USING SOCIAL PRACTICE THEORY TO INFORM TRANSITIONS TO SUSTAINABLE FOOD PURCHASING

By

Camilla Hitchcock

4718909


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School of Environmental Sciences
University of East Anglia
University Plain
Norwich
NR4 7TJ

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Abstract

The consumption of food is unsustainable (Fuchs & Lorek, 2005; United Nations, 1992), however, there are current debates surrounding the ways in which problems of consumer behaviour change should be tackled. The focus of this research moves away from the traditional area of individual’s attitudes and behaviours surrounding consumption and towards how our everyday practices contribute to unsustainable consumption. To date, the application of social practice theory to food purchasing is limited. This research will therefore make use of this theoretical framework to facilitate the understanding of the elements that make this practice and the way in which it is shaped and maintained. This will be achieved using traditional research methods such as interviews, observations and the analysis of Tesco store and website, to establish the role that supermarkets have in food purchasing. Evidence from this will then be available for policy recommendations that aim to achieve the transition to more sustainable ways of food purchasing.
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1. Introduction

Food is one of our most basic human needs, yet the global food system is denoted as being in extreme crisis due to issues surrounding unsustainable consumption. Having reached 7 billion in 2011, and with continual growth, the world’s population is becoming more prosperous, leading to large scale changes in purchasing patterns with a greater demand for more choice and higher quality food (Bloom, 2011). These consumption choices have effects on all aspects of the food chain, including production, distribution and its disposal. For example, the demand for fruit and vegetables all year round has implications for increasing food miles (OECD, 2001) and increasing demand for productivity puts pressure on the environment, through intensive farming methods and the use of pesticides (Francis & Van Wart, 2009). Looking at the impacts in more detail, individual food habits and household activities are a cause for concern. Around 195 million tonnes of CO\textsubscript{2} were emitted within the UK domestic food chain and 15 million tonnes of food and drink waste from households was produced in 2012 (DEFRA, 2012). These issues stem not only from direct but also indirect food-related activities such as the work-spend cycle and transport patterns.

Existing research and related policy surrounding the consumption of food has focused on theories of socio-technical transitions, such as the growth in agriculture mechanisation or on a more local level, the study of individual behaviours and attitudes (Shove et al., 2012; Hand & Shove, 2007). However, despite the complexity surrounding the food system, little consideration is given to the role that food purchasing has in our everyday lives, surrounding how practices, such as shopping, cooking and eating, come into existence, persist and then disappear (Shove & Walker, 2010). The challenge therefore, lies in how to gain insight into this complex sphere of varying levels and meanings, by looking at themes, which are often dismissed as unimportant. One way of looking at this topic is through the eyes of ‘Social Practice Theory’.

Existing research in this area surrounding food and its associated practices are fairly extensive. Previous research has looked at the topics of food preferences (Kemmer, 2000), food preparation (Flanning & Wall, 2011), food waste (Evans, 2011) and the eating of food (Cheng et al., 2007), however, to date, the application of social practice theory to food purchasing is limited. This study will therefore explore this gap in research to advance our understanding of how this theory can contribute to the field of sustainable consumption of
food. It will then go one step further and use Tesco as a unit of analysis, in order to see how supermarkets contribute to the purchasing of food. The main aim of this piece of research is therefore to contribute to the understanding of how social practice theory can be applied in design, with the aim of informing transitions to sustainable food purchasing practices.

To begin, a detailed analysis of the literature will reveal current theories used in the study of sustainable consumption, before introducing the social practice theory framework and the ways in which it can be applied to food purchasing. Existing research surrounding food purchasing will also be outlined followed by a brief overview of food purchasing history. Looking at the history will reveal sequences of events that have formed ideas of what is normal and appropriate, surrounding food purchasing today. The methods section of this research will then outline and justify the use of interviews, observations and a supermarket analysis, in order to study food purchasing as a practice. Finally, a detailed analysis of data will be carried out, concluding with suggested interventions for the transitions to sustainable food purchasing practices.
Literature review

1.1. Sustainable consumption and theories

The recognition that worldwide consumption patterns are unsustainable is a common topic in environmental academia and has been discussed in the policy arena since the early 1990s (UNCED, 1992). The United World Commission on Environment and Development defines sustainability as ‘ensuring that we meet our needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (United Nations, 1987, p. 37) and in 1992 at The Earth Summit a proposal promoting the adoption of sustainable consumption patterns was approved (Fuchs & Lorek, 2005).

A key feature of the social science discipline surrounding sustainable food consumption, concerns the extent to which behaviour change is within the capacity of individuals to bring about or whether it requires more fundamental systemic change in society (Hargreaves, 2011). At the micro level, food consumption has been explained by the pursuit of individual interests and rational decision-making, where by educating people or by adjusting economic costs and benefits of more sustainable options, behaviour change can be induced (Shove et al., 2012). These information and market-based policy instruments are dominant in the food domain focusing on themes such as certification and standardization (Lorek et al., 2012). For example, state-run labeling of organic and regional foods is aimed at raising consumer awareness about the health and environmental aspects of their food and for facilitating informed choices about which products to consume. Finally, shifts towards more healthier diets and lifestyles have been informed by behavioral economics, suggesting the use of regulatory ‘nudges’. Gently nudging consumers into ‘better choices’ can be achieved by the use of supportive infrastructure, such as the provision of canteens set up to serve healthy food (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008).

At the other end of the spectrum, it has been suggested that technological change and modification to the wider systems in society can bring about socio-technical transitions in food consumption levels (Shove & Walker, 2010). An example of this includes improving the self sufficiency of communities through providing local food production (Seyfang, 2007). The vast majority of the literature on socio-technical transitions is currently rooted in a theme of this technological change and studies of systems of provision and infrastructure (Shove &
Walker, 2010). This approach originally proposed by Rip and Kemp (1998) and developed by Geels (2011) is a Multi-Level Perspective (MLP) that demonstrates how environmental innovations can emerge through transitions at three analytical levels: socio-technical niches, socio-technical regimes and socio-technical landscapes (Geels, 2011; Lorek & Spangenberg, 2014). For example, it is through the diffusion of innovative niche ideas and practices, which successfully compete with regimes, that these new ideas become widely adopted and hence accrue significant influence. An example of this is the adoption of organic food (Seyfang et al., 2010).

It has been noted that whilst the MLP is effective in demonstrating how new structures and innovation can be developed as ‘technological niches’, to replace or transform existing unsustainable systems within society (Seyfang & Haxeltine, 2012), it tends to overlook the wider systems that hold things in place and maintain normality (Shove, 2003). To fully understand transitions in consumption there is a need to extend this theory to incorporate activities that “cut across existing regimes and systems that engage more with people’s everyday life practices” (Tom Hargreaves et al., 2012, p. 6).

Policy suggestions surrounding ‘Defra’s Food 2030’ report are another example of the more systemic approach to food consumption (Defra, 2010). It promotes a future in which the different parts of the food system, (such as the food institutions), and the actors (such as the producers and consumers) involved are ‘joined-up’. Framed in this way however, it assumes business as usual, with continual demand for international supply chains and supermarkets as the principle mode of food provisioning. However, in the same way as Internet shopping and ready meals would have been unimaginable a century ago, dramatically different trends in food consumption are also possible. This therefore raises the question of what radical changes in the way we purchase food mean for sustainability and what types of interventions could be proposed by thinking in this new way (Spurling et al. 2013)?

More recently, literature surrounding consumption suggests that human activity and the social structures that shape it are closely related (Giddens, 1984; Shove et al., 2012). This middle ground has been found in the everyday routine performances of social practices (Shove et al., 2012). As put by Hargreaves (2011), the focus is no longer on individuals’ attitudes, behaviour and choices, but instead on how practices in our everyday lives form, exist and disappear.
1.2. Social practice theory

Social Practice theory is a way of understanding how humans act, particularly in the routine of everyday life. Considering neither humans nor products as the unit of enquiry, it focuses on the interplay between three main elements. ‘Stuff’, which encompasses objects, infrastructures, tools, hardware and the human body itself; ‘skills’, which are the competence needed to carry out a practice and ‘images’, which are mental activities, emotion and motivational knowledge. (Shove et al., 2012; Schatzki, 2010; Warde, 2005). For example, cycling is particularly prevalent in the Netherlands due to the flat terrains, bicycle lanes, traffic conventions and the skill of bike maintenance (Shove, 2014). This theory suggests that existing elements are ‘out there’ waiting to be linked together to form a practice and when links are broken the practice fragments and is no longer sustained (Shove et al., 2012). To maintain the links however, elements have to be renewed with stability and routinisation, repeatedly linking the elements in similar ways (Shove et al., 2012) (See fig. 1).

Figure 1: Stages in the development and breakdown of a practice

In this way, practice theory challenges models that describe behaviour being driven by values and ambitions, and instead takes a more complex view of these elements and their inter-connectedness as the central topic (Shove et al., 2012). It views an individual, not as an autonomous rational being, nor as a conformer to social norms, but one who has an independent understanding of the world and can interact with others in drawing from and
generating shared meaning. In other words, practices do not reside in individuals, but they are socially constructed (Warde, 2005).

Sahakian and White (2013) demonstrated the effectiveness of using social practice theory in explaining how the consumption of drinking water might be shifted towards more sustainable patterns. In 2007, The London on Tap campaign (Thames Water, 2012) against bottled water originally focused its pro-environmental methods around price and information deficit with no success. However, by shifting the focus to purchasing water in restaurants as a practice it was found that ordering tap water was seen as being ‘socially unacceptable’ with 1 in 5 people feeling nervous about asking for tap water (Sahakian & Wilhite, 2013). This provided evidence that the element social norms are influential dispositions for restaurant practices.

Moreover, the use of practice theory has also shown that it is possible to break the cycle of energy demand within the practice of indoor temperature regulation (Shove et al., 2012). By simply encouraging occupants to wear less clothing to work, through a programme known as ‘Cool Biz’, the Japanese Government were able to redefine the elements of which practices of comfort were made and reproduced. The changed ‘meanings’ of normal clothing were used as a method of changing both the technologies (levels of air-conditioning) and competencies (of dress and facilities management) which in turn reconfigured the complete routines of office life (Shove et al., 2012). It is therefore clear that with inspirations from social practice theory, the components of food purchasing can be suitably studied in order to inform transitions to sustainable consumption (Spaargaren, 2011; Fonte, 2013).

1.1. Food purchasing as a practice

Food purchasing, in the same way as other practices, can be understood as a social accomplishment rather than an exercise of choices made by individuals. It is a socially learned and habitualised activity, which is governed by structural change in the retail landscape (Everts & Jackson, 2009). As dictated by social practice theory, food purchasing is reliant on the composition of the different elements. Firstly, ‘stuff’ (by which we mean materials, technologies and physical entities) could include the supermarket, modes of transport and cooking facilities. ‘Images’ (including the domain of symbols and meanings) could include one’s perceptions of food and cultural influences, and ‘skill’ (which encompasses competence, know-how and technique) could include the technical ability to prepare and organise food and knowledge of different products (Shove et al. 2012; Everts &
Shopping practices can then “exist, persist and disappear” when links between the elements are either made or broken over time (Shove et al., 2012, p.21).

Alone however, these elements are not sufficient and it is only in relation to other practices, such as work, leisure, travel and domestic routines, that the specific configuration of food purchasing practices can take shape. This therefore needs to be considered in research, to avoid studying a practice in isolation (Shove, et al., 2012).

Figure 2: The practice of food purchasing and its associated elements

Source: 1) PlanningResource (2014) 2) Tesco (2014d) 3) own photography
1.4. History of food purchasing

In order to gain an insight into its construction as a practice, is useful to trace the history of food purchasing back in time, to reveal sequences of events that have formed ideas of what is normal and appropriate today (Shove & Walker, 2010). In modern society there have been significant changes in food purchasing practices over time, conceptualised through elements such as the rise of supermarkets, widening availability of product choice, the origins of products, product marketing and advertisement (Everts & Jackson, 2009). As described by Ashley et al. (2004) “The supermarket is the paradigm of the everyday experience of modernisation” involving innovations of “travel, payment, quality control, packaging and self service” (Ashley et al., 2004, p.113).

Since starting as ‘economy’ stores in America in the early 1900s, staffed by a few employees selling only canned goods, supermarkets have advanced in a relatively short period of time (Matsa, 2011). Post-war retailing saw the increased adoption of supermarkets (Alexander et al. 2008), with contemporary definitions identifying them as providing ‘everything the housewife will need to buy week to week for running the household’ (McClelland 1962, p.155). During this time a rise in disposable income lead to a remarkable growth in personal consumption, with food representing an important percentage of this. Rising availability of refrigerators and other elements were also directly or indirectly related to changing patterns of food purchasing (Alexander et al., 2008).

More recently, surrounding the development of this infrastructure, there has been a shift in institutions, supply and competition structures such as a decline in shop numbers and increasing average distances to shops from settlements (Bahn-Walkowiak & Bleischwitz, 2010). The major developments of the food retail sector has also increasingly being aligned to the ‘car born consumer’ entailing not only the rise of short-haul routes but also the growing of so called ‘food deserts’, which are areas with low food provisions (Guy et al., 2004). This contrasts to previous trends where between 55%-65% of all shopping trips were made on foot in 1973 (Davies, 1973) and demonstrates the link between mobility and food purchasing practices.

The changing practice of societal working hours and time-use has also had a huge effect on shopping practices. People’s notion of self-wealth, social position and well-being are arranged through their consumption behaviour and as a result a work-spend cycle has become fundamental to the economic and social dynamics of contemporary society (Knox & Mayer, 2009). Speed has therefore become a trademark of many aspects of consumption
and due to this, there is an increasing dependence on commodified food provisioning, the growth of pre-prepared convenience foods and the diffusion of domestic technologies into the home (Cheng et al., 2007). Food provisioning has shifted to become a less time consuming activity with a huge emphasis on convenience food.

This change in shopping practice has also been prompted by the constant output of new innovative products and services from the retail industry, which can create lock-in effects due to persistence and resistance to change. For example, in the food sector there has been innovations within dairy products, water, soft drinks and frozen food stuffs, yet all of which belong to categories with the strongest environmental impacts (CIIA, 2007). Global food brands, such as Heinz and Coco Cola, are also increasingly culture-shaping, with their symbols and products, activating personal meanings and lifestyle orientations among consumers. These symbolic resources inevitably shape the ‘images’ associated with shopping practices (Thompson & Arsel, 2004).

Finally, the continual modernisation of food purchasing has more recently been influenced by the rise of phenomena such as internet shopping (Dholakia, 2012). Around a fifth of UK households are buying their groceries online every month, and of these, a third use online shopping as the main channel for buying food and groceries (IGD, 2013). The practice of shopping online is therefore another crucial aspect of the wider food purchasing practice in today’s society.

To conclude, food-purchasing practices have changed dramatically over time, often in an unsustainable way. Yet despite being considered an essential part of everyday life, they are recognised as being conducted with little conscious thought (Giddens, 1984). Understanding how and why consumers purchase food in the way they do may require us to look at behaviours that may otherwise be dismissed as ordinary and unexceptional, such as the process of travelling to the supermarket or selecting certain products. Practice theory not only enables the researcher to see how methods of consuming are positioned in the web of social change, but also enhances the ability of empirical analysis to focus on the complexities of food purchasing as a practice rather than consumer choices about shopping, food and meals (Halkier & Jensen, 2011). Finally, the literature has demonstrated that the rise of the supermarket is key in the development of food purchasing. Using it as a main focus of analysis will therefore allow this research to make specific supermarket policy recommendations.
1.5. The contribution of social practice theory to policy

So far, the theory of social practice has made little contribution to public policy, yet given that the importance of establishing how behaviour change lies in the development of practices (Warde, 2005; Shove et al., 2012) it seems that this is a crucial starting point for environmental governance (Spaargaren, 2011). The traditional paradigms of individualistic versus systemic approaches presently used to frame policy interventions for sustainable consumption are inadequate and therefore need to be replaced by new practice-based approaches in order to tackle over-consumption (Spaargaren, 2011). This will make it possible to both assess the influences of higher-level socio-technical dynamics and lifestyle dynamics operating at the level of practices (Spaargaren, 2011). Environmental performances will depend upon policy, lead by governments, as well as businesses and civil society to provide practical systems that make it easy and normal for consumers to consume in more environmentally considerate ways as part of their everyday food practices (Spaargaren, 2011; Fuchs & Lorek, 2005).

2. Overall aims and research questions

The primary aim of studying practices in this way is therefore to identify opportunities for deliberate intervention that can achieve or facilitate change towards configurations of food purchasing that are more sustainable. This will endeavour to add to the emerging literature surrounding sustainable food practices, focusing on food purchasing, which as of yet is an understudied, yet crucial part of our food system. Moreover, it will also aim to demonstrate the potential that practice-based approaches have over more traditional explanations of technological change or theories of rational choice. The supermarket as a space of consumption and the use of Internet shopping have also been noted as key features in the development of this practice, so it is important to question their role in making shopping more sustainable. Key questions to be answered in this research are as follows:

1. What are the elements involved in food purchasing as a practice?
   a. How are shopping practices constructed, changed and integrated?
   b. How is the construction of shopping practices unsustainable?

2. How do supermarkets contribute to the practice of food purchasing?
   a. How are supermarkets making shopping practices unsustainable?

3. How can current purchasing practices be changed to inform more sustainable food purchasing?
   a. How can supermarkets be targeted to inform sustainable food purchasing?
3. Methods

3.1. Research design

The primary goal of studying practices is to identify opportunities for deliberate intervention that can achieve or facilitate change towards configurations of food purchasing that are more sustainable. The practice theory approach lays not so much in proposing a new type of information-gathering activity, but rather guides the types of data to be gathered as well as the way information is understood and assembled. As argued by Hargreaves (2011) the transformation of a practice can be achieved through the active negotiation of novel combinations of the practice elements; ‘images’, ‘skills’ and ‘stuff’.

The research design in this study took the form of a cross-sectional analysis and the research strategy was of an in-depth qualitative nature. A combination of data collection methods were used in order to fully understand the complexity of elements that establish and maintain food purchasing practices. Self-reported actions via interviews were complemented and compared to actual observations of practices, both of which are complementary to studies using social practice theory (Hargreaves, 2011; Halkier & Jensen, 2011). This was then supplemented with a supermarket store and website analysis due to the key involvement that supermarkets have in food purchasing (Ashley et al., 2004). The UK retailer Tesco was chosen as the unit of analysis, as it is one of the largest food retailers in the country. Using mixed methods of data collection in this way allowed the analysis of the practice at different scales, giving the researcher a more complete picture of how the practice is comprised (Mason, 2006). Each method allowed the study of ‘images, skills and stuff’ (see table 1).
Table 4: Data gathering methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Application</th>
<th>Images</th>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Stuff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured Interviews</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews took place in the interviewee’s home, in order to discover the influences and availability of personal knowledge, culture and equipment in relation to food purchasing practices.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>Observation of participants whilst carrying out food purchasing in shopping locations, in order to see how they interact with the surroundings and make food purchasing decisions.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supermarket store analysis</td>
<td>A study of Tesco’s in store retail settings, to determine their set-up for food purchasing.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supermarket website analysis</td>
<td>A detailed analysis of the Tesco website in order to discover the meanings and symbols created by this food retailer in modern society.</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2. Participant recruitment

Due to time constraints, the size of this study was limited to five participants. This number was deemed sufficient for gaining the level of data needed. To recruit participants, 15 individuals were approached using opportunistic sampling and then questioned regarding the specific study criteria: carries out a weekly shop and shops at Tesco. Participants were recruited from the Cambridgeshire area and ranged between 20-70 years of age. As mentioned earlier, the literature also identifies the method of shopping, such as in-store or online as important. To incorporate this variable into the analysis, at least one participant who regularly shops online was included in the sample (Dholakia, 2012). Six participants and a further two remaining as back-up participants, in case of dropout, were then chosen from the sample of 15 according to their suitability (see table 2 & appendix A).

Prior to the onset of data collection, and in accordance with UEA Research Ethics Policy (2006), participants were asked to complete a consent form to ensure that they were aware of data protection and confidentially procedures. Tesco supermarket was also contacted in order to gain permission to carry out product analysis and take photographs in store.
3.3. Data collection

Interviews

The first form of data collection involved interviewing the main food-purchasing practitioner in each household. This was used to gain detailed information surrounding the construction of consumer food purchasing practices and underlying food-purchasing rationales. Questions were structured around the ‘images’ (the meanings, purposes and emotions surrounding food), ‘skills’ (the practical understandings and knowledge of food) and ‘stuff’ (the material/functional structures which shape food purchasing) (Fonte, 2013; Ashley et al., 2004; Cheng et al., 2007) that shape their practice.

With specific data analysis in mind, semi-structured questions were drafted before the interview, in order to guide the researcher in the elicitation of desired information. Pre-planning also ensured that questions were of a suitable nature, avoiding the use of leading or ambiguous questions (Leech, 2002). Interviews were recorded throughout and then transcribed after using qualitative coding and categorisation.

Table 5: Sampling criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Undertakes a weekly</th>
<th>Shops at Tesco</th>
<th>Shops online</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Household size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>60-70</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key Questions to be answered:

1. What are the elements involved in food purchasing as a practice?
   a. How are shopping practices constructed, changed and integrated?
   b. How is the construction of shopping practices unsustainable?

Interviews, which took place at participant’s homes, begun by talking through their average week and food related consumption activities. Firstly, participants were asked to, retrace the short-term history of their shopping practices, such as the stages involved in their last shopping trip, and then the long-term history of their shopping practices, such as how their shopping practices have changed over time. For example:

   Interviewer: “Can you describe the long-term history of your shopping practices?”

   Interviewer: “Have you always shopped in that way?”

Next, participants were asked about their food purchasing in general and the influences that surround their food purchasing. To find out more about the ‘images’, ‘skills’ and ‘stuff’ related to participant’s food purchasing practices, they were then asked how their shopping links with their other weekly routines, such as work and leisure activities. This revealed, how the practice of shopping is coordinated with other directly and indirectly related practices. Finally, participants were questioned about their perceptions surrounding sustainable food, to establish more specifically how the images and knowledge surrounding sustainability contributed to purchasing practices. Interviews varied in length but were carried out until maximum saturation was reached. This meant that no new information was being elicited and it was therefore unnecessary to collect any more data. An example of a transcript from the interviews can be seen in appendix B.

Observational Studies

Observations of participant’s purchasing practices were carried out at a Tesco store. This was a useful process as it enabled the validation of existing data gained in the interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2011), and allowed the researcher to see how participants actually behave as opposed to perceived assumptions of their behaviour. Carrying out observations within the environment where the practice takes place also fills the requirements of a social practice theory approach which “demands paying particular attention to the doings of particular practices in particular settings” (Hargreaves, 2008, p.72). Observations revealed apparent elements, such as the materials and environment, which made up the practice. However, participants were also asked to ‘think aloud’, in order to gain further insight into
less obvious elements such as skill and convention. Actions and responses were recorded during the observation and then subsequently coded in the same way as the interview data.

**Key Questions to be answered:**

1. **What are the elements involved in food purchasing as a practice?**
   
   a. How are shopping practices constructed, changed and integrated
   
   b. How is the construction of shopping practices unsustainable?

To begin the observation, participants were asked to carry out their shopping routine as normal and notes on how participants interacted with the surrounding environment were recorded. Participants were then questioned about how often and why they bought certain products. Other observations noted whether participants were drawn to certain products or specific sections of the supermarket and whether things such as price or brand were influential. The length of each observation varied depending on the time it took participants to complete their shop.

### 3.4. Coding

Soon after the initial collection of data, interviews and observations were transcribed and then analysed using a coding process. This typical method of qualitative data analysis was chosen as it offered an ongoing systematic way of interpreting the data. Coding in this way means that any interesting findings could be identified at an early stage, giving the researcher a chance to explore these concepts further in the next set of interviews (Bryman, 2008).

The coding process involved the breakdown of data into component parts, giving each section a name. Interpretations of data then shaped emerging codes. This process involved reviewing transcripts and giving labels to component parts that seemed to be of potential theoretical significance or that were particularly relevant or salient to words of social practice theory. Different levels of coding were used throughout this process.

Firstly, open coding was used to examine, conceptualise and code data, relevant to social practice theory. Concepts within the data were systematically identified and then categorised using the codes: ‘Images’, ‘skills’ and ‘stuff’ (see fig. 3). Four other minor categories, related to the themes of social practice theory, were also identified, including; ‘routine’ (the way practices have been reinforced and repeated over time), ‘convenience’ (reliance on certain solutions for ease), ‘changes in practice’ (influence of new trajectories and life events) and
‘references to sustainability’. Each of these categories was given a unique colour for identification (see table 3). Codes were then given to specific sub-categories within each of the main categories to further highlight specific elements of the shopping practice, in order to answer key question one of this research. For example, within the ‘images’ category codes such as ‘practices of social norms’ and ‘supermarket imagery’ were identified.

Next axial coding was used. This is where data is combined in new ways after open coding, by making connections between the categories (Bryman, 2008). This was done by linking concepts to consequences, to patterns of interaction and to cause. For example, links present might suggest that certain elements are either related or dependent on each other as part of the food purchasing practice. Additionally, any evidence of the development, change, or breakdown of a practice was also identified, as this is key to the existence of food purchasing.

Finally selective coding was used. This was where core categories were identified as the most interesting or prominent pieces of data from the dataset. A core category becomes the central issue or focus around which all other categories are integrated (Bryman, 2008). For example, is has been noted that the category ‘images’ seems to be the highly prominent in the makeup of participants shopping practices.

**Figure 3: Example of main categories in coded data**

![Image](image.png)

**Source:** own construction
Table 6: Main categories and associated codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stuff</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Transport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Supermarkets/other shops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Computer/internet for online grocery shopping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Provision of wealth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Availability and choice of food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Cooking/storage facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Provision of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Provision of Tesco Club Card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Offers and in store deals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Services- delivery /click and collect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Facilities – petrol station/carwash/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skills</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Knowledge of food products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Cooking and food preparation skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Knowledge of sustainable food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Computer skills for online shopping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Organisation/time management skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Images</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Practice of culture and traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Personal beliefs about food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Influences of up-bringing and childhood experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Perceptions of socially acceptable norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Self image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Influence of Tesco Club Card offers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Brand/product image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mood/feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Enjoyment of cooking/food purchasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Supermarket imagery – offers product information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other sub-categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Routine</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Number of visits to supermarkets in a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How shopping trip fits in with other weekly activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The shopping trip preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The types of items that are purchased on a regular basis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Convenience</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Shopping at a certain location for ease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Shopping online for ease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Using certain technology to make processes more convenient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Causes of changes in practice</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Birth of child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Moving in with new partner/friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Children leaving home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>References to sustainability</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Attitudes towards sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Evidence considering sustainability when purchasing products</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Source: own construction
After completing data analysis, and as a later addition, participants were asked one further question as a follow up to the interviews: 'Can you think of three things that you could do/change as part of your shopping routine to make it more sustainable?' This was a chance to elicit information regarding key question three, and determine which elements could potentially be changed in order to make the shopping practice more sustainable.

Supermarket analysis
In addition to the observation of participants, the Tesco supermarket store was analysed in order to answer key question three. This enabled the researcher to determine how supermarkets contribute to shopping as a practice, with particular relevance to the 'stuff' element, and how they can be targeted to inform more sustainable food purchasing.

Key Questions to be answered:

1. How do supermarkets contribute to current food purchasing practices?
2. How can supermarkets be targeted to inform transitions to sustainable food purchasing?

To perform this analysis, the supermarket environment was analysed through the taking of notes and photographs. A variety of products were then studied, including: carrots, bananas, coffee, pasta, frozen meat and ready meals, in order to see what proportion of the product range were sustainable (number of products), and how accessible they were to the customer (i.e. location on shelves). This was then recorded in a table for analysis.

Website Content Analysis
A final method of data collection took the form of a qualitative website content analysis of tesco.com. This enabled the analysis of the ‘images’ and the ‘stuff’ that this large UK food retailer contributes to food-purchasing practices, paying particular attention to any ‘sustainable’ food references and how this is portrayed to the consumer. Once again this provided data for key question three. To do this, screenshots of related web pages were taken for study.

Key Questions to be answered:

1. How do supermarket online grocery stores contribute to current food purchasing practices?
2. How can supermarket online grocery stores be targeted to inform transitions to sustainable food purchasing?
4. Analysis

4.1. Introduction

This section will outline and discuss the main findings in order to answer the key questions proposed in this research. A good starting point in order to synthesize interventions, which target change in a practice, is to consider how interventions relate to each component of the practice; ‘images’, ‘skills’ and ‘stuff’ (Buchs et al., 2011). This was done by analysing coded transcripts and providing evidence for each element individually. Secondly, unsustainable features of the practice and the way food purchasing is coordinated with other related practices was discussed. For ease, participants will be referred to as ‘P’, when presenting extracts from transcripts. In the second half of this analysis, specific emphasis on the role of the supermarket in food purchasing, using evidence from the Tesco store analysis, will be examined. To conclude, specific opportunities for deliberate intervention that can facilitate change towards more sustainable food purchasing will then be proposed.

4.2. Elements involved in food purchasing as a practice

Interviews and observations have highlighted that food as a purchasing practice, (including shopping at the supermarket or via the online grocery store), is constructed by a diverse range of elements within the images, skills and stuff categories. It has also demonstrated that food purchasing is connected to other associated practices by the overlap of these elements (see fig. 4). Such practices include: food purchasing, food preparation, cooking, eating, leisure activities and work. The data also suggests that the web of shopping practices is influenced by the connections between practices and also the coordination of elements between practitioners.

Figure four depicts the results of the interviews and observations, as a web of food purchasing and related practices. The size of the symbol used for each practice represents its relationship to food purchasing. For example, cooking has a closer relationship to food purchasing than the practice of work. For simplification, only closely related practices and their elements that were discussed in interviews and observations have been included in the diagram.
Figure 4: Conceptualised web of food purchasing and related practices

**Images:**
- Culture & traditions
- Attitudes of food
- Past experiences
- Socially acceptable norms
- Self image
- Brand/product image
- Mood/feelings
- Media
- Supermarket imagery

**Stuff:**
- Infrastructure
- Supermarket services
- Availability of food
- Access to supermarket
- Access to transport
- Provision of time
- Cooking and storage facilities

**Skills:**
- Knowledge of food products
- Cooking/preparation skills
- Knowledge of sustainability
- Computer skills
- Organisation skills
- Gardening skills

**Source:** Own construction
Stuff, materials and infrastructure

Within the ‘stuff’ category elements including infrastructure and other physical materials have been identified as key in constructing the basic practice of food purchasing. These artefacts add value to the construction of a practice when they are assembled together in effective configurations (Shove et al., 2012). For example, access to the supermarket or a computer is needed in order to carry out a weekly shop. This then requires a mode of transport for travel or an Internet connection to access the website. Different arrangements of these socio-technological infrastructures then shape practices in different ways (Halkier, 2010). For example, participants living in close proximity to the supermarket may make multiple visits per week, whereas other participants living up to 8 miles away may only go once, and instead make use of smaller local shops.

P2: “I go shopping once a week, although sometimes I go more often…. depends on how quickly I get through food. Generally tends to be a pattern of about once a week…topped up with local shops in between”

These elements ultimately have implications for the sustainable purchase of food. Making multiple journeys or driving long distances to the supermarkets incurs high fuel consumption and often practitioners in these situations are also unable to support local producers due to being remotely located.

P5: “well particularly pertinent to where I live…. where is the local greengrocers?? In an ideal world, if I lived in Marylebone High Street then you’d have lots of shops…all the greengrocers and butchers, I’d happily go.”

Other materials, which construct the basic practice, include the availability and access to food, which is provided by the supermarket and the provision of time or money in order to carry out a weekly shop. Participants with a limited budget tended to be more conservative in their shopping habits, sticking to items on lists and purchasing the Tesco Everyday Value range of products. Whereas those with larger budgets seemed to have an uncapped spending limit and were subject to impulse purchasing of expensive products. Implications for sustainability here stem from the fact that those with higher incomes have the potential to over-consume.

P6: “in reality as you get that much older you get more affluent, I’m not saying that I’m affluent for god sake but….if you’ve got two small children and a mortgage then…and all the other associated things like that, then you have to watch the pennies…a lot more than you do when you get to my age.”
P5: “I’m a bit of a snob in general, you know if I see something with Tesco Finest on it then I’ll make a beeline for it….I think why not.”

Finally, the provision of domestic kitchen facilities can dictate purchasing habits. Participant 1 only has access to a small freezer and therefore is restricted on quantity and size of items that he can purchase. Participant 2 and 5 however, both have access to a second fridge located in their garages. This enables them to stock-up on items by buying in bulk.

P1: “..its annoying because sometimes buying small amounts costs you a lot of money so its tempting to go for larger amounts, but we only have limited freezer space”

Skills and competencies

Know-how and competence, surrounding food is needed to carry out the practice. The extent of this skill set therefore allows practitioners to understand aspects of the practice such as what they are buying and subsequently how to prepare, organise and cook with certain ingredients. Participant 1 explains that before becoming experienced with different foods and learning how to cook he simply purchased simple ingredients and convenience food.

P1: “when I came to uni, I had to start cooking and shopping on my own. Back then I think I would shop for simple ingredients….as I wasn’t really very experienced….and didn’t like many things.

Knowledge has to be established and then routinised in order for it to construct the practice of food purchasing. As it becomes more widely shared, it also becomes stabilised to the point that it can be taught and learnt by others (Shove et al., 2012). Processes of sharing and standardising knowledge, such as how to cook a meal from scratch, then has the effect of stabilising what counts as expertise and shaping the nature of shopping practices and the competencies of those involved (Shove et al., 2012). Participant 2 demonstrates that transfer of knowledge from one family member to another has enabled her to grow her own food and develop food organisational skills. For her, this is an unquestionable way of cooking which has become normalised in her daily routine, whereas other participants, who lacked opportunity for the transfer of knowledge, may have been less proficient in their knowledge of food as a result.

P2: “my mum used to always have a roast dinner on a Sunday and that’s what we have always done, then used the meat to make other meals during
the week. Also my dad used to grow lots of his own food so I do that too. I grow lots of vegetables, soft fruit and things like that… All the meals my mum made were from scratch……I never buy these types of food from the supermarket”

P1: “I wasn't really very experienced….and didn't like many things. That was probably as my parents just used to give me stuff like pizza and pasta so I was never introduced to fresh food…and they never really got me into cooking……It was more ready-meals that I used to buy…and very quick and easy, convenient things…simply because I wasn't that experienced at cooking then”

Implications for sustainability also stem from the lack or pre-shopping preparation and food organisational skills. Participant five often decides on what he needs as he goes round the supermarket and doesn’t tend to stick to his list. Participant three, is also often poorly prepared, and purchases items that were not needed, or that they had not run out of. In this case food waste is a key issue.

P5: “Vanessa will text me and to go and get this and…she tells me we need some…one loaf of bread then I'll get it plus other stuff…I’ll end up spending £50…so I’ll decide what else we need then. You know it’s what supermarkets want….you just say…I want some of those…I’ll have some of that.”

P3: “Well, I don’t like to admit it but I think it’s down to laziness really….I'm not very good at using things up and looking at what I need before I go shopping…I just buy things without knowing if we have run out….therefore things just end up in the bin when I buy more. I wouldn’t eat anything that is past the sell by date as there’s a risk it could be gone off.”

Images and meanings

Meanings are extended and eroded as a result of dynamic processes of association (Shove et al., 2012) and practitioners attach different images to the practice of shopping. For some, it is seen as a necessity and a chore. It is essential for a household to have food to eat and it is necessary for someone to provide the meals. Providing and eating food have to be manageable and the surrounding activities are therefore manoeuvred in relation to other practices such as: work, studying, socialising, and leisure (Halkier, 2010). A weekly shopping
routine, which often lacks variety, could be seen as an obligatory chore by participants and in this case is linked to its practical do-ability (Halkier, 2010). Shopping is done without a specific plan but in order to have a stock of food with which to improvise with.

P5: *there's no rhyme or reason to what we get in our shopping, apart from bread, and the actual staples*.

Moreover participants explained that foods were chosen for their convenience. Participant three and five purchased pre-made coleslaw as it was deemed “too time consuming to make from scratch” and other items such as pre-chopped, frozen onions, pre-made pasta sauces and pre-cooked potatoes.

P1: “*when I go shopping it's a lot easier to look for items that I've had before, rather than having to scan through a brand new selection and pick something that I think I'll like*.”

P3: “*when I come home in the week I just want to be able to come home and put it in the oven, I don't want to have to start looking at recipe books or chop up loads of onions….I even buy those chopped onion already frozen…erm and then I can just chuck it in…and chopped tomatoes, I get them frozen too……easy!*”

Other participants actively see food purchasing as more of a pleasurable experience. For example, making homemade meals from scratch can also be organised according to an engagement in what is understood as pleasurable about food, choosing new ingredients and enjoying new tastes. This can result in pleasant emotional and social experiences for the practitioner (Halkier, 2010).

P1: ‘*cooking is a hobby so I like to cook for friends and try out new meals….I also have a food blog, so I often like to buy new ingredients if it's not too expensive.*”

Here, pleasure is also a crucial aspect of coordinating the elements of shopping; the understandings of food, the procedures for handling of food and the engagements in food (Halkier, 2010). Mental persuasions also shape the practice, such as emotion and feelings. Participant five explained that products were often chosen depending on what they felt like eating that evening.
P5: “I sometimes just go without a list and buy whatever I fancy that evening. I might think, I can be bothered to cook, so I’ll just go for something like a takeaway…especially if it’s a Friday for example”

Different expectations are also attached to the practice and this therefore has an influence on what is purchased. For example, participant six has high expectations about the quality, price, and availability of food.

P6: “They have a range of things… virtually everything which is called Tesco Finest which I always buy, because I think that I’m getting the quality that I’m looking for but at a better price…that’s my feeling”

P6: “I won’t buy certain stuff when it’s at full price, as I just perceive that that’s not the right price for it….in my mind I have set a price for it and if it’s above then I won’t pay for it”

Food purchasing may also act as an expression of social status. This may result in choosing to shop at a certain location or purchasing certain products. Participant six dislikes shopping at Tesco due to the associations he has with other shoppers. He also refuses to make use of a Tesco Credit card to avoid being associated with the store when using it in other shops. When convenient, he often shops at Waitrose to avoid this issue as he deems it to be more ‘up-market’.

P6: “I like Waitrose because the people are nicer…you know they genuinely are…they don’t smell”.

Other meanings involve practicing ‘healthy’ food purchasing. This involves selecting foods that are constructed as healthy, such as low-fat products and fresh ingredients to cook meals from scratch. Participant five chooses low calorie food and explains that he doesn’t eat certain foods such as bread as they are fattening. Despite this he will still buy some of these products for the rest of his family. Participant one also tends to buy raw ingredients to cook from scratch.

P1: “I just think it’s more healthy really, and I like to know what goes into my food...”

The media has a vital role in determining the ideas, pictures and texts involved with food purchasing and there is virtually no limit to the ways in which such images can circulate, due to mass infrastructures of communication in today’s society (Shove et al., 2012). Participant one likes to try out new styles and advice from chefs.
P1: “A lot of influences for me come from cooking shows, cooking books, also meals that I have out and round other people’s…all my influences come from places like that”.

For this participant cooking is an enjoyment so he actively seeks inspiration, however other participants do not take inspiration from outside sources.

P5: “Where do I get my inspiration from…Jesus!…Just whatever….I think what are we going to eat tonight…(wife) said make sure you get stuff for spaghetti bolognai...so I think about that, what you have in, what sort of stuff goes with it….again I don’t really plan, its just impulse buying.

Coordination with other practices

Shopping routines are coordinated with other practices, such as the journey to work and daily chores. For example, participant five makes multiple trips per week to the supermarket as he passes it when dropping his children at school. Participant two also passes the supermarket on a regular basis and combines her shop with coming home from work, or walking the dog.

P5: “we are back and forwards past the supermarket all the time so we just go there.”

P2: “Well I might go periodically on the way home from work just because I’m passing…usually I combine it with other trips, such as walking the dog, or going to the bank and getting other things, as I say….so its not just a trip to the supermarket”.

Food purchasing is also influenced by the routine of eating as part of a social activity. Participant five explains how they will buy certain foods for when they have a ‘special’ family meal at the weekend. For example, more indulgent foods such as joints of meat and ‘luxurious potatoes’ are chosen as an alternative to what is bought for other meals during the week. Additionally, another habitual ‘treat’ that the family maintain is purchasing other items referred to as ‘luxury foods’ such as bacon for bacon sandwiches to eat at the weekend. Here, family members obtain flows of pleasant experiences through theses type of food activities (Halkier, 2010).
Construction of the practice

To maintain the links, elements that comprise a practice have to be renewed with stability and routinization, repeatedly linking them together in similar ways (Shove et al., 2012). Shopping, for example, is a routinised practice, carried out on the same day every week; in the same way and with the same list of food items often being purchased. Participant five makes repeated purchases of one particular brand. This is a combination of buying a product for its perceived taste and quality but also as it is a norm for that participant to do so.

P5: “I will always buy Heinz baked beans, so if I went down there now and I needed to buy four tins of baked bean and Tesco ones were 1p each...I wouldn’t buy them....just because I most probably haven’t had them for 30 years.”

The ways in which practices can be carried out can then potentially be changed through small adaptations, negotiations improvisations and experiments (Halkier, 2010) with different routines or food items. In particular, changes in family trajectories that occur during the life course of individuals, such as the birth of a new child (Lamine, 2008) or the widening of social networks (Southerton, 2002), have been associated with changes in food practices. With such events, the resources and constraints that structure the household’s food patterns are then forced to change (Plessz et al., 2014). Participant four made changes to the way she cooked as a result of moving in with a new partner and participant three altered her food purchasing due to the growth of her children.

P4: “because Garza likes different things from me, we try and cater for both of us...he likes meat so...I might have had more vegetarian stuff had I not been with him.”

P3: “when the children were younger, I just used to always rely on Tesco and do a big shop and it used to be twice a week because I was at home and I was having to provide lunches for them...well (child A) is gone and (child B) is at college the whole time so he just buys sandwiches then...so you know, that’s how my patterns have sort of changed. And....this sounds awful but when the children are younger I used to get much more of that organic range but then I found....well that was fine as I was using stuff quickly...so I found that it goes off quicker than the other range so I sort of...you know, so it wasn’t worth it, well I was doing it twice a week and using more stuff. But now as I only do it once a week it doesn’t really last 7 days...or whatever...”
“I don’t buy as many snacks and things like that as the children are older now.”

These trajectories of practices are at the same time interdependent within larger historical and institutional dynamics, such as technological and product innovations, regulatory interventions, and shifts in media discourses (Shove, 2003). For example, ways of shopping are adapted to the supply of processed foods in supermarkets and to advice on television programs and the internet (Halkier, 2010). Participant two details a change in her food purchasing due to the availability of new types of food.

P2: “Actually… I would say that when we were younger we used to have very traditional foods, that’s what my mother would cook…..now more modern styles of cooking have become available and foods from different cultures and cuisines. When I was younger and when the children were younger there was never the same choice in the supermarket. Now you can buy Chinese style products etc….when I was younger my mother would never have cooked a stir-fry for example…and that’s something I cook often.”

This type of change has an impact on her food purchasing, dictating the products that are selected and the style and type of cooking that she carried out as part of her weekly set of meals.

Implications for sustainability

The construction of food purchasing and its associated practices have certain implications for sustainability. Transcripts revealed that some practitioners lacked the availability of motivational knowledge needed to act sustainably, such as understanding how to prevent waste, or how to reduce food miles. This could be due to the lost opportunities for knowledge transfer from family member or past experiences. On the other hand, practitioners often possessed knowledge surrounding sustainability, yet their actions and words rarely reflect this. For example, image of ‘sustainable food’, including words such as ‘organic’ and ‘sustainable’ were largely unused by the majority of respondents, unless prompted by the interviewer.

P5: Yeah….I’d like to say that I go for everything Fair Trade and stuff but, to tell you the truth… I don’t. If I see Fair Trade bananas… I’ll buy them over and above something that isn’t Fair Trade but I don’t pick packets up and read them to see if they are Fair Trade like I probably should….but I just don’t.
In this case, educated people are aware of the concept but are simply inconsiderate to it in their everyday shopping practices, as it is only when established knowledge is repeatedly routinised that these sustainable practices can be carried out (Shove et al., 2012).

*P1:* “I don’t tend to shop for things that are in season, I just get whatever I want for the meals that I’m making”

Another issue is that opportunities for association and reclassification of sustainable images are often restricted by existing patterns and distributions of meanings (Shove et al., 2012). For example, the images of high quality surrounding fresh produce prevent those of less pristine organic vegetables from being purchased. Participant five is very sceptical about certain products such as margarine, as he believes that its claims about being healthier than butter are not true. Moreover, despite making a beeline for the top quality range of products, he also holds this attitude with organic products. He believes that they are no better in quality than non-organic foods and are not worth the extra cost.

The provision of time and the emphasis on ‘convenience’ is an image that also constructs unsustainable shopping. Convenience is a hugely influential factor that stems from the hectic life of today’s consumers, which means mundane practices such as food shopping are often rushed and with little consideration for their sustainable nature. The need for convenience makes purchasing at the supermarket, rather than from a local producer, a key aspect of this practice, due to the ease of access and ability to purchase all goods under the same roof.

*P6:* “Well it’s just more convenient, I wouldn’t shop at a greengrocers, even though I might save more money, as there isn’t very much choice”

*P5:* “I’ve gone to the Thriplow shop just to be supportive, Vanessa works in Thriplow and she knows the people who take classes….but I went in there to get ham and it wasn’t very nice ham…and I wanted to get something else and they didn’t have it. But saying that so many people give lip service. We sometimes go to Leaches butchers as few times, but again it’s all about the ease of doing it. We tend to go to the supermarket more…because I can tell you where everything is laid out”

Related to this is the perceived need to have access to a wide variety of products. Consumers are used to being selective when choosing food, which can be considered a luxury in today’s shopping practice. With so much choice and supermarkets stocking
products from around the world, consumers can decide to avoid food produced in this country, which is inevitably a form of waste.

P1: “in terms of choice... I like to have a large choice... so I like to be able to choose from the basics range and home brand range... all sorts of branded ranges, where as if you were to go to a local independent place there is very limited choice...and I like to have a lot of choice as to what I buy.”

4.3. Contribution of supermarkets to the practice of sustainable food purchasing

4.3.1. Tesco store analysis

The store analysis demonstrated that the Tesco supermarket is a large food store that stocks a wide variety of products. It has a huge variety of choice including: fresh, frozen and canned products, as well as ready-meals and pre-prepared foods, all available in different price brackets. Tesco stores are located all over the country and are open 24hrs a day allowing consumers to purchase food wherever and whenever.

Tesco stores provide the ‘stuff’, and the ‘images’ elements of food purchasing practices (See table 4). The material and physical elements include: supermarket infrastructure, which is the store itself, the provision of parking, other services such as petrol filling stations, click and collect services, car washing services and scan and go machines in-store. Other elements categorised as ‘stuff’ include the provision of food availability and in-store offers. These features allow consumers to complete all their food shopping in one place, taking advantage of other services at the same time. Elements such as the ‘scan and go’ machines also enhance the ease of the shopping experience.

Additionally, the arena of the supermarket is laid out so that the fashioning of a particular route by the shopper is inevitable. This layout entails physical progression throughout the entire store ensuring the shopper routinely passes all products, giving them maximum purchasing opportunity.
Table 4: Elements provided by the Tesco supermarket

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Specific elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Stuff    | • Availability and choice of food products  
           • Provision of low cost food  
           • Provision of self-scanning machines  
           • Accessibility of store  
           • Abundant parking  
           • Petrol stations  
           • Tesco Loyalty Card  
           • Provision of in-store offers  
           • Car washing services |
| Images   | • Advertisement  
           • Store ambiance  
           • Store imagery |
| Skills   | • N/A |

Source: own construction from data collection

Mental images and meanings include in-store advertisement, store ambiance and store imagery. Advertisements are placed at a convenient location for customers to see and are displayed in bright colours to attract attention. Such imagery portrays products in a certain light, encouraging consumers to purchase them. There are also displays positioned throughout the store stating ‘the more you shop, the more you save’. This imagery provides a constant reminder to the customer to keep spending money (see fig. 5). Strategically placed at the front of the store there is also a special section devoted to the latest offers. Being the first thing that customers see when they enter the store, it draws them in and directs their attention to the products (See fig. 6). Finally, this analysis revealed that elements categorised as ‘skills’ were not provided by the supermarket.
Figure 5: ‘Images’—Store messages

Source: own photography—Tesco supermarket, Royston, Photographed: 10/06/14

Figure 6: ‘Images’—Product advertisement

Figure 7: ‘Stuff’—Store infrastructure

Source: own photography—Tesco supermarket, Royston, Photographed: 10/06/14
**Product analysis**

Specific product analysis demonstrated the ease of access to and the availability of certain items within the store (see table 5). Items analysed included: bananas, carrots, instant coffee, pasta, ready meals and frozen meat.

All bananas and carrots available in Tesco were credited by the Nurture scheme and therefore claim to be grown in an ‘environmentally responsible way’. This information could be found on the back of the packaging. Two out of the six types of bananas were organic and one out of the six types were Fair-trade. For carrots, one variety was Organic and one was specifically labelled as ‘British’. Dry ingredients, including coffee and pasta were also analysed. Instant coffee included nine out of fourteen varieties with sustainability references, including those that were Fair Trade, Organic, accredited by the Rainforest Alliance or available in refill packaging. All seven pasta varieties can be classed as unsustainable, due to non-recyclable packaging and high food miles.

In contrast to this, the majority of Tesco frozen food is comprised of unsustainable convenience products, including vegetables, meats and deserts. For example, both ready meals and frozen meat were considered unsustainable, due to unrecyclable packaging and intensive production methods. Ready meals were also located at the front of the store, near the checkouts, enabling easy and quick purchase. This reflects the convenient nature of the food. Finally, frozen ready meals were priced at an average of £1 each. This pricing supports the practice of unsustainable shopping by providing a cheap, yet intensively produced product for consumers.
Table 5: Availability of sustainable products in the Tesco supermarket

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>No. of ‘sustainable’ products</th>
<th>Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Ready meals | 0/10                          | • 10 had non-recyclable packaging  
• 10 had unsustainably sourced ingredients  
• 10 had intensive manufacturing processes |
| Frozen meat | 0/8                           | • 8 had non-recyclable packaging  
• 8 had unsustainably sourced ingredients  
• 8 had intensive manufacturing processes |
| Pasta       | 0/7                           | • 7 had non-recyclable packaging  
• 7 had intensive manufacturing processes  
• 7 had high food miles |
| Bananas     | 6/6                           | • 6 were accredited by Nurture scheme  
• 2 were organic  
• 1 had Fair-trade  
• 6 had high food miles |
| Carrots     | 4/4                           | • 4 were accredited by Nurture scheme  
• 1 was Organic |
| Coffee      | 9/14                          | • 8 had Refill packets  
• 3 were Zero waste Landfill accredited  
• 3 were Supporting British Farmers  
• 9 had Rainforest Alliance status  
• 2 had ‘Coffee Made Happy’ status  
• 1 had ‘Good for Life’ status  
• 4 were Fair-trade  
• 1 was Organic |

Source: own data collection—Tesco supermarket, Royston, 10/06/14
Specific product analysis demonstrated that many of the fresh fruits and vegetables, such as bananas and carrots, are somewhat sustainable, in that they are credited by the Tesco Nurture scheme (see table 5). This scheme details how products are grown in environmentally considerate ways (Tesco, 2014). Despite this accreditation however, much of the produce has still been sourced from foreign countries, incurring significant food miles.

Much of the dry or frozen food products such as crisps, ready meals and frozen meats, which make up a large percentage of the store, can also be classed as unsustainable due to packaging, origin and intensive manufacturing processes. They are also available at significantly low prices, encouraging customers to purchase them, instead of making meals from scratch using fresh local produce (see fig. 8).

**Figure 8: ‘Stuff’—availability of ready meals**

![Image of ready meals in a supermarket fridge]

Source: own photography—Tesco supermarket, Royston, Photographed: 10/06/14

### 4.3.2. Website analysis

The Tesco online grocery website analysis demonstrated that the supermarket website contributes to the ‘stuff’ and ‘images’ elements of the shopping practice. The website itself provides a retail space for customers to search and purchase a huge selection of products, in varying varieties via the Internet. Customers can systematically look for items, either by searching through product lists or by typing in the name of an item in the product search bar. Customers can then select a delivery slot from a list of times and dates to suit them. Other
features of the website include saved shopping lists, product recommendations, meal planners and recipe ideas. These features facilitate the customer shopping experience by making it easy and flexible. The images provided by the website include brightly coloured photographs and symbols displayed in the form of offers and adverts (see fig. 9). These are present throughout the website and act as constant reminder for customers of how they can save money and purchase increasing amounts of food.

The website analysis also revealed ways in which the online space is specifically contributing to the sustainable practice of food purchasing. In particular, findings related to references of sustainability and product information. Firstly, being dominated by images and text relating to sales maximisation, the website lacks references to sustainability. When accessing the website, the customer is immediately faced with the current offers and pricing information (see fig. 9).

**Figure 9: Tesco online grocery store homepage**

![Product advertisement](Image)

As part of Tesco’s online grocery page there is also a small section entitled ‘season’s best’, informing customers of the products that are readily available in the UK at this time of year. Using local produce is a key aspect of consumption reduction (Winter, 2003). However, the emphasis here is on quality and freshness, rather than the reduction of food miles or supporting local farmers, and access to this section is relatively unobvious. Navigation involves first clicking the ‘Fresh food’ link on the homepage and then scrolling right to the bottom of the page where the ‘seasons best’ link is located (see fig. 10).

**Figure 10: Tesco’s ‘Seasons Best’**

![Image of Tesco's 'Seasons Best']()

The lack of sustainability references can also be seen through the provision of product details, which are available to customers when selecting items. For example, for a ‘Tesco Large Whole Chicken Roaster’ (see Fig. 11) information provided includes: price, nutrition, cooking instructions and storage advice. This information is useful in the delivery of knowledge to the consumer, however there is no information surrounding other aspects such as produce welfare, food miles or carbon-footprint. This is the case for the majority of dry, frozen and meat products thought the Tesco website.

Figure 11: Product information for Tesco Large Whole Chicken Roaster

Implications for sustainability

The images attached to food purchasing are highly associated with the physical materials and infrastructure provided by the supermarket, throughout the store and the Tesco website. The products on offer, the store opening hours and other services provided by supermarkets also prompt images surrounding availability and choice. By providing consumers with the vast selection of imported products all year round, they are routinised into purchasing out of seasonal produce. The supermarket store and website layouts also have implications for sustainability. The shop layout encourages shoppers to pass all items so as to maximise purchasing opportunities and the ease of access and availability of sustainable products are limited. The online store is also dominated by images and themes, again relating to over consumption. In this way we can conclude that the supermarket dictates the trajectories that shape and determine the way in which food purchasing practices are carried out, namely in an unsustainable ways.
5. Intervention and recommendations

Using findings from the analysis, this research can attempt to ask whether current purchasing practices be changed to inform more sustainable food purchasing.

As it stands, the role of policy intervention is generally untouched by developments in social theory, yet practice-orientated policy can provide some useful insights to behaviour change (Shove et al., 2012). Current efforts to promote pro-environmental behaviour intervene from the outside, placing consumers as the target of government advice and encouragement. However, by focusing on the historically and culturally specific trajectories, the combinations of meanings, materials and competence and the arrangement of food purchasing in relation to other practices, practice theory can offer a more holistic approach to changing the way people shop (Shove et al., 2012).

There are three main ways to target intervention through social practice theory, highlighted by Spurling et al., (2013) (see table 6). Firstly, practices can be re-crafted. This could involve reducing resource intensity of food purchasing habits by changing the components or elements that make up the unsustainable practice such as, products with high food miles. Secondly, practices can be substituted. Replacing less sustainable practices with more sustainable alternatives and identifying how they can fulfil a similar purpose is a key form of intervention. Lastly, intervention can change how practices interlock. As seen from the data collection, social practices are connected to each other by their overlapping elements; for example, food purchasing is linked to the practice of cooking, eating and mobility. Harnessing the complex interaction between the practices can therefore propagate change throughout the complete web of practices (Spurling et al., 2013).
Table 6: Targets for sustainable food purchasing and related practices, associated intervention and actors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Actors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Re-craft practices | Change the diet of consumers | • Fashionable chefs  
• High profile political supporters  
• The media |
| | Changing the layout of supermarkets | • Supermarket owners  
• Governments |
| Substitute practices | Substitute supermarket shopping for local purchasing | • Governments  
• Local authorities  
• Household members |
| Change how practices inter-lock | Rearranging the sequence of food purchasing | • Media  
• Household members |
| | Urbanise development | • Governments  
• Local authorities |
| | Encourage internet grocery shopping | • Supermarket owners |

Source: Own construction based on targets from Spurling et al., 2013

Changing the diets of consumers

Rather than focusing on the consumer choice of products, policy intervention could aim to change consumer diets for more healthy sustainable cuisines. This would then indirectly affect the practice of food purchasing. To do this, multiple elements of the practice need to be addressed simultaneously, with the use of multiple actors, such as fashionable chefs, high profile political supporters and the media for rapid diffusion. For the materials and meanings that surround the practice, chefs could make use of local seasonable products, emphasising the value of their taste and quality. Such images are often associated with food purchasing so are more likely to be accepted among consumers. To then address the skill involved, such as ones knowledge of products or how to cook, cookery courses could be provided by local councils or other institution.
Shifting tastes and changing cultural conventions can also have an indirect influence on the practice of food purchasing. For example, changing ideas of what is 'normal' to have for an evening meal could also be more useful than focusing on the consumer choice of products. For example, with the use of marketing and social media, interventions could encourage households to consume a certain number of meat-free dishes per week, inevitably reducing the carbon footprint of one’s diet and the food that they purchase. This type of initiative has been seen effective through the Meat Free Mondays campaign, which is supported by the Chefs such as Jamie Oliver (Meet Free Monday, 2012).

Changing the layout of supermarkets

It is evident from this research that the way in which retailers’ market themselves and the food that they put on their shelves informs how consumers purchase and perceive food. Therefore, we need to introduce new social arrangements surrounding food purchasing by providing the moral and material infrastructure around which they might develop (Jackson et al., 2006). Specifically, configurations of infrastructure can inhibit the performance of a practice in a certain way (Foulds et al., 2012), inducing the overconsumption of food. For example, in the supermarket analysis it can be seen that resource intensive products such as ready-meals are placed near the entrance of Tesco and products on special offer are located on the end of aisles. This enables the easy access of items for consumers and encourages overconsumption. Furthermore, sustainable versions of products, such as fair-trade coffee, are often located in among other less sustainable products, making them difficult to access.

Considering this, rearranging the setting of a supermarket in a certain way can give consumers scope for changing their practice of food purchasing. This could include repositioning ‘sustainable’ products to an easy to reach location or grouping them together at the end of the isles. Many participants in this research stated that it was time consuming to read packaging or scan through products for sustainable versions. Therefore, rearranging supermarkets in this way would not only improve supermarket infrastructure but would also tap into the images of convenience that surround shopping. Supermarket owners and governments will be required to instigate this type of initiative.

Finally, to further the promotion of sustainable shopping within supermarkets, in store imagery that leads to over consumption could be targeted. For example, removing in store and online advertising that relates to bulk buying and instead encourage images of local and seasonal produce. These types of messages, which often go un-noticed by customers, could then be relocated to the homepage of Tesco’s online store.
**Substitution of supermarket shopping for local purchasing**

Producing and consuming local produce is a key way to enhance sustainable consumption (Seyfang, 2007). By substituting supermarkets for this type of practice it will encourage a modal shift in the way we currently shop. Practices compete to recruit practitioners (Spurling et al., 2013); therefore to do this it is crucial to make the preferred practice of local purchasing more competitive than supermarket shopping. Policies could include increased charges on out of season produce and cultural interventions that associate the purchase of ready-meals and processed foods with ill-health.

Substituting supermarket shopping might also involve mapping out the range of elements currently available and identifying which particular variants of local shopping are already supported. For example, in supermarkets, British meat and vegetables are already being sold to some extent. Therefore, emphasis needs to be on the increased benefits that consumers can obtain from buying the same food from a local producer, such as putting money back into their own local economy.

Finally, the concept of community practices is well established in the fields of education and management (Royston, 2011) and could be used to establish local food purchasing. Communities can be sites for development, negotiation and distribution of values, including concepts of the ‘good life’ and understandings of appropriate practices. The learning of new values occurs not through direct teaching, but through interaction and experiences (Royston, 2011). Participating in shared practices, such as growing local produce or learning how to make and eat meals from scratch as a community, can therefore facilitate the localisation of food. To enable this type of initiative governments could make land available for community food growing.

**Urbanisation of development**

All interviewees, excluding the online shopper, travelled to the supermarket by car, due to the location of the supermarket. This supports evidence that “the shifting culture of grocery shopping is inseparable from shifting patterns of personal mobility, with out of town supermarkets co-evolving with patterns of personal car mobility and the broader restructuring of the temporary rhythms of daily life.” (Watson, 2012, p.491). Intervening in the wider systems of practice, which produce the need for mobility, might allow the change in patterns of the car use (Urry, 2007). For example, policy that encourages urban living would reconfigure the spatial arrangements of our everyday practices and change how shopping
interlocks with mobility. Distances to and from supermarkets would be reduced, therefore reducing the need for a car.

**Encourage Internet grocery shopping**

Many respondents in this study mentioned that they either currently use online ordering or have done in the past. Internet shopping, which involves the movement of goods from producer to retailer and then to the consumer represents a shift in the way households are provisioned with food (Spurling et al., 2013). Using policy to encourage this type of shopping could cause a change in how food-retailing practices interlock with transport. Despite unknown quantities of petrol use, cutting out the practice of travelling to the supermarket by individual consumers may have some significant fuel saving advantages (Spurling et al., 2013).

**Rearranging the sequence of food purchasing**

As demonstrated by interviews and observations, the purchasing of food will require a certain set of sequences: planning what meals to make and what food to buy, driving to the supermarket, shopping at Tesco, unpacking and storing purchased food. Extending, consolidating or re-ordering such sequences of inter-linked practices offers an “untapped opportunity for intervention” (Spurling et al., 2013, p.24). For example, participants mentioned that driving to the supermarket could be combined with other activities in order to reduce fuel consumption, such as shopping on the way home from work or completing a shop on a full stomach so as to curb impulse purchasing. These types of interventions can be applied through the media or via sustainable shopping campaigns.
6. Conclusions

Main Findings

Findings in this research conclude that food purchasing as a practice is socially constructed by a combination of three elements: physical materials and infrastructure (such as the supermarket and the provision of food), meanings and images (such as perceptions of choice and quality) and the understandings and know-how (such as knowledge of food product and methods of cooking). It has also demonstrated that food purchasing is coordinated with many other practices including: cooking, eating, leisure and work and that they are inter-linked by the overlap of different elements.

More specifically, it has highlighted that practices such as food purchasing are often configured by subtle but cumulative differences in the arrangement of elements such as technologies, the availability of products and how their carriers integrate these, all of whom take their routine to be the normal thing to do. In other words, food purchasing can emerge and evolve through minor adjustments made on a personal level but also made possible by the circulation of new materials, meanings and forms of competence in the wider landscape (Shove et al., 2012). Finally, it has demonstrated that supermarkets are highly influential in the practice of unsustainable food purchasing, through the availability of non-locally sourced products, images surrounding overconsumption and the inaccessibility of sustainable goods within the store.

Using insights from its findings and the practice perspective, this research has then been able suggest some suitable interventions for sustainable food purchasing. Much of this will involve trying to alter the elements of the practice through different levels of the food system, using a combination of government figureheads, local authorities and supermarket owners. Policy suggestions included changing consumer diets by the re-crafting of the elements that make up the practice of eating. This will then have an influence on what types of foods are purchased. Substituting supermarket shopping for the practice of purchasing from local producers would also reduce food miles and support local economies. Using policies that change how practices interlock will also demonstrate how food-purchasing links to wider practices such as mobility. Finally, recommendations also include the rearranging of material infrastructure to encourage more sustainable variants of a practice, such as changing the layout of supermarkets to ways that encourage more sustainable forms of food purchasing.
Potential limitations

This study demonstrates the potential that social practice theory has, both in explaining how our daily lives surrounding food take shape and how it can contribute to the literature of food purchasing policy. It is key however, to consider the challenges that come with using practice theory. In light of the research design, analysing a practice as the main entity can only be achieved indirectly through people’s performances and related artefacts, as it is often difficult to study a practice over a long period of time. This also relates to the fact that a practice is continuously changing; therefore any overview, such as the one provided in this research, is simply a snapshot (Reckwitz, 2002). Moreover, the often mundane and common understandings that exist between practitioners are difficult to access by a researcher. Topics discussed in interviews are often of a personal nature, creating issues such as the withholding of information from researchers to avoid embarrassment or shame. Similar issues may have occurred during observations, with participants acting in an unrepresentative way, so as to hide actions from the observer. These factors therefore place limits on the in-depth nature that practice theory can achieve. Finally, implications for policy are also relevant. Considering the time it takes for major shifts to occur in society, the time scale involved in changing a practice policy could be large and as it stands, methods for assessing the impact that policy might have on practices are often lacking (Spurling et al., 2013).

Future developments

To address some of these issues and develop this study further, future research could aim to provide more than just a snapshot of food purchasing practices. Data collection could take the form of a diary analysis, with participants recording their shopping routine over an extended period of time. This could be taken even further by the researcher accompanying the participant on multiple shopping trips, so as to validate recorded actions even further.

Despite these downfalls, the practice-based approach offers a unique way of shifting the responsibility of change from the individual, and instead focuses on everyday practices as the unit of analysis. In this way it simultaneously reveals the urgent need for radical change in societal structures and in the dominant unsustainable regimes that surround our food system.
7. References


Seyfang, G. et al., 2010. Energy and communities in transition – towards a new research agenda on agency and civil society in sustainability transitions, Norwich.


Spurling, N. et al., 2013. *Interventions in practice: re-framing policy approaches to consumer behaviour*. Sustainable Practices Research Group Report,


8. Appendix

A. Participant recruitment

Table 1: Selected participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Undertakes a weekly shop</th>
<th>Shops at Tesco</th>
<th>Shops online</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Household size</th>
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----------  Chosen participant

----------  Backup participant
B. Example transcript exert

Participant 1: Interview

Interviewer: Can you tell me about your general food related consumption activities…eg when and where you go shopping?
Participant: “I go shopping once a week, although sometime I go more often…. depends on how quickly I get through food. Generally tends to be a pattern of about once a week…topped up with local shops in between”
Interviewer: “What types of shops do go to in between then?”
Participant: “I go to Roy’s which is just a small local supermarket…just for general things like milk and bread.
Interviewer: “Why don’t you just do all your shopping there if its close?”
Participant: “Well I prefer shopping at a bigger store as there’s more and Roys might be expensive for something’s.”
Interviewer: Why do you choose Tesco?
Participant: “Mainly for the online shopping…for the deals that they offer…such as a discount on a fist time shop…that’s why I chose them when I first started shopping online….and because its easy.”
Interviewer: Can you describe your short-term history…last week for example can you go through your shop and describe your routine…..?”
Participant: “I think about what meals I want to make and then make a plan…I tend to buy for a week at a time. I buy those ingredients and then some other stuff so I can make up other meals as I go along. I always have standard food items that ill get…like milk, bread, butter, sugar…things like that….then some specific meal related items. So ill tend to have a list and keep it in the same budget each week”
“The last shop I did was at TESCO online and it was free delivery as well….and that was convenient for me to get it delivered at the times when I’m around….as I’m not often around during the day, so its convenient to get it delivered in the evening, rather than to have to have to go to a supermarket. So that was my last shop.”
Interviewer: “Does that routine tend to vary at all each week?”
Participant: “Erm….no not really I tend to shop in the same way each week really. Well it depends if I’m going away or….maybe having friends over then I might do something differently…..but its generally the same routine every week.”
Interviewer: “Ok….so why do you think you shop in that way?”
Participant: “Well… it’s just convenient for me, that’s why I choose to do my shopping online as I can do it at home and…you know…get it delivered at a convenient time. Since I have come to uni I have basically always shopped like that but it has changed a bit since living with my girlfriend.”
Interviewer: “So can you describe the long-term history of your shopping practices then?….Have you always shopped in that way?”
Participant: “Its varied…”
Interviewer: Well you’re a student ect, how did it vary before that, then once you became a student?
Participant: “Well before I was a student I didn’t do any shopping for myself….my parents just chose the food I ate and I didn’t have much choice in it. But…you know, when I came to uni, I had to start cooking and shopping on my own. Back then I think I would shop for simple ingredients….as I wasn’t really very experienced…..and didn’t like many things. That was probably as my parents just used to give me stuff like pizza and pasta so I was never introduced to much fresh food… and they never really got me into cooking.”
Interviewer: “Do you have any other influences from your family/parents?
Participant: Initially I’m more likely to shop at places where my parent shop and where I’ve had food brought from before…because I’m familiar with that…I’m familiar with that brand, so I trust that…and also when I go shopping its a lot easier to look for items that I’ve had before, rather than having to scan through a brand new selection and pick something that I think I’ll like….So its nice not to have the uncertainty as to whether or not anything is good as I’ve tried it before in the past”

Interviewer: “Have there been any trends in your shopping…for example do you buy anything different now to when you started shopping for yourself?”
Participant: “Well yes, when I started out because, as I say….I wasn’t very experienced….It was more ready-meals that I used to buy…and very quick and easy, convenient things….simply because I wasn’t that experienced at cooking then….so just wanted something that I could cook quickly. But as I got more into it and had more time I started buying more raw ingredients….now I completely cook all my meals from scratch….everything I buy now is raw ingredients. I don’t get any ready meals, so I say yeah there’s been a definite evolution in what I buy over the last few years.”…..”Oh also I didn’t have very good cooking equipment back then as I lived in uni accommodation so that definitely made a different to my cooking. it limited what I could buy as we didn’t really have proper ovens. Then even in second year we had a house but a small kitchen. Now I have a really nice kitchen with all the appliances I need, so can cook pretty much anything…and I have more space to store things for cooking from scratch like my spice rack etc.”

Interviewer: “Why do you choose to cook and shop in that way now?”
Participant: “Well…I just think its more healthy really, and I like to know what goes into my food…I also enjoy cooking a lot now so I enjoy making everything from scratch. Sometimes I like….I make up new meals and I like experimenting with new ingredients.”

Interviewer: “Have there been any other things that have influenced your purchasing habits?”
Participant: “Well in my first year of uni, I used to shop on my own and walk to a small Tesco so I didn’t buy very much….then I lived with friends and my girlfriend so I tended to shop with her and I started shopping online as it was more convenient….and also made more sense economically to share the delivery cost. I think she has influenced me as she was used to buying and cooking a lot as she did that with her family….so we shopped together and I bought more varied stuff…..like vegetables and raw ingredients. I think I began to enjoy cooking more and so became a bit more aware of what I was buying….my cooking skills improved a lot and I learnt more about different ingredients.”

Interviewer: “Can you tell me how does your shopping routine fit into your other weekly routines…such as work and leisure?”
Participant: “I tend to try and fit it around work…. because if can obviously take a fair amount of time…so I’ll do the online shop before I start work…so it takes up some of my leisure time.”

Interviewer: “Is that the same every week?”
Participant: “Well it might change for example if I’m going to visit my parent at the weekend for example, or I’m going on holiday or something….then I might not do a weekly shop the week before as I don’t want food left in the flat whilst I’m gone. Also if I’m really prepared then I might try and arrange a delivery whilst I’m away for when I get back…that’s the great thing about being able to order on the Internet.”