

The Consumer's Experiences and Explanations of The Concentrated Retail Grocery Market and Meaningful Actions

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Objective

The aim of this study is to build an understanding of how the concentrated retail grocery market reveals in consumers' everyday life. The study pursues to extend the knowledge of how the consumers understand and interpret the concentrated retail grocery market, and finds an answer to the research question; how do consumers experience the concentrated retail grocery market in their everyday lives and what does it mean to them.

Methodology

The study is based on the constructionist, interpretive paradigm which forms the ground to understand and construct the complexity of the individual person's experiences and world view. The data is gathered with personal consumer interviews and analyzed with phenomenological data analysis and hermeneutical analysis.

Findings

Consumers' everyday life experiences revealed the unclear structure of the concentrated retail grocery market. However, the consumers aim to understand the market conditions, food price and food selection, and act meaningfully and give reasons for the existing situation. The data analysis produced three sense making types – mannerism, acceptance, criticism, that manifest the consumers' reasoning and actions in their everyday life in the concentrated retail grocery market.

Keywords

Concentrated market, retail grocery, consumer, consumer experience

Kaupan strateginen johtaminen

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Kuluttajan kokemukset, selitykset sekä merkityksellinen toiminta keskittyneillä päivittäistavarakaupan markkinoilla

Tavoite

Tämän gradututkielman tavoitteena on lisätä ymmärrystä siitä, miten keskittyneet päivittäistavarakaupan markkinat ilmenevät kuluttajan arkielämässä. Tutkimus pyrkii ymmärtämään, tulkitsemaan ja kuvaamaan kuluttajien arkipäivän kokemuksia markkinoilla sekä sitä, miten kuluttaja ymmärtää päivittäistavarakaupan markkinoiden keskittyneisyyden ja mikä merkitys sillä on kuluttajan elämässä.

Tutkimusmenetelmä

Tutkielman lähtökohta on konstruktivisessa, tulkitsevassa tieteenfilosofiassa ja tutkimusote on hermeneuttis-fenomenologinen. Kuluttajien kokemuksia kerätään avoimin henkilöhaastatteluin. Kuluttajien kokemusmaailman ja sen merkitysisältöjen ymmärtämiseksi ja rakentamiseksi tutkimustieto analysoidaan ja tulkitaan fenomenologis-hermeneuttisten analyysimenetelmien avulla.

Tulokset

Kuluttajan kokemukset paljastavat keskittyneen päivittäistavarakaupan markkinarakenteen olevan kuluttajalle epäselvä. Kuluttajat pyrkivät kuitenkin ymmärtämään ja selittämään kokemuksiaan keskittyneestä päivittäistavarakaupasta - kuten kaupan tarjoomaa ja hinnanmuodostusta, sekä näiden asioiden merkitystä heidän arkielämänsä ja tarpeidensa tyydyttymisen kannalta. Tämä ymmärrys ja selitys heijastuvat kuluttajien toimintaan ja ajatuksiin keskittyneistä päivittäistavarakaupan markkinoista. Analyysi toi esiin kolme tyyppiä – tottumus, hyväksyntä, kritiikki, jotka ilmentävät kuluttajan suhtautumista ja toimintaa keskittyneillä päivittäistavarakaupan markkinoilla.

Avainsanat

Keskittyneet markkinat, päivittäistavarakauppa, kuluttaja, kuluttajan kokemukset

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1 INTRODUCTION

This research is a qualitative consumer study on the experiences of consumers in the concentrated retail grocery market. The interest in this subject arose from the media debate on the effects of the retail grocery concentration on the selection and price of food in retail grocery shops (Helsingin Sanomat 2011). This is a relevant subject considering a consumer. Even though the public discussion around the concentrated retail grocery market is increasing and the subject has been academically studied, the consumers' perceptions of the concentrated market structure and its effects on consumers' everyday life have not been fully addressed.

The concentration of the retail grocery market refers both to the geographical concentration of the retail groceries and to the competitive concentration where there are only a few players in the market. This study discusses the issue from a broad viewpoint, acknowledging both meanings since the consumer may refer to either one.

In order to better understand the effects of the concentrated retail grocery market for an individual consumer and for the society as the whole, it is important to examine how consumers perceive the concentrated retail grocery market in their everyday lives.

1.1 Background

The concentration of the retail grocery market has been an increasing trend in the European Union (Dobson, Waterson & Davies 2003, Aalto-Setälä 2002) and it has been studied substantially during the last decades, due to the changes in the market structure (Lamm 1981, Dobson & Waterson 1997, Marion 1998, Clarke 2000, Cotterill 1986; 1999, Burt & Sparks 2003) originating from the competition and increased efficiency of the grocery market. This is also the situation in Finland. The retail grocery market is considered

as highly concentrated since the two major companies, Kesko and S-Group, split a market share of nearly 80 % (Nielsen, 2011).

The concentrated retail grocery market structure has been studied over the years in Finland and both the changes in the market structure (Home, 1989a; 1989b) as well as the competitiveness have been studied (Aalto-Setälä, 2002). The academic discussion in the field of retailing is however lacking in studies where the concentrated retail grocery market is examined from the consumer's point of view.

A research conducted by Ritakallio and Vuorenhela (1998) discussed the social effects of the concentrated grocery market in different types of consumer groups. The issue is more related to a social policy since it examines the effects of the altering store location to specific consumer groups and the changes in their consumption behavior. The regional location of grocery stores has also been studied by Spåre and Pulkkinen (1997). Their research focused more on the effects of the restructuring retail services on accessibility for the consumers.

There are several marketing research studies that have discussed the retail grocery market in Finland from the consumer's perspective. The consumer's store choices have for example, been examined by Marjanen (1997a; 1997b) and Raijas (1993; 1994; 1997) and the consumer's perceptions on grocery stores has been very extensively covered by Uusitalo (1998, 2001). In these studies the market structure is acknowledged but the consumers' views on the concentrated structure of the retail grocery market and the effects of that on their lives has not been included in these studies.

There is a research gap in the studies on the concentrated retail grocery market regarding the consumer's views on it and its effects on the consumer's every-day life. As Aalto-Setälä (2002) states, it is not known what the outcome of the concentrated retail grocery market is for the consumers. There has been a concern that the concentrated market structure might harm the consumers (Burt & Sparks 2003, 237). To extend our understanding of

the concentrated retail grocery market, we need to examine consumers' views. This study aims to fill this research gap and to explore the issue from the consumer's perspective.

1.2 Research objectives and the research question

The aim of this study is to build an understanding and interpretation on how the consumers understand and interpret the concentrated retail grocery market. The main focus is to describe the experiences and to understand the role of concentrated grocery retail market in the consumer's everyday life, what meaning it has, how consumers understand their role in this context and how the market situation affects the consumers' actions.

The overall research question is: **How do consumers experience the concentrated retail grocery market in their everyday lives and what does it mean to them?**

The interest in the consumers' everyday experiences in the life world context is a research orientation which emphasizes description and understanding (Holbrook and O'Shaughnessy 1988; Belk, Sherry and Wallendorf 1988; Thompson, Locander and Pollio 1989; 1990). Even though this research area contributes more to the cultural perspective of studying consumers, the methods related to studying consumers from a cultural perspective are justified when pursuing an interpretation of the consumer's experiences and meaning in the retail grocery context. After all, as Holbrook and O'Shaughnessy (1988, 398) claim, the consumer research is a social science and therefore it needs to be viewed from an interpretive perspective. Therefore this study is based on the constructionist, interpretive worldview and it has a hermeneutic-phenomenological perspective. The consumer experiences are gathered through personal interviews and by analyzing and interpreting the data the aim is to understand what is the meaning of the concentrated retail grocery market in the consumer's everyday life.

1.3 Structure of the study

The introductory chapter presents the background for the study and highlights the research gap (the consumer's perspective in studying the concentrated retail grocery market), then the fundamental research orientation is stated and the research objectives and question presented.

The second chapter introduces the context of the research; the consumer in the concentrated retail grocery market. The first section gives a concise introduction to the retail grocery market in Finland and the second reviews the academic discussion on the subject. In the subsections the issue is viewed from the consumer's point of view and the consumer's choices, price and store locations are discussed.

The third chapter presents the theoretical approach in studying the consumer experience. A short introduction to Husserl's phenomenology and its application as a research method is described. A description of the phenomenological consumer studies concludes the chapter.

The fourth chapter covers the methodological framework which is based on the constructionist, interpretive paradigm. The sections present the philosophy of the science in study, the judgment criteria and the data collection, analysis and the interpretation methods.

Chapter five presents the findings of the study and gives a phenomenological analysis of them. The consumer's experiences, explanations, reasoning and meaningful actions in their everyday lives are described. These findings are discussed in more detail in chapter six.

Finally chapter seven concludes the study by presenting the main findings and discusses the practical implications and limitations of the study and suggests related topics for further research.

2 THE CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH – THE CONSUMER IN THE CONCENTRATED RETAIL GROCERY MARKET

There is a gap in the studies on the effects of the concentrated retail grocery market on consumers. This study contemplates the Finnish retail grocery market and the academic discussion considering the effects the concentrated retail grocery market, the prices, the location of the stores and the products/services have on the consumers. These are the issues that have an influence on consumers' behavior in the grocery market.

This chapter describes the context of the research; the consumer in the concentrated retail grocery market. First the retail grocery market in Finland is introduced and then a review of the academic discussion on the concentrated retail grocery market follows.

2.1 The retail grocery market in Finland

A concise review of the retail grocery market in Finland is presented to introduce the empirical background of this study. The changes in the competition in the retail grocery market are presented with a table showing the market shares during the last seven years. The present market structure is introduced by examining the retail grocery companies that currently hold the top four places in the grocery market. The structural change in the number of the stores is illustrated, and the indices of the consumer prices and earnings show the development of the consumer's purchase power during the last years.

Changes in the market shares in the retail grocery between 2004-2010

Kesko and the S-Group have been the two major competitors in the retail grocery market during the years 2004 – 2010 (Table 1). Other grocery trade groups have not had notable shares. The biggest changes in the market structure were in the year 2005 when Tradeka and Wihuri merged forming a new retail trade company Suomen Lähikauppa and Spar-Group operated in Finland for its last year.

Table 1. Changes in the market shares in the retail grocery 2004 - 2010
Source: FGTA 2012 (Finnish Grocery Trade 2005-2012)

Grocery trade Market Shares 2004 - 2010 (%)							
Grocery Trade Group	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Kesko	35,3	33,9	33,5	33,9	33,7	34,2	35
S-Group	34,3	35,9	39,9	41	42,4	43,2	44,1
Suomen Lähikauppa					11,3	10,2	9
Tradeka	10	10,8	11,9	11,9			
Spar-Group	6,8	6,2					
Wihuri	4,6	1,8					
Stockmann	1,5	3,7	1,6	1,5	1,4	1,3	1,4
Lidl	2,8	1,5	4,1	4,7	5,1	5,1	5
M-Chain				0,8	0,9	0,7	0,7
Tokmanni						1,3	1,4
Minimani						0,7	0,6
Other private	4,7	6,2	9	6,2	5,2	3,3	2,8
total (%)	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Tradeka year 2004 = chains Siwa, Valintatalo, Euromarket

Tradeka year 2005 = chains Siwa, Valintatalo, Euromarket, Ruokavarasto, Etujätti, Sesto

Tradeka year 2006 = chains Siwa, Valintatalo, Euromarket

Suomen Lähikauppa 2008 = chains Siwa, Valintatalo, Euromarket

Spar Group year 2005 = Eurospar, Spar

Wihuri year 2004 = Etujätti, Sesto, Ruokavarasto, Tarmo, Kymplit

Wihuri year 2005 = Tarmo, Kymplit

M-Chain year 2007 = M Itsenäiset kauppiat

Market shares in 2010

The retail grocery market (table 2) in Finland is mainly occupied by the two major companies Kesko and S-group, with a combined market share of 79.1 % in 2010. Suomen Lähikauppa Oy holds third place with a market share of 9 %. The only foreign competitor is German Lidl with a market share of 5 %. The value of the total sales of the grocery market was 14.526 billion euros in 2010 (Finnish Grocery Trade Association 2012.)

Table 2. Market shares of the Finnish grocery trade groups in 2010
(Source: FGTA 2012)

Market Shares of the Finnish Grocery Trade Groups in 2010		
	Market share (%)	Total Sales € (million)
<i>S-Group</i>	44,1	6,412
<i>Kesko</i>	35,0	5,081
<i>Suomen Lähikauppa</i>	9,0	1,308
<i>Lidl</i>	5,0	723
<i>Stockmann</i>	1,4	202
<i>Tokmanni Group</i>	1,4	201
<i>M Chain</i>	0,7	102
<i>Minimani</i>	0,6	84
<i>Other private</i>	2,8	413
Total	100	14,526

The S- Group

The S-Group is a network of retail and service trade companies. It consists of the independent co-operatives and the SOK Corporation which is owned by the co-operatives. The SOK Corporation operates as the central firm and is in charge of the strategic steering of the co-operative companies. The number of the outlets is over 1600. The co-operative members are both the

owners of the local co-op and its customers (S-Group internet-site, 2011.) The S-group increased its market share to 44.1 % in 2010 (Nielsen 2011). The largest national chain brands of the S-Group are the S-market, Prisma, Alepa and Sale grocery stores (FGTA 2011).

Kesko

Kesko is a listed company and reached a market share of 35 % in 2010 (Nielsen 2011). K-food retailers operate under a chain business model. There are more than 1000 K-food stores in Finland (Kesko Annual Report 2010.) The largest Kesko grocery store chains are K-Supermarket, K-market and K-Citymarket (FGTA 2011).

Suomen Lähikauppa Oy

Suomen Lähikauppa Oy was formed when Tradeka Oy merged with Wihuri in 2005. It now operates with the Valintatalo, Siwa and Euromarket grocery store chains. Suomen Lähikauppa has 692 grocery stores across Finland and a market share of 9 %. (Suomen Lähikauppa 2012; FGTA 2011.)

Lidl Finland Ky

Lidl is a German discount store chain that holds the fourth place in the grocery market with its 5 % market share. It began operating in Finland in 2002 and is the only foreign retail competitor in the Finnish retail grocery market. It now operates with a nationwide grocery store chain in Finland (Lidl 2012; FGTA 2011.)

Market strategies

It is argued that there are no major differences between the market strategies of the Finnish retail groups (Uusitalo 1998, 186; Aalto-Setälä 2002, 209). Uusitalo's study from over ten years back (1998) surveyed the consumers' perceptions of the grocery stores, and the study revealed that there were no significant perceived differences between the different grocery stores at the time. However, it is worth noting that the study was made before Lidl entered the grocery market.

Structural change in the number of the stores

The Finnish retail grocery market consists mainly of large sized grocery stores; over 1000 square meter stores control 65 % of the market and those stores that amount to only 10% of the total number of stores are responsible for 50 % of the total sales in the retail grocery (FGTA 2012). The different types of grocery stores and their numbers are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Grocery stores by type in 2010 (Source: FGTA 2012)

The number and sales of the grocery stores according to the store type in the year 2010			
Store type	Square meters	Number of stores	Sales (€ million)
Hypermarket	2500 (min.)	141	3,8022
Department store	2500 (min.)	120	558
Supermarket, large	1000 (min.)	585	4,913
Supermarket, small	400-1000	441	1,776
Self-service market, large	200-339	1070	2,306
Self-service market, small	100-199	479	473
Small store	<100	447	317
Special store (614) Indoor markets (26)		640	185
Total number		3923	14,331

The market share of the large grocery stores (> 1000 square meters) in the Finnish grocery trade market is nearly 65 %. The number of the market-size grocery stores (< 1000 square meters) has decreased by one third from the year 1978 (9398 market-sized grocery stores) to 3283 market-sized grocery stores in 2010 (FGTA 2012.)

Changes in the indices of the consumer prices and earnings between 2005-2011

From 2005 to 2010 the consumer prices have increased by 9,67 %. The price of the food and non-alcoholic beverages followed nearly the same annual growth average except for a sudden increase during 2008 and 2009. In 2011 the annual average in the consumer price index (2005=100) was 113,5 (Official Statistic Finland 2012).

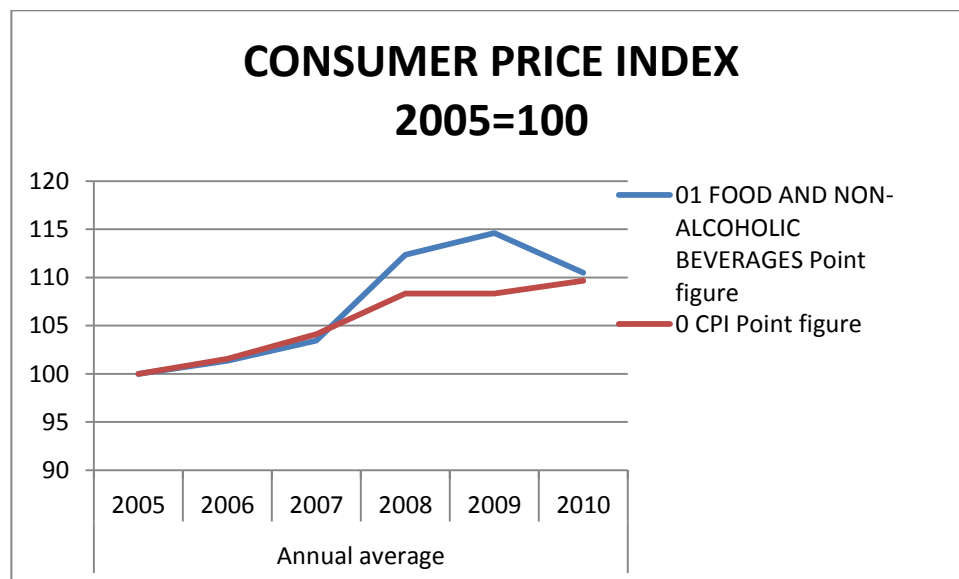


Figure 1. Changes in the Consumer Price Index between 2005 - 2010
(Source: www.stat.fi, 30.1.2012)

An increase in the consumers' earnings from 2005 to 2010 can be seen in the index of the wage and salary earnings.

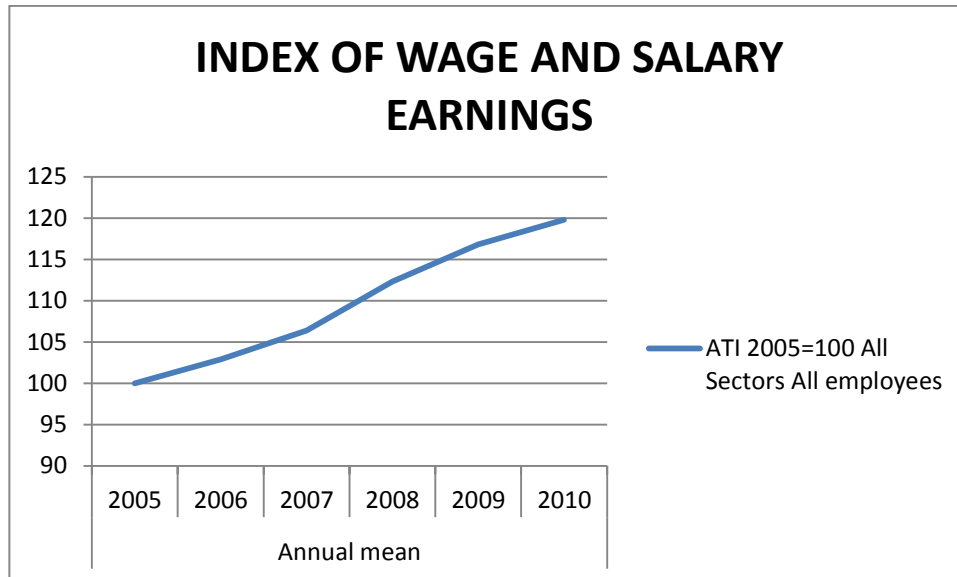


Figure 2. Changes in the Index of Wage and Salary Earnings 2005 – 2010
(Source: www.stat.fi, 30.1.2012)

The index of the wage and salary earnings only measures the average development of the earnings in regular working hours by sector, industry and wage and salary earner groups (OSF 2012). Nevertheless it shows a trend of increasing income levels.

When studying the indices of the consumer prices and earnings it is worth noticing that as the consumer prices have increased the income level have also been improving. Nevertheless it should be noted that the statistics are a calculated mean and that there are differences in the development of the consumers' income levels.

2.2 The consumer and the retail grocery market concentration

Retail is the link between the manufacturers and consumers. Its function is to deliver the merchandise to the consumer's disposal and offer the assortment of items that answers to the consumer's needs, at the right time and with a price with which the consumer is willing to buy the goods (Raijas 1993, 1). Retail grocery in Finland refers to the delivery of the daily consumer goods to grocery stores, which are most often self-service markets that offer goods. Groceries include food; which accounts for the 80% of all the grocery store sales, as well as techno-chemical products, household paper and tissue products, tobacco products, daily cosmetics, and news-papers and magazines (FGTA 2012.)

In the relationship between the consumer and grocery retail the most important factors are the location of the store, the selection and the prices. Considering the consumers in the retail grocery market and their relationship with the grocery deliverers, Clarke has argued that the consumers and the grocery retailers are not in as equal a position as it is suggested in the economic studies. In the concentrated retail grocery market the consumers have to adjust their lives to e.g. travelling long distances to grocery stores and their knowledge of prices and the retailer's selection are not equal to the knowledge that the retailer has (Clarke 2000, 981-985.) But how conscious are the consumers about their position in the grocery market and how does their knowledge about the prices and supply affect their actions in the concentrated retail market?

When studying competition in the retail sector, Bresnahan and Reiss (1991, 977), found that in the oligopolistic market where there are only a few firms (from three to five) competing, the entrance of a new competitor has little effect on new competitive measures being taken into use to compete for customers. From the consumer's point of view this could mean that the market conditions might remain quite stable in spite of the newcomer, unless the consumer's attention is called to perceive the change in the market

situation by the players on the market using different kind of competitive weapons.

Clarke (2000, 982) states that most academic papers studying retailing assume a perfect competition in the sector, and he questions the competition in a situation where only two retailers hold a market, since there can be perfect competition only when one firm can capture a significant market share at the expense of the others. The concept of perfect competition is also interesting from the consumer's viewpoint. What are the abilities of a consumer to consider the competition conditions in the grocery market and its effect on the consumer, whether there is a severe competition or not?

Considering the competition, the debate on the market power in the distribution channels (Burt and Sparks 2003, 238) and its effect on the market structure and consumer prices, as well as the impact of these issues on the social welfare have been addressed (Dobson and Waterson 1997, 428; Clarke 2000, 976) but not studied further with an everyday life consumer perspective.

When studying the relationship between the retail market and the consumers, Clarke (2000, 989) found that the retail has become something more than merely a way to distribute goods. In the concentrated retail grocery market not only the role of the consumer should be given more thought, but also how the consumer reflects on the issues such as the retail competition, price, supply and the location of the grocery store, and also then what are the consequences that can be seen in the consumer's behavior should be considered.

2.2.1 The consumer's choices in the concentrated retail grocery market

A grocery retail is much more than a mere distribution of goods, it also includes a large range of different kind of services; the store location, range of the goods, atmosphere, availability of information and confidence of the distribution (Raijas 1993, 33). The service also reduces consumer's costs of shopping (Marjanen 1998, 5) but the consumer is, however, subject to other costs than the price of the purchase and that is, the cost of time and energy (Raijas 1993, 1). When studying the concentrated retail grocery market, the costs the consumer is subjected to should be taken into account more extensively, so that the issues that the changing market structure has affected would be covered.

The range of available retail grocery service gives the consumers possibility to choose among the service providers, but a study by Dobson et al. (2003) brought up the substantial changes in the nature of the supply chain in the concentrated retail grocery market and those affect the consumer's choices. On a general level, these changes in the market structure benefit the consumer with a wide range of selection and lower prices, but the disadvantage is a greater homogenization of the retailing and a greater similarity of the products and services offered to the consumers (Dobson et al. 2003, 121-123).

Large retail chains can offer more convenience and one-stop shopping to the consumers; however they also alter the consumers' shopping behavior. Although the new retail grocery formats and large retail chains offer the consumers much more shopping convenience, they are also narrowing the number of traditional and special retailers (Dobson et al. 2003, 111) and leading and directing the consumer's food choices by retail supply and grocery store locations; therefore changing the market structure (Clarke (2000, 990-991).

The altering structure of the retail field has been discussed and connected to the competitive situation in the retail grocery market. It has been stated to affect and constrict the consumer's choices, when the primary production and small retailers have problems competing in the concentrated market (Clarke 2000, 975; Dobson et al. 2003, 111, 121-123). It is clear though, that the consumers are also affecting the supply and market conditions with their purchase decisions. However, in order to determine how aware the consumers are of the connection between their actions and the market conditions, and what is the power relationship between a consumer and the retailers in the concentrated retail grocery market, more studies are needed.

2.2.2 Prices and the retail grocery concentration

The relation between the concentrated retail grocery markets and the prices both locally and in the market structure was studied in the United States. The concentration of retail is perceived to increase the prices (Lamm 1981; Marion 1998; Cotterill 1999) and the study by Lamm (1981) showed the evidence of the food prices being higher in those local markets where only a couple retailers held the major market shares.

There is a possibility that the concentration grocery retail affects the prices in a local area where there are only a few competitors, or nationally affecting the whole market structure, which affects the consumers more widely. Paying attention to the number of the firms on the market and to the market shares among these firms is based on industrial organization theory, since these two factors are the important determinants of the prices and profits of the industry (Lamm 1981, 67.)

The studies (Dobson and Waterson 1997, 428; Clarke 2000, 983) have concluded that concentration of the market leads to an increase of the prices. However, also decrease is possible due to the bulk buying power, which leads to savings that could then be passed to the consumers. Studying the

effects the concentration and market power on food prices in Finland, Aalto-Setälä (2000, 214) concluded that larger retail firms pass on their cost saving to the consumers as long as there is sufficient competition.

Price was seen as a main factor influencing the choice between the daily consumer goods stores in Finland (Spåre & Pulkkinen 1997, 58). Other factors were a friendly staff and a broad product range. Burt and Sparks (2003, 237) contradict the assumption that the price is the only thing that dictates the consumer grocery shopping behavior, and question the importance of the price in modern supermarkets. They find that the price is not the only attribute in defining the purchase motivation since there are also other factors to take into account, such as the product portfolio and quality, the convenience of the store location, store atmosphere and available extra services.

Cotterill (1999, 101) studied how the concentrated market structure is related to the higher service level and therefore higher prices in food retailing. His study rejected this assertion and found that even though the services measured by in-store promotions and extensive product selection have a positive impact on price levels, when ignoring those services and non-price competition the firms in more concentrated markets charge higher prices.

Regarding price, an important issue discussed by Raijas (1993, 1) is that the costs for the consumer are far more than the plain price of an item at the grocery store. There are also intangible costs, such as time and energy to take into account, and there the location of the store has a major role. Price is a complex issue and its meaning might not be so simple and stable, but dependent on the individual and on circumstances. It is, however, interesting to examine how the consumers perceive the prices in the concentrated retail market.

2.2.3 The structural change and the location of the store

A retail trade is an activity which serves a surrounding area and the people living there (Marjanen (1998, 5). The accessibility of the retail service is a central factor when studying the effects of the structural change in retailing from the consumer's perspective (Marjanen 1997b, 49; 1998) and it also determines the relationship between the consumer and the retailer (Clarke 2000, 985).

The structural change in the retailing in Finland has transferred the location of the grocery stores next to highways and the consumers are expected to be more mobile (Raijas 1993, 3). Due to this change the consumers are divided into unequal positions in regard to access to daily goods: depending on the individual's personal resources, such as mobility and purchase power (Raijas 1993, 8-9).

Ritakallio and Vuorenhela (1998) studied concentrated grocery retailing and the structural change from a socio-political perspective, also taking into account the unequal position of a consumer. Ritakallio and Vuorenhela noted that the price levels in corner shops are higher and the diminishing customer base is pulling the price even higher. The inequality between the different socio-economic consumer groups is apparent and the shopping costs even increase more if there is no corner shop available and even the small purchases require travelling (1998, 1; 39-40.)

Spåre and Pulkkinen (1997) studied the experienced accessibility of purchasing daily goods in Finland. The results indicate a good accessibility of the retail services, but the researchers point out the limitation of the sample size and absence of over 70-year-olds in their study. The overall conclusion is that consumers do not see the distance to the store negatively as long as there are positive benefits accompanied, such as the price and a good selection of food available (Spåre and Pulkkinen 1997, 55-56.)

A new store with a constant wide variety of goods year around accustoms the consumers to a new standard and persuades the customers from a wide area to shop there; leading to the closing of smaller stores and narrowing the shopping possibilities of those consumers who are not mobile. Therefore the consumers have to re-evaluate where to do their shopping, and the decision is affected by their socio-economic characteristics along with their mobility (Clarke 2000, 990; Ritakallio & Vuorenhela 1998). However, the ability of a consumer to make these redefinitions may vary. Therefore it is essential to study the consumers' real life experiences and increase the knowledge of how the concentrated retail grocery market manifests in the consumers' lives and what meaning it has to them. All aspects of the concentrated grocery market should be examined in order to understand its effects.

3 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE – CONSUMER EXPERIENCE

In this study the consumer experience is examined through the concepts and philosophy of phenomenology in order to gain understanding on how the consumer experiences the concentrated retail grocery market and also to enable the studying and interpreting of the consumers' realities. This study does not aim to find any causal relations within the study but instead it strives to picture and form the studied phenomena from consumers' perspective.

A short introduction to Husserl's phenomenology with a description of phenomenological research, intentionality and phenomenological reduction and a description of how to use phenomenology in studying consumers follows, in order to present the tools to study the consumer's real life experiences.

3.1 Husserl's phenomenology

Phenomenology is based on the thoughts of a German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). His tradition has had followers in philosophy concentrating the interest on lived reality, human life world and its structure. There is not, however, a clear agreement of the concept, method or target area of the phenomenology (Miettinen et al. 2010, 9; Judén-Tupakka 2007, 62.) The history of the phenomenology is based on the interpretation of Husserl's thoughts (Miettinen et al. 2010, 9.)

The term phenomenology originates from a pietistic study on the divine system of relations between the things on the surface of the visible world. Later on the term came to refer to the theory of the appearances that were fundamental to all empirical knowledge, and it was a descriptive enterprise contrast to causal explanations which seek what lies behind the appearances (Smith & Smith 1995, 9.)

The philosophy behind Husserl's phenomenology is derived from Aristotle, Descartes and Hume, in relation to the new ideas and understanding of the mind and the conscious experience by Brentano. Husserl influenced the evolution of the traditional philosophical concerns of the late twentieth century about the philosophy of mind, ontology and cognitive science. His thoughts have had an impact among others on phenomenology, existentialism, hermeneutics, post structuralism and deconstruction among other things. He is said to be the last of the great Cartesians (Smith & Smith 1995, 1-2.)

Husserl's work consists of the conceptual tools to understand the social relationships and the aim and function of a human life. He saw philosophy as a form of scientific research and therefore its task was to explain the meaning and conditions of the science, focusing on "*to the things themselves*" (Pulkkinen 2010; Heinämaa 2006, 7-8.)

Husserl saw our ordinary life as naïve, since the world behind our perception and action was not questioned. The experienced world is set as real and sound. The completeness of the settings of how we connect to the world is called the natural attitude and according to Husserl, this natural attitude cannot be sustained by philosophy but instead, the philosophy is to untangle the structure of this attitude (Pulkkinen 2010; Taipale 2006, 26.)

The natural attitude is not seen as problematic or contradictory by Husserl. Confusion occurs when the naturalistic arguments are understood as philosophy and the connection to the world is based on the natural attitude. Husserl finds this as to be a common reaction to the natural attitude and finds that the essence of consciousness has not been understood (Pulkkinen 2010, 26; Taipale 2006, 26-27.) Husserl criticized the naturalistic idea that pure knowledge of the reality is obtained when constructing the reality with theoretical stance. He claimed that a constitutive understanding about the reality is gained subjectively and experienced life-world (Pulkkinen 2010; Judén-Tupakka 2007; Husserl 1995, Smith & Smith 1995.)

In relation to this study Husserl's notion of the natural attitude is important. By using Husserl's philosophy the structure of the consumer's perceptions and actions can be examined and therefore in order to understand and analyze the consumer's reality, the study must use Husserl's phenomenological tools to study this phenomena; a consumer in the concentrated retail grocery market.

3.1.1 Phenomenological research

Phenomenology is the study of phenomena "*in the sense of the ways in which things appear to us in different forms of conscious experience*" (Smith & Smith 1995, 8-9). A central phenomenological concept is the life world. It is the world where we are living and it gives a basis to all knowledge and the scientific definition. The life world frames the knowledge of our reality and the knowledge is guided by the practical interests of our life world. In the context of research, a life world can be understood as the socially constructed daily routines (Judén-Tupakka 2007, 63-64.)

Husserl's phenomenology is about the description and structural analysis of the consciousness and the consciousness is studied precisely as it is experienced. The objects of consciousness need to be characterized accurately according to the experience without any reinterpretations or effect of reductive explanation or other motives. Phenomenology is dealing with phenomena, "*with the objects as we experience them in consciousness and with our different ways of relating to these objects via intentionality*" (Smith & Smith 1995, 9.)

The science of phenomenology is the study of the essence of conscious; the intentional experience defined as the noema. Every act has a noema and it is seen as a type of meaning or sense. Husserl saw the consciousness as pure rational, mental activity and his theory of the essential structures of the con-

consciousness was developed in terms of the parts and moments of our mental acts. A noema is an abstract, ideal entity which can be shared as a common content of different acts on the part of different subjects. An act's noema prescribes which object satisfies the given act (Judén-Tupakka, 2007, 62; Smith & Smith 1995, 9-10: 24.)

The purpose of the phenomenological research is not to illustrate the accuracy of the research results; instead, it aims to a certain kind of practice to challenge and ask questions (Miettinen et al. 2010, 9). The phenomenological research describes how we experience the reality. It is about the general structure of the experience, not about a separate, individual experience or consciousness (Miettinen et al. 2010, 11.)

3.1.2 Intentionality and phenomenological reduction

In the phenomenological reflection the consciousness is intentional in the sense that it is directed towards an object, which means that the consciousness is consciousness of something. The phenomenological interest is in the acts of the consciousness and in the objects that acts are intended to just at the same time as they are experienced and intended. It is something immediately experienced even if the object in our consciousness does not exist in the world beyond the consciousness (Pulkkinen 2010; 33; Smith & Smith 1995, 11, 15.)

Husserl's phenomenological reduction (abstention) is to bracket or abstain from positing the existence of the natural world around us. It is to "*put out of action the general thesis of the everyday natural standpoint, our background presupposition that there exists a world independent of our experience*". The reduction leads to abandoning the (naturalistic) world that is taken for granted and adopting the phenomenological position. From this position the pure consciousness can be described (Pulkkinen 2010, 28-29; Smith & Smith 1995, 11.)

With this critical step back the phenomenology abstains from the ready given arguments of the existence in the reality and tries to understand how the thing become real to us. Nothing is removed from the reality but instead attention is focused on the manifestation of the acts; the phenomenological reduction enables understanding how we perceive and experience things as real, and how the things we value become meaningful (Miettinen et al. 2010, 11-12.)

The method of the phenomenological reduction is a technique that focuses on the act and on the correlated object precisely as they are experienced. The object does not need to exist in the reality. The experience is described from the first-person point of view and it also reveals the form of consciousness in which the objects are experienced (Smith & Smith 1995, 11.)

The reduction can be applied to all things, whether they are physical, in memory or in imagination. Focusing on the experience, the phenomenology aims to take into the consideration the whole spectra of our experiences in the lived world and pursuits to understanding what the experience is about (Smith & Smith 1995, 11-12; Miettinen et al. 2010, 11.) The importance of the phenomenology and its goal is to bring out the world from its self-evidently token truth (Pulkkinen 2010; 31).

In the phenomenological reduction the world is neutralized and studied differently, not paying attention to its existence (Pulkkinen 2010, 31-32). The existence of the world beyond consciousness is acknowledged by the claims of common-sense realism; there are objects that exist independently of consciousness and are objects of our experiences (Smith & Smith 1995, 13.) The phenomenological reduction allows us to freely and without bias study how the world is experienced.

3.2 Phenomenology in consumer studies

The consumer experiences and descriptions of lived meaning have been the research interest of consumer studies for decades. This perspective reveals the actual real life experiences which are overlooked and under the rational beliefs and assumptions, and gives better understanding of consumers (Thompson et al. 1990). It describes the person's life world as a socially contextualized completeness in which the experiences interweave coherently and meaningfully and emphasizes the experiencing individual even though the social context is seen as a fundamental ground from which all meanings emerge (Thompson, Locander & Pollio 1989; 1990).

The phenomenological consumer studies focus on the consumer experiences and strive for conceptualizing and understanding the consumer phenomenon (see for example Rook 1987, Thompson et al. 1989; Thompson et al. 1990). These interpretative studies aim to produce descriptions of the real life experiences of the consumers and to find out the meaning of these experiences to the consumers.

The phenomenological consumer studies give profound knowledge of a consumer's individual actions and behavior in their everyday lives (see for ex. Mick and Demoss 1990). The information gathered from the real life experiences reveal the consumers' needs, motivations and attitudes in different kind of consumption related contexts (for example compulsive buying see O'Quinn & Faber 1989) or finds the specific lifestyle manifestations (for example the consumers' temporal orientation see Bergadaà 1990; Cotte et al. 2004) which are very subjective and related to a personal meaning.

The consumers' experiences and personal meaning are important to acknowledge when improving the service and the relationship between the consumer and the service provider. When the consumer's everyday life and the issues related to the relationship between the consumer and the market are better understood, the marketers are then able to find hidden needs and

desires, to rationalize their functions and to develop new, innovative and better functioning business ideas.

The perspective of phenomenological consumer studies gives information that is relevant to marketing, by giving an insight into the lives of the consumers. It explores the subjects and phenomena and detects their functions and interactions in various contexts. Just as Husserl criticizes knowledge of reality that is based on theoretical positioning, in consumer studies the reality should also be acknowledged by placing the experiencing consumer into the spotlight, trying to understand the consumer's world and go "to the things themselves".

4 METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodological framework of the study. First the philosophy of the science and the criteria of judgment of the study are discussed, and then a description of the data gathering and information on conducting the study follows. Finally the analysis methods and the interpretation process are described.

4.1 Philosophy of science in this study

In this study the philosophy of science is based on the constructionist, interpretive paradigm. This paradigm gives the basis to the research question, the analysis and the interpretation; how do consumers experience the concentrated retail grocery market in their everyday lives and what does it mean to them?

From this perspective, the aim is to understand and construct the complexity of the individual person's experiential and social reality in constructing their world view. The findings are literally created between the researcher and the research participant via social interaction and then analyzed with the hermeneutical and dialectical methods (Guba & Lincoln 1994, 110-111.) This study brings out the processes and the activities of the social actor that involve meanings by exposing them from the spoken language (Schwandt 1994, 118).

In the hermeneutical-phenomenological tradition the human experience, meaning, social constructions and the understanding nature of the interpretation are essential (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 34–35). The aim of this research tradition is in constructing the phenomena, to “reveal the already known”, as Tuomi and Sarajärvi put it (2009, 35). In the research process one becomes aware of things that are hidden by habit or that have been done but not con-

sciously. Holbrook and O'Shaughnessy (1988, 400) discuss the continuous tendency of humans to seek meaning in their lives and thus the need to construe the meaning of consumer behavior with an interpretative method is justified.

4.2 Judgment criteria

The quality of this study can be examined by considering the paradigm it represents and reviewing the qualitative judgment criteria. This section discusses the issues related to the validity and reliability of the study. Most importantly, the subjectivity and objectivity are closely considered.

In the philosophy of the science the question of subjectivity and objectivity is analyzed differently both from an interpretive and positivistic worldview and this discrepancy is important to take into account when judging this study. The possibility of the pure objectivity is questioned in the hermeneutical tradition of the science, where the interplay between the researcher and the object of the research (interviewee) is recognized (Mäkinen, 2005).

From the constructionist viewpoint subjectivity is considered a given starting from the research interest. There is always a subjective value judgment included in the decision of conducting a research. Unlike in the post positivism, where objectivity is one of the central issues in qualifying the goodness and of the study, Guba and Lincoln (2005, 208) describe the objectivity as *“a chimera, a mythological creature that never existed, save in the imaginations of those who believe that knowing can be separated from the knower”*.

An important aspect that Eskola and Suoranta (2005, 17) discuss is the relationship between the objectivity and subjectivity. The objectivity of the researcher can be described by not mixing one's own beliefs, attitudes and regards into the research but instead becoming aware of them. The objec-

tivity of a qualitative research is gained through acknowledging the subjectivity of the researcher (Eskola and Suoranta 2005, 17.)

Subjectivity contains both the elements of the limitations and of the credibility of the study. It is important to become aware of one's own prejudices and not to let them interfere with the study. Subjectivity is, however, one of the main elements in phenomenological research, as described earlier in the chapter 3. The topic and theoretical framework of this study also includes the life of the author of this study; a consumer who is surrounded with this research phenomenon. Therefore the issues of subjectivity and objectivity discussed by Eskola and Suoranta in the previous paragraph resonate with the writer, and were carefully considered during the data analysis process.

Hirsjärvi and Tuomi (2000, 185-187) also discuss of the definitions of the validity and reliability in a research. The most essential issues related to the concepts of reliability and validity is the idea of true objectivity and true reality. Hirsjärvi and Tuomi assert that the use of these two terms should be abandoned since the interview data is based on a dynamic, meaning producing situation which is unique and not repeatable (2000, 185).

Instead, Hirsjärvi and Tuomi (2000, 189) suggest that the research must pursue to reveal the perception of the studied respondents and their world as well as possible, and this issue is therefore related to the trustworthiness of the gathered data. This question of reliability includes the considering the whole data, its accurate transcription and determining whether or not the result reflect the way of thinking of the studied respondents. The influence of the researcher is, however, truly recognized since eventually the result is the researcher's personal interpretation. The validity of the interpretation is not measured by another researcher having to come up with the same kind of interpretation from the same data (Hirsjärvi & Tuomi 2000, 189.)

Also, an important issue concerning validity is the validity of the structure of analysis of the data. The researcher must document and justify the analysis and interpretation believably (Hirsjärvi & Tuomi 2000, 189.) This reso-

nates to Schwandt's (1994, 122) idea that when judging a research one can acknowledge its rigor, consistency, intelligibility and whether the interpretation is acceptable.

These questions of reliability and validity have been taken into account in this study process. The writer has extremely carefully considered her stance and strove to produce the respondents' worldview. The analysis and descriptions of the three case examples were verified by the respondents and approved to be an acceptable interpretation and representation of their worldview and reality.

Eskola and Suoranta (2005, 65-67) discuss of the generalization of the qualitative studies and classify them as case studies of which there are no intentions of making any statistical generalizations or empirically universal conclusions. Instead Eskola and Suoranta emphasize the sound formation of the data, in which the interviewees have the relatively similar experiences of the research subject and express an interest to participate in the study (2005, 66). Also, to be able to describe and understand certain functions and to interpret the phenomena, the respondents must be familiar with the phenomena or have personal experience of it (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 85-86).

The data in this study consists of a heterogeneous group of consumers, in order to ensure rich and varied descriptions. The studied consumers were acquaintances of the author of this study. The consumers that were chosen were known to be talkative and able to articulate their thoughts. As the study aimed to examine consumers' experiences on the retail grocery market, one of the criteria for the interviewees was that the informants were living in their own households. This was to ensure the personal experience of the research phenomena in the consumers' everyday life.

For this study the interviewees were asked for their consent to take part in this study and to give an interview on the retail grocery market. The interviewees were informed that their identities would be kept anonymous and that they could have a transcription of their interview in hard copy if they

wanted. Only one interviewee wanted a paper version of the interview. In this process the ethical questions concerning the interviewees were ensured (Eskola & Suoranta 2005, 52; 57).

4.3 Conducting the study through phenomenological interviews

The data of this qualitative study consists of a small amount of cases that are analyzed as thoroughly as possible. One can describe the data as a discretionary sample in order to get relevant information on the studied phenomenon. The scientific criterion of the data is not based on the quantity but on quality, and on how the data has been conceptualized and linked to the societal context of the studied subject (Eskola & Suoranta 2005, 18.)

The data was gathered through personal interviews keeping in mind the phenomenological perspective. The free descriptions of experiences were achieved through descriptive and open questions in a course of a dialogue in an equal atmosphere (Thompson et al. 1989, 138-139). The interview format was similar to unstructured, in-depth open interviews where the interviewer deepens and broadens the interview according to the interviewees answers (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000, 45-46).

One preliminary interview was conducted in order to define and finalize the interview method (Eskola & Suoranta 2005, 88). The interviews were conducted in the interviewees' homes, except for one which was conducted in the premises of the Aalto University. In the beginning of the interview an orientation material was asked to be read by the interviewee. The orientation material was a book review concerning the concentrated food and grocery retail industry (see appendix 1). The orientation material gave a good start to the interview, but it did not manipulate the interviewee as was noticed by the author of this study. The interviewees stated their opinions openly and acknowledged the statements in the orientation material as being issues they

had come across earlier on through the media or in their everyday life experiences.

After completing the reading, the taping started and the interviewer (the author) asked how the orientation material had affected the reader. An insightful and rich description followed by the interviewee. After completing the interviews the tapes were carefully transcribed to be analyzed and interpreted. The transcriptions, as well as the interviews, were in Finnish and therefore it was easier to conduct the analysis in Finnish and then to translate the analysis into English later on.

The amount of interviews was 15, which has been perceived to be a sufficient number in order to reach saturation point (Tuomi & Sarajarvi 2009, 86-89). In this case it is reached when the interviewees cease to bring any new information regarding the research question and the descriptions given become similar. In addition an overly large amount of data prevents a deep interpretation (Hirsjarvi & Hurme 2000, 58). Keeping the amount of data concise is extremely important so that there will not be an excess of material, and this is equally important because of the judgment criteria.

The saturation point in this study was noticed to be reached when 9 interviews had been conducted and the respondents' descriptions were noticed to start to become similar. Regardless of the saturation point, the predetermined amount of 15 interviews was carried out, including one interview that was eliminated due to lack of profound information and description, and therefore it was not transcribed. The transcribed 14 interviews are shown in table 4.

Table 4. The original interview data

INFORMATION ON THE INTERVIEW DATA							
SEX	AGE	MARITAL STATUS	HOUSE HOLD SIZE	PROFESSION	LENGHT OF THE INTERVIEW	TRAN-SCRIBED PAGES	WORDS
male	22	cohabiting	2	student	0:31:54	7	3513
female	24	single	1	student	0:33:57	8	4896
female	31	cohabiting	3	store manager	0:43:33	9	4796
female	32	single	1	student	0:28:17	7	2804
male	33	married	4	coach	0:36:21	9	4321
female	35	cohabiting	2	secretary	0:42:47	9	4119
female	36	married	4	dentist	0:24:05	6	2987
male	42	married	4	engineer	0:46:24	11	6696
female	46	cohabiting	3	student	0:32:47	8	4306
female	51	married	3	consultant	0:36:10	8	4054
female	64	married	2	teacher	0:38:22	8	4915
male	65	cohabiting	2	pensioner	0:31:04	6	2602
male	67	cohabiting	2	pensioner	1:09:42	12	6298
male	72	cohabiting	2	pensioner	0:54:28	10	5321
				Total	9:09	118	61628

The transcript of an interview reveals if the interviewer has been intrusive or has assumed a directive role; in which case that interview is not acceptable data (Thompson et al. 1989, 139). After a careful consideration based on the judgment criteria, four interviews did not pass the author's critical evaluation of the data gathered and were dismissed, because of the directive questions by the interviewer. The final interview data is demonstrated in the table 5.

Table 5. The final interview data

INFORMATION ON THE INTERVIEW DATA							
SEX	AGE	MARITAL STATUS	HOUSE HOLD SIZE	PROFESSION	LENGHT OF THE IN-TERVIEW	TRAN-SCRIBED PAGES	WORDS
male	22	cohabiting	2	student	0:31:54	7	3516
female	24	single	1	student	0:33:57	8	4896
female	31	cohabiting	3	store manager	0:43:33	9	4796
male	33	married	4	coach	0:36:21	9	4321
male	42	married	4	engineer	0:46:24	11	6696
female	46	cohabiting	3	student	0:32:47	8	4306
female	51	married	3	consultant	0:36:10	8	4054
female	64	married	2	teacher	0:38:22	8	4915
male	65	cohabiting	2	pensioner	0:31:04	6	2602
male	67	cohabiting	2	pensioner	1:09:42	12	6298
				Total	6:40	86	46397

The open-ended interview proved to be challenging by nature. It is not easy to ask questions and probe without letting any of your own prior knowledge on the research subject inflict the questions. Therefore all the interviews where probing questions might have affected the answers of the interviewee were eliminated.

Thus the total amount of interviews forming the data of this study is ten. The effects of reduction of data will be discussed later on with the limitations of the study. The data consists of 6 hours and 40 minutes of speech on the research topic; nearly 86 pages of transcribed text and 46397 words that were to be analyzed.

4.4 Methods of analysis

The methods of analysis of this study include the Husserl's phenomenological reduction discussed earlier and the hermeneutical circle. The interview data consists of the texts that are being analyzed and interpreted. The interpretation is defined as "*a critical analysis of text for the purpose of determining its single or multiple meaning(s)*" (Holbrook and O'Shaughnessy 1988, 400).

Judén-Tupakka (2007) discusses of the phenomenological research and the process in which the research phenomenon and its aspects are dissociated. It is a process where one becomes aware of the foreknowledge and presumptions of the research phenomenon and afterwards builds new knowledge more openly, through a circular analysis process. In this hermeneutic circle, the reduction reveals the phenomenon in its own manifestation (2007, 63.)

A hermeneutic circle is a central philosophic concept of hermeneutics and it has multiple meanings; it is referred to as a methodological process of interpreting textual data, it is a philosophical view of the research process and as a general model of the process of forming understanding (Thompson et al. 1994, 433). A hermeneutically grounded interpretive framework is a method to interpret consumers and to acquire insight that is relevant to marketing from the texts of consumers (Thompson 1997, 438).

The phenomenological analysis in this study focuses on personal meaning and sense making, peoples' experiences of a particular phenomenon and their personal views of the world (Schwandt, 1994). For this perspective the researcher must put aside all the prior knowledge of the phenomena, although Eskola and Suoranta (2005, 156) are skeptical of this aim and point out that an analysis is always a construction made by the researcher. This problem is also recognized by Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009, 156) and they take into account the nature of the phenomenological and hermeneutical

tradition where the researcher is writing down the prior bias and attitude toward the phenomena during the analysis.

The thesis writing process begun with gathering of relevant theory, reading and writing. Once the research context was covered the interviews started, taking about one month and a half, including the time spent on the transcriptions. This time was thought to be enough to detach from the theoretical background which had affected the point of view of the author. As the analysis process started, the author noticed a bias in the study draft and had to reconsider her attitude towards the phenomenon. This is an illustrative example of how to become aware of the prior bias; after this the analysis could be conducted with more conscious and open mind.

The hermeneutical process of the reasoning, the hermeneutical circle, determines the correspondence between the analysis and interpretation. This correspondence is important when examining what the difference is between analysis and interpretation (Eskola and Suoranta 2005, 149.) Eskola and Suoranta (2005, 149-150) note that there is no specific separation, there is always interpretation in the analysis and vice versa, but in some sense the analysis is a technically separate process since the data is classified (coded) in some sense and the analysis then follows.

The analysis started by listening to the recorded interviews and by rereading the transcribed interviews. Each interview transcription was read line by line and relevant and meaning-carrying words or comments were marked (coded). Relevant, compatible codes were joined into clusters which then formed a concise subtheme. It is important to note that the meaning-carrying codes were manifested in the transcribed texts and were not predetermined by the study writer. That would have been strictly against the used analysis methods. The table 6 shows the number of the codes and found subthemes found from each transcribed interview.

Table 6. The number of the codes and subthemes in the interview data

CODES AND SUBTHEMES IN THE TRANSCRIBED INTERVIEWS				
INTERVIEWEE	SEX AND AGE	WORDS	CODES	SUBTHEMES
student	male, 22	3516	87	14
student	female, 24	4896	108	26
store manager	female, 31	4796	113	15
coach	male, 33	4321	91	15
engineer	male, 42	6696	136	16
student	female, 46	4306	103	11
consultant	female, 51	4054	189	14
teacher	female, 64	4915	161	10
pensioner	male, 65	2602	58	11
pensioner	male, 67	6298	132	16

At this point a certain kind of similarity between the found subthemes among the separate interviews was noticed. Also, every interview was separately analyzed with the help of the codes and subthemes and by rereading and listening to the interview tape. This helped in getting an exact view of the individual interviews and finding out the essence of each.

The subthemes of individual interviews were entered into an excel-file and by studying the subthemes the common and shared features in the transcriptions were found. This helped in clustering the subthemes into the categories and the interpretation continued into finding out the global themes. The categories and global master themes were named according to their content (table 7).

Table 7. The global themes and categories emerging from the interview data

THE GLOBAL THEMES AND CATEGORIES EMERGING FROM THE DATA	
THE GLOBAL THEME	THE CATEGORIES
Real life experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market situation • Competition • Price • Selection of food products • Store locations • Consumer's role
Sense making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge/unawareness • Explanation
Value and want consciousness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Values • Desires • Wants
Function and action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence • Choice • Action

At first there was a problem concerning the reporting of the findings. The found global themes and categories helped in forming a general view of the findings and the analysis and interpretation focused on people's experiences, their sense making and explanations, the descriptions of their wants, values and actions. These elements were found to form the overall structure and the elements of the phenomenon (see e.g. Judén-Tupakka 2007, 85-86, Eskola and Suoranta 2005, 151-152, Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 101-102).

When starting to write down the findings, the author began to look for representative case examples from the interviews. At this point, it became clear that there were specific kind of attitudes and behaviors that showed in the statements of the interviewees. A new analysis and interpretation began to study these different, distinguishable characteristics. The types found were described as mannerism, acceptance and criticism; each according to their individual characteristics. A new revised view evolved by studying the em-

pirical findings and the found elements of the studied phenomenon, and the final empirical framework of the studied subject was found.

The interpretation evolved through iteration of the interview data and the circular process of this research method became evident. This self-corrective process has also been regarded as being an important qualification of the method (Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy 1998, 400-401.) Once the interview data was familiarized with and analyzed and reviewed repeatedly, the interpretation evolved and the overview was specified. The iterative process of the analysis and interpretation was also obvious. The interpretation developed and the structure of the studied phenomenon – consumer's experiences on the concentrated retail grocery market and its significance to their everyday life, was sharpened through a circular a process when writing the interpretation and going over the data that was at this point learned by heart.

5 THE FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings from the interview data. The consumers' experiences on the concentrated retail grocery market are presented and the analysis done based on these findings follows, covering the consumer's knowledge, confusion or unawareness, the expressed needs, values and desires as well as actions in the grocery market. Then the consumers' explanations for the market situation are presented and analyzed. Finally the sense making and meaningful actions in the consumer's everyday life in the concentrated retail grocery market are illustrated with an interpretation of how the market situation affects consumers' actions.

5.1 The consumer's experiences of the concentrated retail grocery market

The interview data shows that the structure of the concentrated retail grocery market does not open easily to the consumers. The competition in the retail grocery trade as well as the formation of the price of food was unclear to a great extent. Most of the interviewees found that there was room for more players in the retail grocery market and only a few thought that there already is adequate competition. The consumer prices were mainly experienced to be high and compensatory, meaning that when one grocery item is cheap must the consumer pay a higher price on another. Only two of the ten interviewees considered the food prices to be reasonable. Nevertheless, the interviewees mainly questioned the importance of the price of food.

The selection of food products in the grocery stores was found to be industrialized, homogenized and considered to answer to consumer's needs. Service in the larger retail grocery chains was considered to be similar, and a lack of service was reported in many. The location of the retail grocery

stores were noticed to be focused in the larger centers or malls near traffic lanes and this was mainly considered as a negative aspect for the consumers.

The interviewees experienced their own role in the concentrated retail grocery market as extremely insignificant and they felt that they could not affect the conditions of the retail grocery market. This was due to the experiences in the grocery shopping where the individual needs were not entirely met and the possibilities to fulfill these needs were experienced as impossible.

The following chapters present the studied and analyzed consumer experiences in the concentrated retail grocery market. They describe the knowledge, confusion with unawareness of the market situation, the expressed needs, values and desires and the actions and function of the studied consumers.

5.1.1 Knowledge, confusion and unawareness of the grocery market

The interviewed consumers presented their knowledge of the concentrated retail grocery market. There was actual knowledge of the research issue based on the business life experiences, following the media coverage and the real life experiences from the grocery shopping. The unclarity and confusion regarding the research matter was also obvious.

Some of the interviewed consumers had much economic knowledge and they discussed about the issue analytically. Also, the studied phenomenon was familiar or acknowledged by almost all of the interviewees. Nevertheless, most of them had not thought about the issue in more detail earlier before the interview.

The interviews made it clear that the concentration of the market and its effects on the competition or to the consumer is difficult to understand, since the power relations and the market structure are not known. The chain

steering operation's model of the grocery retailers was acknowledged by the consumers, but what was remarkable was that a few interviewees had a misconception of the business model of the retail grocery chains and perceived both of the leading market companies as co-operatives.

"I think that S-group and the Kesko are... they both are... those are not like owned by customers, what is the word... that those are not the incorporated companies... those are like co-operatives. So those should not apparently make any profit, those should like give the bonuses back to these customers..." "Well, I think it is a good thing, that of course it gives a little pressure... less pressure for seeking profits." "Well it is like; I don't know Kesko however... I think it is positive that Kesko is a co-operative. I don't know if Lidl is a co-operative or not. But at least I think than in Lidl, the money is used so that it would go abroad more easily. However, Kesko employs Finns more..." "And speaking of the prices, which I have not understood that, is it because of..., does Finnish cost, those, does grocery industry pay such a good money to those who produce the food, or not, since the workforce in Finland is kind of expensive. So, if like Valio makes something, so the store workers get quite a good pay also. I think that that's why, that a bottle of milk is one euro, a euro per liter is not so expensive". Man 22 year old student

It was noted however that the independent grocery retailers are diminishing and the retail chain operated business model is increasing. In a grocery store level it was noted that smaller grocery stores are more expensive than larger ones and the amount of the small grocery stores is declining.

On a general level the interviewees found the competition essential in ensuring reasonable prices and food quality to the consumers. The effect of the competition on food prices in the concentrated retail market could not be evaluated and the division of the food price between the primary production, food manufacturing and the grocery retail was considered a mystery. The interviewees wanted the retail grocery market to be more transparent.

“I don’t know. So, do they compete or do they compete. At the same time they compete against their own units when there are higher prices in the smaller grocery stores than in those large halls, but then. They cannot, I don’t know where is the money speaking of the producer prices and when those are like this and the price when the consumer is buying is like that, so the chain is too long...”...”... I haven’t thought about the competition or the situation particularly, but it is some way like, those chains, that there is no locally produced food and when you hear what the producer gets when they complain that it is not profitable you start to wonder where does it go, the money...” Woman 64 year old teacher

5.1.2 Expressed needs, values and desires

Finnish food, or the food industry as well as small Finnish producers and primary food production were considered to have a substantial value to the interviewed consumers. The Finnish employment and ensuring that the money paid for the groceries would stay in Finland were found to be important. Attitudes towards a foreign retail grocery company were revealed from the opinions on the retail grocery company Lidl; which was found to increase the competition in the market, but was also seen as a discount store that was functioning in its own niche.

“... I feel that if it would be made easier for the foreign grocery chains to come here then the domestic players would be in a challenging position and then the large chains would come with a lot of money, the capital from their own country and they would eat the market and then we would eat the foreign food and pay the money to the foreign producers in the worst case and that does not feel good either.” Woman 46 year old student

The food selection in different grocery stores were found to be similar and the most of the interviewees felt that the selection of the retail grocery stores answers purely to consumers' personal needs. Highly industrialized food and homogenized food selection in the grocery stores were criticized and the quality of the food was questioned. While the interviewees were mainly satisfied with the overall food selection in the retail grocery stores, they brought up the demand for the locally produced, organic and high quality special food products.

“Well a lot has been written about how much Kesko and S-group define what Finnish people eat; that they, those buyers are basically deciding what people eat...”...” Well, it could also be, it has also been discussed somewhere that this has an effect on the public health, that it, it is not necessarily the most high-quality food they sell, and then it has a major impact on the public health and so forth.” Woman 31 year old store manager

“And what really sticks in my throat is that, when you go to one of these S-grocery stores, or a K-grocery store anywhere in Finland they have the same products, like there are not any special needs in the different places for sure and in the different places they have their own special things that you would like to see in the grocery stores but then, they aren't available. So in that sense the grocery store keeper should have much more freedom in making acquisition decisions. Woman 51 year old consultant

The attitudes of the interviewees toward food prices were interesting. Some interviewees were openly displeased with the high prices and some considered price as secondary; putting more weight on the location of the grocery store and its selection. Generally the price was taken as a given, and the possibilities to seek lower food prices by doing the shopping in several grocery stores at a time were seen as impossible and a waste of time, since the price of a grocery basket in the two major retail grocery chains was considered to be similar and compensate each other.

The price however became meaningful in a situation where the interviewee became irritated by an unfounded price increase of a product, or when the products were found as strong substitutes and the more expensive product did not yield any added value even though it cost more. Some of the interviewees did not want to pay extra for the ordinary daily products, but if the product was answering to a special need, the consumer was willing to pay more.

“... so yes I am ready to pay if I know that the money is going to the right place, what I am paying in food, so long as it goes to the right cause, so that it encourages the Finnish enterprise and economic operators” Woman 46 year old student

Food price was also discussed in relation to different values. Some of the interviewees emphasized the value of their own time and effort and took this into account when discussing the cost of food. The safety of Finnish food and the systematical inspections in the food industry were seen as valuable and also as affecting the food prices.

“Well, let’s say that the Finnish grocery stores are in good shape. We don’t have like the rotten groceries, the quality of which is...,... or I’ll say that of those countries that I’ve been to we have the world’s best grocery stores. They are build the best, the products are displayed the best, the hygiene is taken care of the best, we have the trained personnel in the grocery stores and there are like... and the Finnish grocery industry is well tested and there are these systematic inspections and other stuff, so the safety of the grocery industry is the best in the world and I appreciate it, I don’t like, I don’t want to see the certain kind of bacteria it’s a risk, so I would get..., so the price of these expensive groceries is, or the price of the hygiene of the groceries is the expensive groceries.” Man 42 year old engineer

The changing structure of the concentrated retail grocery market was evident to the interviewed consumers and the extinction of the local stores was

considered to be negative for the consumer's. The interviewees brought up social aspects and they questioned the ability of certain groups of people to go to grocery shopping if the local grocery stores vanish. Also the contribution of a local smaller grocery store to a small town's livelihood was considered significant and it was also seen as contributing to the social interaction of people. The convenience of a large grocery store was also questioned.

“So I think that this small grocery store culture should be favored as much as possible. It means that these small grocery stores should be located as densely as possible, so that our physically disabled, senior citizens, families with children and such could get the food as close as possible; that groceries would be obtainable near to their other daily functions, and, if the customers would do their grocery shopping daily that would be better for the public health than when people are getting a huge pile of food, loads of beer and other stuff. That's the point, I think that is it, people are happier when there is a small social environment, than when there is a strange social environment where one has to move a lot but doesn't get connected with any neighbors or anyone...” Man 42 year old engineer

”That those who live near the place (shopping mall) have to get their bottle of milk from that Citymarket, from a huge grocery store. That is not so convenient. You'd run to a small grocery store and get the milk in five minutes, but now you have to spend twenty minutes to run through the Citymarket, so it is not so convenient considering the time. But, er... personally it does not affect me... So somewhere, think about like Vihti where they were planning some kind of a new shopping center so, more likely there are, there are a huge amount of small shops in a town center and if this kind of a big shopping mall comes it takes the customers away, that is clear. But as I said, while I am living here, it does not affect me personally. This is just

*sort of a reflection and empathy towards those small ones.” Woman
31 year old store manager*

The interviewees stressed the location of the grocery store to be very important and this was connected to the personal benefits. A few of the interviewees valued the location of larger grocery stores when those were connected to their daily functions and provided a broad selection that suited their needs. Some of the interviewed consumers felt that the prices could even be higher if the shopping is easier to do near to their homes. Others brought up their use of car, so the distance was not a concern to them. The interviewees were willing to travel a longer distance if it was worthwhile to them, in terms of fulfilling a certain need.

“If you think about a person who has to keep a car just to go grocery shopping 10 kilometers away, the grocery bag must really be much cheaper in order to pay for the use of car. The capital expenditure of a medium size car is over a hundred per month, excluding the insurance, gas and maintenance. We are talking about at least two hundred per month. If you have to keep a car just because of the grocery shopping, then it does not matter what the food costs as long as it is located near you.” Man 65 year old pensioner

Many of the interviewees felt that the large retail stores are too big: they are not so pleasant, shopping takes time in a large hall and products get lost as the selection is so wide. The highlighted benefits of a small, nearby grocery store were the personal service and a social connection with the staff. A few of the interviewees stated that in a smaller grocery store under a chain controlled management there are little exceptions the storekeeper can make and thus consumers' individual needs are not met. Even if the prices were perceived to be higher in a nearby store than in a large chain store, other benefits such as accessibility and faster shopping were stated. Time saving, saving costs of keeping a car, climate change and other environment issues were also brought up.

“But globally thinking it is also an environmental issue: it is a big factor considering how much people have to travel in the countryside and spend much more time in a car just for grocery shopping. That, there is no, because the nearby store chains have disappeared, the nearby grocery stores have vanished, so people sit in a car and pollute and there is this, this aspect to consider.” Man 33 year old coach

5.1.3 Consumers’ actions in the grocery market

The interviewees expressed many reasons that affected their choice of grocery store; however price was not often the main reason influencing their choice, despite the thoughts on expensive food prices. Convenience, time-saving, the location of the store, the food selection and bonuses were in the most cases more important. Some of the interviewees favored Lidl due to its cheap but well-tried products, while others strictly avoided shopping there. Some of the interviewees stated that they favored one of the major retail companies because of the good bonuses they received in return, they felt that the price they paid and the lack of selection was what they gave in return for their commitment and the bonuses they received.

The interviewed consumers described their grocery shopping habits and they commonly aimed for convenience. The concept of convenience had many different meanings among the consumers. For some it meant a quick and easy grocery shopping, for others the combining of several errands systematically into one shopping trip. Convenience also meant finding both a relevant and desired selection and good service from the same grocery store, or when grocery shopping was combined with spending time with the family. The interviewees were not willing to go to several different grocery stores on one shopping trip because that was not thought of as practical.

”...but it is quite hard at the moment to start to run to some small grocery stores and disperse the grocery shopping but of course it would be a possibility, so that with your buyer’s choices or the choice of what to buy you would... would make an impact but it seems to be so small and ineffective plus time consuming that what you might save in money costs you in time and time is money to me at the moment so... there is always this kind of loss...” Woman 46 year old student

It was visible from the interviewees’ descriptions that experienced individual convenience differed according to the circumstances. If the interviewees were satisfying their own personal daily needs they defined the convenience through their own personal functions, for example getting lunch from the nearest grocery store as quickly as possible, but if they were going grocery shopping for the weekend with the family, convenience was defined through different attributes. The required actions and the needs were optimized and this determined the scope of the actions needed for performing the grocery shopping.

Regarding the selection of a grocery store the interviewed consumers perceived that they do not always get what they want and this was considered to restrict their choices. However, the interviewees stated however, that they knew where they could buy the kind of food that met their needs but it required an extra time, effort and travel. Some of the interviewees felt like they could not influence the selection at all, while others thought they could make a stand by buying the products that are similar to the ones they would want, and thus have an impact on the grocery store’s supply planning.

The choices of where to go shopping were mainly experienced to be limited and the options were mainly between the two largest grocery store chains. The freedom of choice was experienced as whether to buy from the retailer’s selection or not.

“Actually I find that a consumer does not have anything, even if they say that it is the consumers’ market that consumers’ decide what companies should offer. It is not real, I don’t think it is a reality, we are defined what the products are we want to buy and the consumer has no chance or no possibility in those big, to have an impact on those big chains. So they are what they are.” Woman 24 year old student

Some of the interviewees felt resigned under the conditions but others felt they could vote with their feet, but in a situation where the effort exceeds the easiness, the consumer gives in and comes back to do the grocery shopping in grocery store that caused the resentment. The options in the grocery store and voting with their feet were in some cases experienced as ineffective, time consuming and meaningless.

”Well it is, well... let’s put it that I have, I have it, have the choice. And I have, I have a choice to choose but, but not much choices. That’s how it is, that it has, there is the choice indeed, I could go, not to eat or go to someplace else, but. There is only one easy and cost efficient solution. Of course it is certain that it is, at some point when the threshold is big enough then I leave most certainly, but not every time...”...” It depends where the store is located. For example, if Alepa in Otaniemi which is about one hundred meters from here, so, if you would get disappointed in there and you would decide to vote with your feet, so that you won’t never come here again, so to the next grocery store, I would have to take a bus to go there, so at that point I would probably go back to Alepa again, even though at that point the inconvenience and the disappointment are sort of opposite. So it is most certainly the same, that I would go there unwillingly and might not buy the stuff that caused the disappointment...”...” “But there is again the effort and that, you calculate yourself and the use of the public transportation so much price that, I don’t know, food should cost a lot more for me to go to grocery shopping at Prisma by

bus, of course by car, that's a different story. Especially if you don't have to go alone, that is if you go together. It is more like a shopping... you go to buy something so it is... but I should to go there by walking in the rain so it is Alepa where I am always heading.” Man 22 year old student

5.2 Consumers' explanations of the concentrated retail grocery market

The interviewees explained the concentrated retail grocery market to themselves with knowledge and everyday life experiences they had about the subject. The malpractices covered in the media, the lack of knowledge and the unclear structure of the retail market evoked negative feelings and these were visible in the interviewees' opinions. When there was no knowledge or a reasonable explanation could not be found, the unawareness caused suspicion. The personal values and feelings were seen to affect the explanation. The present market situation was explained through politics, competition and the profit seeking and maximizing of profits.

The interviewed consumers mainly criticized the considerable market position of the largest retail grocery chains. Half of the interviewees felt that the competition is imperfect and that a real competition situation does not exist between the two major retail companies. The other half of the interviewees felt there is a competition in the market since there are two large retailers side by side competing over consumers and that the separate grocery stores are competing against each other. There was also skepticism regarding fair competition in the market. Some thought the situation has settled in its place.

“So the grocery stores are nowadays built side by side, so where there first was an S-group store there is suddenly also a Kesko store, so there is like, quite a strong competition to which grocery store you are going to go.” Man 22 year old student

“Well it is has been like a natural development, they have competed the other ones out. So that’s how I see it, they have deliberately and patiently done that and they have had the money to do it... But yes, the politicians, municipalities, they all get something; they always get something from it. So, jobs they definitely give to the area, to the area where they are planning the large retail chains. But, yes... They have to think in the way the municipal politicians think, which is the budget first. So that’s what they think about in practice, and there is nothing wrong about it, since they get the industry to the area, it is the industry they are planning... they are not thinking about anything else.” Man 33 year old coach

There were a few interviewees who clearly presented their criticism toward the concentrated retail grocery market, a few discussed the issue critically but expressed that the situation was not affecting their lives and a few though criticized the concentration, underlined the acceptance of the situation in the name of a Finnish food safety and protection of the Finnish food, primary production and Finnish labor force. It is also worth noting that some interviewees stated that the current situation in the market originates from the consumer’s choices.

Even if the interviewees were calling for more competition to the retail grocery market they did not respond positively to a possible entry of a foreign retail grocery company to the Finnish market and even questioned the possibilities of a foreign company to get into the market. Most of the interviewees stressed their support for and trust in Finnish food production and did not want the Finnish grocery trade to suffer and the money from the groceries to go abroad.

There were contradictions in trusting the foreign food products in a foreign store as well as suspicion of Lidl’s ability to sell low-priced Finnish food products when the Finnish food chains were selling the same for a higher price. This distrust and contradiction between the price and the quality of

the food were brought up in general and as well as connected to published news of the accuracy of the country of origin of the food products.

A few of the interviewees questioned the need for a real competition in the market when there are only two large retail grocery companies that share the marketplace and brought up oligopolistic problems and possible exploitation of the competitive position which the interviewees understood to mean more expensive food prices to the consumers.

”So a free competition can never occur with only two, so that is like, there is no such equation, these players necessarily cartelize or oligopoly is a better word. Cartel is more like systematic but oligopoly is more like there is a benefit for both of us and like, there is no need to ruin the market for both of us, or our profit margins...”...” Well it means to me that groceries are more expensive that than if we would have four or five large wholesale firms...”...”... So they give the consumer a picture that there is evidently a bloody competition going on when there are two grocery stores side by side...” Man 42 year old engineer

The prices were however, understood and accepted by some of the interviewees because of the high quality of the Finnish food and the food safety. The competition in the retail grocery market was seen as a competition over the same consumers with the same kind of products, offers and bonus-systems.

The difficulty to determine the formation of food price showed clearly in the statements of the interviewees. The interviewees expressed that they could not perceive how the retail grocery concentration affects the food prices and there were contradictions involved with the price and suspicion that as there is a lack of the competition it is easy to pull up the prices. Only a few of the interviewees noted the high Finnish wage level but mostly the interviewees tried to explain the food prices with the cost of the service in the grocery

store and the food industry, the bonus-systems of the grocery chains, the cost of advertising and the lack of the competition in the market.

“... maybe you don't realize that they are pulling like very high prices to themselves, filling their own purses. Even though you should not necessary need to pay so much for those products, but on the other hand, they have the opportunity to ask, because there are no other competitors, like it was said about Carrefours and such, those have to get the certain posts, but on the other hand they are not allowed to come, they don't let the competition to develop, and that might be needed to get the prices down and so forth”. Woman 24 year old student

“Yes it is definitely the price; the price is affected because every time when there is no competition, the prices increase, there is no reason to mark down. And I don't know... On the other hand we are paying too much attention to the price, even the consumers. So, maybe that's why the food price is so high on the whole and then you try to bargain and think of the cheap food and the cheapest possible and however, you can't afford it either.” Man 65 year old pensioner

Some of the interviewees were comparing the present food prices to past food prices and felt that the food prices are higher than they were before, compared to the earnings. The price of the food was also compared to the food prices in other countries.

“But even if how I compare for example the wages to what they were, and then the share of the food price of that, then the food price has indeed increased considerably.”...” They have options, the decision making and everything is based on the extreme greediness of a small elite. So in a way, that the business would roll with a smaller marginal profit, but there is this small elite whose options and bonuses are depending on how it goes and this influences the price formation nowadays in my opinion... Woman 64 year old teacher

The change in the location of the grocery stores was noticed and it was analyzed with a broad perspective. The expectations for a consumer's mobility and the disadvantages and costs of the long distance to the grocery store causes were brought up. The interviewed consumers did not try to find any profound explanations for the locations of the grocery stores but there were a few doubts about the politics behind the scenes. Mostly the interviewees stated that the number of small grocery retailers is decreasing because of the large grocery stores are being build next to highways.

"So outside beltway III the local stores have largely disappeared and this is because there are Prismas and Citymarkets that have been able to build the gigantic retail grocery stores and the people who drive home from their jobs via the freeways have done their grocery shopping there, and their own local grocery stores have failed and everything has concentrated into one place. And some Prismas have deliberately made financial loss years in order to eliminate the local grocery stores around until they are the only player left and can increase prices". Man 33 year old coach

The interviewees explained and tried to understand the food selection of the retail grocery stores and they mostly perceived the selection as resulting from the retail concentration and efficiency. Some of the interviewees understood that smaller retail chain stores are profiled to serve a certain kind of customer base and selection and therefore it is impossible to fulfill every consumer's needs. It was also noted by a few interviewees that consumers' own choices have had an effect on the provided selection in the grocery stores. The selection was understood to serve a busy consumer who wants to buy food conveniently.

"Hmm... well, people have been accustomed to that once again I would say about fifteen or twenty years ago we did not have so overly processed food... I guess it is that everything is so overly processed, that people are lazy and there is a so called lack of time and people have started to buy that stuff, and when you think about..."

that you can make the food more easily. But that is also on the other hand, what the grocery store is offering; it is really hard to find anything that has not been processed from a grocery store.” Man 33 year old coach

“So that, there is just that, that the offerings are like, the kind of standardization is increasing and then this... the too much of control over the production or to the whole chain, so that when discussing grocery stores, ... er, it’s like the grocery stores are getting the most value of the products, so I feel like that is the case when playing with the percentages, that’s how it goes.” Woman 51 year old consultant

Most of the interviewees found that small grocery stores cannot compete with larger chains, and that small producers have problems in getting their products into the chain operated grocery stores and this has an effect on both the food selection and the lessening of the private grocery stores. Some of the interviewees found this situation however, as a chance for smaller stores to specialize in providing certain type of service.

“... they can block the supply of a product because the competitor does not have it either, and people don’t know how to ask for it or then the consumer cannot make a request for something that is not available. And it is sort of easy for these two wholesale players; because they are not under any threat that someone would suddenly for example introduce a French ham or something to the market, they don’t have to worry about that when both of them are shutting it from the Finnish market and this is why, perhaps this is why this is a kind of a “pet subject” of the politicians, they don’t want an abundance of a foreign food supplies, and they don’t want that, the homeland or the food industry is quite a huge employer in addition to agriculture... this is clearly caused by politics, this situation.”.. Man 42 year old engineer

“Well it is a bad thing that it reduces the selection of the food into quite small because the both of them have, both of them are striving and concentrating on the sort of products that have an adequate volume. So that, the small producers cannot compete and don’t even get onto the lists of those grocery stores.” Man 65 year old pensioner

The selection of the grocery store was the most emotive issue among the interviewed consumers. Only one interviewee was satisfied with the selection in the grocery stores and all the others made comments on the selection. Most of the interviewees thought that the retail grocery directs the consumer’s buying behavior by determining and setting the limits to the food selection. The irritation of the interviewees regarding the food selection of grocery stores originates from the perception that the retailers’ are defining what they buy; and therefore what they can or cannot eat.

“...well somehow it feels annoying that the central administrations are steering hugely this, this, those have merged and merged into the larger and larger forces and it means that... we don’t have any locally produced food, instead it is cycled from these warehouses of these central administrations and then on the other hand the offerings are very much the same.” Woman 64 year old teacher

”... Or what is it, what defines what they buy... but, but it is easy to get the customer to buy what they have, because you have to buy what they have. So is it about where they get a good profit margin or whatever it is... “...”Therefore the consumer should be the starting point but I know myself working in a store that it is the other things that define the operations or that not entirely just other things, but there are many things that affect everything in the store operations... But I also understand that there are many five or six million people or something in the middle... I suspect it is not easy to do the buying... Woman 31 year old store manager

5.3 Sense making and meaningful actions in the consumer's everyday life

The Husserl's phenomenology deals with understanding the social relationships, the aims and functions of a human life (Pulkkinen 2010; Heinämaa 2006, 7-8), in viewing our life in a conscious manner in order to clarify its structure. In this study the world behind the consumers' perceptions and actions (the everyday life experiences) is considered and analyzed to find the personal sense making and meaning along with the intentional action (Schwandt, 1994; Smith & Smith 1995; Juden-Tupakka 2007); in order to find the structure of the consumer's everyday experiences in the concentrated retail grocery market.

The phenomenological and hermeneutical data analysis produced the global themes that framed the consumer's real life experiences and formed the basis of the analysis. When developing the analysis of the interview data further the focus was on the elements found; the consumers' descriptions of their everyday life, the interpretation of the values and the knowledge/unawareness/sense revealing in the consumers' perceptions and in the formation of the meaningful actions that manifested in the acts of the consumers. The detailed findings and analysis of these basic elements are described in the previous chapters.

Further analysis defined the structure that forms the empirical framework of the studied phenomenon – a consumer's experiences and sense making in the concentrated retail grocery market (figure 3). The structure can be divided into elements that describe the essential parts of the consumer's behavior and sense making in the concentrated retail grocery market.

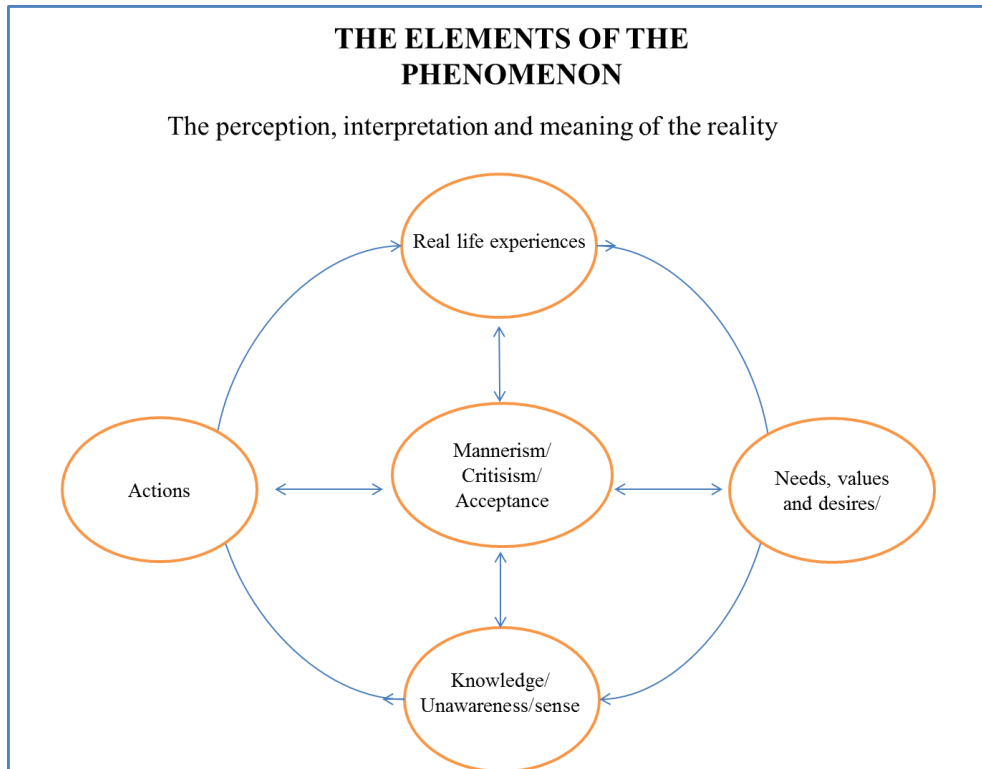


Figure 3. The elements of the phenomenon – The consumer’s experiences and sense making in the concentrated retail grocery market

The elements of the phenomenon are connected to and interact with each other when new experiences evolve. The strength and influence between the separate elements are not considered in this study since this analysis only aims at finding out the structure and meaning of how the concentrated retail grocery market affects the everyday life of a consumer.

The analysis of the interview data revealed that the everyday life experiences are affected by individual manners (habits), needs, values and desires, and that the concentrated retail grocery market is viewed through the knowledge or unawareness the consumer has of the grocery market. The perceptions of the interviewees were based on the conscious following of the public discussion on the market situation and/or the lived experiences in their everyday lives.

Values, desires and needs can be seen as having an influence on intentional action in the grocery shopping and the knowledge (or unawareness) defines

the consumer's reasoning and the meaning the concentrated retail grocery market has; which leads to the certain kinds of functions and actions and produces the experiences of everyday life.

When the consumer comes across a conflict in the grocery store, for example when a consumer cannot buy the products they wanted, the price is not understandable or agreeable, or the ratio of the price and location to location of the store is not acceptable, the consumer aims to understand and/or explain the situation and the meaning of the intended actions for the everyday grocery shopping.

There was a pattern found in the consumer's sense making and an effort to solve the contradictions between the lived experiences and the perceptions of the grocery market with a certain kind of typical pattern of sense making. The analysis and interpretation revealed a structure of how the consumer connects to the world (that is to the grocery shopping in the concentrated retail market). The three kinds of basic sense making types that reflect the way a consumer reasons and acts in the concentrated retail grocery market; mannerism, acceptance and criticism, were found from the interview data. These basic sense making types were included in the final analysis and added to the overall picture of the research phenomenon (figure 3). A detailed description of the elements that form the studied phenomenon with the basic sense making types is presented in the table 8.

Table 8. The consumer's sense making in the concentrated retail grocery market

THE CONSUMER'S SENSE MAKING IN THE CONCENTRATED RETAIL GROCERY MARKET			
Sense making	Mannerism	Acceptance	Criticism
Knowledge/ Un-awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accustomed to the market situation, does not think about the subject • The market situation doesn't affect consumer's life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A broad view and knowledge of the market situation • Analyses the situation rationally • Accepts the situation with a reasonable explanation and/or for the sake of the public good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extreme awareness of the market situation • Criticizes and debates the subject • skepticism • Finds injustice in the market situation
Values/ Wants/Desires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavior that seeks to add value • Value is attached to the products and/or the location of the grocery store • Value is negotiable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compromises with their wants/ needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A specific personal value becomes more meaningful than what the grocery market is providing
Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strives for easiness • Optimizes • Not committed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeks the win-win situations • Commits to certain grocery stores 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes extra effort in own actions according to personal values
Real life experiences			

Even though all of these sense making types found were some extent visible in all of the interviews, there were cases examples where they manifested more strongly. Examples of these basic sense making types are introduced in the following subchapters.

5.3.1 Mannerism

The consumers that have become accustomed to the market situation in the concentrated grocery retail do not deliberately think about the market situation and do not find it as harming their everyday life. They were satisfied but not necessarily committed to something stable. The dissatisfaction was shown more on the product level. The meaning of the concentrated retail grocery market to them was not directly visible from the perceptions of these consumers. However the changed market structure can be seen as affecting these consumers through the location and food selection of the grocery stores.

Mannerism can be seen as being accustomed to the market situation and pursuing behavior that seeks to add value, which gives the consumer the feeling of getting something out of the ordinary. These consumers did their grocery shopping in grocery stores that were located conveniently, so that it was easy and quick to do their shopping and that also had a selection that suited their needs.

The mannerism-type of consumers perceived the price of food not to be expensive, and calculated the price in relation to the perceived personal extra value which was related to convenience, easiness or to the desired food product. The value of the action focused on the easiness of the shopping and in the fulfillment of needs, and in a conflict situation where the value was not delivered by the grocery store the meaning of the perceived value addition could be traded off for something else that was felt to be more meaningful.

Example of the mannerism (woman 24 year old student)

The market structure of the retail grocery market is so familiar and clear that it is not even thought about. The consumer has however noticed that the market is mainly hold by Kesko- and S-groups. She thinks that the consumers have been conditioned to the thought that there are only these two chains in Finland and that the consumers are content with this situation. It is a question of a habit having become a self-evident truth.

“Maybe it is because of some decision makers in the back or then just because people’s buying behavior is accustomed to it; that we have only these two providers and we are not willing to buy anywhere else... that effects that we have been accustomed to this since we were children, that these are the grocery stores where we shop and these are the brands we are buy and this is how, and this is how... The kind of competition does not develop because we are so used to thinking that there are only these two and full stop.”...” I think this is why they have so huge market shares, because we do not allow any new competitors. On the other hand because we are so used to, us peop... we consumers, we don’t necessarily want, it is like we don’t want a new one here. But rather that we are accustomed to, we are satisfied with the ones we have here.”

“Well there is not much of a choice, but maybe it is also a question of habits. You are just so used to it, that is why it is so difficult to answer because you are so used to this and you cannot see any other choice, you have to go to these ones, full stop. You cannot get the food from anywhere else. If some new shop opens, you don’t shop there because it does not meet the certain criteria... Well, so, maybe it is just that the grocery store offers certain stuff and you think that this is the choice and that’s it. You cannot even think about the fact that there might be something else to offer because it hasn’t ever been offered to you, of course if there is something missing for real....”

Mannerism is visible in the consumer's stories about her childhood when she used to shop regularly in Kesko grocery stores and at Stockmann with her mother or grandparents. She says that her family never did grocery shopping in S-groups stores and now she is avoiding grocery shopping in S-group stores because she doesn't have any experiences of shopping there and so they are unfamiliar to her. She justifies the grocery shopping in Kesko grocery stores with the store location, good opening-hours and familiarity, even though she finds the prices to be shockingly high.

The price of the food is high in her opinion but she understands that the grocery stores need to make a profit. She questions the significance of the price of the food on the whole and feels that people are primarily fulfilling their needs and are ready to pay for that. She is willing to pay a great deal of money for the food products that are essential for her, because she feels that a consumer is willing to buy whatever from these indispensable goods. Regarding products that are of similar quality she chooses the cheapest of them. When it comes to special products, she is willing to go short and if need be not buy them.

Mannerism is linked to the expectations a consumer has and expects the grocery store to meet. The expectations are mostly linked to the selection that is expected of the grocery store, and if these expectations are not met, disappointment and contradictions are felt. Still the consumer feels that the products that were not available are not missed for real, since one can get them elsewhere.

The consumer in question is not going to separate grocery stores after lower prices since she does not find it beneficial or valuable to save money on a product that is only slightly less expensive. The supply, location, service and the opening hours of the grocery store are more important to her than price. She does not feel herself committed to a certain grocery store chain and would not deliberately go to a certain grocery store if it was not located nearby. She does her grocery shopping at Stockmann, because she knows there are products available there that cannot be found elsewhere. She feels

that the two largest chain grocery store chains do not have the sort of products that would make her committed, and therefore those chains do not offer any extra value to her.

“So they can provide, these grocery stores, they can provide a sort of added value to the customer if they also offer something extra, other than just these basic products but as I said earlier, these S-group and this Kesko, so they don’t need to offer that... they just offer the kind of basic stuff which don’t bring any extra value to the customer. And the one who buys those in that price is because you need those. And they won’t stop buying milk if it gets expensive... they might whine a little but what can you do. You cannot do anything about the price they determine. But on the other hand you can influence on those special products by not buying them...”...”So those grocery stores to which you don’t have any bonds, so if the grocery store is near located so I go there. Because they don’t offer anything extra why I should go there, like for example Stockman, like, they have those products and so on. But these have not understood to take use of such a strategy but do they have to? It’s because people shop there anyway.”...”...but these two strongest grocery stores, this S-group and this Kesko, they don’t have the kind of products that would make me committed to shop there. They don’t, I don’t go shopping there because some Pirkka tuna fish is cheap there; I can buy Abba-tuna even if it costs one euro more, the price is not the determining issue for me; it is more about what they have to offer.”...”But then in some products like milk products or products where there really are differences in the taste, I really am ready to pay those prices, so it is shocking to pay something like two euros for milk but it is the milk you need and full stop. So you are like, the products that are essential to you, so you are ready to pay, as I could not live without milk or without bread or... cheese... So you are willing to pay and this is what these grocery stores are offering to you, just the basic products for which you are prepared to pay the price

and you won't stop drinking of the milk even if it's getting more expensive, I would buy milk even if it would cost five euros per liter. That's just what I need and it is a kind of basic need. So that's why they have those basic products in their selection."... "... so, it can be noticed that if you are really feeling like, you know that this costs one euro more, so I don't go to another grocery store because of that, that I could have it one euro cheaper. It does not make the, like, er, it does not, what is it, it is no use. Or like this. It is not beneficial to you, and it is not valuable to you to go there, to go to another grocery store just because of one product."

5.3.2 Acceptance

These consumers discussed the concentrated retail grocery market analytically and soundly from a broad social perspective and with the knowledge of the subject. They perceived the meaning of the concentrated retail grocery market to be largely social, taking into account the accessibility of the grocery stores to the consumers. They considered the effects of the concentration on food prices and perceived price of food as high, but examined the market situation from different angles. Nevertheless they accepted the concentrated retail grocery market situation mostly in the name of common good, because of e.g. trust in the safety of the food, employment in Finland, or in addition to that because they understood the business decisions that had led to this situation.

Even though these consumers found flaws in the concentration of the grocery market and were aware of the fact that the food selection of the grocery store and the overall service was not entirely answering their wants, they accepted the situation. They were settling for the situation and knew where to get the specific products they wanted but could not get from the chain grocery stores. Some had settled the contradictions between their personal needs and the lack of the fulfillment by reasonable explanation and sought

win-win situations in the form of bonuses received from the grocery shopping, or compromising with their wants and values.

Example of the acceptance (woman, 51 year old consultant)

This consumer had followed the news on the concentrated retail grocery market in the media and acknowledged that the market is mainly held by the two major retail grocery chains, Kesko and S-group. She had thought about the effects of the situation and found that the downside of the concentration is that the whole production chain is getting monopolized and that competition is becoming unilateral. However, she also noticed the benefits, which are the support and stability of the chain model and its large volumes. She thought that there is room for a third competitor, but that the competition is healthy, the market situation is evolving and new kind of niches, focusing on locally produced and organic food products are coming.

The changing location of the grocery store and the planning of hypermarkets near the motorways upset her, because it means that the living, local township identity is becoming extinct. Nevertheless she understands that the change is bound to the decisions and knowledge of the grocery trade.

The concentration of the market is visible to the consumer as the declining of the private, storekeeper managed K-stores and in the increase of chain led grocery stores of a similar concept, where the storekeeper does not have much decision making power. The interviewed consumer has experienced that this affects the service and the food selection. The consumer describes a good, local private grocery store which has gone out of business. This store was always serving the customers, surprising and thinking about customers' needs beforehand and fulfilling their desires.

Now she feels that she cannot find any special products from the large retail chains and that she has to look for them elsewhere. She says that the consumer adapts to the market situation, but it makes the grocery shopping one

of the obligatory, basic activities. One goes to the grocery store and tries to ponder what to buy. She finds that she can buy the food products that are close to what she would have wanted, and therefore she is giving a message of her desires, since the grocery stores keep track of purchases and change their selections accordingly.

According to her the grocery chains loyal customer programs are a sign of competition and she finds that she can choose which grocery chain she is patronizing. The acceptance of the market situations shows in the consumer's tendency to seek gain for her investment. She finds that committing to a certain chain is a good thing, because of the received bonuses and because one has to buy the food anyway. After all, there are only two choices where to shop and she accepts that she has been bought into a specific camp.

“Well it is kind of, it is like, I kind of accept it, accept the fact that I have been bought into a certain camp with these bonuses and this reasonable price level, and that this, there is less freedom of choice but it is on the other hand part of the deal sort of, and it is sort of... it is a basic hall where I can according to the deal go shopping for what I need and it covers like 90 percent of what I need that, so in that sense it is not bad, but it is like, people are divided into shopping in one or the other. On the other hand it is of course, those are good while you have to buy somewhere, that's where you get something back and some benefit of committing to a certain grocery store, so it is better than it would not exist, because there are basically only two options.”

The interviewed consumer does not see the price of food in Finland as cheap, but she accepts it because the production of food and its quality are controlled. She finds that overall there is not much difference in the food prices between the two large grocery chains. She feels annoyed if there are unfounded price increases and therefore might not buy that food product, even if she could afford it, but if it is a product that she needs and it cannot

be swapped, she considers accepting the price because she trusts and understands the production methods.

“Well it’s like, so it’s... it is not cheap but yet I see that the quality is good and it is controlled, the quality and the production...” ... “So in that sense I sort of accept that even though it is not the cheapest the price the circumstances and the quality affect it, but in a way, nobody cannot afford to take a sort of categorical percentage on top in the chain” ... “I think Lidl is a good example of the cheap concept as such, but I don’t trust it so much, and those products, also. And that, in a way I value domestic products, and I try to keep that in mind when making decisions.” ... “So there is something like extra luxury products so there my buying behavior has changed, there has been something incomprehensible... some unusually high price increases, for one reason or another, you can’t know the reason, and so those are not bought. So there is a kind of, I think a consumer, if there is a spike so especially, and no justification so a consumer becomes irritated and like even if you could afford it, so leaves it... kind of resentfully does not buy it. But then again, if you need those specific products then you cannot buy other products instead. So then you start to think about swifiting to Lidl’s version, of which you don’t know anything about, where it comes from, who has produced it and how, or do you stick to the chain that you can understand, that the product comes from this kind of productions and you can try to understand how it has been done.”

5.3.3 Criticism

The consumers in this group were also analytical and they pointed out the issues they had found questionable. They had considered these issues and their real life experiences and the contradictions carefully and were ex-

tremely conscious of their criticism and debated the benefits and costs of grocery shopping in the concentrated retail grocery market.

They criticized the price, food selection, location of the store, disappointments in the grocery store and the business model of the grocery retail market. This was also the group that stated that the subject was really significant and caused inconvenience in their everyday life functions and/or was against their personal values. They had not found any reasonable explanations to the contradictions found in the concentrated retail grocery market.

According to their experiences they evaluated a personal value (time, diet, quality of the food) to be more meaningful to them than what a grocery store was providing, and with this explanation they were willing to make an extra effort in their grocery shopping in order to act according to their individual beliefs or value system.

Example of the criticism (man 33 year old coach)

This consumer has perceived the concentration in the retail grocery market critically and finds the competition non-existent. He has followed the media coverage on the issue and had experienced and acknowledged the high prices of the retail grocery market. He analyzed and rationalized the market situation and understood the economic development. He, however, could not understand the reasons for the high prices and found contradiction in the causal relationship between his experiences and the explanations.

“I think it is tragicomic that Citymarket and Prisma are almost always located side by side, so that the distance between them is not over 200 meters and it is always the length of the parking space that is the distance. And if there are only two players so it is evident to everybody that they don't compete anymore.” ... “Well as a consumer I find that there is no competition. That there are other players but they are in so minor scale” ... “Well, well, I think that it is, I think it

is wrong, that the most people are justifying and the majority is thinking that the consumer is benefitting when everything is concentrated and therefore it (food) is cheaper but I don't see that it is cheaper”.

The concentration of the retail grocery market is visible in the decrease of local stores and in the expensive food prices. A wider selection of food is to be found in the hypermarkets or malls and to go shopping there requires a vehicle as well as investing his time.

At a personal level he feels that the concentrated retail grocery market strongly restricts his choices and directs his behavior. He finds the reason for the directive power of the retail grocery market to be in the laziness and busy lifestyle of the consumers, which has conditioned the consumers to take the operations of the retail grocery market as a given and that this is a chance for the grocery market to make a profit at the consumer's expense. He feels that chains are the reason behind high food prices since he cannot understand where the money goes.

“Well it is mainly that it would be good that a consumer would know where the price comes from. That who takes the money and how much, because it is strange that food prices in Finland are so expensive compared to other countries. So where is the cost, because the food producers, the farmers, they have to stop working because they don't get enough money so they are not the ones that take the money. So there is someone who rakes in a good deal of it, since food is so expensive here.”

The non-transparent and unclear price formation in the retail grocery stores adds to the mistrust and the feeling of deception. The offers of the large retail grocery stores seem manipulative and urge to buy unnecessary products that end up in the trash. The cheapness of the offers disappears when shopping too much and the observation of the prices blurs and the price of the grocery basket is high even if one has bought the products that were on of-

fer. The data gathered through the use of loyal customer cards maintains the circle of the sale and the maintenance cost of this system is added to the food prices. The price is not comparable to the quality of the food and the mistrust of the origin of one product does not make the quality of other products reliable. The efficiency of the concentrated retail grocery does not lower the food price.

“... those are just the same products with a different name; a different name and they are notably cheaper, the only thing is that there is the illusion that you think, you think hard that it cannot be the same product when it is much cheaper, but it has a strange foreign name, and you think it is good but then on the other hand, nowadays we hear from numerous sources that these products that are advertised as Finnish in Finnish grocery stores, so those are not Finnish either.”

The interviewed consumer in question feels that the situation is underrating his intelligence and feels that the large retail chains are leading people on. He feels that this is the system one must cope with. He is annoyed by the fact that the grocery market has a grip on him and determines the supply and the price. His skepticism has increased and his feelings are affected by way he is explaining and interpreting the function of the retail grocery market.

The consumer has begun to manifest his feelings through his actions. He values his personal time as a monetary unit and sets it high, so it can be contrasted to the expensive prices of grocery stores. He finds that the high food prices in his near local grocery store are acceptable since the local retailer has to pay royalty to the retail chain group and this puts the store keeper on the same level with him. Also, the restricted supply of the local store no longer matters because of the saving of personal time. He acknowledges that he cannot avoid the major grocery chains anyway, so he does his basic grocery shopping in a foreign competitor's grocery store.

“Well it feels like being a puppet on a string, that, people are tried to make buy very much what they are offering. And that is it. So it is not like, it is not like they have offers of those products you would like to buy but they are trying to manipulate you, that’s what it’s all about.” ... “... the grocery stores are only selling what they have ordered. Or mainly the grocery stores are deciding what people buy, there is not much of a choice at the end of the day, so that they buy in some articles and sell those on the cheap and then the people are accustomed to the product and continue to buy it.” ... “This has led to me avoiding all chains to the last, and so, well you cannot avoid the chains because everything is linked to each other somehow, but I avoid going shopping in larger grocery stores, so try to shop in smaller grocery stores as much as possible.” ... “So I prefer walking two minutes to the grocery store and two minutes back, and it takes only about three to four minutes in the grocery store so I save an hour in time when keeping hourly wages in mind it is a lot of money, and that adds up to many hours a week and a month and in a year, it is a huge saving...” ... “So the food can cost more, if it can be bought nearby. It is much more important, the time is much more expensive in the end than what you save in money when going somewhere, to some larger grocery store...” ... “... well, from my point of view it is worth buying from a local near grocery store as much as you can because it benefits you when you save so much time.”

6 DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to build understanding and interpret how the consumers understand and interpret the concentrated retail grocery market, how the market situation comes out in consumer's everyday life, what meaning does it have, how the consumer's interpret their role and how is this all visible in their actions. The interview data brought out the everyday experiences of the consumers in the concentrated retail grocery market and the data analysis produced three sense making types that describe the consumer's attitude to the grocery market; mannerism, acceptance and criticism.

It is apparent that the market structure is not distinguishable to the consumers and it retains obscurities which are tried to be explained and reasoned. The consumers have to settle for the market conditions and this causes the different kind of sense making types and the associated actions. These sense making types explain how the consumers understand and interpret the grocery market, how the market situation reveals itself and what it means to the consumers and how the market situation affects the consumers' actions. The retailers' impact on consumers regarding the price, choice and quality of the food products (Dobson et al. 2003, 111) became evident through the interviewees' experiences, but the impact was varied among the consumers and even with the same consumer, depending on situational reasoning.

The irritation about the food selection in the grocery stores originated from the perception that the retailers are defining what the consumers can buy and what they have to eat. The food selection was found to be industrialized, homogenized and standardized and the retailers were experienced as constricting the consumers' options and choices, and controlling the supply along with directing the consumers' needs, and these perceptions go along with the notions that have been presented academically (Dobson et al. 2003; Clarke 2000). This conception was brought up by all of the interviewees.

The major retail grocery chains in the market were perceived to be alike and offer a similar food selection, and thus they do not utilize any distinguishable competitive advantages (Uusitalo 1998; Aalto-Setälä 2002). The structural change in the retail market and in the location of the grocery stores and the higher food prices in the corner shops were acknowledged by the consumers (Raijas 1993; Ritakallio and Vuorenhela 1998). The good accessibility of the retail services (Spåre & Pulkkinen, 1997) was partly evident, but it was linked to the required car usage and criticized via environmental reasoning.

To those consumers who have become accustomed to the market situation the existence of the competition or the level of the food price are not questioned. They have learned to know the grocery stores that exist in the market and these grocery stores form the familiar surroundings for the grocery shopping. The customer's attention is drawn to other issues such as to the easiness of shopping and determining the gained additional value when doing grocery shopping or to the decision making involved in purchasing food products. The concentrated retail grocery market is more of a mere distribution system around them, and even if these accustomed consumers are the ones who are the most striving for the fulfillment of the individual need for extra values, they don't find these needs to always be fulfilled in the retail grocery chain stores.

Based on the interview data and analysis the younger consumers mostly fit into the mannerism type of consumers. These young consumers who have lived among an abundance of opportunities to get the extra that the brand product advertisers and manufactures have promised, seek the fulfillment of these promises also in the grocery stores. However, they have learned to negotiate with their needs and values because they have learned to choose from the plenty of available consumables and they know the store formats and their offerings. They have the knowledge to demand the extra value and they can attach this extra value not only to the products or food prices but

also to their actions and this makes them demanding and unpredictable consumers.

The consumers of the acceptance or criticism types are more aware of the market and have noticed the concentration of the grocery market. They are analytical and knowledgeable and ponder the market situation they perceive as not entirely fair. Those who are more willing to accept the situation and to find rational, acceptable explanations, even if they consider the social aspects and are empathic to other consumers, are compromising with their needs in the grocery stores but know they can fulfill the needs when necessary in other, special stores or through other means. The acceptance-type consumers form commitments to the grocery stores even if they are not entirely satisfied with what is provided. The most noticeable feature of the acceptance type consumers was their social considerations and concern about the ability of the other people to access the grocery stores. They however strove to fairly consider all the aspects of the concentrated retail grocery market.

The criticism-type consumers take the issue of the concentrated retail grocery market more personally. Their perception of the market situation is emotionally charged and therefore it for the most part transforms into predetermined action which is intentional, systematic and impacts also other behavior outside grocery store shopping, for example the conscious avoidance of a specific grocery store retailer's advertisements. There is mistrust and doubts about the grocery market, competition and the prices and the criticism-type of consumer acts according to the value system that equalizes the felt unbalance between the powerful retail market and the consumer. These consumers are the ones that are skeptical, they view the loyalty programs of the grocery stores doubtfully and are not easy to convince.

An interesting finding from the interview data was that even though the food price was mainly considered to be high, it was not however the main issue in grocery shopping. The sense making and the justification of the food prices differ among the three sense making types, and the fulfillment of

the individual and various needs were more important than the food price. Convenience, time-saving, close location of the store and selection of food and the bonuses were in most cases more important, and these findings agree with the notion by Burt and Sparks (2003, 237).

The price increase in the concentrated market (Lamm 1981; Marion 1998; Cotterill 1999) was noticed by most of the consumers but not all of them saw the high price level as deriving from the market concentration. Mostly the acceptance and criticism-types of consumers, who had consciously thought about the concentration of and competition in the grocery market, considered the concentration to be connected to the high prices. It can be asserted though that the sense making of the consumers develops through time, as the experiences and knowledge accumulates along with the interaction with other consumers (see Wright 2002).

The assumption that the concentration of the retail decreases the costs to the consumers by easing the comparison between alternative purchase choices with physically close location and competition of the grocery stores (Marjanen 1998, 6) was not verified. Instead it was mostly stressed that the consumers strive for convenience and find it impossible to go to several stores on one shopping trip.

Convenience was however, noticed to have many different meanings to the studied consumers; it was included in the close location of a grocery store and the time saved in grocery shopping. The location of the grocery store was considered more important than the food price and it was seen worth paying extra if the grocery store was located conveniently. The close location of the grocery store was extremely important to both the mannerism and criticism-type of consumers, but the reasoning behind this revealed opposite view points. While the mannerism-type of consumer is seeking the value addition attached to the service or a product, the criticism-type of consumer finds his/her personal possession (time, diet) and satisfaction of these needs as the main focus.

The meaning of the concentrated retail grocery market to the consumers was revealed in the efficiency of the changed market structure and its effects on the food selection and provided service. While the consumers' needs are complex and their sense making of the grocery market condition varies, the studied consumers mostly felt that the selection of the retail grocery stores answers their needs purely and that they could not influence the retail grocery market and get the sort of products they wanted. This is not completely consistent with the idea that large super stores can offer and persuade consumers with a large range of selection (Clarke 2000; Dobson et al. 2003). The study by Cotterill (1999, 101) indicated that concentration relates more to high prices than to any service factors, and this notion is supported by the findings of this study.

The arguments of Clarke (2000) on the asymmetric relationship between the retailing and the consumers can be found in the experiences of the consumers even though not all of them recognize this relationship. It is however important to consider and study. The retail grocery market is not just about the manufacturers and retailers; they have a major impact on the lives of the consumers. The consumers make observations, considerations and try to understand the conditions in the grocery market.

Consumers are not easy to manipulate, but making a stand through spending and product choices are not felt as efficient ways of influencing retailers (Marjanen 1998, 6) and it should not be left as the only way a consumer can influence the market conditions. The consumers reason and adjust their actions in various ways, and because the sense making behind the actions remains hidden from the decision makers of the retail grocery market, it may seem to the consumers that nothing concerning their everyday circumstances changes.

It is apparent that the human actions and sense making differ according to the situation, personal experiences and the knowledge that the consumer has on the grocery retail market. There is a possibility that retail grocery studies draw too simplified momentary pictures that are easy to understand from the

industry perspective, but considering for example the convenience and costs of shopping, they ignore the influence and complexity of the human world. A deeper interpretation brings out the variance and sense making behind the actions and consumption behavior of a consumer. The purpose of a retailing as serving the consumer should be more profoundly considered, especially when acknowledging the possibilities and restrictions the retailing places for the consumers.

The academic discussion on the relationship between the retailers and consumers (Clarke 2000, 985) and the effects of the concentration on the price, selection of food and store location has ignored how the consumer adjusts to the changes in the market and tries to cope with the situation in a way that makes sense to them and feels meaningful in the consumers' everyday lives. A striking remark by some of the interviewees was that the consumers are not even asked about what they really want from a grocery store.

7 CONCLUSION

This final chapter summarizes the main findings of the study. The practical implications and the limitations of the study are presented and in conclusion the suggestions are made for the further research.

7.1 Main findings

The consumers' everyday life experiences in the concentrated retail grocery market intertwine with the consumers' individual needs, values and desires and this is perceived through what knowledge or unawareness the consumer has about the phenomena. Consumers aim to make sense of the market situation, act meaningfully, understand and give reason for the existing situation. Their attitude and behavior and its justification along with the perceptions about the market were strongly affected by consumers' habits and personal values.

There were three kinds of sense making types revealed from the interpretation of the data that reflected the way a consumer makes sense and acts in the concentrated retail grocery market and these can be described as mannerism, criticism and acceptance. These basic types manifested as combinations in some of the interviews.

7.2 Practical implications

It can be said based on the findings that there is a need to reassess if the retail grocery store is answering to the consumer' needs regarding the assortment and location (Clarke 2000). This is more a question of a service that is provided to the consumer but it is an essential issue when building a commitment and a satisfying relationship between a retailer and a consumer.

This relationship requires more profound information of the consumers in order to learn how to answer to the consumers' various needs and expectations. In respect to this, the retail grocery industry supply chain management and closer co-operations with the manufacturers and producers should also be considered more closely.

Based on the findings it seems that the consumers' will to spend money, time and/or energy on grocery shopping varies from each individual to the other. However, a common interest is to get the product that answers their needs easily, in which case the consumers' were willing to increase their costs of shopping. Also, the interviewed consumers stated a strong wish to do their grocery shopping in their own neighborhoods by foot. This confirms the notion to reassert the existence of the corner shops with versatile additional services (Marjanen 1998, 8). The development of e-commerce and mobile marketing might offer possibilities to map the consumers' demand, extend the supply, compress the supply chain and warehousing and build faster delivery systems.

In the grocery retail industry, more emphasis should be put into fulfilling the needs of the consumers' and it should be recognized that even if the needs, values and convenience are versatile, they are presenting more possibilities to differentiate and build commitments than to make restrictions in the service.

7.3 Limitations of the study

This qualitative study explored subjective consumer experiences and the interpretation is admitted to be a result of subjective reasoning. The amount of data was limited to 10 interviews but the saturation point was noticed to be achieved. The quality of the data was studied carefully and the possible bias of the study writer was acknowledged. As pointed out by Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2000, 58), an overly large amount of data prevents a deep interpre-

tation and studying these 10 interviews showed the challenge of finding common structures and meaning from several interviews. However, the number of 10 interviews in this study was manageable.

These findings, although are not aiming to provide a generalization or empirically universal truth, present authentic experiences and descriptions of the everyday lives of the consumers and the similarities in these experiences were notable.

7.4 Suggestions for the further research

There is a need for further examining the relationship between the consumers and the concentrated retail grocery market; how does the market concentration affect the consumers' behavior and store choices? The research interest could also be in studying how the supply chain management of the retailers answers to the development of customer relationship management and fulfillment of the actual needs and wants of the consumers. This is a relevant question considering the possible increase in the competition in the retail grocery market and the need to build a commitment and trustful relationship with the customers.

A possible research interest could also be in further studying how the consumers perceive and communicate about their perceptions and adapt to the concentrated market situation, and does this affect their consumption behavior. There is a definite need for more studies discussing the concentrated retail grocery market from a consumer perspective.

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APPENDIX 1

The orientation material to the interview

Ruokabisnes on pahiksia täynnä

Mikko Laitila



Seppo Konttinen: Suomalainen ruokalasku. Siltala 2011. 205 sivua, 30 euroa

Yleisradiossa uransa tehnyt taloustoimittaja [Seppo Konttinen](#) on tiivistänyt kymmenien vuosien kokemuksensa äkäiseksi pamfletiksi. Aiheena on elintarvikebisneksen keskittyminen ja siitä seuraava kohtuuttoman kallis ruoka.

Poliitikot, EU, MTK, elintarviketeollisuus ja keskittynyt vähittäiskauppa toimivat kaikki palkansaajaa vastaan.

Kritiikki on monessa kohtaa perusteltua, mutta se uhkaa kääntyä kirjan ongelmaksi: Konttinen näkee kaikissa elintarvikeketjun toimijoissa pelkkiä vihollisia.

Tuomituksi tulee myös [Valio](#), joka on viimeinen tyydyttävää tuottajahintaa maksava elintarviketeollisuuden yrittäjä. Epäselväksi jää, haluaako Konttinen ylipäänsä lautasille Suomessa tuotettua ruokaa?

Pääpahis on kauppa, joka on kasvattanut omaa siivuaan ruokakassin hinnasta selvästi tuottajia ja teollisuutta tehokkaammin.

Kilpailuviraston veltot päätökset saavat kirjassa huutia. Lammasmaisten viranomaisten luvalla kaupan keskusliikkeet ovat lihottaneet itsensä ja saaneet niskaotteen elintarviketeollisuudesta. Kilpailuvirasto tutkii paraikaa omien kättensä töitä selvittäessään [S-ryhmän](#) ja [Keskon](#) markkinaosuuksia vähittäiskaupassa.

Elintarvikeketjun hinnanmuodostuksen avaaminen on ollut lähes mahdotonta. Koko elintarvikesektori on neulottu sellaiseksi kudelmaksi, että siitä ei ota selvää edes maatalousministeri, Konttinen kirjoittaa.

Kilpailua saadaan, jos sitä halutaan. Edellinen asuntonministeri **Jan Vapaavuori** (kok.) ajoi yhdyskuntarakennetta hajottaville kaupan suurhankkeille tiukempaa lain ohjausta.

Mieleen hiipii ajatus, että kuntapäätäjiltä pitää ottaa nopeasti valta pois kaupan kaavoittamisesta jo pelkästään kilpailun lisäämiseksi.

[Carrefourin](#) tai [Wal-Martin](#) kaltaiset kauppatalot voisivat tulla Suomeen, jos niille taataan pääsy parhaille kauppapaikoille kasvukeskuksiin. Kauppapaikat eivät kuitenkaan järjesty ulkopuolisille maassa, jossa kunnallispoliitikot ohjaavat kaavoitusta ja istuvat samalla osuuskaupan hallinnossa.

Konttisen kirja kärsii lähteiden puutteista ja liiallisesta mutkien suoristelusta. Nimivirheitä on siellä täällä.