of interaction, such as formal or informal or market or non-market, and they can refer to agent-agent relations in, for example, the adoption and diffusion of innovations. In this way, proximity dynamics reflects the forces that shape the markets. As illustrated in Figure 3, this played an important role in comprehending observed patterns of the moral multiplicity found within the markets under study, and consequently moral policing as a phenomenon. As the market-shaping role of moral principles became increasingly evident as the field work continued, the literature on morality within markets became a natural source of investigation (see Figure 3, in which double bold arrows illustrate the interplay between theoretical perspectives and field work). Early in 2019, my growing engagement in the work as an online REKO administrator led to the observation of multiple online interactions and dynamics. As depicted in Figure 3 (double bold arrows), by studying the platform and affordance literature while at the same time watching for patterns in regard to observed intersections of platform affordances and market participants' behaviour, some digital platform affordances that shape the market, and in particular the moralization of the market, became clearly evident.

Next, as paper 1 (literature review) explicitly presents its methodological procedure, screening process, and descriptive statistics of the collated literature, I focus on further

outlining the ethnographic procedures and methods used in this thesis, demonstrating my quest to understand the complex dynamics of contemporary local food markets.

Data collection and analysis

An ethnographic inquiry

“Field work involves the disciplined study of what the world is like to people who have learned to see, hear, speak, think and act in ways that are different. Rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people (...) the ethnographer hopes to learn to use the native language in the way informants do. Finally, informants are a source of information, literally, they become teachers for the ethnographers.” (Spradley 2016, p. 3)

With James Spradley’s words in mind, fortunately, an opportunity arose in early 2018 to not only make sense of an outcome in retrospect but also to be a part of the emerging local food phenomenon, REKO. Inspired by the growing interest in understanding markets in the making (Arnould and Thompson 2005, Giesler and Fischer 2016, Latour 1987), I eagerly started to “follow the people” (Marcus 1995), including their connections, associations and relationships across space and place. In my endeavour to unravel the social meanings and activities of people in the doxic reality of my research context (Belk, Fischer, and Kozinets 2013) a unique occasion presented itself: to participate while observing, to experience the phenomenon as an insider, to become a part of the phenomenon I was studying.

In January 2018, I interviewed two of the initiators of REKO markets in Norway. Thereafter, my supervisor and I invited one of them to hold a meeting. We actively engaged in tracking down local farmers across the region (Facebook, Farmers Markets) to attend the meeting as well. In March 2018, we held a meeting with 46 producers and consumers in attendance. As membership is a privileged point of view (Jorgensen 1989), I opportunistically volunteered, taking on the facilitator role for one of the markets to achieve an observational advantage (at this time, there were only a dozen markets in Norway). We informed the participants at this meeting of our intentions, and we provided information about our research projects on the national REKO website and national REKO admin site.²

Involvement in one market as an administrator led to the involvement of startups of multiple markets in southeastern Norway, which resulted in almost daily contact with other administrators, producers and consumers. I typically engaged in the following activities: spotting for appropriate parking lots (free parking, not too dark, easy access) for the exchange, asking permission from owners of these parking lots, daily discussions on various regional administrator forums, and attending various food stands. Over time, the number of markets grew, and although I followed multiple markets, under the experienced guidance of my supervisors, I started to focus my ethnographic field work

² <https://www.facebook.com/rekonorge/> ; <https://www.facebook.com/groups/rekoadmin>

on four specific REKO markets, each located in a distinct region. I refer to these markets as REKO north, REKO east, REKO south and REKO west.

Inspired by Spradley (2016) approach to ethnographic research, I initially set out to understand the broader context within which variations in the creation of the REKO markets occurred. Informal interviews were conducted throughout the process to gain insight and understanding about the research context (Spradley 2016, 58). Field notes documenting onsite experiences were recorded on my phone while I was attending them, and were subsequently written down manually. In addition, following the recommendations of Belk, Fischer, and Kozinets (2013), I maintained a reflexive journal in the form of narratives and timelines of incidents, which I shared and discussed with my supervisors on a weekly basis. As a participant in the REKO community, I also purchased a substantial amount of food from the participants, attended various food stands and meetings, visited farms, shared food, shared information and listened to countless food and farming stories. I also collected media texts related to REKO and bought and read books about food. Table 1 provides an overview of my data collection.

Table 1. Data collection overview

| Description | Source | Data set | Purpose of usage |
|--|---|---|---|
| Ethnographic participant observation | Field work in REKO markets (north, east, south, west) between April 2018 and October 2020 | Field notes 115 double-spaced pages | First-hand experience of offline participant practices |
| Ethnographic interviews, photos and videos | Interviews of consumers, producers, administrators during fieldwork | Informal interview notes, photos and videos | Understanding motives and behaviour of REKO participants |
| Facebook data | REKO forums: REKO Producer site. REKO Norway REKO National admin site REKO admin site REKO market North REKO market West REKO market South REKO market East | 433 entries | First-hand experience of online practices of the participants |
| Facebook Group analytics | REKO markets Norway | 116 downloaded files | Statistical insights into participant engagement, interaction |

| | | | |
|---------------------|---|--|--|
| In-depth interviews | Consumers, producers and administrators | 24 interviews, 246 double-spaced pages | In-depth understanding of the perspectives of the participants |
|---------------------|---|--|--|

Facebook data

Ethnography in the social spaces of the online environment involves taking an active approach to online research and thus immersing oneself in the full cultural complexity of online social worlds (Belk, Fischer, and Kozinets 2013, 108). Online participation drives netnographic data collection with the purpose of experiencing embedded cultural understandings (Kozinets 2010). For me, this entailed the following: participating in the various national and regional REKO forums, producer forums and administrator forums; reading messages regularly, in real time, and replying to other members online; offering both short and long comments; joining and contributing to the activities of this community; and becoming an organizer, expert and recognized voice in the community (Belk, Fischer, and Kozinets 2013). I downloaded and took screenshots of discussions and themes I thought to be interesting and important, and subsequently categorized these entries and discussed them with my supervisors. In addition, I downloaded Facebook Group analytics files, which informed me of the growth/decline of market transactions and interactions in the markets.

In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews are a part of core data collection activities in qualitative research, particularly when the researcher seeks an in-depth understanding of a topic about which an informant can confidently speak (Belk, Fischer, and Kozinets 2013, 31). Theoretical

sampling (Lincoln and Guba 1985) suggests that informants should be chosen based on who is best suited to inform the research questions, and participant observation served as an excellent way to gain access to informants for interviewing. When I started this journey, I took great comfort in McCracken (1988) observation that it is often easier to do research in an unfamiliar context, as I honestly must have seemed quite naïve when it came to matters of farming and producing food. It was also very important for me to remember that “an open mind need not mean an empty head” (Belk, Fischer, and Kozinets 2013, 32) so that before entering the field, I familiarized myself with relevant literature on local food through a systematic literature review (see paper 1) of the phenomenon and conducted both informal and formal interviews with the founder of REKO and two of his contacts in Norway.

In-depth interviews with 24 producers, consumers and administrators from the REKO community were conducted to develop a more extensive understanding of participants’ perspectives and interrelationships. Under the guidance of my expert supervisors, an open-ended question guide was created to invite reflections on personal thoughts, emotions and experiences. The guide captured themes from “how it all started” (motives for participating) to the elements of interactions, both online and offline, to the exchange process on market sites. Each interview lasted from 45–70 minutes and was recorded and transcribed. Table 2 provides an overview of the characteristics of each informant.

Table 2. Overview of characteristics of each informant

| Pseudonym | Age | Time of participation | REKO role |
|------------------|------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 Elise | 30s | 2018- | Platform administrator, Consumer |
| 2 Lars | 50s | 2018- | Platform administrator, Consumer |
| 3 Axel | 40s | 2018- | Platform administrator, Consumer |
| 4 Tony | 40s | 2018- | Platform administrator, Producer |
| 5 Alex | 30s | 2018- | Producer |
| 6 Kaia | 50s | 2018- | Platform administrator, Producer |
| 7 Liv | 50s | 2018- | Platform administrator, Producer |
| 8 Elisabeth | 30s | 2018- | Platform administrator, Producer |
| 9 Isak | 30s | 2018- | Consumer |
| 10 Harriet | 40s | 2019- | Consumer |
| 11 Alan | 40s | 2018-2019 | Consumer |
| 12 Cecilie | 40s | 2018-2019 | Consumer |
| 13 Amanda | 30s | 2018- | Producer |

| | | | | |
|----|---------|-----|-------|-------------------------------------|
| 14 | Julian | 30s | 2018- | Platform administrator, Producer |
| 15 | Brit | 40s | 2018- | Platform administrator, Consumer |
| 16 | John | 50s | 2018- | Consumer |
| 17 | Lisa | 40s | 2019- | Producer |
| 18 | Julie | 50s | 2018- | Consumer |
| 19 | Jill | 50s | 2019- | Consumer |
| 20 | Richard | 60s | 2019- | Producer |
| 21 | Gerard | 30s | 2019- | Producer |
| 22 | Karen | 30s | 2020- | Producer |
| 23 | Thor | 60s | 2020- | Producer |
| 24 | Robert | 40s | 2019- | Producer |

Analysis

Under the guidance of my supervisors, data analysis and data collection were closely interwoven. In addition to our weekly Skype meetings, we discussed, categorized and compared incidents and themes whenever we found it to be necessary to do so over the course of my dissertation work. Because of my daily contacts with other participants, I was also able to discuss incidents with them and, in this way, perform member checks (Belk, Fischer, and Kozinets 2013, Spradley 2016). In addition, one of my supervisors also participated as a producer in several of the markets, which generated even more insights. The data analysis followed established guidelines for hermeneutic analysis (Arnold and Fischer 1994).

At its core, analysis involves looking for similar and contrasting themes and patterns in the data. Working iteratively, we applied common analytic practices of abstraction, categorization and comparison (Grodal, Anteby, and Holm 2020). Searching for patterns within and across the full dataset, we concentrated on those aspects of the data that we found to be surprising or salient. As data analysis is fundamental to the interpretation of a phenomenon and subsequent theory building, we combined the generation of initial categories with the refinement of tentative categories (dropping, merging, splitting, relating, contrasting and sequencing categories); in this way, we were able to begin distinguishing those categories that might function as mechanisms from those that might function as concepts, and thus begin to map out the links between them (Grodal, Anteby, and Holm 2020, 17). As the analysis progressed, the interpretations that emerged considered the variety observed and outlined the theoretical insights yielded in this study.

Research ethics

“(...) there is a fine line between who we pretend to be, and who we are in everyday life.” (Jorgensen 1989, 62)

As a qualitative researcher, you are taught that how you, as the researcher, choose to form your role will have implications for the research itself. However, I found that I really did not get to choose my role at all – I was given one by the community instead. That said, at first, I felt like an outsider, but after hanging out at a lot of delivery sites and actively taking part in the daily run of the markets (managing the online forum), volunteering to pick parking lots, and standing out in the streets in all kinds of weather (snow, rain or shine) to tell producers where to park and consumers where to find their purchase, I slowly started to feel as though I was one of them. The first time I felt this way was when I received an invitation from Elisabeth, a producer, to help deliver food at REKO north. The following is an excerpt from the invitation:

Elisabeth: Hi, I am delivering food on Wednesday, would you like to help out? I can pick you up at 17.45?

Me: Yes, that would be great! Thank you so much, that is really nice of you.

Elisabeth: Remember to wear warm clothes, it gets really cold!

Me: Ok, thanks, see you then. (Private message, October, 2018)

Although challenging at times, I would like to stress that being a part of the REKO universe produced valuable data that ultimately made important and irreplaceable contributions to the analysis, as well as to the understanding of the context. Furthermore, informed consent, in written or verbal form, was obtained from each participant prior to being interviewed and photographed (Belk, Fischer, and Kozinets 2013), and participants

were given pseudonyms to protect their identity. As transparency is important when conducting this type of data collection (Jorgensen 1989), I fully disclosed my status as a researcher on all the REKO forums in which I participated. Data collected from these forums were considered public when accessible through a search engine, i.e. without requiring a login and/or a password.³ Finally, I conducted member checks with key informants.

Research context: REKO markets

In Scandinavia, the local food phenomenon known as “REKO” has grown from two pilot projects in the western part of Finland to some 430 markets spread across Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Italy, Canada and Australia, clearly demonstrating the appeal of this type of distribution model for consumers and producers alike. REKO is an abbreviation of “*Rejäl konsumtion*,” which translates as “sincere/honest consumption.” REKO started as a way to explore solutions to the problems faced by local food producers in attempting to gain access to traditional distribution channels of grocery retail.

Originally, REKO markets are based on many different ideas related to direct food distribution, local markets and AFN, such as community-supported agriculture (CSA) and food assemblies (FA). The purpose of a REKO market is to establish a digital local food market that offers an effective, direct and easy way for local food producers to sell their food, and for consumers to access local food.

³ This research was approved by NSD (Data protection services).



Figure 4. The REKO model.

As illustrated in Figure 4, and as inspired by Bakos (1991) interpretation of marketplaces, the REKO market model may be understood as consisting of three main elements: infrastructure, interaction and exchange. *Infrastructure* consists of a Facebook group through which producers can place their advertisements and volunteer administrators can approve these ads. Thus, the *interaction* process is online, and consumers pre-order local food directly from local food producers, who then confirm the order. It is possible for consumers to pre-pay for what they have ordered, depending on what the producer prefers. The *exchange* process takes place at the fixed time, and at the predetermined place, typically a free parking lot, where consumers pick up their pre-orders. Producers are responsible for distribution, and they are obligated to follow local regulations on food safety, accounting and taxation.⁴ Figure 5 is an illustration of a REKO Facebook group.

⁴ https://www.mattilsynet.no/mat_og_vann/produksjon_av_mat/Lokalmat/



Figure 5. Illustration of a REKO Facebook group.

The times and places when and where food can be picked up are explicitly stated. Anyone who wants to order food sends a request to join the group; a member of the administrator group then approves their request. A producer who wants to join the group and place an advertisement must send a request to the regional producer forum for that specific market. Producers must fill out an application form on which they must verify that they are indeed approved by the Norwegian Food Safety Authority. A member of the regional administrator group then reviews the application and either approves or declines access to the producer. Figure 6 illustrates an advertisement in a REKO market.

REKO markets are composed of consumers and producers meeting on a digital platform. In Norway, these markets comprise 620,603 members and generate around 120 million

NOK in revenue.⁵ Producers offer their local produce, and consumers pre-order the food of their choice – in this way, these roles are fairly straightforward. The administrator role, on the other hand, is not that obvious. An administrator may be either a producer or a consumer (or both) who, based on voluntary work, manages the online forums and organizes the offline exchange sites.



Figure 6. Illustration of advertisement.

⁵ No coordinating or data collecting organization for the REKO rings exists. The data provided here are from our analysis conducted in October 2020. Transaction value is based on a conservative estimation method. For an overview of markets see <http://www.smabrukarlaget.no/norskbonde-og-smabrukarlag/matnyttig/lokalmatringer/>

When asked why they take on administrator roles, consumer informants often explain that they do so in order to create an opportunity to gain access to local food, to support the local community or out of concern with animal welfare or issues of sustainability (e.g. food waste). Producers who take on an administrator role, on the other hand, explain that they do so not only to gain access to the local food market but also to meet other producers, as well as their consumers, face to face. Often, the administrator groups consists of both consumers and producers who together set the rules of the markets.

Figure 7 and Figure 8 illustrate producers on site and consumers lining up to collect their products, respectively.



Figure 7. Illustration of producers at a parking lot.



Figure 8. Illustration of consumers lining up

Central to this study were the REKO markets situated in regions in southeastern Norway.

I briefly describe each market below.

REKO- market North, East, West and South

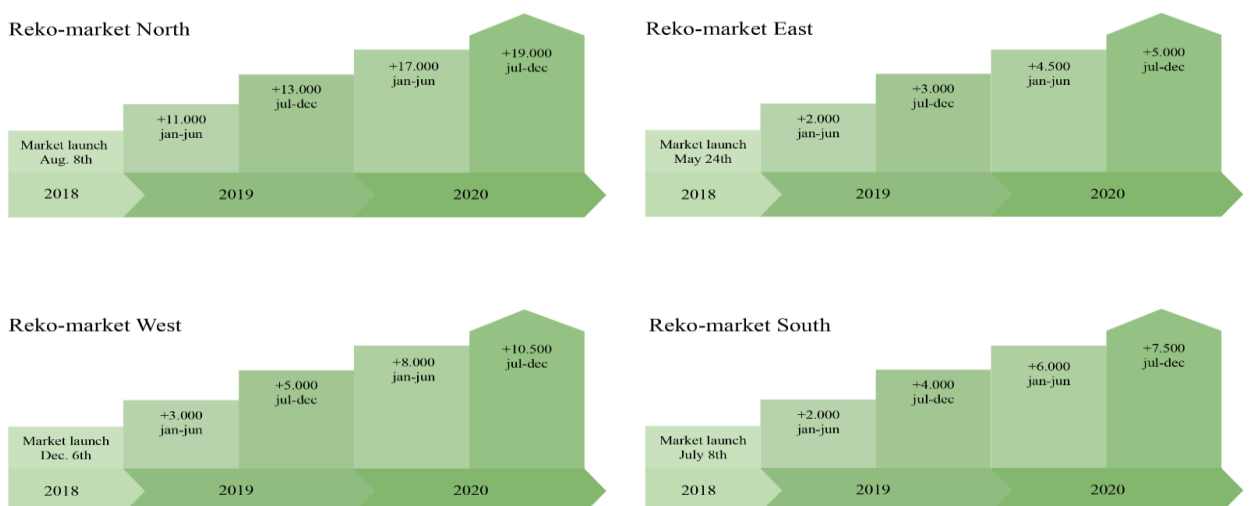


Figure 9. Illustrations of market participant growth.

Figure 9 graphs the growth in market participation from the start of each market (from 2018–2020). It is important to note that not all participants plotted in this figure are active participants in terms of buying products, as some participants follow the markets online. Table 3 provides the overall status of the four markets (December 2020), including the number of months active, as well as the number of participants and administrators.

Table 3. REKO north, east, west and south (December 2020)

| REKO - Markets | Months active | Participants | Administrators |
|----------------|---------------|--------------|----------------|
| North | 26 | 19000 | 5 |
| East | 29 | 5000 | 3 |
| West | 22 | 10500 | 3 |
| South | 27 | 7500 | 2 |

REKO market North

REKO market North started up in 2018, initially quite slowly. It has since become the largest of the four markets under study. This particular market is composed of a large variety of producers and includes both small- and large-scale producers. The products sold at REKO market North range from organic raw food made from plants to prime steaks and other meats. This market is administered by three producers and one consumer. Together, the four administrators discuss all pertinent issues in a messenger group on Facebook, and they cast votes whenever disagreements arise. Of the four markets examined in this work, REKO market North was the only one to completely close down during the Covid-19 pandemic, beginning in March 2020.

REKO market East

REKO market East launched on May 24, 2018. Like REKO market North, this market, which is situated in a small town about 1.5 hours from Oslo, got off to a slow start. It initially attracted those who possessed strong beliefs about ethical consumerism. REKO market East thus resembled a little club at first, comprising those who knew each other already and liked to discuss how, where and by whom the available food was made. Initially, the market was held at a parking lot some distance from the centre of town, but after a heated discussion concerning whether the market could actually be sustainable when people had to drive long distances to reach it, the administrator group moved the market to the town centre (before Christmas 2019). REKO market East primarily focuses on promoting small-scale producers and views “local” in terms of geographical proximity.

REKO market West

REKO market West was the last of the four markets examined in this study to begin operations (December 6, 2018), mainly due to disagreements over where it should be located, when it should start, and who should administrate it. Once open, this market, which offers a wide variety of producers and products, similar to REKO market North, was instantly very successful. REKO market West currently has three administrators.

REKO market South

REKO market South has two administrators, one of whom up to recently, was the leader of the town’s chamber of commerce. He first heard about REKO through our research

project.⁶ He immediately wanted to assume an administrator role, together with a well-recognized producer in the local food community. He thought REKO market South could really revitalize the town centre, and as he worked as a marketing manager involved with the town's development, he had the authority to allocate the town square as the site for the market. Of the four examined markets, REKO market South was the first to open (July 8, 2018), and it has since been quite successful. It is one of the few markets in Norway not to be situated in a parking lot.

Key Findings

In the section below, I briefly summarize the key findings from the three complementary articles included within this dissertation

Article 1. Consumers in Local Food Markets: From Adoption to Market Co-creation?

The purpose of Article 1 was to explore the consumer adoption literature on local food. More precisely, we conducted a literature review aimed at investigating how contrasting views on the role of consumers are reflected in the literature on local food adoption and diffusion. Towards this end, our search generated 53 relevant articles.

Through article categorization, we derived three main findings: First, the definition of local food varies according to what sort of predominant local food adoption perspective

⁶ The Digifood project funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Agriculture and Food and the Research Council of Norway, project no. 301428.

is applied; second, divergent assumptions exist about market functions and modes of examining market emergence and change; and third, divergent consumer assumptions also exist, depending on which lens is applied.

We found that traditional marketing scholars often apply traditional theories and innovation models to explain how consumers react to market innovations, and we concluded that research on local food may need to redefine or further develop adoption and diffusion concepts in order to more fully understand contemporary markets.

Article 2. Should You Be Doing That? An Exploration of Moral Policing by Everyday Market Participants

This paper presents an ethnographic inquiry into market-shaping dynamics related to one phenomenon that has been implicitly acknowledged, but not explicitly investigated, in prior consumer research on morality in contemporary markets: what we term “moral policing.”

The study on which this paper is based addresses three research questions: First, what triggers moral policing? Second, what is the nature of moral policing in markets? And third, what consequences are likely to be precipitated by moral policing?

Our research points to three triggers of moral policing within markets. The first is observed violations of taken-for-granted moral principles. The second is ambiguity regarding the interpretation or applicability of a moral principle. The third is contradictory implications of two or more moral principles. We theorize that instances of moral policing can vary in intensity from exploratory to confrontational and can vary in focus from localized and dyadic to distributed and collective policing. Finally, we

highlight three potential outcomes of moral policing: stakeholder disenchantment, market loyalty and persistent moral attunement.

Overall, this study complements prior work on market systems dynamics, moralized markets and market governance by focusing on moral policing as a governance mechanism that may shape the character and evolution of markets.

Article 3. Can Digital Platforms Support Moralized Markets? An Analysis of Affordances that Matter to Moralization

This work draws on the concept of digital platform affordances in order to explore the ways in which platforms may support the moralization of contemporary markets. In order to develop and illustrate insights on how affordances matter to market moralization, this article draws on an illustrative case of local food markets that rely on support from digital platforms. Specifically, this article discusses how particular affordances of digital platforms may enable market moralization, and how the affordances interact in order to enable market moralization.

This work points to the interaction and dynamics of the social media features and the behaviours of the market actors using the platform, and how they matter in enabling moral affordances that, in turn, support a moralization of markets. In particular, this article argues that the interaction and dynamics between low-level affordances and high-level social media affordances enable what may be understood as moral affordances that matter in the moralization of markets.

Altogether, this article aims at expanding our knowledge and understanding of one market shaping factor – the affordances offered by digital platforms – and how they matter in the

dynamics of market moralization. As such, this article complements prior work on market system dynamics, moralized markets and digital platform affordances.

General Discussion

The purpose of this dissertation is to shed light on how markets emerge, change and vary. To achieve this goal, I thus explore the answers to the following research questions: *“How are traditional perspectives on consumer adoption and diffusion applied in research in order to understand local food markets, and how is consumer adoption of local food markets understood from an MSD perspective?”*, *“How are markets shaped by the moral principles by which they are animated, and how does moral policing affect dynamics in digital local food markets?”*, *“How do particular digital platform affordances influence the moralization of digital local food markets?”*. I analyzed data collected through a literature review study and a three-year ethnographic inquiry of digital local food markets (REKO markets). I began by exploring whether existing theories on how market innovations are adopted and diffused were in need of being revisited, reassessed and/or expanded to account for new phenomena, such as emerging digital local food markets that are shaped by multiple market actors. In doing so, it became clear that traditional marketing scholars apply traditional theories and innovation models in order to account for how consumers react to market innovations, and these traditional models are not always adapted for new contexts.

Moreover, the analysis of the data from the REKO markets identified several characteristics from which patterns began to emerge. One was the capacity of moral principles to shape and reinforce the markets. Via the inductive qualitative analysis, it became apparent that the concept of “moral policing” is a market-shaping factor that animates the market. Another market-shaping characteristic that manifested itself in this

analysis was the digital platform affordances offered by digital platforms and the supporting role they play in the moralization of markets.

In the following section, I discuss theoretical implications and debate some methodological and practical implications of this research. I conclude by highlighting some limitations of the current study and offering suggestions for future research directions.

Theoretical implications

Multiple theoretical contributions to marketing and consumer theory may be derived from this dissertation. Because each paper covered within this study explicitly addresses these contributions, I will, in the following section, focus on the primary theoretical contributions that speak to the market dynamics literature.

First, an initial goal of this dissertation was to extend the existing literature by offering new concepts and by generating novel perspectives on traditional concepts. In regard to this goal in particular, the literature review of consumer adoption of local food (Bentsen and Pedersen 2020) uncovered divergent market and consumer assumptions among consumer-oriented studies of local food. We found that the understanding of what constitutes markets varies in the literature on consumer adoption. In particular, depending on which moral principles are applied, the understanding of what constitutes local food differ. For instance, within organic food research, “local” is often treated as an implicit attribute of “organic”, however organic food consumers may be more concerned with knowing how their food is grown and processed than where it is produced. This points to how local food markets are dynamically shaped, not predefined and adopted, by

the different moral principles undergirding them. Hence, in accordance with recent developments in marketing theory underscoring the complexity of markets, we call for new perspectives on consumer adoption and diffusion of local food practices. In this regard, an understanding of market innovations as traditional firm-driven market development processes, in which the consumer–producer relationship is clear and well defined (Kristensson, Pedersen, and Thorbjørnsen 2020), does not even begin to cover the multiple dynamics I observed during my ethnographic journey.

Second, in addressing the call for alternative theoretical avenues to discern market phenomena within market system studies (Castilhos, Dolbec, and Veresiu 2017), the dissertation identified one such avenue to be the market-shaping role of the moral principles that undergird markets. We identified a governance mechanism, termed “moral policing,” that extends consumer- and producer-centric research as a practice that shapes market evolution. Moreover, we contribute to the understanding of market governance by studying participants that include (but are not limited to) consumers. Recent research comparing fields of market system studies (Nøjgaard and Bajde 2020) has urged MSD scholars to consider the practices from which the meanings of markets emerge, specifically how market meanings are materially assembled and circulated through market practices. An example of this is the role of moral principles in shaping and reinforcing the REKO markets examined in this study.

Third and finally, another theoretical avenue explored in this study was the analysis of the digital aspect of local food markets in the exploration of market shaping. In the conference paper “Digital Platforms and Market Intermediation” (Bentsen, Fischer, and Pedersen 2020), we describe how market intermediation patterns can best be understood

as arising from the intersections of platform characteristics and the behaviours of market actors using platforms. During the ACR review process, we were urged to dig deeper into, and follow up on, the ability of the internet, particularly social media platforms, to facilitate unprompted innovative inputs from market actors. A conceptual analysis of how digital platforms may support moralized markets, theorizes that emerging digital platforms shape contemporary markets through moral digital affordances that matter for the moralization of markets. In this regard, in addition to contributing to the LFS and AFS literature, this thesis expands theories of MSD by extending our knowledge of digital platform affordances and the process of market moralization dynamics.

Methodological implications

Emerging phenomena, such as REKO markets, are complex market systems that require in-depth understanding in order to discern multifaceted practices, behaviours, values and cultural matters. In order to research these facets, I engaged in a nearly three-year-long ethnographic study of REKO markets in Norway. The study generated rich data and insights with respect to the three biases highlighted in the MSD perspective (Giesler and Fischer 2016). First, addressing the challenge of the economic actor bias, this study interprets the REKO market phenomenon as a complex social system and takes into account the multiple market-shaping stakeholders within the REKO social system. Second, responding to the micro bias challenge, this study addresses the multi-level relationship between micro, meso and macro relationships in an effort to shed light on the forces that shape the thinking and acting of multiple actors. Third, the variance bias was examined by focusing on change and development between markets, actors and time using longitudinal data.

My experience suggests that researchers who wish to gain an understanding of market dynamics within phenomena such as REKO markets should engage in participant observation. This is particularly important because, in my attempt to understand the various issues relevant to the development of such markets, participant observation allowed me to more substantively and deeply explore complex cultural matters, practices, values and structures at different times, revealing the links and patterns among them.

Identifying informants who could help to answer the research questions became significantly less complicated as I came to know the markets inside out. In addition to following participants offline at multiple physical sites, I also followed participants online. New challenges for researchers studying markets are emerging through multiple new market models, such as hybrid platforms (e.g., Cusumano 2020) that incorporate both interaction and transaction in a “platform in platform” phenomenon (e.g., the REKO model). My experience illustrates how the combination of first-hand experiences of offline and online participants’ practices, behaviours and perspectives can yield aspects of markets that would otherwise go unnoticed.

Practical implications

Terms such as *social distancing*, *self-quarantine* and *pandemic* have certainly raised pertinent, timely questions concerning multiple issues over the last year. In this context, it is perhaps more important than ever to expand our knowledge of complex market-shaping dynamics.

Overall, this dissertation demonstrates that for managers and practitioners in contemporary markets, it may be vital to consider applying new understandings of

adoption and diffusion concepts. In particular, because contemporary theories on adoption and diffusion are less developed and, as such, lack formal models that can be applied to support practitioners' decision making in contemporary markets.

This dissertation suggests that there is much to learn from the practices of participants in digital local food markets.

First, it is possible to interpret "local" in local food markets in various ways (Bentsen and Pedersen 2020), and each interpretation will shape these markets distinctly. For instance, this dissertation shows that several morally valorized principles are attached to the various definitions of local food affecting market shaping dynamics. One example of this, is how the moral aspect of local food makes it challenging to regulate local food markets. In this regard, this dissertation demonstrates that further development of local food regulations and certification schemes are needed to reflect the complexity of the consumer rationales shaping the markets.

Second, an important insight into managerial decision making that may be derived from the REKO markets are the dynamics of moral principles by which they are animated. This study identifies "moral policing," a concept that can be used to illustrate how the moral schemes undergirding markets may undermine or strengthen their relative continuity. Considering this concept, this work may inform the practices of marketing managers, in particular in paying attention to the relative roles of and moral policing by actors who lack formal authority in contemporary markets. For instance, this work points to the possibility that moral policing may lead to a decision for producers/consumers to altogether exit a market. This contribution to the nature of moral policing, to the study of

what triggers it and what its effects may be, has value for other contemporary cases of moral policing as well.

Third, this dissertation points to how digital platform affordances have the potential to impact markets profoundly. Specifically, this work contributes to the understanding of how markets may be affected when market actors rely on digital platforms. In this regard, there is much to learn that companies may apply to other contemporary business environments. For instance, there are plenty of tales of the negative effects of digital platforms such as “catfishing” and “cyberbullying”, but in contrast, this dissertation points to possible positive effects of digital platforms, such as the supporting role digital platform affordances may play in the moralization of markets. As such, it is important for practitioners to observe that the digital transformation of markets founded on moral principles, may indeed, support moral actions.

Limitations and future research opportunities

First and foremost, as with all studies, this investigation has certain characteristics that condition the transferability of insights about the market under study. REKO markets were founded on a set of moral principles and are based on many different market models from all across Europe, but, as they are set in a Scandinavian context, there may be certain sociocultural aspects that, if studied somewhere else, could play out differently. Also, the design of REKO markets, as direct producer-consumer markets, are without intervention of middlemen, while in many markets this is not the case. The REKO market model, both comprised of online and offline arenas, offers rich opportunities for surveillance, which is not that common in day-to-day market conduct. Nonetheless, I am convinced that the

insights derived from this study are likely to be transferable to other contexts that have similar features.

I dedicate the rest of this limitations section to addressing some concerns that are often raised regarding the reliability and validity of ethnographic research (Nurani 2008; Queirós, Faria, and Almeida 2017). Afterwards, I highlight some future research opportunities.

Limitations

Regarding both reliability and validity, concerns about whether a study can be accurately replicated (reliability) or its findings statistically generalized (external validity) are often raised. Because observation takes place in natural settings, the research in an ethnography cannot always be reproduced; however, providing a description of the methodology that is as comprehensive and “thick” as possible ensures that others investigating similar phenomena may reconstruct the analysis strategies used (e.g., Belk et al. 2013). In regard to generalization, it is important to note that this ethnographic inquiry aimed for *analytic* generalization (Yin 2018, 38) for the purpose of understanding and explaining the market dynamics of the REKO markets. The overall goal was not unlike those of experimental researchers, as generalizable findings that can transcend the specific research setting were sought. As the ethnographer’s golden principle is to be able to uncover the various dimensions of a problem under analysis, this dissertation attempted this by providing in-depth and illustrative information.

Another research concern that is often raised is internal validity; to achieve this, an analysis must be verified and validated. Because the ethnographic research conducted in the current study depended on my understanding of events as they were perceived and

interpreted by informants, and as the meanings, motives, aspirations, beliefs, values and attitudes of those involved in REKO markets was in focus, data sources, data collection methods and researchers were triangulated. In this way, it is possible to assess the sufficiency of the data in order to ensure the accuracy of the in-depth knowledge of the situation under analysis, as well as to verify whether the results are precise and targeted towards establishing meaningful conclusions (Maxwell 2020).

Future research opportunities

The results of this dissertation offer several directions for future research, four of which I briefly highlight below.

First, future research on consumer adoption of local food may benefit from the three perspectives revealed in our literature review. This is especially true when investigating issues regarding local food definitions, local food market development and the rationales of consumers in these developments.

Second, our work suggests conditions under which we might expect to see non-state actors, including consumers, engaging in moral policing; as such, further investigation of governance directed towards other market stakeholders is called for. In this regard, understanding markets as moral projects in their own right, following the paths of investigation on sustainability and moralized markets, may uncover deeper, more extensive knowledge on market evolution.

Third, further empirical studies investigating the role of digital platform affordances in market shaping are warranted. Also, further inquiries into the variation of platforms and digital affordances might inform us of the roles of these platforms in shaping the

technological tools and experiences of users. Also, further investigations into market models that are based on both online and offline arenas might generate additional research avenues and opportunities.

Finally, as I was conducting my data collection in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, several opportunities for future research arose. Research shows that crisis situations often compel innovative developments to business models, and I was fortunate enough to witness this in action. Quite interestingly, I observed that in particular small- and medium-sized businesses were compelled to think differently and further develop their business models utilizing entrepreneurial competencies during the pandemic. Consequently, there is much to be learned from these developments, and, although I am concluding this dissertation, I am certain that I am far from completing my task as a researcher unraveling the complexity of this phenomenon.

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Article 1:

Consumers in local food markets:

From consumer adoption to market co-creation?

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Consumers in local food markets: from adoption to market co-creation?

Consumers in
local food
markets

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the consumer adoption literature on local food. This study discusses the applicability of traditional models of adoption and diffusion to understand new phenomena such as the development of local food networks.

Design/methodology/approach – A systematic review of the literature on the adoption and diffusion of local food systems was conducted.

Findings – A total of three main challenges within the literature on the adoption and diffusion of local food are identified: the lack of a clear definition of what constitutes local food, divergent market assumptions and divergent consumer assumptions. In addition, this study points to the need for new perspectives on consumer adoption and diffusion of local food practices.

Originality/value – This paper provides an overview of current local food research streams and contributes to the literature on consumer adoption and diffusion of local food consumption.

Keywords Local food phenomena, Literature review, Consumer adoption, Diffusion, Market creation, Market system dynamics

Paper type Literature review

Introduction

Consumers increasingly want to know where their food comes from, how it was made and by whom. Accordingly, there is a growing interest in shopping and consuming locally produced food products and in participating in direct producer–consumer cooperatives (Schermer, 2015), which has fuelled the development of new alternative local food systems (De Bernardi and Tirabeni, 2018), such as food assemblies, community-supported agriculture (CSA), *Associations de Maintien de l'Agriculture Paysanne*, solidarity purchasing groups and various boxed food options. Recently, online local food markets called REKO-rings [1] have emerged in Scandinavian countries. REKO-rings are networks of producers, consumers, and administrators who facilitate producer-consumer interactions that have been co-created by stakeholders over time without traditional intermediaries (Humphreys and Grayson, 2008). The question of whether these recent local food phenomena are truly co-created practices, rather than consumers adopting suppliers' predefined offerings, has emerged naturally at the intersection between the market system dynamics literature and the alternative local food market adoption/diffusion literature.

Numerous practices, networks and movements have been investigated under a “local food” umbrella within consumer research (Hinrichs, 2000; Holloway *et al.*, 2006; Toler *et al.*, 2009; Cucco and Fonte, 2015; Munjal *et al.*, 2016), including consumer perceptions and preferences for local and organic food products and the sustainability of different types of alternative food networks (Feldmann and Hamm, 2015; Hughner *et al.*, 2007; Michel-Villarreal *et al.*, 2019). In this research, the markets in which adoption and diffusion take place are considered to consist of individuals or segments of consumers who perform well-structured behaviours in response to suppliers' and intermediaries' innovations.



Traditional marketing scholars often apply the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) and the diffusion of innovation model (Rogers, 2003) to explain how consumers react to market innovations. These theories offer tremendous insights into why consumers choose to adopt particular product and service offerings and how such offerings are diffused in aggregate markets. However, they were developed at a time when innovation was thought of as simply new products and standardized services, the consumer–producer relationship was clear and well defined and there was a firm-driven market development process (Kristensson *et al.*, 2020). In the traditional conception of value creation, consumers are market actors outside the firm that the firm captures value from, while value creation originates from inside the firm.

The purpose of this article is to investigate the role of the consumer in local food market developments, applying an understanding of value co-creation as the joint creation of value by the company and the customer (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) practise development (Mccoll-Kennedy *et al.*, 2012) and production (Ranjan and Read, 2016). We propose a contrasting view on consumer adoption and market creation based on a market system dynamics perspective wherein markets are viewed as social, multilevel systems in which value is co-created by consumers and producers (Giesler and Fischer, 2016). According to this view, market creation and development are the result of discursive negotiations of market practices amongst multiple stakeholders, including market-shaping consumers (Giesler and Fischer, 2016, p. 3).

It is unclear whether the traditional perspective on adoption and diffusion can be applied to understanding recent developments in local food markets. Thus, here, we investigate how contrasting views on the role of consumers are reflected in the literature on local food adoption and diffusion. We structure the research streams on local food and offer new perspectives on how local food adoption and diffusion can be studied. The present review article is organized into four sections: a description of the methods and descriptive statistics; key insights; a discussion of the challenges of consumer research on the adoption of local food; suggested implications for future research.

Methods

We collated 53 articles on consumer adoption of local food published in 38 journals, which we grouped into three journal categories: marketing and economics (26.5%), econometrics and statistics (19%) and other (54.5%). The procedure, screening process and some descriptive statistics of the collated literature are presented below.

Procedure

We conducted a title/keyword/abstract search in two search engines for articles focussing on the adoption and diffusion of alternative local food markets from 2000 to 2019 with the following search terms: “local food” or “organic food” or “community supported agriculture” or “food movement” or “food systems” and adoption or diffusion. We obtained an initial sample of 142 records in EBSCOhost and 78 records in Scopus. For our systematic review, we selected search terms intended to capture *consumer*-oriented local food literature specifically. This approach complements previous reviews focussing on the breadth of the local food phenomenon (Feldmann and Hamm, 2015). To avoid missing relevant articles from other sources, in accordance with West and Bogers (2014) recommendations, we identified the article on local food most cited by relevant articles in the field; the article (Hinrichs, 2000) published in the *Journal of Rural Studies* has >1,600 citations, and 32 records citing this article were yielded with our search terms.

To further ensure that articles with a market system dynamics perspective were included, we conducted an additional search with the following terms: “market system dynamics” or

“market creation” or “market emergence” and “local food”. This search yielded four additional articles (Kjeldgaard *et al.*, 2017; Press *et al.*, 2014; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli, 2007; Weijo *et al.*, 2018). After eliminating overlapping articles, we had collated a total of 256 records from EBSCO (142), Scopus (78), the most highly cited article (32) and our additional search addressing consumer- or market creation perspectives in local food (4). This broad research domain was limited to peer-reviewed journals because they are considered to be validated and potentially impactful in the field (Crossan and Apaydin, 2010).

Screening

We applied a three-stage approach to systematically review the articles. In the *first stage*, all 256 collated abstracts were manually reviewed, leading to the elimination of 130 records that were duplicates, not research articles (book chapters, commentaries and theses), not focussed on direct agricultural markets as defined by Hinrichs (2000) or predominantly concerned with nutrition and health. In the *second stage*, the remaining 126 articles were classified as addressing ($n = 53$) or not addressing ($n = 73$) consumers to fulfil our aim of elucidating consumer roles. If it was unclear whether the article concerned the role of consumers from the abstract, the articles were read in full. In the *third stage*, the 53 articles in the former category were read in full by the authors and found adequate for the content analysis (see Figure 1).

Descriptive statistics: journals, research designs and theoretical perspectives

We applied Page and Schirr's (2008) classification principles for our descriptive statistics. Both authors individually considered each article and classified each by journal and research design. The 53 included articles, published in 38 different journals, are summarized in Table 1.

Regarding research design (Table 2), 67.5% of the studies applied quantitative research designs, typically with variance designs dealing with change-associated covariation amongst dependent and independent variables. For example, Guido *et al.* (2010) studied marketplace reality through the role of ethical dimensions and product personality in purchasing intentions for organic food products, and Krystallis *et al.* (2006) applied a conjoint analysis investigating consumer willingness to pay for a variety of organic products. Both studies were delimited to a specified time and space. A qualitative research design, focussing on longitudinal design from a processual perspective on change was applied in 22.5% of the studies. For example, Kjeldgaard *et al.* (2017) used multiple methods over a five-year period to understand the Danish beer market and its transformation, and Press *et al.* (2014) applied a socio-historical analysis to explain how CSA programmes have gained legitimacy.

Key insights

In further article categorization, we focussed on definitions of local food (elaborated immediately hereafter), the assumptions made about market functions (section 2) and consumer rationales (section 3).

Exploring the definitions of local food: what is local food?

Local food means different things to different people, including amongst local food researchers. Many studies have focussed on defining the term “local” (see Feldmann and Hamm, 2015, e.g. Eriksen, 2013). The published definitions are quite disparate (see Table 3), consistent with the evolving and heterogeneous state of local food research. We did not set out to propose a universal definition of “local” in local food but rather explored the complexity of the term.

Terms employed by authors examining aspects of local food adoption include “organic food”, “organic processes”, “processed organic food”, “local consumer food movements”, “slow food”, “food sovereignty”, “CSA”, “alternative food networks”, “alternative food system” and

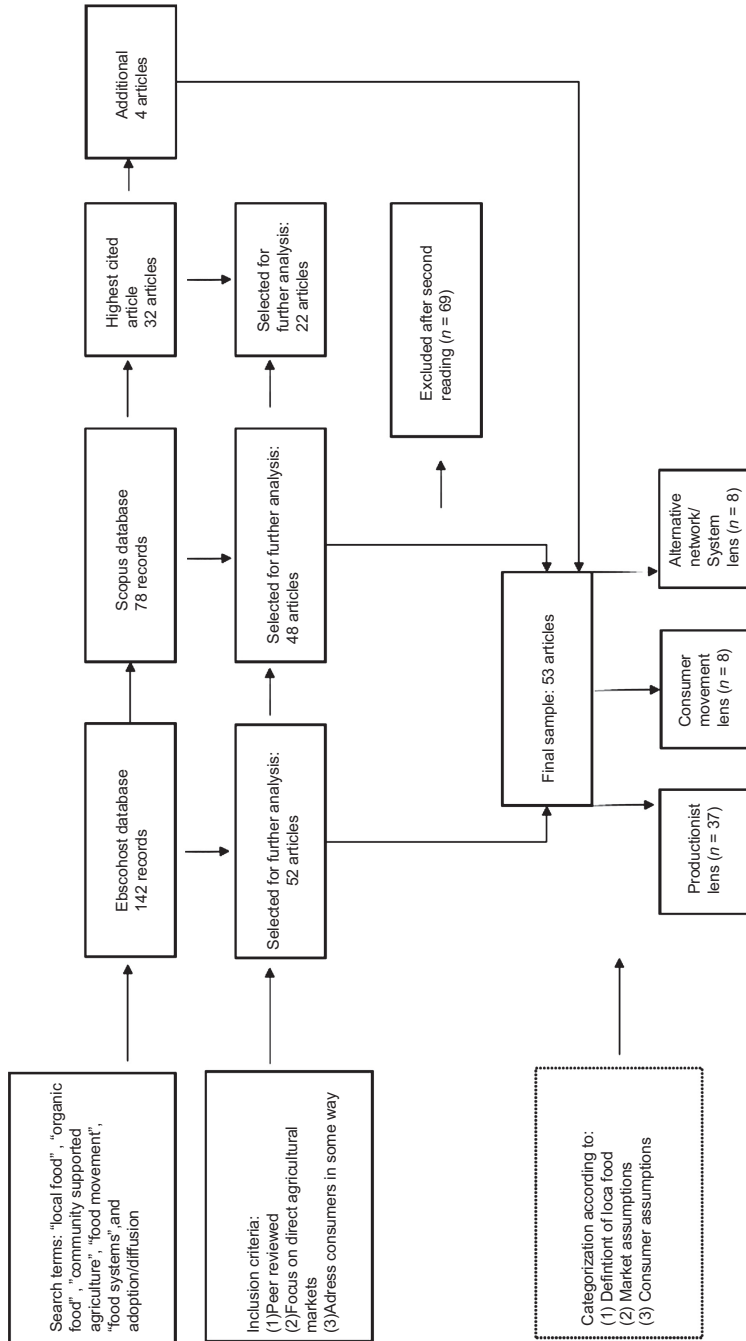


Figure 1.
Overview of the literature review process

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| Journals/ classification | Number | Percent | Total (%) | Journals/classification | Number | Percent | Total (%) |
|--|--------|---------|--------------|---|--------|---------|--------------|
| <i>Economics, econometrics and statistics</i> | | | | <i>Various</i> | | | |
| <i>Economic Modelling Sustainability</i> | 1 | | | <i>Agriculture and Human Values</i> | 4 | | |
| | 3 | | | <i>Food Quality and Preference</i> | 1 | | |
| <i>International Review of Economics</i> | 1 | | | <i>Food Policy</i> | 2 | | |
| <i>International Journal of Social Economics</i> | 1 | | | <i>British Food Journal</i> | 5 | | |
| <i>International Journal of Applied Business and Economic Research</i> | 2 | | | <i>Meat Science</i> | 1 | | |
| <i>American Journal of Agricultural Economics</i> | 1 | | | <i>Antipode</i> | 1 | | |
| <i>Agricultural Economics</i> | 1 | | | <i>Agroalimentaria</i> | 1 | | |
| <i>Total</i> | 10 | | 19 | <i>Allelopathy Journal</i> | 1 | | |
| <i>Marketing</i> | | | | <i>Acta Agriculture Scandinavica</i> | 1 | | |
| <i>Journal of Marketing</i> | 2 | | | <i>Journal of Food Products Marketing</i> | 1 | | |
| <i>European Journal of Marketing</i> | 1 | | | <i>Berichte Uber Landwirtschaft</i> | 1 | | |
| <i>Journal of Consumer Research</i> | 2 | | | <i>International Food and Agribusiness Management Review</i> | 1 | | |
| <i>Marketing Theory</i> | 1 | | | <i>Geographical Journal</i> | 1 | | |
| <i>Journal of Consumer Culture</i> | 1 | | | <i>Regional Studies</i> | 1 | | |
| <i>Journal of Consumer Marketing</i> | 1 | | | <i>Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes</i> | 1 | | |
| <i>International Journal of Consumer Studies</i> | 2 | | | <i>Journal of Rural Studies; Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning</i> | 1 | | |
| <i>Place Branding and Public Diplomacy</i> | 1 | | | <i>Journal of Extension</i> | 1 | | |
| <i>Journal of International Consumer Marketing</i> | 1 | | | <i>Journal of Interdisciplinary</i> | 1 | | |

(continued)

Table 1.
The 53 articles by
journal

BFJ

| Journals/ classification | Number | Percent | Total (%) | Journals/classification | Number | Percent | Total (%) |
|--|---------------------------|---------|--------------|--|-----------|---------|--------------|
| <i>Journal of Marketing Management</i> | 1 | | | <i>Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions</i> | 1 | | |
| <i>Journal of Cleaner Production</i> | 1 | | | <i>Food, Culture and Society</i> | 1 | | |
| Total | 14 | | 26.5 | Total | 29 | | 54.5 |
| Total of journals: 38 | No. of articles: 53 | | | | | | |

Table 1.

| | Qualitative | Quantitative | Total |
|--------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-----------|
| Empirical | 12 22.5% | 36 67.5% | 48 90% |
| Conceptual | 3 5% | 2 3% | 5 10% |
| Total | 15 30% | 38 78% | 53 |

Table 2.
Research design:
empirical/conceptual
and qualitative/
quantitative

“direct consumer/producer markets”. It appears that local food research can be viewed through different lenses depending on the role of proximity, such as spatial distances and relationships between producers and consumers. To shed light on the role of proximity, including nearness in space, time and relationships, we applied [Boschma’s \(2005\)](#) five-dimensional proximity framework ([Table 4](#)) in our content analysis. By applying this framework, we identified three predominant local food adoption perspectives, which are elaborated below: *productionist*, *consumer movement* and *alternative network/system lenses* [2].

“Local” as a food product/production characteristic: the productionist lens. The productionist lens was highly represented in research on organic food, organic processes and organic production. Typically, such research addresses various product characteristics or production schemes, often as part of the “organic” labelling. Through this lens, researchers define organically produced food as also having the qualities of being “local” and “small scale”, and we find that the terms “local” and “organic” are partly treated as overlapping ([Williams and Hammitt, 2000](#); [Underhill and Figueroa, 1996](#)). Some studies (e.g. [Migliore et al., 2015](#)) identify “organic” as a quality criterion recognized by consumers. Thus, assuming there is not always an overlap, we find that this lens has an implicit boundary-spanning perspective on local and organic food products. One explanation for the overlap is that early advocates of organic food focussed on the production characteristics of local food ([Adams and Salois, 2010](#)). As such, research employing a productionist lens often examines the commodification of organic agriculture, organic food production and consumer behaviour related to organic food (i.e. [Olson, 2017](#); [Ramesh and Divya, 2015](#); [Vindigni et al., 2002](#)). The high percentage of reviewed articles (70%) in this category suggests that research on local food in the context of organic food, organic processes and organic production is very well established in the literature on consumer adoption and diffusion of local food.

In this perspective, “organic” and “local”, alone or together, are associated with added value relative to industrialist agricultural products. [Adams and Salois \(2010\)](#) propose dividing organic into “deep organic” and “organic lite” to clarify the overlap of and distinction

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| Source | Term | Definition |
|--|--|---|
| Olson (2017), Ramesh and Divya (2015) | Organic food/organic processes | “Organic production supports locally grown food” The main motives to purchase organic food products are health and environmental benefits, plus support for local or small farmers |
| Ayres and Bosia (2011), Alkon and Mares (2012) | Food movement | “For some, localism refers to greater local control and participatory democracy—local production for local consumption, using local resources under the guidance and control of local communities” “(. . .)local and national policies designed to increase food access, and national and transnational social movements opposing the World Trade Organization and calling for an alternative system of global agriculture that benefits small farmers and landless people(. . .)” |
| Holloway <i>et al.</i> (2006), Hinrichs (2000) | Alternative food networks/food systems | “(. . .) sustainable farmland management can be expressed through broader understandings of developing networks of care concerned with local economies and societies, high-quality specialist food products, particular ‘traditional’ farming practices and livestock breeds, as well as the ecology of a farmed landscape” “Local food systems `are rooted in particular places, aim to be economically viable for farmers and consumers, use ecologically sound production and distribution practices and enhance social equity and democracy for all members of the community. They include an array of new (and not-so-new) market arrangements, such as farmers’ markets, community-supported agriculture, roadside farm stands, U-pick operations, local bakeries and breweries, specialty food processors, and the like” |

Table 3.
Excerpted explicit and implicit definitions of local food

| Types of proximity | The types of proximity refer to |
|--------------------------|--|
| Geographical proximity | The physical distance between the actors in the production space and the actors in the consumption space in absolute (e.g. miles) or relative terms (e.g. travel time) |
| Cognitive proximity | Is the extent to which the actors share the same knowledge base |
| Organizational proximity | Is the extent to which actors are under common hierarchical control |
| Social proximity | Is the extent to which actors have friendly relationships |
| Institutional proximity | Is the extent to which actors operate under the same institution |

Table 4.
The proximity framework (Boschma, 2005)

between “local” and “organic”. A proximal location is an attribute that is valued for both “local food” and “deep organic food” but not integral to “organic lite food” (Adams and Salois, 2010). As such, spatial distance is an implicit element of localness, whereas *organizational* proximity is an explicit element of local food. That is, a close producer–consumer relationship is anchored in the same type of hierarchic control found in organizations (see Batte *et al.*, 2007; Hughner *et al.*, 2007; Thøgersen and Zhou, 2012).

“Local” as a food ideology/identity: the consumer movements lens. The consumer movements lens was characteristic of articles in the “local food movements”, “slow food” and

“food sovereignty” research streams. The authors of such articles interpret local food as being linked to the formation of local, national and international social movements concerned with food and agriculture and investigations of *how* they have developed in recent decades (see, i.e. [Holt Giménez and Shattuck, 2011](#)). Typically, studies applying a consumer movement lens investigate the influence of consumer movements that may define local food through protests, rallies, boycotts and alternative lifestyle expressions related to local food adoption ([Weijo et al. \(2018\)](#)). For example, [Ayres and Bosia \(2011\)](#) consider local food adoption to be a localized resistance against globalization and investigate strategies of localism or relocalization opposing neoliberal globalization. Following the proximity framework of [Boschma \(2005\)](#), the “local” element in this literature is based on the *social* and *cognitive* proximities that actors attribute to local food. For example, in a study investigating food sovereignty in US food movements based on the shared values in the consumer movement, [Alkon and Mares \(2012\)](#) define local food as an articulation of efforts for attaining food justice in the community.

“Local” as a food practice/activity: the alternative network/system lens. Studies applying an alternative network/system lens of local food adoption are found in the alternative markets and networks research streams (see, i.e. [Holloway et al., 2006](#); [Toler et al., 2009](#)). Research into alternative local food networks/local food systems advocates for a more *direct* market form (i.e. [Hinrichs, 2000](#); [Toler et al., 2009](#)), wherein participants are united in prioritizing locality/region and (at least) temporary co-location (face-to-face interactions) ([Schermer, 2015](#); [Hinrichs, 2000](#)). In line with co-creative practices theory (e.g. [Mccoll-Kennedy et al., 2012](#)), research applying this lens emphasizes how customers can contribute to value creation through their own activities.

Research employing this lens emphasizes both formal (law and regulation) and informal (cultural norms and values) institutions in explaining how and why institutional structures may provide a basis for differential development quality amongst networks and markets ([Hinrichs, 2003](#); [Sundbo, 2013](#); [Donner et al., 2017](#)). In such research, proximity is discussed across a range of domains. Spatial locality, direct relations, face-to-face interaction, place of origin, traceability, authenticity, freshness and quality attributes are considered dimensions of “local” in local food adoption. Thus, authors’ understandings of local food are defined by *geographical* proximity as well as by *social*, *cognitive* and *institutional* proximities.

Market assumptions: modes of examining market emergence and change

The articles in our sample vary in terms of the authors’ explicit and implicit market and consumer assumptions, which are dependent on the lens applied. The lens applied may also influence the *level of analysis*, *units of analysis* and *research design*.

The productionist lens. In terms of the *level of analysis*, local food research applying a productionist lens is attentive to theoretical attention directed at how consumers and firms think and the forces that shape their thinking and behaviour (i.e. [Vindigni et al., 2002](#); [Batte et al., 2007](#)). There is a tendency towards favouring more specific micro-level theoretical questions. For example, [Krystallis et al. \(2006\)](#) explore organic buyers’ (Greek locals) willingness to pay for a variety of organic products in local product categories.

In research applying a productionist lens, the *units of analysis* tend to be restricted to only consumers and producers, leaving out other individual and institutional actors. For example, [Thøgersen and Zhou \(2012\)](#) investigate what motivated the early adopters of organic food in a local context in China. Further, research based on a productionist lens tends to focus on investigating marketplace circumstances *within* a certain time and place. Consequently, authors employ a *research design* that captures covariation amongst dependent and independent variables over a period of change. For example, [Ramesh and Divya \(2015\)](#) study consumers’ awareness, attitudes and satisfaction regarding selecting organic food products

with reference to a local Indian market. The validity of conclusions from these designs relies on the pre-existence of a marketplace composed of stable entities (actors, products, stores, etc.), while market development and emergence imply variability in the attributes of these entities.

The consumer movement lens. Research on local food applying a consumer movement lens tends to emphasize macro-level theoretical questions and concerns, without focussing on multilevel relationships (micro, meso, macro, etc.) when it comes to the *level of analysis*. For example, Fairbairn (2012) addresses the food sovereignty movement as having transformative potential in a US context, placing emphasis on ethical consumption at the macro level. In terms of *units of analysis*, consumer movement research on local food often involves observation of behaviours of micro-level agents and an aggregation of findings as a collection of socially embedded relationships amongst agents at a macro level. Thus, the *research design* applied in this perspective is often process oriented. For example, in an ethnographical longitudinal process study, Alkon and Mares (2012) undertook two years of extensive participant observation to address how and why markets emerge and develop over time.

The alternative network/system lens. In the literature applying an alternative network/system lens, the focus is on unpacking the relationships amongst micro, meso and macro levels of analysis (Holloway *et al.*, 2006; Giesler, 2008; Kjeldgaard *et al.*, 2017; Humphreys, 2010). Consequently, the *units of analysis* cover multiple stakeholders, including market-shaping consumers. In terms of *research design*, processes are examined over various periods based on numerous sources of data. For example Mcadam *et al.* (2016) adopt a subjective and multiple story milieu positioning consistent with a phenomenological enquiry to explore regional horizontal networks within the small and medium-sized enterprise agri-food sector. The researchers became immersed in the network through detailed interviewing and observation over 27 months, with a focus on understanding how networks and associated actors emerge, develop and dissipate over time. Problematizing the boundaries between market systems, market actors and time, the authors view markets as dynamic social systems.

Consumer assumptions: understanding consumer engagement with local food

As with organic food, the rationales for consumer engagement with local food may be structured around nine themes (Hughner *et al.*, 2007) including six that are *egoistic* (health and nutrition; superior taste; food safety; more wholesome food; nostalgia; fashionable/curiosity) and three that are *altruistic* (concern for the environment; animal welfare; supporting local economy).

The productionist lens. Commonly, research on local food employing a productionist lens investigates consumers' individual needs and the *egoistic motives* that drive consumer preferences. Because consumers often associate organic food with small-scale agriculture and local production, altruistic motives become secondary and implicit considerations. For example, although Hooker and Shanahan (2012) focus on health and nutrition concerns to explain consumers' willingness to pay for organic products, their work incorporates the characteristic of "locally grown".

The consumer movement lens. In the literature applying a consumer movement lens, we find research explicitly focussing on *altruistic motives*, with the common themes of environmental concern, concerns about animal welfare and support for the local economy. Such research describes these movements as being driven by resolute and persistent efforts by organized consumer collectives. Consequently, egoistic motives are often secondary and implicit in these studies. Munjal *et al.* (2016) find the slow food movement to be about knowing the source of meal-preparation ingredients and consumers' rights to have nutritious food

without contaminants. [Alkon and Mares \(2012\)](#) argue that the concept of food sovereignty is rooted in international peasant movements across the USA, with altruistic motives anchored in themes such as food justice and community food security.

The alternative network/system lens. Typically, local food research employing an alternative network/system lens focusses on market models that are transitioning to more sustainable local and regional food systems via changes in culture and consumption practices. For example, [Fairbairn \(2012\)](#) describe food sovereignty (consumers being convinced that the people who produce, distribute and consume food should control the mechanisms and policies of food production and distribution) as having transformative potential in the USA, placing emphasis on ethical consumption. [Scherner \(2015\)](#) examined direct producer–consumer cooperatives (CSAs and *Associations de Maintien de l'Agriculture Paysanne*) and demonstrated how alternative food networks may contribute to food system transformation through the motivation of changing the culture of consumption. Findings indicate that food sovereignty provides a broad vision of agri-food activists engaged in creating alternatives that *result* in new market models. Considering food sovereignty as a *motive* reduces the relevance of examining individual motives as antecedents of consumer behaviour because this motive is more complex and evolves in response to changes in culture and consumption practices (see [Table 5](#)).

Discussion

Challenges in consumer adoption of local food research

Our literature review revealed three perspectives in local food research and how they approach the issues of local food definition, local food market development and the rationales of consumers in these developments. Although the application of heterogeneous perspectives to the same phenomenon is challenging, the contrasting perspectives also create opportunities for deeper understanding. Here, we discuss some of these challenges and opportunities for each of the three identified issues.

Defining local food: food from nowhere, food from somewhere or food from here?

Studies on local food often argue that the absence of a universal definition of “local” is preventing standardization for “local” labelling (e.g. [Eriksen, 2013](#); [Feldmann and Hamm, 2015](#)).

| Dimensions | Positioning of local food | Scholarly market assumptions | Scholarly consumer assumptions |
|----------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Productionist lens | (1) Organic food (2) Organic processes (3) Processed organic food | (1) Micro-level (2) Consumer/firm level (3) Co-variation between dependent and independent variables | (1) Focus on the individual's egoistic motives |
| Movement lens | (1) Local consumer food movements (2) Slow food (3) Food sovereignty | (1) Macro-level (2) Consumer/market level (3) Focus on change and development | (1) Focus on collective altruistic motives |
| Alternative network/systems lens | (1) CSA (2) Alternative food networks (3) Alternative food system (4) Direct consumer/producer markets | (1) Relationship between micro, meso and macro (2) Markets as social systems (3) Focus on change and development | (1) Focus on changing the culture of consumption |

Table 5.
Summary of key highlights

We have found that the definition of local food varies depending on the lens that is applied. For example, when a productionist lens is applied in organic food research, “local” is often treated an implicit attribute of “organic”. This practice creates challenges because organic food consumers may be more concerned with knowing *how* their food is grown and processed (Kloppenborg *et al.*, 1996) than *where* it is produced. Organic food could be found anywhere, even in fast-food restaurants and vending machines. In contrast, research on local food employing the consumer movement or alternative network/system lenses has mapped out emergent patterns and trends that imply a general transition from “food from nowhere” to place-embedded “food from somewhere” that is traceable to the individual farmers who produce it (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli, 2007; Holloway *et al.*, 2006).

Globally, agri-food systems have undergone major changes in recent years. Along with globalization, commodification and de-localization, we can observe a substantial movement towards re-localization (Schermer, 2015). Ethical consumerism based in ideological principles is yielding innovative marketplace practices and relationships. Distance and proximity criteria defining what can be considered local food are highly variant (Eriksen, 2013), ranging from driving time between production and consumption to ambiguous social and environmental outcomes.

As summarized in Table 6, productionist lens research defines “local” in relation to the integration of organizational proximity in hierarchically organized value chains (i.e. Batte *et al.*, 2007; Hughner *et al.*, 2007; Thøgersen and Zhou, 2012). Meanwhile, consumer movement lens research emphasizes the proximity of economic relations embedded in a social context based on trust that facilitates exchanges and the concept of cognitive proximity, which emphasizes the role of shared knowledge in buttressing relationships amongst producers, distributors and consumers. Cognitive proximity may be fundamental to network strengthening through agreements and partnerships amongst public and private institutions, grassroots organizations, civil society and universities (Holt Giménez and Shattuck, 2011). The alternative network/system lens defines local food based on geographical proximity, resulting in a strong link between food and place (i.e. Cucco and Fonte, 2015; Hinrichs, 2000; Hinrichs, 2003) and closeness between consumer and producer enabling face-to-face interactions. This perspective also reflects a complex understanding of local as a descriptor of institutional, cognitive and social proximities. Consequently, collaboration between multiple stakeholders (e.g. Munjal *et al.*, 2016; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli, 2007; Weijo *et al.*, 2018) is important in the alternative network/system lens.

Market assumptions of local food research

The understanding of what constitutes a market varies in the literature on consumer adoption of local food. Giesler and Fischer (2016) point to economic actor, micro-level and variance biases “*plaguing marketing scholarship*” (p. 3). When a productionist lens is applied, the *economic actor bias* affects the choices of actors and theoretical interpretations (Giesler and Fischer, 2016). For example, investigating new US food labelling standards,

| | Geographical proximity | Cognitive proximity | Organizational proximity | Social proximity | Institutional proximity |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| Productionist lens | | | X | | |
| Consumer movement lens | | X | | X | |
| Alternative local network/system lens | X | X | | X | X |

Table 6.
The proximity of “local” in different lenses of local food research

Batte *et al.* (2007) focus on adopter–developer relationships between consumers and producers in pre-existing markets. By contrast, research applying consumer movement or alternative network/system lenses explores the creation, formation and reshaping of markets, including market-shaping consumers. Press *et al.* (2014) illustrate how opposing ideologies restrict consumer adoption in transitions to organic production and marketing in a commodity agriculture context. Thompson and Coskuner-Balli (2007) underscore the complexity of markets in an analysis of CSAs as a form of ethical consumerism organized by a nexus of ideological discourses, romantic idealizations and unconventional marketplace practices and relationships.

Regarding the *micro-level bias* proposed by Giesler and Fischer (2016), research applying a productionist lens favours specific micro-level issues, such as consumer awareness and attitudes towards organic products in local markets (Ramesh and Divya (2015)). On the other hand, research applying consumer movement and alternative local network/system lenses often operates at multiple levels of analysis. For example, Littaye (2015) investigates the role of organizations, institutions and networks in a multi-sited ethnographic study.

Research applying a productionist lens is also susceptible to a *variance bias*. For example, Hooker and Shanahan (2012) find that market access and intermediate input factors correlate strongly with the distribution of organic adopters. Typically, research applying the other two perspectives focusses on problematizing boundaries between markets, marketplace actors and time to explain change and development (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli, 2007; Press *et al.*, 2014). The three biases imply that the behaviour of consumers and producers co-creating new local food markets needs to be explored with new theories. Research applying a consumer movement lens often addresses predefined movements, such as the food sovereignty and slow food movements (e.g. Alkon and Mares, 2012; Ayres and Bosia, 2011; Munjal *et al.*, 2016). In such research, consumer movements are explored and interpreted as resolute and persistent efforts by organized consumer collectives to change markets and theoretical perspectives in which markets are viewed as multilevel systems which are favoured (Weijo *et al.*, 2018). For example, Kjeldgaard *et al.* (2017) examine how consumers can work strategically to alter market dynamics through evolution in the logics of competition within the Danish beer market. Thompson and Coskuner-Balli's (2007) analysis of CSAs takes a different approach based on ethical consumerism. Studies applying theories of value co-creation in an alternative network/system perspective may further complement this understanding of emergence and development of local food markets as they have for other markets, such as public transport (Gebauer *et al.*, 2010) and tourism (Lin *et al.*, 2017).

Understanding the consumer in research on consumer adoption of local food

Crises of confidence (Veflen *et al.*, 2017), such as the bovine spongiform encephalopathy, dioxin and foot and mouth disease crises, have led consumers to question food production practices and to demand greater transparency and information about food origins (Bànàti, 2011). According to Hughner *et al.*'s (2007) review, people's motivations for purchasing organic food and consumers' increasing interest in food origins have not been sufficiently captured in the food-purchasing behaviour literature (p. 94).

This issue extends to research on consumer adoption of local food. The focus on individual egoistic motives in the productionist lens involves consumers' concerns with buying food that is safe, healthy and nutritious in addition to being good tasting (Chamorro *et al.*, 2012; Crescimanno *et al.*, 2002; Ramesh and Divya, 2015). Consumer confidence in the conventional food industry is not strong (Bànàti, 2011). Research applying the consumer movement lens suggests that increased interest in local food reflects disapproval of dominant food systems (Sims, 2009) motivated by consumers' altruistic concerns related to the environment and

animal welfare and a desire to support the local economy (Alkon and Mares, 2012; Munjal *et al.*, 2016).

Alienation of consumers from food production due to scaling up of industrial agriculture has been suggested to play an important part in the development of an “alternative” and “local” food sector. Research employing an alternative network/system lens links the desire for food perceived as local to a shared quest for authenticity and more environmentally sustainable consumption, such as that associated with products having only travelled a short distance, directly from the producer. Alternative network/systems research has thus explored how producers and consumers can work together, bound by their interest in changing mainstream food consumption practices. In this context, markets are considered social multilevel systems in which value is co-created by consumers and producers.

Conclusions, limitations and further implications

In this article, we explore whether growth of the local food phenomenon can be better understood as being co-created by multiple stakeholders, including engaged consumers, than as growth in consumer adoption of producers’ predefined offerings. We identify three lenses applied in consumer-oriented research on the local food phenomenon: productionist, consumer movement and alternative network/system lenses. Additionally, we identify three challenging issues. The first challenge identified is regarding the lack of a consensus definition of local food, especially across studies applying different lenses. Hence, researchers should always clarify which interpretation of “local” they are applying (Eriksen, 2013). The second challenge identified is the existence of divergent market assumptions amongst consumer-oriented studies of local food (e.g. Hashem *et al.*, 2018; Sims, 2009). We elaborated the differences between these lenses by considering three biases in market system dynamics Giesler and Fischer (2016) that show how a value co-creation approach can help explain why engaged consumers are influencing the creation of new local food markets. With this approach, it is easier to unify divergent findings regarding market change and development across the three lenses. Lenses can also be combined to extend theoretical approaches into empirical studies of local food system development.

We have uncovered divergent consumer assumptions within local food market research that require further investigation. Future research should explore how differing local food consumer rationales across lenses translate into consumer roles and behaviour. Elucidation of such outcomes may guide follow-up empirical research and improve our understanding of the complexities of contemporary food consumerism. Studies have established the necessity of a value co-creation perspective for the development of chains, networks, constellations, flows and services (e.g. Festa *et al.*, 2015; Mars, 2015). Such findings are encouraging consumer co-creation in both local food businesses and food systems.

Our attempts to ensure the validity of our conclusions notwithstanding, we acknowledge the limitations of the procedure, method of analysis and perspective applied. Firstly, the search term design, literature databases searched and screening procedure may have influenced the sample that we base our conclusions on. We have attempted to ensure replicability and prioritized depth over breadth. The present study would be complemented by a broader search beyond consumer-oriented literature, particularly for further identification of contextual factors within local food research, such as how study setting may affect consumers’ views. Consumer rationales are likely to vary across contexts, and consumer roles in local food network initiatives may differ between regions and across different regulatory conditions. Secondly, our analysis approach is subject to influence by our personal value co-creation and market system dynamics frames of reference. However, each author of this review identified the three lenses independently, ensuring their relevance across frames of reference. Further research applying other higher-level frames of reference,

such as practice and institutional theory (e.g. [Crivits and Paredis, 2013](#); [Ertimur and Chen, 2020](#)) may contrast, complement and enrich the present findings. There is an overall need for applying complementary theories and models in local food research.

The most important practical implication of our study concerns the finding that “local” lacks a consensus understanding across lenses. This ambiguity is relevant for food safety and quality certifications intended to protect origin and geographical indications of local food ([Hinrichs, 2016](#)). A broader set of characteristics informed by the different lenses may advise further development of local food regulations and certification schemes that reflect the complexity of consumer rationales identified in this study. In clarifying what constitutes “local” in local food research, the three lenses may hopefully guide future research as well as be useful for managers and practitioners in local food markets, chains and networks.

Notes

1. REKO is an abbreviation for “Rejäl konsumtion” which translates into “sincere consumption”. REKO is a platform for local food markets based on many direct food distribution concepts.
2. See [Table A1](#) for a classification of the reviewed articles according to these lenses.

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Appendix

**Consumers in
local food
markets**

| Productionist lens | | Consumer movement lens | | Alternative network/system lens | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|--|----------------------------|
| Author | Term | Author | Term | Author | Term |
| Batte <i>et al.</i> (2007) | Processed organic food | Ayres and Bosia (2011) | Food movement | Chen <i>et al.</i> (2019), Donner <i>et al.</i> (2017) | Food networks |
| Bartels and Reinders (2010) | Organic food | Alkon and Mares (2012) | Food movement | Holloway <i>et al.</i> (2006) | Alternative food networks |
| Brzezina <i>et al.</i> (2017) | Organic food | Fairbairn (2012) | Food movement | Toler <i>et al.</i> (2009) | Alternative food networks |
| Bullock <i>et al.</i> (2017) | Organic food | Garner and Ayala (2019) | Food movement | Littaye (2015) | Alternative food networks |
| Chamorro <i>et al.</i> (2012) | Organic food | Munjal <i>et al.</i> (2016) | Food movement | Sundbo (2013) | Local food systems |
| Chen <i>et al.</i> (2015) | Organic food | Thompson and Coskuner-Balli, (2007) | Movement | Press <i>et al.</i> (2014) | Alternative local networks |
| Constance and Choi (2010) | Organic food | Kjeldgaard <i>et al.</i> (2017) | Movement | McAdam <i>et al.</i> (2016) | Alternative network |
| Crescimanno <i>et al.</i> (2002) | Organic processes | Weijo <i>et al.</i> (2018) | Movement | | |
| Dimara <i>et al.</i> (2003) | Organic processes | | | | |
| Guido <i>et al.</i> (2010) | Organic food products | | | | |
| Hooker and Shanahan (2012) | Organic production and processing | | | | |
| Juhl <i>et al.</i> (2017) | Organic food market | | | | |
| Krystallis <i>et al.</i> (2006) | Organic food market | | | | |
| Lacaze (2009) | Organic agriculture | | | | |
| Leeakulthanit (2016) | Organic food | | | | |
| McCarthy <i>et al.</i> (2016) | Organic food | | | | |
| Mosier and Thilmany (2016) | Organic food | | | | |
| Olson (2017) | Organic food | | | | |
| Raab and Grobe (2005) | Organic food | | | | |
| Ramesh and Divya (2015) | Organic products | | | | |

Table A1.
Classification of perspectives on local food in the consumer adoption literature

(continued)

| | Productionist lens | Consumer movement lens | Alternative network/system lens | |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|-----|
| | Risku-Norja and Løes (2017) | Organic food | | |
| | Sangkumchaliang and Huang (2012) | Organic food products | | |
| | Schäfer (2003) | Organic food | | |
| | Shanahan <i>et al.</i> (2008) | Organic food products | | |
| | Sondhi (2014) | Organic food products | | |
| | Stofferahn (2009) | Organic food | | |
| | Thøgersen and Zhou (2012) | Organic food | | |
| | Vindigni, G; Janssen, M.A; Jager, W | Organic food consumption | | |
| | Yakovleva and Flynn (2009) | Organic production | | |
| | Narwal (2010) | Organic agriculture | | |
| | Ølson (2017) | Organic food | | |
| | Guthman (1998) | Organic agriculture | | |
| | Loizou <i>et al.</i> (2013) | Organic food | | |
| | Miele (1999) | Organic products | | |
| | Becchetti <i>et al.</i> (2014) | Organic food | | |
| | Carolan (2017) | Organic agriculture | | |
| | Chipley (2001) | Organic agriculture | | |
| | <i>Sum</i> | 37 | 8 | 8 |
| Table A1. | <i>Percent</i> | 70 | 15 | 15 |
| | | | | 53 |
| | | | | 100 |

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