

The Marketing of Plant-Based Protein

**The Beyond Meat Case: Making food alternatives appealing to
multiple groups of consumers**

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Abstract

This paper aims to describe and discuss how marketing promotes plant-based proteins. Based on the frameworks of the marketing studies within green marketing and marketing devices (Callon et al., 2007; Cochoy, 2008; Peattie, 2001; Ottman et al., 2006; Dubuisson-Quellier, 2007), this paper illustrates how Beyond Meat are using marketing devices – digital media, packaging, and stores to make plant-based protein as an alternative that qualifies for multiple consumer groups through “convenientising” their products to meat-based products. The result is a range of product qualities, packaging, and consumption practices that assimilate to existing methods of conventional products – cooking and eating and the convenience of shopping. Beyond Meat does not solely emphasize as an alternative to meat but pushes its emphasis on traditional food products - i.e., burgers, hot dogs, and pizza. Their approach aims not only at niched groups like vegan consumers but various other consumer groups and appeals to a broader market.

Keywords: Plant-based proteins, animal-based protein, marketing devices, store, retail, McDonald, packaging, social media, digital media, influencers, fast-food, convenient, alternative.

1. Introduction

How can we change the practice of consuming meat-based protein that has existed for centuries? For smaller companies, changing social norms can be out of their capacity. However, assimilating to the existing social norms and providing better cooking and storing values have been an approach by a few newly established plant-based protein brands. Newly established companies such as Beyond Meat are among those new enterprises working to accelerate plant-based protein. These companies are not focusing on vegan or vegetarian consumers but on omnivores and aim to replicate the taste, smell, and visual elements of meat and consumption similarities (The Economist, 2019). Plant-based diets are increasing in many nations as a part of the increasing population of vegan or vegetarian lifestyles. Multiple groups of non-meat consumers chose this diet for various reasons, i.e. ethics, altruistic values, and health (Janssen, Busch, Rödiger & Hamm, 2016).

Non-meat diets can have a significant effect in terms of sustainability since plant-based food is proven to produce less waste and damage to our environment than animal-based food. This indicates that as these new plant-based brands gradually replace animal-based products at a larger scale, beyond smaller and niched consumer groups, there can be a more meaningful change to our impact on the environment regarding our food consumption and production (Jalava et al., 2014). In multiple cases, vegan brands position themselves as a radical alternative in terms of product, production, and consumption and position themselves within stances that can be political – i.e., ethics, environment, sustainability, and animal cruelty. With this type of positioning, it can be efficient to target niche groups – i.e., vegans or vegetarians – but it can be harder to target other groups of consumers (Andersen et al., 2013).

The growing number of plant-based alternatives in the dairy market has adopted assimilation strategies to make their products similar to traditional animal-based milk through packaging and marketing. Rather than marketing new consumption modes and changing social norms and consumption practices, these existing alternatives are assimilating as a source of nutrition, just like the nutrition from animal-based products. Further, rather than encouraging entirely new cooking, storing, and eating modes, these alternatives tend to assimilate existing cooking, storing, and eating practices. For these alternatives, the objective is to often reach a broad consumer population beyond a niched group (Fuentes & Fuentes, 2017).

Introducing a plant-based protein to a consumer culture predominantly dominated by meat eaters can take time and effort. Previous studies concluded that marketing these alternatives includes many complex aspects – e.g., consumers' expectations of the product and willingness to repeat the consumption (Hoek et al., 2011; Elzerman, Boekel & Luning, 2013). These studies indicate that a novel product must be attractive enough to trigger an initial consumption trial, but to requalify and repeat the consumption frequently can be challenging. Previous studies argued that plant-based alternatives should approach “differentiation” to separate the alternatives from conventional products to bring novelty and appeal to the mass market. In contrast, other previous studies argue that the similarities to conventional products will include the main factors to construct a mass market for alternative products (Hoek et al., 2011; Wansink et al., 2005).

It is of interest for marketing practitioners and researchers to examine the marketing practices of plant-based trends in the market. Observing how newly established companies use

marketing approaches to make plant-based proteins similar or different from meat-based proteins can contribute insights to marketing practitioners or researchers within the field. The purpose of this research is an ethnographic approach to observe, describe, conceptualize, and discuss how the current marketing practices of contemporary plant-based protein brands – specifically Beyond Meat – use marketing devices to promote plant-based protein products to a broader market beyond niched consumers.

We approach this research by framing concepts from previous literature related to market devices (Callon et al., 2007; Cochoy, 2008), and based on our ethnographic findings, we intend to conduct a discussion and examine how plant-based proteins are approaching the market beyond niched groups, i.e., vegan or vegetarians. Our research is explored by analyzing a specific case; Beyond Meat is an American company that researches, manufactures, and promotes plant-based proteins as semi-processed products – i.e., burger paddy and hot dog – and emphasizes product qualities are similar to conventional fast-food products. Our analysis examines the marketing devices of digital media, packaging, and stores. The analysis will present Beyond Meat’s approach to how its products capture the interest and consumption of broader consumer groups. The analysis will critically discuss the framework with the findings and show that plant-based proteins can be presented as an appealing product to a broader market but remain favorable to vegan consumers.

Based on the findings and the analysis, this research offers two contributions to marketing practitioners and researchers. First, this paper describes and explains how plant-based protein can be promoted to a broader market, beyond niched groups, without solely emphasizing “green values,” i.e., environment, corporate social responsibility, animal cruelty, and sustainability. The green values serve as fundamental elements of added value, among others, to the product. There is a strong emphasis on convenience values, which tend to be focused on creating alternatives that can be consumed similarly to meat-based products and are closely linked to fast-food products. Beyond Meat’s approach displays how the company created an alternative that is as convenient in consumption, similar to meat-based products, and simultaneously offers a healthier option within the same price range, which in turn enables the company to capture a larger group of consumers beyond vegans and vegetarians.

Second, this paper contributes to the field of green marketing by showing the unique approach of Beyond Meat, putting an alternative product inside the menu of McDonald’s – a fast-food chain that makes Beyond Meat’s product accessible to a large consumer base. What this paper will show below is similar to the marketing of alternatives stated in previous literature. However, the unique approach of collaborating with relevant partners, McDonald’s, serves to proliferate the alternative values in the context of reaching out to a broader market. Thus, this indicates that plant-based products can access a broader market by cooperating with relevant partners beyond conventional grocery retailers, which can significantly impact the outcome. Whether deemed as sustainable or unsustainable from political viewpoints is up to further research and discussion in future papers.

Our research conclusion and contributions are derived from the findings, method, and selected theoretical framework presented below. Along the journey of this research, we always aim to examine, describe and critically discuss with the guidance of two questions: First, in what ways are the products of Beyond Meat distinguished from conventional meat products? Second, what aspects are Beyond Meat’s products considered comparable or similar to

conventional meat? Together with the selected theoretical framework, this has facilitated us to examine, describe and discuss our research paper effectively.

2. Theoretical Framework

To achieve a literature framework within the study's context, the conceptual frameworks are constructed from previous marketing literature – *Market Devices* (Callon et al., 2007; Cochoy, 2008) and *Consumer Value* (Peattie, 2001; Napoli et al., 2020; Ottman et al., 2006). Studies within this field, closely related to green marketing, emphasize the knowledge and understanding of multiple ways in which marketing can shape consumer behavior and enact brands through various marketing practices to promote a product. This paper aims to focus on previous literature on market devices and how various devices are utilized in marketing practices to qualify alternative products (Callon et al., 2007; Cochoy, 2011), and based on this frame, we analyze the marketing of plant-based protein in the context of selected marketing devices - digital media, packaging and stores and how these marketing devices promote plant-based proteins to communicate consumer value – price, health and convenience (Ottman et al., 2006).

Marketing practices intend to signal some form of relevant or relative values of a product, service, or issue to the targeted audience. As mentioned before, this paper analyzes the marketing practices of contemporary brands of plant-based protein marketing practices by exploring what marketing devices are used by Beyond Meat to promote plant-based protein. Marketing is to enact the consumers and create interest for consumption (Callon et al., 2007). The term “Device” is used to emphasize the agency, whether a physical object or non-physical object, to carry on a purpose to allow the user to act or do another activity. Marketing devices are not passive objects but work as a stimulus to incentivize action - shopping carts and displays in retail are, among other devices, examples of how devices can influence consumer behavior (Callon et al., 2007; Cochoy, 2011). There is an emphasis on the qualification of alternative products by involving multiple actors and devices, complex processes that define, test, alter, commercialize and requalify the product and involve multiple actors - advertising, consumers, sales, and engineers (Ariztia, 2013; Dubuisson-Quellier, 2010). Additionally, this qualification process can involve multiple devices packaging, brands, retail displays, website, and digital- and conventional media (Cochoy, 2010, 2014, 2004).

As a marketing device, the packaging is an agency of information with both textual- and visual information that mainly aims to communicate the nutritional value, content, origin, quality, and even taste to the consumers (Cochoy, 2004). The visuality of the product (e.g., material, shape, and size) is not only the sole agency in the context of shopping, but it includes other agencies, and each can facilitate or disregard the other depending on layout, visibility, and reach of the product in the setting of a store. Further, products sometimes can have a scope of conflicting and different identities to specific consumers, which can result in different outcomes depending on the packaging shape, size, and other features that may affect the convenience and consumption practice (Cochoy, 2007a; Hawkins, 2011).

The store's layout can be a significant device to enact the consumers to act in the context of store shopping since it is designed to make certain products more attractive or prominent and accessible through visibility and accessibility. Thus, the placement of a product or categories of products in the store's layout can induce compulsive consumption behavior as

it can make certain products more visible and reachable than other products (Dorismond, 2016). As Dorismond (2016) argued, there is an indication that the category or the products which receive the optimal placement can have a significant impact on the sales prospect. The brands that can place their products in the store advantageously to other options can significantly impact the consumer decision.

Previous literature within green marketing regarding marketing practices of edible vegan products has put a significant emphasis on health and environmental concerns as the main value proposition. In some cases, green products, or products, with an extended amount of compromises on consumer values – consumption modes (e.g., eat, store and cook a different way), poor quality, or high cost – tend to be unattractive to the general consumers (Peattie, 2001; Napoli et al., 2020; Ottman et al., 2006). In a free market, the relative value of other existing products is essential to consider. Therefore, providing superior consumer value cannot be avoided if the product wants to thrive, whether a conventional product or an alternative. Thus, it is incomplete to add environmental concerns or benefits as the only values; a better product must be holistically better than its competitors. The consideration of relative value in terms of economic value, convenience, and health needs to be calculated into the product to be an attractive product to a broader market (Peattie, 2001; Napoli et al., 2020; Ottman et al., 2006).

Pricing is linked to the economic factor of the consumer, as it regards purchasing power and affordability of the product. Introducing an alternative product to the market with a relative affordability, whether competing with conventional or other alternatives, will attract both green- and other groups of consumers. Cost-conscious consumers, whether vegan or omnivore, are sensitive to high costs, and providing a cheaper alternative or cheaper by value can be attractive to a broader market (Ottman et al., 2006).

Introducing plant-based products to market with health benefits seems to have greater value than conventional products, such as meat, as modern consumers are aware of health issues linked to red meat and industrial production (Peattie, 2001; Napoli et al., 2020; Ottman et al., 2006). To communicate such values there are specific labels such as “organic” and “non-GMO” or with visual packaging that embody such messages. The health aspect can attract health-conscious consumers, whether vegan or omnivores, as this group tends to put importance on both their personal and their family’s health (Peattie, 2001; Napoli et al., 2020; Ottman et al., 2006).

The convenience of a green product can range from ease of use, time-efficient, cooking, and eating. The main value is minimal friction to the consumer’s life but also removes frictions from the consumer’s life, i.e., the storage of food and how long that food will last in the fridge or how easy it is to cook and eat. As there are few frictions to initialize consumption or repeat the consumption, then there is a high tendency to adopt the products into the consumer’s lifestyle (Peattie, 2001; Napoli et al., 2020; Ottman et al., 2006).

In previous studies, there is an emphasis on political messages related to environmental and social issues, ethics, and animal cruelty that can be linked to the marketing of products, both alternative and mainstream, in order to argue their relevance to consumers and capture the consumers by offering a solution to some of the societal problems linked to consumption. Qualifying a product as a green or sustainable can give it a political agency and the consumption itself can be an act of ethic (Hawkins, 2011; Ariztia, 2013). For this research paper, the main focus will be on utilizing marketing devices to qualify food products as alternatives and how they promote both similarities and differences of plant-based proteins to

consumers in terms of their consumption practices. We will specifically draw our analysis on marketing devices such as digital media, stores, and packaging, to show that plant-based proteins like Beyond Meat are promoted as valuable food products and convenient as meat-based products. We will touch on but not focus on the complexity of political elements in marketing or draw political conclusions regarding the consumption of plant-based proteins and meat-based proteins.

The aforementioned marketing devices by previous studies are used to exemplify and highlight the marketing devices. They are not necessarily limited to this paper since the nature of this research is to describe and critically analyze marketing devices that are explicitly used by Beyond Meat. We mainly focus on a viewpoint to qualify marketing devices; the agency must carry on a purpose to allow the user to act or do another act by incentivizing action (Callon et al., 2007), and through the marketing devices, we discuss how the devices are used to communicate value (Ottman et al., 2006).

3. Methodology

In academic research, especially within the field of social science, a qualitative approach is expected. The main difference between a quantitative and qualitative approach is the form of data - numerical or non-numerical data – and it is common to conduct qualitative observations on social phenomena (Bryman, 2012). More specifically, qualitative business research tends to be helpful in the context of social and cultural constructions and cultivates interpretation of cultural-meanings and behaviors (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). According to Eriksson & Kovalainen (2008), with findings related to the observation of social- and cultural meanings then, qualitative is a more approachable choice. Furthermore, this study has an inductive approach in order to understand the observed findings, offer perspectives from selected frameworks, and critically discuss social phenomena. However, such an approach has issues; if the conclusions of this research are not aligned with previous literature then the generalization may not be accurate (Given, 2008). This research does not intend to reject previous literature. This paper tends to describe and discuss the chosen topic rather than reject previous literature.

To examine marketing devices, we will employ ethnographic techniques. The research on which this analysis is based combines online and offline observations in the form of pictures, photographs, videos, posts, and notes, to show how digital and physical devices are used in Beyond Meat's product marketing. Similar to other ethnographic studies, our investigation of this case focuses heavily on observations, is conducted at several different locations, and aims to provide readers with a detailed understanding of the subject under study. This approach is not novel in the realm of marketing research. (Geertz, 1973; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Hannerz, 2003; Marcus, 1995; Elliott & Jankel-Elliott, 2003). Our methodological approach, however, differs from conventional ethnographic research in two ways: first, it was carried out during a brief period. The majority of the fieldwork was done over the course of a month (May to July). While there are always drawbacks, it also gives us the chance to examine a marketing phenomenon in a condensed period thoroughly.

It also serves as an illustration of ethnography that is more object-focused (Carrington, 2012). The emphasis is not on a community or a collective but marketing devices but does not necessarily exclude elements of a community or a collective. This kind of ethnography is increasingly prevalent in scientific research. The shift in several areas of the social sciences away from "pure" cultural analysis and toward socio-material analysis has resulted in the adaptation of ethnographic approaches to understand better how people and objects collaborate to create realities and social phenomena (Bruni, 2005; Frisk, 2004; Michael, 2004; Mol, 2002).

In some cases, ethnographic research findings may align with the previous literature. However, stating that the alignment is “replicable” is not entirely true since each research has its purpose, different issues, and different observations, conducted in a unique time and space (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Crang & Cook, 2007). There can be alignments with previous literature and additional findings that could contribute to previous literature (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Crang & Cook, 2007). In this case, the research’s objective is not to quantify

or seek objective truth or reject previous literature but instead to collect partial truths from observations by describing the findings and critically discussing the findings with the selected framework.

In this study, we use two types of observations to assess the marketing "work" done by three marketing devices: digital media, packaging, and retail. These three devices construct the primary way Beyond Meat communicates its message to consumers. By looking into these methods, we are able to collect data that will present us with Beyond Meat's message to its consumers and also the image they want to portray to the world. The first thing we did was to observe Beyond Meat's numerous digital marketing platforms online, including its corporate website (www.beyondmeat.com), Facebook page, where we went through posts, mentions, initiatives, and comments, their Instagram account, where we went over thoroughly their grid and pictures, their Twitter account in which we observed communications and collaborations with influencers, and their YouTube channel where we went through their video marketing campaigns. Therefore we joined up, subscribed, followed, and liked in order to follow Beyond Meat's digital marketing initiatives. This resulted in a general comprehension of Beyond Meat's marketing strategies, which was documented in field notes.

Moreover, following this initial phase, we meticulously tracked Beyond Meat's web marketing activities. We captured the entirety of Beyond Meat's website using screenshots, and as stated above, we also documented Beyond Meat's Twitter and Instagram profiles, as well as its Facebook page. When combined, these research techniques led to the creation of a database with photos and documents pertaining to Beyond Meat's internet marketing. The field notes were composed of statements, comments, and posts (text, video, images) accompanied by the dates these posts were posted and observed, along with our comments based on our brief observations or comments noted further down the line.

Second, we observed things at multiple stores from the 4th of May 2022 to the 12th of July 2022. We accumulated 25 observations at ten supermarkets, grocery stores, McDonald's, and convenience stores to understand better how Beyond Meat's products and different food retail stores functioned as marketing tools. Thus with notepads and cameras on our hands, we set out to collect written and audiovisual findings from all various significant Swedish franchises, including Coop, ICA, and the international fast-food chain McDonald's. The reasoning behind the in-store product displays for Beyond Meat's goods was the main subject of the observations. We were curious about how they were displayed on shelves and menus and what advertising was employed. Photos, videos, and field notes were used to document the in-store observations (Chiseri-Strater & Sunstein 2007). Significantly, Beyond Meat's products were also purchased using these observations. Then pictures of the goods and their packaging were taken and added to the material for analysis.

We worked together to conduct our analysis, which was done in two steps. In the initial stage, we looked through and coded the various items gathered under the direction of two questions: (1) How are Beyond Meat's products distinguished from conventional meat products? and (2) How are Beyond Meat's products distinguished from conventional meat products in terms of similarity? We conducted a thematic analysis of our observations. This process allows the researcher to categorize qualitative data to find patterns, themes, or general topics (Given, 2008). Specifically, our first assessment produced a variety of unique and related themes, which were eventually organized and coded into more general topics discussed in the study below.

Following is a presentation of the paper's findings, and afterward comes the discussion section, where we discuss the findings with the theoretical framework.

4. Findings

The following describes and provides examples of the marketing "work" that the three groups of marketing tools — digital media, product packaging, and stores — perform to promote Beyond Meat's products to consumers. We present how these marketing devices distinguish Beyond Meat's products from or are similar to conventional animal-based products. We will demonstrate how these three sets of promotional tools qualify Beyond Meat's products as convenient and alternative options, giving them a breadth of values that allows them to catch various consumer groups (Cochoy, 2007a). The structure is similar to another inspiring food-alternative research by Fuentes & Fuentes (2017) as we believe this structure is depicting our findings in an interesting, comprehensive and readable manner. We have used our selected theoretical framework as support to guide us during the collection of data and filter down to relevant themes under the direction of two questions: (1) How are Beyond Meat's products distinguished from conventional meat products? and (2) How are Beyond Meat's products distinguished from conventional meat products in terms of similarity? Following is a presentation of the paper's findings, and afterward comes the discussion section, where we critically discuss the findings together with the theoretical framework.

The Story of Beyond Meat

Beyond meat started when Ethan Brown left his day job as a clean energy executive in 2009 to create his plant-based protein company, which is most known for the vegan burger that "bleeds" like a cattle burger. In 2012, the company's debut goods were introduced in the US. In the main animal protein categories, the company provides plant-based alternatives. Products from Beyond Meat are offered in over 80 countries as of March 2021 in about 118,000 retail and restaurant locations (Scipioni, 2020; Popular timelines, 2021). In the beginning, Brown used his 401(k) funds, his children's savings accounts, and the sale of one of his homes to keep the business

a float. Because his credit cards were maxed out in 2013, Brown even had problems reserving a hotel room for a meeting with the billionaire Bill Gates, whom he was supposed to pitch as an investor. Later that year, Gates made an undisclosed investment in the business (Scipioni, 2020; Popular timelines, 2021).

Ethan Brown established the business in 2009 with the explicit goal of halting climate change. Fu-hung Hsieh and Harold Huff, two University of Missouri professors who had been working on their meatless protein for years, were the ones whom Brown first called. In 2012, Beyond Meat introduced its debut product, Beyond Chicken Strips (formerly known as "Chicken-Free Strips"), in a Whole Foods store. In 2013, the company went global. Beyond Meat created Beyond Beef Crumbles, its first plant-based beef product, in 2014 and has subsequently added plant-based pork. Beyond Meat was selected by the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals as its Company of the Year for 2013 (Popular timelines, 2021). The burgers are created from a mixture of non-GMO, hormone- and antibiotic-free "pea, mung bean, and rice proteins," canola oil, coconut oil, and beet juice for color, and the main claim is that eating Beyond Meat is healthier than eating animal meat.

The Center for Sustainable Systems at the University of Michigan conducted a study on behalf of Beyond Meat that found that compared to a quarter pound of traditional U.S. beef, a plant-based burger produces 90% fewer greenhouse gas emissions, uses 45% less energy, has 99% less of an impact on water scarcity, and uses 93% less land. Naturally, no animals are killed to produce plant-based protein (Scipioni, 2020). Besides Beyond Meat's products being better for the environment relative to meat products, one of their main promotional points is the fact that it is healthier than traditional meat. For example, Beyond Meat claims on its website that its patties are 35% less fat than beef. However, are vegan proteins actually healthier than animal products? According to Dr. Frank Hu, head of the nutrition division at Harvard, it all comes down to how an individual consumes. Substituting a burger for a plant-based option and following it up with Coke and French fries does not change the quality of your diet (O'Connor, 2020), (Beyond Meat, 2022). Dr. Hu stated that research contrasting the physiological effects of consuming cow burgers as opposed to vegan burgers is now under progress for customers who are looking to select a healthy alternative. He views the meat alternatives as "transitional foods" for the time being for those attempting to switch to better nutrition. Beyond burgers offer comparable levels of calories and protein to beef patties but less trans-unsaturated fatty acids and no cholesterol.

In contrast to traditional meat, they also include fiber. According to the company website, these burgers contain roughly 16% of the daily recommended salt intake, which is significantly more than genuine meat. There are around 75g of sodium in 112g of raw beef patty, whereas, in Beyond Meat's burger patty, there is 390g (O'Connor, 2020), (Beyond Meat, 2022).

Beyond Meat's commercial objective was considerably more extensive than those of its predecessors from the beginning. Although Beyond Meat's products are plant-based, their marketing does not explicitly state this. Throughout its website and social media, they avoid advertising its products as vegan, despite being vegan. This makes perfect sense, given that just 2.7% of U.S. packaged meat sales are plant-based. Instead, Beyond Meat pushed for placement in supermarket meat sections. When grocery retailers first opposed this, Beyond Meat chose to wait until a grocery store accepted its mission before placing its product in its stores. Whole Foods placed Beyond Meat in its meat aisle in 2016.

"This Beyond Meat Burger, in particular, cooks like a burger and looks like one,"

Remarked Joe Wood, the meat supervisor at Whole Foods Market in the mid-Atlantic region at the time. For the first time, Whole Foods Market has stocked a vegan meat substitute in its meat section.

Following this, Beyond Meat began referring to itself as "the world's first plant-based burger offered in the meat section of U.S. supermarkets." The fact that the most significant natural and organic food shop in the United States took a risk on this relatively unknown brand encouraged other grocery stores to experiment with similar product placement. Beyond Meat's goal includes redefining the optimal protein source. Who asserts that it is red meat? According to Carol J. Adams, author of *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, people are perfectly content consuming vegan meals so long as they are unaware of their actions. They become nervous only when they discover they have not consumed what they have grown to believe they require (Popular timelines, 2021).

Moreover, a unique approach by Beyond Meat is to collaborate with fast-food chains. Specifically, McDonald's and Beyond Meat are working together to create a burger option with a plant-based patty and started their partnership in November 2020. In February 2021, the piloting test started in Sweden and Denmark (Cision, 2021). Beyond Meat argues that protein is protein, and customers should not care where it comes from. Plant-based proteins can have a complete set of amino acids, just like meat-based protein (Beyond Meat, 2015).

Beyond Meat sales have soared despite the pandemic. The Wall Street Journal reports that consumer stockpiling increased Beyond Meat grocery store sales by 69% during the second quarter. The value of Beyond Meat is \$7.7 billion. Beyond Meat's first trading day in 2019 was one of the most successful initial public offerings since the dot-com bubble of 2000 (Popular timelines, 2021).

In retrospect, Beyond Meat, at its founding belief, is an organization that promotes animal welfare, climate change, and public health by emphasizing that protein is protein whether it comes from animals or plants and focusing on the product's resemblance to meat in appearance and flavor.

Marketing on digital media of Beyond Meat

Significant reliance is placed on the company's digital marketing technologies for the qualification work. Beyond Meat advertises itself and its products using a vast array of digital media, as do the majority of modern firms selling consumer goods. The company's website hosts a network of linked websites, including YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. Even though marketing strategies may vary significantly between channels, according to our observations, they were usually planned, interconnected, and designed to work together. This collection of websites is an essential resource for Beyond Meat since it enables the firm to communicate, interact, and engage with its consumers as well as market to them. Using a combination of text, pictures, links, videos, and interactive elements, Beyond Meat's products are described in a manner that attracts and holds the attention of potential buyers. The marketing activities carried out utilizing Beyond Meat's digital media tools are primarily intended to frame the business and attribute to its goods a number of characteristics that set it apart from its primary rivals and animal-based products.

An important observation, Beyond Meat's goods are promoted as being distinct from and a replacement for traditional animal products by designating them as plant-based protein. According to Beyond Meat's marketing on social media, its goods are for vegans, vegetarians, and non-vegans, trying to support what they call a flexitarian diet. Beyond Meat includes a wide range of environmental issues in its communication, including global warming, food waste, genetically modified (GMO) food, and sustainable farming methods. These concerns and statements are part of Beyond Meat's more significant commitment to being a company that develops and sells green products (Beyond Meat, 2022). In actuality, this is one of its key differentiators. Beyond Meat invests a lot of time and energy in marketing itself as a sustainable business, and a lot of this work is done online. For instance, according to its web page, Beyond Meat promotes itself as a business whose quest is to find "a way to feed our future" (Beyond Meat, 2022). Here, we see how Beyond Meat, by assigning them the task of feeding the future, portrays every other animal-based company as the past.

Furthermore, it is imperative for Beyond Meat to present in their social media accounts their involvement in the fight for the future of nutrition and make the source of protein sustainable by producing the protein from plant-based sources. Following there are examples of posts on Beyond Meat's Facebook page that we came across in our research:

***"It may be summer, but Beyond Meat is still on campus!
CEO Ethan Brown had the honor of speaking with Abbas Kazmi for the Oxford Guild's speaker series to discuss how Beyond Meat is building the future of protein as we work to champion a more accessible and sustainable food system. While on campus, students also stopped by our food trucks to sample some of our delicious plant-based products. Thank you to the students and alumni who attended!"***

This statement was posted along with a picture of a food truck with Beyond Meat's logo, social media accounts, and tags, as well as a line of students and professors being serviced.

Customers can also watch a video featuring Kevin Hart, a highly successful and sustainability-conscious comedian, on the company's Twitter account with the following statement written :

***"If it ain't Beyond, it ain't right. Delicious plant-based food for a better future.
@KevinHart4real"***

The video portrays Kevin grilling beyond pattys for his friend in a cookout by explaining that consuming beyond burgers is the right step to fight for sustainability.

Beyond Meat is establishing itself as "the food of the future" and imbuing its goods with environmental morality by taking advantage of its different internet marketing tools and posts. This could make them desirable items for customers with a passion for sustainability (Onyas & Ryan, 2015; Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2007). Beyond Meat's goods are promoted as unique and more environmentally friendly than conventional meat alternatives through these market representations and producers (Onyas & Ryan, 2015; Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2007), and they are positioned as food items that customers interested in reducing the environmental footprint of their purchasing habits and/or in leading a vegan lifestyle will find appealing.

In other aspects of its marketing strategy, Beyond Meat labels its products as healthier alternatives. Beyond Meat, for example, in our research, we came across a statement on their website that expressed that beyond burger.

"has all the juicy, meaty taste of a typical burger, but comes with the benefits of a plant-based meal."

And claims it has 35% less saturated fat than beef.

Summing up, based on our findings, Beyond Meat's digital media, as a marketing device, consistently position their plant-based proteins as distinct from traditional meat products in multiple ways (e.g., healthier) but can be consumed in the same manner. Beyond Meat's viewpoint as the future of meat is founded on their condemnation of how industrialized meat production has contributed to the degradation of the earth.

The Packaging of Beyond Meat

While going through Beyond Meat's goods and packaging, we realized that they serve the double goal of identifying them as both distinct from and comparable to conventional items, in contrast to the online tools mentioned above that concentrate on differentiating. As part of its new medium of communication, according to our observations from our research and as it is stated on their website, Beyond Meat uses a packaging system that is composed of a sticker-like label and a plastic tray with a thin membrane which, according to the website is 80% recyclable and aims to turn it to 100%. Once the packaging gets opened, it is easy to separate the stickers from the plastic tray. Moreover, in another product line, Beyond Sausage, they have managed to replace the plastic tray with a compostable one (Beyond Meat, 2022).

The packaging conveys numerous salient characteristics. The items from Beyond Meat's packaging serve as a reminder to customers that their products are "100% vegan, contains no soy, no gluten, is kosher and halal. More specific information can be found on the boxes. For instance, consumers get a clear description of the product with the statement "plant-based burger made from pea protein" as well as instructions on how to cook it and preserve it. Moreover, based on our findings and on the webpage, on the packaging, Beyond Meat has printed the username as well as the social media channels and the two hashtags #beyondburger and #gobeyond. Thus, Beyond Meat's packaging is being used not only to store and preserve the product but also as a promotional tool that also backs the sustainability movement. In a way, their packaging is a statement.

Even though there is a clear explanation stating the food is plant-based, the term "Beyond" appears three times as frequently. This stems from Beyond Meat's core belief that they represent the future of meat, attempting to demonstrate that they are not simply another meat substitute. In addition, incorporating the marks "no GMO" and "no soy" to demonstrate to the buyer that they value organic products and distinguish them from other alternatives that use soy.

According to a previous study from Cochoy (2004), the packaging provides a tangible way to communicate resemblance and exchangeability. The packaging for Beyond Meat's goods is fairly similar in size and type to the packaging used for the goods they are meant to replace, i.e., meat patties. The packaging for the patties resembles the packaging of other meat patties

compared to the more general options, which come in larger quantities. Usually, it has transparent packaging to show the meat's freshness.

Based on our observations, Beyond Meat uses product names to clarify the intended usage of each product. For example, Beyond Burger is a plant-based burger patty designed to replace meat-based burger patties. Beyond Meat's "Beyond Meatballs" is another product that aims to replace meat-based meatballs. Beyond Meat's product naming is both simple and effective, as it focuses on the conventional product yet begins with "Beyond" to include its brand in the conventional name of a food item. The package clearly indicates the items' usage and suitability without specifying instructions. This naming approach, together with the packaging size (the same as other meat-based patties), informs the buyer of the product's intended purpose and how it will fit into his or her everyday cooking and eating routines.

The main point here is that Beyond Meat's plant-based proteins are alternative in a number of ways, but they are also handy; they allow customers to address and voice their concerns over industrialized meat production without requiring them to modify their consumption habits drastically. In retrospect, the packaging of Beyond Meat's product, as a marketing device, is "convenientising" and resembles a conventional package of meat products and, on top, communicates the other distinctive values.

Beyond Meat in Stores

This final section will show how the qualification of Beyond Meat's products also functions in stores. They are sold in various Swedish grocery chains like ICA and Coop, as well as served in fast-food chains like McDonald's. Collectively, these food merchants create a vast supply chain that makes Beyond Meat's goods accessible to a sizable market and a broader consumer group. In retail establishments, producers' and merchants' marketing devices coexist. Cochoy (2010) and Dubuisson-Quellier (2007) indicate that the design and architecture of stores, the organization and kind of shelving, and the display tactics all define and commercialize items in diverse ways. Basically, these merchants set up shop or create a structural foundation for the marketplace (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2007) that Beyond Meat is integrated into.

During our fieldwork, it became clear that the manner in which Beyond Meat's goods are exhibited is relevant to comprehending the advertising of alternative foods. Beyond Meat's items were displayed in relation to other products, and the way certain retailers identify areas of stores or groupings of merchandise with textual information all qualified these products in various ways and suggests those products' qualities and appropriate use (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2007).

We discovered two ways in which Beyond Meat's goods were presented and qualified as non-meat, vegan, and conventional protein products. Beyond Meat's products are primarily available in the sections labeled as "vegan" or "veggie" in supermarkets. Specifically, Beyond Meat's products are paired with other brands that offer various plant-based protein alternatives, such as soy, wheat, peas, tofu, and quorn that aims to substitute meat, and these are located in both the frozen and fresh vegan protein aisles. By physically isolating these goods from standard meat-based patties and labeling them as part of a 'Vegan or Vegetarian' category, Beyond Meat's products are considered particularly suited for a narrow population of vegans and vegetarians. Grocery store counters served as spatial modalities for identifying Beyond Meat's products as distinct from other meat-based items. Beyond Meat's products are accessible to all consumers, but the retail environment defines them as ideal for vegans and vegetarians due to their

placement. In such instances, a product's labeling and physical placement place it in a replacement specialty category. Beyond Meat's products are presented and qualified as a vegan in the grocery context due to the grouping and placements within vegan aisles.

The second way to sell Beyond Meat's products in store settings is to place them inside processed food items, among other meat-based food items. In this case, Beyond Meat collaborated with McDonald, and plant-based burgers are presented next to other meat-based burgers in McDonald's stores. This specific finding has a similar theme to a paper about Oatly, as the milk-free product is placed within a normal coffee and is conventional as a milk-based coffee, making it a part of a conventional product (coffee) and convenient (see more Fuentes & Fuentes, 2017). At these McDonald's stores, Beyond Meat's products are not separated from conventional products. Based on our observations, their in-store devices, e.g., menu displays at checkout and menu displays at self-checkout, group products on the basis of what they have in familiar while at the same time inviting consumers to differentiate between the qualities of the individual products to present the plant-based burger as just another conventional food item. Hence, McDonald's stores work towards spatially qualifying Beyond Meat's products as conventional while simultaneously allowing the brand's alternative qualities to be recognized by consumers mentioning the burger patty as "plant-based."

Furthermore, according to our observations, some McDonald's signature burgers with meat-based patty can simply be replaced with plant-based patty. In these store settings, meat-based and plant-based products come across as similar. Labeling "plant-based" makes Beyond Meat's products recognizable to consumers as an alternative. The plant-based patties and the conventional meat-based patties are about the same size, made of similar sauces, have the same visibility on the menu, and are found in the same section of the menu. Using plant-based patties that are red as uncooked, "bleed" like meat, smell, and eat like meat also enforces the products' meat-like qualities. Hence, the number of similarities between meat burgers and plant-based burgers, based on the way the products are displayed on the menu or on the basis of visibility and eating, are qualifying plant-based burgers as convenient as meat-based burgers. Plant-based burgers are included in the "signature menu" with other conventional signature dishes. McDonald's signature burger can be found across its menus next to all the other options without being treated differently than any other burger in the list. Even though the digital ordering systems that McDonald's has installed, the veggie category is treated the same way as the other categories. Beyond Meat's patties are included in the standard product selection at McDonald's due to their classification as just another type of burger. Their menus and product information banners organize things according to what they have in common while simultaneously encouraging customers to distinguish between the features of the various products (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2007).

In retrospect, McDonald's strives to characterize Beyond Meat's items as ordinary while enabling customers to recognize the product's distinctive alternative traits. McDonald's seamless integration of Beyond Meat's goods is particularly intriguing, given that fast-food restaurants often do not appeal to niche markets seeking "alternative" foods but rather to a large audience seeking convenience and processed food. As part of McDonald's product line and business model, Beyond Meat's goods are made available to a large consumer group and displayed directly next to conventional items.

Furthermore, during our field research, we decided to inspect the price differences between Beyond Meat and conventional meat products in the setting of a grocery store and McDonald's. In the setting of grocery stores, the prices of Beyond Meat's products are similar to

the conventional products it tends to replace. In the setting of McDonald's, the plant-based burger has the exact pricing as the similar burger option with the meat patty. In this case, we find that there is no economic incentive or economic punishment to purchase the plant-based alternative as the prices are comparable to the similar meat version - i.e., burger patty.

To sum it up, the display methods and physical design used by the various retail locations categorize Beyond Meat's items in various ways. They met the criteria for "meat-free" products, conventional convenience, "typical burgers," and "protein" products. The selling points are establishing relationships between the seller and buyer and setting up markets by displaying products and drawing customers (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2007). These supermarkets and McDonald's are creating a connection between this specific section of products and a wide variety of customers, instead of one homogeneous audience, by offering Beyond Meat's goods to a heterogeneous audience. According to the structural configuration of both McDonald's and the grocery stores we visited, Beyond Meat's goods fall within the "meat-free alternative" category but also in the conventional category – the burger menu. They are recognized as a type of meat product that is "meat-free," and they are clearly products meant to be shopped, cooked, and consumed like animal-based. They are presented to the buyer as one of the numerous commercial meat products. Therefore, these significant retailers could convert consumers of traditional animal products into possible buyers of Beyond Meat's goods through the potential arrangement of product displays.

5. Discussion

The findings above presented how digital media, product packaging, and stores perform to promote Beyond Meat's products to consumers. For the discussion section, we aim to take help from our selected theoretical frameworks within Market Devices (Callon et al., 2007; Cochoy, 2008) and Consumer Value (Peattie, 2001; Napoli et al., 2020; Ottman et al., 2006) and critically discuss how Beyond Meat promotes plant-based proteins to a broader market.

According to the findings above, Beyond Meat uses a variety of marketing devices to give its goods a particular set of characteristics that are meant to make them an attractive alternative to conventional meat-based products. In an effort to influence consumption and create a market for its alternative products, an actor is making this endeavor to include a variety of values in its products (Peattie, 2001; Napoli et al., 2020; Ottman et al., 2006; Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2010). Marketing tools are not inert entities; instead, they serve as stimuli to urge action that can impact customer behavior (Callon et al., 2007; Cochoy, 2011). Beyond Meat is taking two steps to transform from a niche product, having a relatively small spectrum of prospective consumers, such as vegetarians or vegans, to a product that can appeal to a more significant number of consumers by utilizing multiple marketing devices.

First, Beyond Meat's marketing devices aim to offer alternative products. The items are alternative, but in many different ways, as aforementioned examples in the findings. An example, among others, drawn from the findings, Beyond Meat's qualification is more thorough. It draws

on several ways that it differs from traditional meat products – i.e., burger patties - rather than simply defining its goods as solely vegan products. This qualification process can involve multiple devices like packaging, brands, retail displays, website, digital and conventional media (Cochoy, 2010, 2014, 2004; Ariztia, 2013; Dubuisson-Quellier, 2010). As we observed in the findings, the meat industry is represented in Beyond Meats' marketing materials as immoral (due to concerns about animal care), unsustainable, and not healthy. The story of Beyond Meat and the founder's vision aim to create a sustainable plant-based protein industry that can replace the meat-based protein industry. The designation of a product as green or sustainable can provide it with a political agency, and the consumption can be an ethical act (Hawkins, 2011; Ariztia, 2013). This specific communication of value can be recognized as being vegan as well as sustainable and nutritious for those consumers seeking that set of values. However, the findings suggest that sustainability is just one of many other central values - e.g., healthier and similar consumption practices. According to our findings, at the company level, there is an emphasis on sustainability advocated by Beyond Meat's digital media, endorsed celebrities, and the founder. On the contrary, on the product level, e.g., packaging, and in-store, there is less emphasis on sustainability and more emphasis on similarity to meat-based products.

In this case, Beyond Meat's plant-based protein is suitable to draw in a wide range of customers with various interests and to invite a variety of uses. This is one of the most intriguing aspects of Beyond Meat. Considering the company's past, it is clear that Beyond Meat is changing its marketing strategy from classifying its products as vegan and focusing on a single consumer demographic (vegans or vegetarians) to classifying its products as alternatives in various ways and simultaneously addressing multiple consumer demographics. Specifically, this variety will appeal to the masses, even if they are not meant to be one monolithic set of customers but rather a variety of groups of consumers, each with their own preferences and interests, similar conclusion on previous studies regarding using a breadth of variances to appeal to the mass (Ariztia, 2013; Dubuisson-Quellier, 2010). For example, this is illustrated in Beyond Meat's packaging. Various values are communicated, e.g., the transparency of the package shows a "red burger patty," which communicates visually that it is identical to a meat burger patty. Other examples from the findings suggest Beyond Meat's marketing consists of various values: the products have quality of convenience in terms of cooking, eating, and shopping and comparable pricing to the meat-based products it is meant to replace. Thus, similar to previous studies, these varieties of convenience, pricing, and value are appealing to a more extensive base of consumers due to multiple consumer values being presented (Peattie, 2001; Napoli et al., 2020; Ottman et al., 2006).

Further, Beyond Meat does not take a single-sided stance on value but pays attention to other values. Expressly, products from Beyond Meat are being qualified as being suitable for vegans without directly communicating it is a vegan product. This is an interesting point; conversely, it may be enough to communicate "plant-based" as it can closely relate to the word vegan. Examples from our findings suggest that the products are also being qualified to draw in consumers who care about specific points (e.g., sustainability issues, health-conscious, anti-meat

industry) without explicitly communicating this on the packaging or in-store. This indicates that communication at the company level, not at the product level, can create an association with the product without explicitly repeating specific points on the packaging or in-store. On the packaging level, it does not exclude one consumer group, nor any act or declaration of exclusion, making it appealing to a broader market. The fact that it is “plant-based” on the package may be enough to be associated with sustainability and health, as these values are highly appreciated by vegans (Hawkins, 2011; Ariztia, 2013).

In a general viewpoint, products from Beyond Meat are both a replacement for conventional meat-based products and have some form of politically charged elements. At the company level, the founder is advocating that the meat industry is a societal problem and stating that plant-based protein is a better alternative can create a political agency, and the consumption itself can be an act of ethics (Hawkins, 2011; Ariztia, 2013). On the contrary, at the product level, the products are also meant for non-vegans looking for wholesome, healthier alternatives to meat-based products. This qualifies the products as a valuable alternative (Peattie, 2001; Napoli et al., 2020; Ottman et al., 2006; Cochoy 2004) and also appeals to a broader consumer group simply due to its multiplicity of values that speak to a broader market. Because of these reasons, Beyond Meat's products are appropriate for both people following vegan consumption habits and ethical eating as well as for those engaging in other disciplines. That is to say, by broadening the range of attributes they are linked to and making them appealing to other customer groups (Peattie, 2001; Napoli et al., 2020; Ottman et al., 2006), thus Beyond Meat's products are arguably defined as valuable beyond niched groups.

As opposed to many other alternatives and vegan brands that appear to focus on a single solution to a particular problem (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2010; Holt, 2003), Beyond Meat's products are being positioned to allow and promote a wide range of interpretations and performances rather than to be sold to customers to imply just one thing. By concurrently relying on numerous discourses, Beyond Meat's goods are being made appealing to larger audiences. Marketing devices are not inert entities; instead, they serve as stimuli to encourage action and can impact customer behavior (Callon et al., 2007; Cochoy, 2011). The intermingling of marketing devices – included in this case; stores, digital media, and packaging – from the findings above that are involved in the marketing practices of Beyond Meat do qualify its products as both a suitable alternative (Cochoy, 2010, 2014; Dubuisson-Quellier, 2010) and an appealing product for multiple consumer groups that consume the products for various reasons. For example, Beyond Meat is using digital media together with influential celebrities (e.g., Kevin Hart) to advocate for “a fight for the future of nutrition” and make “the source of protein sustainable.” At the company level and on the digital media landscape, there are heavily social movements embedded in the communication. However, this is not obvious on the packaging or the product itself, whether displayed on McDonald’s menu or in a grocery store.

Second, although Beyond Meat's goods are categorized as alternatives, as we discussed above, they are convenient alternatives looking from the conveniences communicated by marketing devices in McDonald’s, grocery stores, and digital media (Dorismond, 2016; Peattie,

2001; Napoli et al., 2020; Ottman et al., 2006). For example, we found that on Beyond Meat's digital media, there are multiple pieces of content illustrating that the products are identical to meat-based products in terms of convenience, pricing, taste, and look. On top of that, they also illustrate the additional values (e.g., healthier and less salt), and this indicates that these products are distinguished from conventional meat products, but they are sufficiently similar to be practical (Peattie, 2001; Napoli et al., 2020; Ottman et al., 2006).

We can arguably state that the products are comparable to conventional products in several crucial ways that ensure they can be used in existing practices of food shopping, cooking, and eating without interfering with these. We can draw this from the findings, specifically from the McDonald's findings, the McDonald's menu and the approach of displaying alternatives next to conventional products, making them just as suitable as conventional products (e.g., similar burger type, comparable pricing, and as visible as other conventional burgers) and simultaneously communicating the various additional values that are associated with the naming (e.g., plant-based, vegan, less salt, less fat). The fact that it is visually exposed on the conventional menu next to conventional products can create convenience for the consumers or remove differences. Comparable to the previous study of Oatly, an alternative to milk, as Oatly became a convenient alternative in grocery stores and coffee shops for broader consumers (see Fuentes & Fuentes, 2017). In a similar approach to Beyond Meat, Oatly collaborates with Starbucks (Starbucks, 2021), a coffee chain, to make Oatly's product convenient and accessible to a broader market beyond niche groups. The arguments and findings from the research of Oatly by Fuentes & Fuentes (2017) have similar theme to our arguments and findings, even though different products, but we appreciate highly on their research on Oatly as it is credible, insightful, inspiring and also a valuable benchmark to our paper. In retrospect, both Oatly and Beyond Meat went beyond and executed on effective marketing approaches that helped them make alternatives convenient and reach a broader market as their success can have an effect on the sustainability of the modern food industry.

The work to make a product appealing to a larger market, relative worth in terms of economic value, convenience, and health must be factored into its design (Peattie, 2001; Napoli et al., 2020; Ottman et al., 2006). This work can be discussed carefully in Beyond Meat's case. The products from Beyond Meat are touted as being practical since they function and appear like the meat products they are meant to replace. The titles, physical characteristics, and packaging of Beyond Meat's products are comparable to those of meat-based products, as well as their intended applications while providing additional values relative to similar meat products – i.e., healthier, less trans fat, less cholesterol, more environmentally friendly, comparable pricing and convenience. Combining the product's quality and the unique go-to-market partner, McDonald, can be considered a unique approach by Beyond Meat (similar to Oatly's strategy). This approach reaches McDonald's large consumer base.

Beyond Meat uses packaging intending to convey various relevant values and remove differences to meat-based products. On the product level, the packaging is an information agency containing both textual- and visual information that primarily tries to convey various values

(Cochoy, 2004). As we stated in the findings, the visual of the product (bleed like meat), taste, and nutritional content tend to be very similar to meat-based products. This unique mix of similarities is designed to make Beyond Meat's products an enticing alternative for consumers unsatisfied with conventional meat products but not necessarily interested in dramatically altering their shopping, cooking, and eating behaviors. Thus, Beyond Meat's goods are positioned as an alternative (in a variety of ways) yet easy options for numerous groups of consumers. This makes it an alternative, and convenience generates a product with the ability to appeal to many consumer interest groups. This is arguably accurate on the packaging level. However, Swedish grocery stores are not placing Beyond Meat's products next to meat-based products but in the vegan aisle together with other plant-based products. There are two indications in this case. First, this categorizes the product as vegan and speaks to the niche group. Two, non-vegan and other consumer groups will not be exposed to Beyond Meat's products if they are not exposed to the vegan aisle, as placements for products are crucial for its success (Dorismond, 2016). We can arguably state that Beyond Meat's product placement, at least in Swedish grocery stores, may not be according to the founder's vision of being indistinguishable from meat products. However, in the context of McDonald, Beyond Meat's products have arguably almost succeeded with the vision.

In closing and getting back to our guiding questions: (1) How are Beyond Meat's products distinguished from conventional meat? and (2) How are Beyond Meat's products distinguished from conventional meat products in terms of similarity? It is evident that Beyond Meat's marketing of its products appeals to many consumers and generates discussion on digital media platforms. Beyond Meat utilized digital media, packaging, and stores to promote its products. The packaging of its products illustrates its approach to creating similarities with meat-based products that it is intended to replace through packaging size, transparent design, and communication of the consumption practices; red like meat, bleed like meat and cook like meat. On a product level, it is just another "burger patty," but at the company level, there are social movements related to sustainability being communicated on digital media. It may not have succeeded with product placements in Swedish grocery stores as it did in the U.S. However, its case can be an excellent, inspiring source for future sustainability and food innovation entrepreneurs. Finally, its unique partnership approach with McDonald's gives it access to a larger mass of consumers beyond niched groups. The marketing devices within McDonald's stores are utilized to make plant-based burgers just as conventional and convenient as conventional meat-based burgers. It can be said that Beyond Meat appeals to a larger consumer group beyond vegetarians or vegans. Beyond Meat identifies and provides products that are alternative in a variety of ways. Consumers purchase these products and use them in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons or performing various types of alternativeness.

6. Conclusion

This paper aims to describe and discuss how marketing is used to promote plant-based proteins. Based on the frameworks of the marketing studies within consumer value and marketing devices, this has enabled us to view the topic, describe the observations, conceptualize the marketing devices, critically discuss, and shed light on how plant-based protein products acquire their qualities to be appealing to consumers. It has allowed us to highlight the active and performative role marketing devices play in the implementation of 'alternatives' in food markets. Specifically, this paper's research contributes to the current body of knowledge in two ways:

First, it sheds light on how alternative (food) items – specifically plant-based proteins - may be sold to a broad audience without focusing on "green values" like environment, corporate social responsibility, animal cruelty, and sustainability. The green value serves as one element of added value to the product. There is a strong emphasis on convenience values, which tend to be focused on creating alternatives that can be consumed similarly to meat-based products and are closely associated with fast-food products. Beyond Meat's strategy demonstrates how they have developed an alternative that is marketed as easy to consume as meat-based goods while also providing a healthier choice within the same price range. This helps the company to attract non-vegan consumers but is simultaneously still relevant for vegan consumers due to its non-animal origin.

Second, this study contributes to green marketing by illustrating Beyond Meat's innovative strategy of placing an alternative product on the menu of McDonald's – a fast-food chain that immediately makes Beyond Meat's plant-based product available to many consumers. This research illustrated multiple marketing approaches of alternatives that are similar to what has been described in previous literature. The contrast or contribution in this research is Beyond Meat's partnership strategy with McDonald's to propagate alternatives in the context of fast-food retailers. Thus, this indicates that partnership strategies can play a crucial role for plant-based products in gaining access to a broader market.

Similar arguments and themes are found in the research of Oatly by Fuentes & Fuentes (2017), even though different product categories but the marketing approaches of Oatly and Beyond Meat share some commonalities. We appreciate their research on Oatly as it is credible, insightful, inspiring and also a valuable precedent to our paper. As Oatly and Beyond Meat are in two different product categories, but both are alternatives to animal-based products, we hope that our two aforementioned contributions are insightful for marketing practitioners and researchers and inspire future studies within this topic as the paper by Fuentes & Fuentes (2017) inspired us.

Examining the qualifying process for Beyond Meat's goods, we illustrated that the company uses a variety of marketing devices to concurrently create the quality of alternatives and convenience for their line of plant-based protein products. This makes these items appealing to broader groups of customers who can be interested in alternative products but are hesitant to shift their buying and consumption practices dramatically. The above analysis is an example of

marketing in action, illustrating the importance of devices and how they qualify the product in the setting. It contributes to a marketing field of studies that have previously examined green marketing discourses, practices, and devices (Callon et al., 2007; Cochoy, 2008; Peattie, 2001; Ottman et al., 2006; Dubuisson-Quellier, 2007; Hawkins, 2011). This research illustrates a means of marketing sustainable or vegan alternatives that are neither niche marketing nor aims to normalize sustainability for the mainstream. Instead, it adopts a multi-niche strategy, drawing on alternative traits. Our analysis suggests that the promotion of plant-based alternatives can be done without only or mainly emphasizing green values - e.g., sustainability, animal cruelty, and sustainability. Marketing of plant-based alternatives is likely to gain market access by embedding multiple elements, including green values, but more importantly, non-green values - convenience, consumption- modes, and similarities to meat. A combination of green and non-green values can support plant-based alternatives to reach a broader market.

In the case of Beyond Meat, what is being performed is not an alternative market – a market organized differently from conventional market forms – but an existing market with new alternatives because Beyond Meat's products are produced, traded, and eaten conventionally. Its products may be incorporated into existing food purchasing, cooking, and eating patterns without interrupting them. This analysis is similar to previous literature and cases (see Fuentes & Fuentes, 2017), e.g., Oatly partnered with coffee shops to reach a broader market, and Beyond Meat partnered with a burger chain to reach a broader market. Beyond Meat's products are valuable in that sense, and on top of their products allow people to be vegan, green, political, and anti-meat industry without changing their diets or consumption modes.

There are multiple viewpoints to be drawn from our analysis. The main highlight is that a widespread market success does not indicate vegan subjectivities because Beyond Meat's products are alternative in many ways and enable consumers to interpret and utilize them differently. Eating a plant-based burger does not inevitably mean adopting a vegan lifestyle for non-vegan consumers rather because there are multiple values - e.g., convenience, health, non-green values, and protein. Vegan subjectivities and practices are probably not a deciding factor for Beyond Meat's consumers, who can pick from numerous types of alternatives, and the marketing of plant-based protein to a broader market often involves incorporating a collection of values that fit multiple groups of consumers.

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