The Branding of Plant-Based Milk
A Content Analysis of Three European Brands

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ABSTRACT

The market for plant-based food and beverage substitutes is growing. Not only is plant-based meat, such as burgers, becoming increasingly popular, but so are different kinds of plant-based milk. While the consumption of cow’s milk continues to decline, the increasing consumption of non-dairy milk is revolutionizing the beverage industry. This change has been, among others, caused by health and environmental concerns. Despite this interesting shift, little to no research has been done on the marketing or branding of dairy alternatives. This study contributes to a new and growing field of research on dairy alternatives by providing insights into the way two important issues, sustainability and health, have been used in the branding of plant-based milk. The aim is to analyse the appeal of health and ethics that have been used in the last five years in the branding of three plant-based milk producers in Europe through a qualitative content analysis. A thematic approach was used for a systematic analysis that gives meaning to the data and a focus on providing an exhaustive description. A thematic analysis offered insight into patterns across the data, which were essential to this research. Five different mediums were chosen for data collection and analysis to account for a complete image of the branding strategies of three European companies. The packaging, print advertising, television advertising and social media accounts (Instagram and Facebook) of the brands Alpro, Oatly and Rude Health were studied. Alpro is a Belgian food and beverage producer, specialising in plant-based alternatives to dairy. Oatly is a Swedish vegan brand which makes products from oats as an alternative to dairy. Rude Health describes itself as a healthy food and drinks company from London, which produces dairy free drinks. The main findings demonstrate a general and a specific appeal of health and ethics. The general appeals were demonstrated by living a healthy lifestyle and making environmentally conscious choices that go beyond dietary choices. These appeals were mostly presented on the social media platforms of the brands. The specific appeal of health was shown by communicating that plant-based milk is healthy, nutritious and good for you, which was mostly shown on packaging and television commercials. The specific appeal of ethics was presented by communicating that plant-based milk was good for the planet and a better choice than dairy regarding CO2 emissions, which was mostly shown on the packaging, print advertising and television commercials. The appeal of ethics, and thus sustainability, is an abstract concept predominantly presented through text, whereas the appeal of health as a concrete concept was mainly represented through pictures.
KEYWORDS: Plant-based milk, branding, advertising, packaging, sustainability
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Personal motivation

In the last few years, I noticed a change in people’s buying behaviour of food and beverages, especially the shift from buying meat and dairy to substitutes or no animal products at all. It seems that people around me have become more and more conscious about the environment and the benefits of a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle. What stood out as well is that there is a growing amount of supply of these products in Dutch supermarkets. At first, there was only a limited amount of vegetarian burgers and kinds of plant-based milks based on ingredients such as soy. As the years passed, almost every kind of meat, from burgers to meatballs to a Dutch speciality “kroketten”, all have a vegetarian or vegan substitute. These products try their best to look like the ‘real’ meat products. The same story applies to plant-based milk. There is not only more variety in the sorts of plant-based milk such as oat milk, coconut milk, cashew milk and rice milk, there are also more new brands that only produce plant-based products. Also, there are already existing dairy brands that have started producing plant-based milk.

Moreover, the supply of plant-based milk did not only increase in the supermarkets, but also in cafes and bars. In these places, consumers pay more for non-dairy variants of milk compared to dairy milk. This is a choice I make myself. I like to pay more for a coffee with oat milk for example. I am conscious of what I eat and drink and I want to eat and drink as healthy as possible. So, for me, the health aspect of plant-based milk is my main motivation, however, I do also really care about the environment. I also share this combination of motivations with some of my friends, as well as being the impetus for this thesis.

1.2 Change in consumption of milk

It is interesting to see that the consumption of milk is changing in the Netherlands, considering that a lot of money was spent on generic milk advertising in the last century. In the 1930s the collective promotion of milk started in the Netherlands. This was part of a policy for the agricultural crisis that was happening at that time (Zuivelgeschiedenis, n.d.). Regional and national dairy brands were advertising their milk. After the war, the Dutch Dairy Office set up big national campaigns to encourage the consumption of milk (Zuivelgeschiedenis, n.d.). The milk promotion by the Dutch Dairy office ended in 2003.
The sentence “melk is goed voor elk” (milk is good for everyone) was used quite often by my mother and grandmother. It was believed that milk is good for the bones in your body because of the calcium. By still calling soy, coconut, oat or almond drinks “milk”, for example, it conveys that it has the same nutritional values as dairy milk, which is not true according to dairy farmers (O’Connor, 2017). The term “milk” is used because for consumers, it is easier to understand what they are buying (CNBC, 2019).

The observations of the changes in milk consumption I made in the Netherlands appear to exist globally. The change from dairy milk to plant-based “milk” has even caused a big milk company in the United States to go bankrupt (Yaffe-Bellany, 2019). The global market for non-dairy products in 2017 was estimated to be 11.9 billion dollars (10.92 billion euros) while the consumption of dairy milk keeps declining (Kateman, 2019). The non-dairy industry keeps growing, so the importance of branding and marketing is becoming more important, and therefore needs to be studied. Consumers not only switch because it is a healthier alternative than milk but also because it is better for the environment or just because of the taste (O’Connor, 2017).

The right use of a branding strategy can make the decision-making process for consumers easier to switch to healthier products (Chrysochou, 2010). Therefore it is an important tool to communicate certain values to potential consumers. Moreover, it is difficult to introduce plant-based products into the market (Fuentes & Fuentes, 2017), something wherein branding plays a great role. The shift from the consumption of dairy milk towards plant-based milk is interesting to investigate in terms of branding because it needs to be branded in a way that it stands out and gets people’s attention in order to persuade them to buy it instead of cow’s milk.

Furthermore, the role of the consumer has changed; they are more active and demanding, to which retailers respond (Ernst & Young, 2008). Research shows that healthy eating and drinking has been increasing (Chrysochou, 2010). Health concerns have caused a growing amount of vegetarians and vegans internationally as well as environmental, ethical and social worries (Leitzmann, 2014).

1.3 Appeals of Environment and Health

In this research, the branding of three brands that produce plant-based milk are studied regarding appeals of environment and health. Firstly, the environment is important in the discussion around non-dairy milk because the effect of livestock production is likely to emit fifty per cent of all greenhouse gas emissions and is the
biggest polluter (Beverland, 2014). As mentioned before, this environmental situation is one of the reasons why people cut dairy milk from their diets; they want to contribute to a better environment. Consumers are aware of the consequences of their choices on the world (Cherrier, Black & Lee, 2010) and consumers in the EU are becoming more attentive about the environmental actions of companies (Bhaskaran et al., 2006). According to research, the environmental responsibility of companies can lead to customers turning to companies that are seen as environmentally responsible, subsequently leading to commercial benefit (Bhaskaran, Polonsky, Cary, & Fernandez, 2006). Therefore, it would be interesting to research how the packaging, use of social media and advertising taps into this growing awareness.

Secondly, the appeal of health plays an important role in the debate about plant-based milk because, on the one hand, people see dairy milk as healthy because of the calcium and vitamins. On the other hand, research shows that a high consumption of dairy can cause heart disease and obesity (Mylan, Morris, Beech & Geels, 2018). According to Beverland (2014), a plant-based diet can provide enough vitamins and minerals to live a healthy life. A well planned plant-based diet can even prevent specific chronic diseases (Craig, 2010). Additionally, new drink (and food) products that have entered the market lately are dominated by health claims on these products (Chrysochou, 2010). The appeal of health can be adopted to promote specific food categories or to improve the healthiness of a certain product by for example excluding sugar, in order to make people aware of healthier choices (Chrysocou, 2010).

Appeals of health, green consumption and the use of environmentally friendly aspects as a marketing strategy can be used to persuade consumers to buy plant-based milk. Whether and how environmental appeals will be used for the branding of plant-based milk are researched in this study as a part of ethical branding. Whether and how health claims or statements about health are used for the branding of plant-based milk are researched in this study as part of health branding.

1.4 Research question

The research question to be answered is: “How has the appeal of health and ethics been used in branding to encourage the consumption of plant-based milk in Europe in the last five years?” Three sub-questions are posed to help answer the main research question: (1) How has social media been used by companies to encourage the consumption of plant-based milk in Europe? (2) How has advertising been used to
encourage the consumption of plant-based milk in Europe through different mediums? 

(3) How has packaging been used to encourage the consumption of plant-based milk in Europe? To answer these questions, a qualitative content analysis is conducted on two social media channels, Instagram and Facebook, on print and TV advertising and the packaging of Oatly, Alpro and Rude Health, which are three European brands that produce plant-based milk.

1.5 Academic Relevance

Despite the actuality and importance of the subject, there seems to be a gap in the literature that this research can help close. While research on meat alternatives is slowly growing, little to no research has been done on plant-based milk and dairy milk, especially regarding the marketing, branding or advertising of it. This present research develops two contributions. First, this research will contribute to the small body of already existing literature on vegan substitute products, which lacks research about the marketing of branded plant-based milk. Second, this research contributes to the field of ethical branding, which is still being shaped as it is a relatively new field of study. Following this research, it can be a motive to research more on why consumers choose a specific plant-based milk substitute and how to promote a healthy vegan lifestyle regarding health and the environment.

1.6 Social Relevance

According to PR Week Global (2019) “people are increasingly interested in how what they eat and drink impacts their health, their environment and their personal values. With climate change and obesity top of the media agenda, if brands want long-term success, they must look at their products through both these lenses”. Consumers’ awareness of these problems identify a certain need for a more sustainable planet and a healthy lifestyle. Recently, a new consumer market segment was created that specifically values social and environmental responsibility in their buying behaviour: Lifestyle of Health and Sustainability, (Urh, 2015). The appearance of LOHAS represents the prominence of health and sustainability for consumers, an area to which this research contributes. This research can help plant-based milk producers to gain insight into how their competitors are branding their plant-based milk, which is useful for this growing market.
Furthermore, companies can play a role in how environmental problems are presented and how they should be solved. This can be risky. The values that a company conveys can be internalized by the consumer, which subsequently makes us shoppers of morality (Ledin & Machin, 2019). Political ideas that can be communicated through brands and acts of shopping is also called political consumerism (Ledin & Machin, 2019). Concerns have been expressed about the scenario of marketing of brands, such as Oatly, taking over and shaping the socio-political agenda, in which sustainability is an important issue (Ledin & Machin, 2019). Therefore, the social relevance of this study is to show how brands shape important issues such as health and sustainability and how they can be solved, and thereby contributes to creating awareness about the marketing instruments of food and beverage companies.

1.7 Chapter Outline

In the next chapter, theory and previous research on the branding of dairy milk, plant-based milk and lifestyle branding are addressed. In chapter three, the methodology is explained in detail. Chapter four discusses the results and the interpretation of the analysis of Instagram, Facebook, print advertising, TV advertising and packaging, which also are tied together and compared in the last section of the chapter. Chapter five provides the main findings to give an answer to the three sub-questions and the main research question. Furthermore, the limitations and theoretical implications of this study are considered and directions for future research are given.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

In order to give context to the research question, a historical perspective, previously investigated aspects, and specific theories that have been established as key for this study are discussed. Despite the lack of research on the topic, it is possible to combine certain topics and theories of academic research and apply these to this study.

The first section explores the fields of branding, and in particular, lifestyle branding. In general, a large amount of research has been conducted on branding in books, journal articles and conference papers. However, there are only a few studies that link branding, marketing or advertising to plant-based milk in particular. Therefore, the topic of branding covers the theory of lifestyle branding. This is an applicable theory for the branding of plant-based milk, as other food and beverage companies have used this strategy to create attachment with consumers to share the values of the product.

The second section gives insight into the growing consumer market for products that are promoted as sustainable and healthy. Furthermore, the appeals of health, ethics and sustainability are discussed. Since ethical branding is a relatively new field of research, there is no universal definition yet, but an attempt is made to elaborate on the meaning of this new form of branding.

The third section addresses the identity of dairy milk. This section is of importance as dairy milk is not only seen as the competitor of plant-based milk, but also its predecessor. So, building on this information, the final section addresses the branding of plant-based milk and previous research on the topic of plant-based milk in general.

2.2 Branding

Since this research is about the branding of plant-based milk, the theory behind branding is explained first. Initially, the meaning of ‘brand’ was sign (Saviolo & Marazza, 2012). But after some years, the American Marketing Association (1960) changed the definition into “a name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller’s good or service as distinct from those of other sellers”. The definition of a brand can slightly change within different articles, but the definition of the AMA is used the most in scholarly research, hence the reason this definition is used in this study as well.

Murphy (1992) emphasizes that a brand consists of different aspects that can help to distinguish the brand from others: the product, the packaging, the name, the promotion,
the advertising and the overall presentation. The above-mentioned aspects need to have a certain value, a value that overlaps with the consumers’ values. Walter Landor, a branding pioneer even states that a brand promises a one-of-a-kind advantage, supported by rational and emotional aspects (Saviolo & Marazza, 2012). So the choice to buy a brand depends on both emotion and ratio. Some brands even represent a certain lifestyle that speaks to the consumer because they follow or pursue that particular lifestyle (Vaid, 2003).

Advertising is seen as something that can be controlled to send out a certain brand identity (Meenaghan, 1995). Broadbent and Cooper argue that “In order to be successful, images and symbols must relate to, and indeed, exploit, the needs, values and lifestyles of consumers in such a way that the meanings involved give added values, and differentiate the brand from other brands” (cited by Meenaghan, 1995, p. 25). So, brands can distinguish themselves through symbols and values. Levy explains symbolism in branding as “people buy things not only for what they can do but also for what they mean” (cited by Meenaghan, 1995, p.26). There are two levels of values: intrinsic values that focus on the quality of a product, and extrinsic values that centre on the symbolic meaning of a brand. These extrinsic values come mostly from the brand image that is constructed by advertising (Meenaghan, 1995). Because some brands are seen as homogeneous and interchangeable, marketers try to emphasise the symbolic values as a way of distinguishing from other brands.

Branding has changed over time since there are more branding strategies and more mediums that can be used for branding. According to Murphy, modern branding focusses on “a brand's 'gestalt', with assembling together and maintaining a mix of values, both tangible and intangible, which are relevant to consumers and which meaningfully and appropriately distinguish one supplier's brand from that of another” (Murphy, 1992, p.1-2). So, the values a company wants to reflect need to be both relatable to the customers as well as distinct from other companies. Interestingly, the distinguishable aspects of a brand have become non-tangible (Murphy, 1992).

2.2.1 Lifestyle branding

Consumers have a need to express themselves, which can be done through buying brands and displaying brands they own (Chernev, Hamilton & Gal, 2011). Brands are valued, based on how much they overlap with people's' beliefs and fundamental ideals (Chernev et al., 2011). This attachment with a brand can be created through lifestyle
branding. Jung and Merlin define lifestyle branding as “a product or service that provides consumers with an emotional attachment to an identifiable lifestyle” (2003, p.40). So, emotions are a very important aspect in the identification with a brand. Lifestyle is described as the sum of daily conscious and unconscious behaviour through life (Vyncke, 2002).

Subsequently, the consumer shows his or hers lifestyle by buying and using certain brands (Jung & Merlin, 2003). This form of branding started out as a strategy for products with high emotional involvement and self-expressiveness, such as cars (Jung & Merlin, 2003). However, this is no longer required. Lifestyle branding is used by companies to create and sustain a strong bond with consumers and gain commercial benefit from this. According to Jung and Merlin (2003), the most important prerequisite for brands now is that they stand for something in order to make use of lifestyle branding. It seems that the bar has been set quite low to categorize a brand as a lifestyle brand, as (almost) every brand stands for something.

The beginnings of lifestyle branding can be traced back to Veblen’s theory of conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899). Conspicuous consumption can in short be explained by expressing oneself through consumption to appear high(er) in social status (Veblen, 1899). Many consumers use brands as an instrument to show their lifestyle (Cătălin & Andreea, 2014) as different brands have different values and associations. This form of identification, to show one’s self-identity, without aiming to attain status, recognition or acceptance, is a confirmation of their personality to themselves (Chernev et al., 2011). Moreover, it can be used to signal a certain identity to others (Cătălin & Andreea, 2014). In short, brands can represent a certain personality when showing them, confirming one’s self-identity or indicate an identity to other people.

2.2.2 Lifestyle branding in the food and beverage industry

Since lifestyle branding is not confined to obviously self-expressing brands only, food and beverage brands have been tapping into this strategy as well. Food and beverage brands are in a good position to develop into a lifestyle brand because the choice for certain kinds of foods, whether it is vegan, organic, or sugar free, all carry a meaning, and buying them can even be seen as a statement (Artisan Coffee & Food Marketing, 2017).

Social media are good tools for lifestyle branding, as the content on social media is self-expressive by nature. Food can express an identity according to Micheal Pollan, a journalist and writer known for his books about the socio-cultural impact of food (Poole,
This identity can make consumers identify with or associate with the product and its values. An article in PR Week even argues that people have a very strong opinion on what they eat and drink, to which brands need to react and focus on health and environment in their strategies (PR Week Global, 2019).

For example, Chobani, a Greek yoghurt brand, has been using social media to gain an understanding of what is trending and thereby touch upon consumer lifestyle (Marshall, 2012). Starbucks is another example of a beverage brand that pertains to lifestyle branding as coffee culture leverages on emotional appeals (Poon, 2014). Getting a Starbucks coffee every morning before work is a habit for many people and thus part of their lifestyle.

2.3 Lifestyle of Health and Sustainability

Since this research focuses on both the health and sustainability aspects of consumer goods and is connected to the theory on lifestyle branding, it fits into the LOHAS market segment. LOHAS stands for Lifestyle of Health and Sustainability (Urh, 2015). The consumers in this group base their buying behaviour on the values of social and environmental responsibility, taking into account healthy living and an ecological lifestyle among other things (Urh, 2015). This group is distributed among different socio-demographic levels and are seen to be “the future of progressive social, environmental and economic change” (Urh, 2015, p.168). This consumer group has been growing rapidly and can be seen as an important consumer trend (Urh, 2015).

The combination of health and sustainability comes from the perspective that their own health and the health of the earth are intrinsically linked (Urh, 2015). These consumers are willing to pay more for ethically justifiable products according to research in Europe by Ernst and Young in 2008. Because of globalization, consumer concerns and subsequently the need for transparency are rising (Ernst & Young, 2008).

2.3.4 Appeal of Health

In the last decades of the twentieth century, a large amount evidence was found that a person’s diet was linked to health (Ippolito & Mathios, 1991). A debate started on how to communicate this to consumers with, for example, health claims (Ippolito & Mathios, 1991). In order to make consumers more aware of their dietary choices, a system was introduced. In 2010, the European Union adopted the Guideline Daily Amounts (GDA) system. This shows the amount of energy, sugar, sodium and fats in
food and beverages (Kim, House, Rampersaud & Gao, 2012). Nutritional labeling has been widely researched on food, but less so on beverages.

Because obesity and being overweight are still big issues in modern society, initiatives have been started to advocate a healthy lifestyle (Kraak, Kumanyika, & Story, 2009). Marketing plays a role in this as well. “Industry’s role in marketing both healthy and unhealthy images and products that influence lifestyles is important” (Kraak et al., 2009, p.2028). Companies have the power to reach and influence consumers’ health behaviour. Moreover, marketing health has become a corporate social responsibility for the global food and beverage industry and holds an enormous brand value according to Herrick (2009).

A value or appeal that can be important for a person’s lifestyle is the appeal of health. Research on the appeal of health in branding of food has focused mostly on the effects of different aspects of health branding, for example, the impact of it on children’s taste preferences (Elliot, Den Hoed & Conlon, 2013) or how to use nutrition claims correctly in advertising (Choi & Springston, 2014). A lot of literature appears to focus on disease prevention or recovering from diseases such as obesity, whereas this research focuses more on getting healthier in general and not necessarily preventing diseases. Alpro’s mission statement for example is “We want to bring health through food to as many people as possible” (Alpro, n.d.).

Health branding is a specific field and is described as applying marketing principles to create behavioural change through brand associations and beliefs (Evans, Blitstein, Vallone, Post, & Nielsen, 2014). Health branding distinguishes itself from other forms of branding as it is a voluntary choice to buy the branded product based on health-promoting behaviour the consumer needs to adopt (Evans et al., 2014). Health has been a considerable component element in the rise of alternative milk, because animal fats were believed to be bad for people’s health, causing the dairy sector to suffer (Levitt, 2018). The health benefits and the supply of different plant-based drinks show that consumers’ interests, lifestyle and eating habits are changing (Levitt, 2018).

2.3.5 Appeal of Ethics

Another appeal regarding lifestyle branding is the appeal of sustainability and ethics. Since the 1990s, there has been an increasing popularity of sustainable goods and socially responsible practices that will not threaten the planet (Sirieix, Delanchy, Remaud, Zepeda, & Gurviez, 2012). However, ethical branding has only been a topic of
scientific research since 2005 (Fan, 2005). Buying fair trade, and animal and worker welfare are ethical concerns that consumers seem to care increasingly about and need to be responded to by companies and their stakeholders (Sirieix et al., 2012). To make it easier to let consumers choose ethical products, labels have been put on products, such as fair trade labels.

The fact that consumers take matters like sustainable food consumption into their own hands is also called political consumerism (Ledin & Machin, 2019). Oatly’s branding has been mentioned as an example of ethical branding by Ledin and Machin (2019) because Toni Petersson, the CEO, placed the brand against the dairy industry and the unsustainable image that came with it. The branding of Oatly from 2014 was value-based and not product-based (Ledin & Machin, 2019), meaning that the brand focussed on the sustainability of the product, rather than the product itself.

As Fan (2005) claims, it is very difficult to find a definition of ethical branding or even an agreement on what it is because ethics change over time and are different among cultures. He argues that an ethical brand should promote the public good instead of causing harm (Fan, 2005). Andrivet, founder of the Branding Journal (2018) tries to define an ethical brand, which contains elements that are subjective, but are good to work with. Andrivet states that an ethical brand “represents a company, organization or person whose products, services and activities are: 1) morally correct 2) do not harm people, animals and the environment 3) contribute to society and public good in a responsible, positive, and sustainable way”. So, morality, sustainability and responsibility are important factors in ethical branding.

The advertising of green products in particular, also called green advertising is described as including environmentally friendly aspects and features as a convincing way to sell a product (Atkinson, 2015). Most of the time, green consumption refers to organic and ecological food, and not vegan substitutes, although vegan substitutes could be seen as a form of green consumption. As Atkinson (2015) argues, the definition of green consumption lacks accuracy and consistency, so she uses a definition set by the Norwegian Ministry of the Environment (1994): “the use of services and related products which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials, as well as emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations”.
Arguing along this line, the consumption of plant-based milk can be categorised as green consumption. Other terms that are used along the same line and mean approximately the same are responsible consumption, ecologically concerned consumption, socially responsible consumption, ethical consumption, and political consumption (Atkinson, 2015). However, ethical consumption is even broader than green consumption and is defined as “the conscious and deliberate decision to make certain consumption choices due to personal moral beliefs and values” (Crane & Matten, 2004, p.290). So green consumption can be categorised under ethical consumption.

2.4 Identity of Dairy Milk

Literature on the branding or advertising of dairy or cow’s milk contains research on the impact of generic milk advertising, especially in the US between 1970 to 1990. Apparently, there is very little to nothing written about the advertising and branding of cow’s milk because milk does not really have an identity. This leaves a gap in the literature. As mentioned, most advertising on milk is generic. Generic advertising promotes the consumption of a general good (Blisard, 1999). So, milk would be promoted as a product itself, and not a certain milk brand. Furthermore, it would be difficult to be distinguishable as a milk brand, as there is not much differentiation in packaging. Nick Barnard, founder of Rude Health states: “the only choice people have is the colour of the cap” (as cited by Levitt, 2018, p.16).

Milk is perceived negatively as argued by Bower (2008), due to the fats in it, but also because it is displayed without any personality in supermarkets (as cited in Perkins, Vander Elst & Croxon, 2002). Bas Groot, a Dutch milk sommelier adds to this argumentation: “Milk has a bad reputation because it has none” (Levitt, 2018, p.16). Moreover, milk was decreasing in popularity because of the competitive and refined marketing of soft drinks. Milk had become so familiar for consumers that it had gone unnoticed. Dairy milk had become associated with blandness and dullness (Perkins et al., 2002). Milk has no value and is not unique (Levitt, 2018). Levitt (2018) states that other drinkable milk products differentiate themselves from normal cow’s milk because of certain health, taste or nutritional benefits.

Two campaigns on dairy milk were addressed in scientific articles. These campaigns were run in Scotland and the United Kingdom. Scotland wanted to market milk as a brand using celebrities as endorsers, taking inspiration from the American “Got Milk” campaign (Bower, 2008). The United Kingdom has recently run a campaign on the
generic promotion of dairy on social media and posters. This campaign was targeted at a younger audience, reminding them of the values of dairy (AHDB, n.d.). The campaign was quite innovative as it was not focused on the health aspect of dairy, but on the taste and enjoyment. However, there is no proof the campaign worked (Levitt, 2018).

So, the lack of personality or identity of cow’s milk has created an opportunity for plant-based milk brands to distinguish themselves and promote them as healthy and good for the environment and let consumers choose among different kinds of colourful packaging. These brands are creating a new identity for “milk”.

2.5 Branding of plant-based milk

Although soy milk has been in the supermarkets since the 1950s (Bridges, 2018), academic research into plant-based milk has only gained popularity since the last decade. In the last five years, research has been conducted more critically, investigating the meaning of this rise of plant-based alternatives. Previous research on the topic of plant-based milk contains research on nutritional values (Chalupa-Krebzdak, Long & Bohrer, 2018), the acceptance of milk substitutes for younger and older children (Palacios et al., 2010) and the marketing of vegan milk substitute for a mass market as a case study of Oatly, using ethnographic methods (Fuentes & Fuentes, 2017).

Research shows that there are two different beliefs about substitutes regarding similarity to conventional products. On the one hand, there needs to be differentiation between the two to motivate consumption. On the other hand, the similarity attracts the consumers (Fuentes & Fuentes, 2017). Furthermore, “they are marketed both as different from conventional meat and dairy products (as ethical, sustainable and healthy alternatives) and as similar to these same products (used in a similar manner, and having similar taste, shape and nutritional value)” (Fuentes & Fuentes, 2017, p.530). Bridges (2018) adds that plant-based milk is made to resemble milk visually as well as the name itself.

Oatly has also been researched by Ledin and Machin (2019) regarding their marketing being political activism, using a multimodal critical discourse analysis. McCrow-Young (2017) also researches commodity activism with Oatly being the subject matter in her dissertation, conducting interviews with consumers. Consumer involvement in non-dairy products of Oatly and Alpro has been researched by Rebin Naderi, Emelie Pine, William O’Riordan & Catalina Constantin (2019), making use of interviews as well. Other large or small brands of plant-based milk have not yet been researched in
detail from a marketing or branding perspective.

Ledin and Machin (2019) claim that Oatly, by positioning against the dairy industry and using metacommunication on their posters and packaging, is providing a way for consumers to shop ethically. The consumers internalize Oatly’s values and make moral choices based on these values. “Consumers’ individual political advocacy using Oatly’s products would seem to enhance Oatly’s commercial agenda, as the company has sought to draw on political issues like environmentalism through their lifestyle branding” (McCrow-Young, 2017, p.182). Becoming part of people’s lives is important according to Oatly’s creative director (as cited in McCrow-Young, 2017, p.182).

Thus, there already has been laid a subtle foundation for the research of plant-based milk. However, researchers have so far neglected to include a branding approach on the different brands’ use of health and ethical appeals and lifestyle branding.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the method used in this study. Since this is a qualitative study, the findings will not be generalizable. The relationship between the data and the results will be discussed carefully and transparently and a code tree can be found in Appendix A. This will contribute to the reliability of this study, as reporting the process of qualitative content analysis accurately will increase the trustworthiness (Elo et al., 2014). This chapter will elaborate on the research design, the sample, the data collection and the steps that will be taken to analyse the data systematically.

3.1 Research Design

For this study, a qualitative method was used. Qualitative research is defined by its interpretive nature and the assumption that reality is constructed (Brennen, 2017). The researcher takes an active role in the process, presenting a variety of meanings and socially constructed realities (Brennen, 2017). In media studies, qualitative research focuses on the variety of meanings and values that the media have created, instead of measuring effects through scientific models, which would be done for quantitative media research (Brennen, 2017). The use of language is of utmost importance in qualitative research. Through language, people communicate, create discourse and construct realities (Brennen, 2017). Not only text is analysed in media studies, visual communication is a topic of research as well.

The goal of this study is to analyse the branding of plant-based milk, hereby focussing on packaging and advertising through different mediums of three European brands: Alpro, Oatly and Rude Health. The mediums used are social media (Instagram and Facebook), TV advertising, print advertising and packaging. This is done through a qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis suits this goal, as it allows a systematic analysis that gives meaning to the data and focuses on providing a comprehensive description of the data (Schreier, 2012). Moreover, it requires that the researcher can focus on particular aspects of the data relating to the research question (Schreier, 2012). Qualitative content analysis allows for analysing the more latent and context-dependent meanings (Schreier, 2012) which is especially needed when analysing the advertisements, as meanings in advertising can be hidden. Conducting a qualitative content analysis on advertisements limits its contribution to theory building and marketing practice (Lerman & Callow, 2004).
The specific qualitative method that is chosen is thematic analysis, because this method offers “insights into patterns of meanings across a data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.57). This suits the research as three brands are analysed and collective patterns need to be found regarding their branding. The method is used in a data-driven way. This means that the categories derive from the data itself, not from theory. This decision for a data-driven approach was made because there is a lack of research on the branding of plant-based milk or the branding of cow’s milk. Furthermore, using a data-driven approach leaves no material unaccounted for, in contrast to a concept-driven approach (Schreier, 2012). The steps that are taken to execute the thematic analysis are based on the steps described by Braun and Clarke (2006) and discussed later in this chapter.

In the study by Ledin and Machin a multimodal critical discourse analysis is used to analyse Oatly’s packaging, posters and social media videos. Armstrong, Soule and Sekhon (2019), for example, also use content analysis to categorize persuasive appeals on packaging of humane and vegan meat brands. The goal of their research is similar to this study; exploring the differences in marketing communications of vegan substitute products. As they mentioned that only analysing packaging was a limitation and suggested to analyse other promotional components such as advertising, this is done in this study. Another type of analysis is used as well, which can provide new insights and patterns.

3.2 Sample and Data Collection

According to Elo et al., (2014) purposive sampling is the most commonly used sampling strategy when conducting content analysis. In this present study a combination of random sampling, purposive and convenience sampling was used, which is clarified below. There is no universal sample size for qualitative studies, but as Elo et al., (2014, p. 5) state: “The most suitable unit of analysis will be sufficiently large to be considered as a whole but small enough to be a relevant meaning unit during the analysis process.” This was pursued when collecting the data.

The first step for data collection is selecting the material and the timeframe. Three European plant-based milk brands were selected to analyse: Alpro, Oatly and Rude Health. Alpro is a Belgian company that produces foods and drinks, including plant-based milk. Oatly is a Swedish brand that only produces vegan food and drinks and became popular because of (the marketing of) their oat milk. Rude Health is a food and beverage company from London that focuses on what they term “honest products”. The
branding of these three brands are analysed over the period of the past five years. The products of these brands are available in the supermarkets and health stores in the Netherlands.

The timeframe that has been chosen is the past five years, as this is the period where plant-based milk has been substantially on the rise. For example, the sales of plant-based milk in the UK have increased 30% from 2015 to 2019 (Franklin-Wallis, 2019). Moreover, nowadays people buy plant-based milk for health and environmental reasons, instead of only for lactose intolerance. Therefore, the amount of potential customers has been broadened, and the marketing for these products has been changed. In addition to this, the time frame cannot be too small because enough data needs to be obtained. So, for this study, the timeframe is from January 1, 2015 until January 1, 2020.

The dataset is divided into social media marketing, TV advertising, print advertising, and packaging. The dataset contains twenty social media posts per brand on Facebook as well as twenty posts per brand on Instagram. Tables 3.1 and 3.2 present the social media accounts of the brands and some background information. The social media posts from the past five years were sampled randomly. The dataset also contains thirty images of packaging that were taken from the brands’ websites, and the online website rawbites.com. Also, pictures were taken by the researcher from the products in the Jumbo and Albert Heijn in Rotterdam. The available plant-based milk products (i.e. no yoghurt or cottage cheese) were analysed. If there were more than ten products per brand, the products were picked purposively by the researcher.

Since there is not a lot of documentation of the advertisements, for both TV and print, the ones that are available on the Youtube channels, Vimeo channels, Pinterest, Twitter or Facebook pages of Alpro, Oatly and Rude Health, or found through a Google search, were analysed. So, TV and print advertising were sampled conveniently. Print advertising was gathered on Google using search terms such as “Oatly poster” or “Alpro print advertising”, as there is no platform or database that contains print advertisements for these brands. The results for TV and print advertising were complementary to the results of the packaging and social media.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand</th>
<th>Instagram handles</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number of posts</th>
<th>Number of followers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oatly</td>
<td>@oatly</td>
<td>Our goal is to deliver products that have maximum nutritional value and minimal environmental impact. Share your oatsomeness and tag #oatly</td>
<td>887</td>
<td>236,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpro</td>
<td>@alpro</td>
<td>Creating delicious plant powered foods &amp; drinks with soya, almonds, rice, oats &amp; coconut. Good for you and good for the planet. Enjoy #plantpower!</td>
<td>651</td>
<td>206,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rude Health</td>
<td>@rudehealth</td>
<td>With good food inside you, you can do just about anything.</td>
<td>1947</td>
<td>87,600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand</th>
<th>Instagram handles</th>
<th>Number of likes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oatly</td>
<td>@oatly</td>
<td>196,145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpro</td>
<td>@alpro</td>
<td>1,753,364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rude Health</td>
<td>@rudehealth</td>
<td>21,187</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3 Data Analysis

After collecting the data, a coding frame was created. During this part, categories were defined and data was divided into coding units (Schreier, 2012). Since this method was used in a data driven way, a good description of the material was necessary (Schreier, 2012). The data contained text as well as (moving) images. They both were analysed according to the next systematic approach.

The method of thematic visual analysis was applied systematically through six steps as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first step was familiarizing myself with and immersing myself in the data, in this case, the posts on Instagram, Facebook, print advertising, TV advertising and packaging. This was done when collecting the different data in March and when using the packaging myself as I bought Oatly’s oat milk and Alpro’s soymilk. This already guided me to identifying three very different manners of branding.

During the second step, which is also called open coding (Boeije, 2010), the data was looked at again. In this phase, initial codes based on the collected data were created. These codes carry a label for a component in the data that might be relevant to the
research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was achieved by analysing the data set and identifying interesting elements that occurred in the data set. When the researcher saw anything that might potentially be of interest of the research question, it was coded. These codes stayed close to the data.

When every relevant aspect had an open code, the third phase was executed: sorting the codes into themes. This phase is also called axial coding (Boeije, 2010). During this phase, the researcher looked for similarity and overlap in the codes to construct a theme. The purpose of this is to distinguish the dominant elements from the less dominant elements (Boeije, 2010). These constructed themes are broader and more abstract than the open codes. When these themes were created, they needed to be reviewed in relation to the data. This happened in the fourth phase. If the themes did not capture the data meaningfully, codes were discarded or the themes were adjusted. Additional themes were added as well.

The fifth phase entailed defining and naming themes. In this phase it was important to indicate what is unique about each theme. Characteristics of a good thematic analysis consists of themes that have preferably a singular focus, are linked but do not overlap and are relevant to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this phase, data extracts were selected to put in the results section.

The sixth and final phase involved writing the report. The goal of thematic analysis is to identify the most relevant patterns across the dataset to answer the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This report should tell a convincing story about the data, based on the analysis. The order of the report is logical, as themes are connected in a meaningful way. A summary of each theme was given, supported by specific examples of both captions and pictures that belong to that theme.

3.4 Validity and Reliability

It is important to be consistent and coherent when coding the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The main categories need to be unidimensional, the subcategories need to be mutually exclusive and all the relevant aspects of the data need to be included in a category (Schreier, 2012). Attention is paid to these aspects throughout the data analysis. In order to account for the validity regarding mutual exclusiveness, the theme “miscellaneous” was created if there were codes that did not fit under any selective code. The “miscellaneous” theme is not discussed in the results, as it fails to contribute to answering the research question.
Chapter 4: Results and Interpretation

Three brands that produce and sell plant-based milk were selected for this research: Oatly, Alpro and Rude Health. The Instagram and Facebook accounts, television commercials, print advertising and packaging of these three brands were analysed using the method of qualitative (visual and textual) thematic analysis to answer the three sub-questions and main research question. The results of these analyses are provided in this section.

4.1 Results and Interpretation: Instagram

Social media has become part of branding strategy as there was a need to foster a sense of belonging through engagement (Yan, 2011). Consumers want to engage with the brand they associate themselves with and become involved, therefore, a goal of the use of social media in branding is building a sense of membership with the company (Yan, 2011). Food, beverage and snack companies are progressively using various social media platforms to promote their brand among adolescents and adults (Bragg et al., 2019). Instagram is the most popular social media platform among young people (Huang & Su, 2018), which is why it is interesting to analyse how brands use it. Brands use a way of storytelling through their posts to illustrate the values and experiences the products will add to people’s lives when they purchase the product (Ginsberg, 2015). Moreover, the interactive nature of Instagram allows people to engage with the brand, in contrast with print or TV advertising, which is one-way communication.

The official Instagram accounts of Oatly, Alpro and Rude Health were examined. The data for Oatly’s and Rude Health’s posts on Instagram were collected on March 18. The data for Alpro’s posts on Instagram were collected on March 19. Twenty posts, both image and caption, were analysed for each brand. The posts were collected randomly, selecting every 38th post on Oatly’s account, every 25th post on Alpro’s account and every 75th post on Rude Health’s account, in order to account for the five years in proportion to the total number of posts for each brand account. Comments under posts are not a part of branding strategy, as these are written by followers and therefore excluded from the analysis. So, in total, sixty pictures and captions (20 from each brand) were analysed for this part of the research.

The main findings are discussed in detail in this section. The differences between the representation of the three brands on Instagram were noticeable. Oatly showed a lot
of variety in its posts, ranging from calming pictures of nature to statistic pie charts. Alpro, on the other hand, seemed to utilise one strategy: pictures of food that were made with their products, connoting the diversity of options that were possible using non-dairy products. Rude Health showed a lot of variety as well, presenting recipes, products and people. Whereas Oatly and Alpro maintained a very neutral tone and colour palette, Rude Health used bright and fun colours. The analysis of the data provided twenty-four themes for pictures and captions altogether, from which only the nine most relevant themes are discussed below. The most relevant selective codes and thus final themes are health focus, environmental focus, Swedish focus, recognizable product, usages, people as endorsers, taste and texture focus, and creative wording.

4.1.1 Health focus

Based on the data, the first theme that occurred repeatedly among the three brands was health focus. Twenty percent of the dataset applied a health focus. Rude Health used the perspective of health not as a characteristic of their products, but to encourage people to live a healthy lifestyle. Examples are posts from a person doing yoga and two women who went running (Figures 4.1 and 4.2). Rude Health thereby tried to associate the brand with a healthy lifestyle of exercise. Moreover, the brand supported exercise or a healthy lifestyle by organizing a run in Hyde Park or yoga classes for pregnant women. Oatly also foregrounded health through a post of two people playing sports (Figure 4.3). Oatly also emphasized health in their captions, for example when stating “our goal is to always deliver products that have maximum nutritional value” or “give your body good carbs”.

![Figure 4.1](image1.png)  
Figure 4.1. Post retrieved from @rudehealth

![Figure 4.2](image2.png)  
Figure 4.2. Post retrieved from @rudehealth

![Figure 4.3](image3.png)  
Figure 4.3. Post retrieved from @oatly
4.1.2 Healthy additional foods

A subtheme of the health focus was healthy additional foods. This means that healthy foods appeared as axial codes that were not the product of the brand itself, so no plant-based milk. Axial codes such as nuts, seeds and fruit were categorised under this theme as they were seen as healthy foods. This theme was most employed by Alpro: 19 out of 20 posts showed healthy additional foods. These posts showed a lot of healthy and fresh ingredients such as fruit and nuts, that were part of a meal. Chia Seeds, for example, were even seen as a superfood. Presenting healthy ingredients such as nuts, seeds and fruits in Instagram posts can make people think how healthy a certain meal is in totality. By adding plant-based milk to the meal, the connotation of healthiness can persist and make people think that plant-based milk is healthy.

4.1.3 Environmental focus

The second theme employed in both pictures as captions was an environmental focus. Oatly adopted an environmental perspective in 8 out of 20 posts in the dataset. This was done, for example, by showing that their packaging can be recycled and used as a plant holder (Figure 4.4) by stating in the captions that the “smallest sustainable choice can make an impact” or by addressing consumers directly as “you, non-politician can make a difference for the planet right now, with just a few small changes like switching to a more plant-based diet”. Hereby Oatly encourages their followers on Instagram to take action and make them aware of their power as a consumer. Oatly also addresses companies and directs them to be more transparent about their carbon footprint. So, their environmental focus was very strongly focussed on creating a better environment together.

Alpro uses one very subtle case of environmental focus out of the twenty posts. A paper straw is used in ice coffee to style the drink. A paper straw is considered an environmental focus as these straws are better for the environment than regular plastic straws. This shows that Alpro has thought about the connotation of paper straws and plastic straws and chose to use paper straws. Rude Health did not use an environmental focus in this data set.
4.1.4 Swedish Focus

Oatly is a Swedish brand, which wanted to foreground a country of origin appeal on their Instagram account. Two out of the twenty posts had a Swedish focus. Oatly was proud of their heritage and wanted to emphasize their qualities as Swedes by saying in a caption “we are boring, practical, honest, hardworking and independent”. The emphasis on the brand’s origin can also be seen in Figure 4.7 showing a speech bubble with the text “it’s Swedish”. Alpro and Rude Health did not emphasize their heritage or country of origin on their Instagram accounts, which is why this theme is solely focussed on Sweden as country of origin.
4.1.5 Usages

The theme “usages” arose from the posts that included examples of how to use plant-based alternatives in meals. Codes that were found for this theme were exemplified by its usage in drink, a warm meal, a cold meal, a snack, and providing recipes. This was most demonstrated by Alpro as this theme emerged in 14 out of 20 posts. Alpro focused on creating aesthetic pictures of breakfast ideas that supposedly included their products. By showing how their plant-based products could be used in different ways, they could inspire their followers. Oatly also showed their followers how plant-based milk could be used, by showing coffee in a cup together with their plant-based milk and showing their hot chocolate ‘milk’ in a mug.
4.1.5.1 Convenient Usage

This subtheme was created as Alpro used the benefit of convenience for certain usages. Two out of twenty posts focussed on convenience, as the plant-based product, together with other ingredients, was put in a mason jar, which connoted portability. This perspective was used to potentially influence followers to believe that their products were easy to take with you to work or school and therefore convenient.

4.1.6 Recognizable Product

This theme was created as there were many posts that featured the packaging of the product. This is sometimes combined with other attributes in the picture. This theme consisted mostly of the axial code “product with packaging”. By showing only the product in its packaging or focussing on the product in its packaging in a certain setting, Rude Health and Oatly tried to create awareness for their (range of) products. This was exemplified in Figures 4.11, 4.12 and 4.13. In Figure 4.11, for example, Rude Health presented its Almond Drink without any other attributes in the picture. This could aim the attention on the plant-based milk as a product, which people would recognize in the supermarkets and hopefully buy. So, presenting the product in the packaging was a way of creating brand awareness and recognition among Instagram users.

4.1.7 People as Endorsers

Ten out of twenty posts from Oatly, four out of twenty from Alpro, and seven out of twenty from Rude Health displayed people who represented the brand in different ways. In Figure 4.14, for example, a man was shown wearing a T-shirt with the text “post
milk generation”. This statement fit with Oatly’s standpoint and ideals. This way, the person was used as an endorser of the brand who stands behind this ideal. Figures 4.14 and 4.16 were more subtle examples, but still showed people who fit the target audience. Figure 4.13 showed a barber quartet, who were wearing sophisticated clothes and had a certain grooming style that could be associated with dandys or hipsters. Figure 4.15 showed a girl enjoying a festival responsibly, drinking her coffee with supposedly Alpro plant-based milk. By featuring these people on Instagram posts, users could associate themselves with these endorsers and subsequently feel like they belonged to a certain group.

4.1.8 Creative Wording

The wording of the captions of all three brands was something that stood out. A lot of puns were used by all three brands. Oatly created their own word, merging oat and cappuccino into “cappoatchino”. Alpro created their own hashtag, #alpronista. Alpro also made a lot of puns, such as “berrylicious” instead of delicious, “feel like a smoothie criminal” and “we’re completely (roasted hazel)nuts”. They also used abbreviations like “brekkie” for breakfast and “fav” for favourite. Rude Health also used puns, for example, “open sesame” in the caption of a picture with a sesame bar. The abbreviation “veg” for vegetable was also used. By using these puns and words, the brands tried to relate themselves to an audience that used this lexicon too. It also made the caption light and funny.
4.1.9 Taste & Texture Focus

Besides the health and environmental focus, taste and texture was a theme that appeared in the dataset in line with the literature. According to O'Connor (2017), one reason why consumers switched from dairy milk to plant-based milk was the taste, which was described as “creamy and delicious”, “delicious”, “full of sass, flavour and the best of the best ingredients” and #yummy. These descriptions were all positive, trying to create an upbeat attitude towards plant-based milk.

4.2 Results and Interpretation: Facebook

Social media is used as an effective instrument that can contribute to a brands’ marketing strategy (Alalwan, Rana, Dwivedi, & Algharabat, 2017). Facebook is the leader of all social media platforms (Huang & Su, 2018). On Facebook companies create accounts as well as post messages, get in contact with consumers and create relationships (Hansson, Wrangmo, & Solberg Søilen, 2013). Companies use word of mouth through Facebook to influence consumers’ buying behaviour (Hansson et al., 2013) which has proven to have a bigger impact than traditional tools (Alalwan et al., 2017). Moreover, companies are able to positively influence the level of interactivity between the company and the customers by increasing the amount of posts that are shared on social media (Alalwan et al., 2017). Because Oatly, Alpro and Rude Health actively use their Facebook accounts, it is interesting to see what these posts represent.

The data was taken from the official Facebook accounts of Oatly, Alpro and Rude Health. The data from Oatly’s Facebook posts was collected on March 19. The data from Alpro’s Facebook posts was collected on April 22. Rude Health’s posts on Facebook were collected on March 24. Oatly’s Facebook page only goes back to March 1, 2016, so the year 2015 is not represented in this dataset. The posts on all three Facebook accounts were selected randomly to provide a representative sample. For Oatly, in the available period January 2020 till March 2016, every 25th post was selected in order to account for the four years in proportion to the total number of posts for each brand account. For Alpro, every 20th post was selected and for Rude Health every 25th post was selected, in order to account for the five years in proportion to the total number of posts for each brand account. In total, sixty Facebook posts were selected and analysed (20 from each brand) for this part with the results discussed below.
The most relevant themes that emerged are similar to the themes that appeared in the analysis of the three brands on Instagram. Although some themes were similar, the codes and examples that belong to the themes were different. Based on the datasets in this research, Oatly and Alpro represented their brand slightly different on Facebook than on Instagram. Oatly was more activist and emphasized the importance of the environment and the relationship between dairy milk and the environment a lot in their posts. Alpro did not only share ideas on how to make meals and drinks with plant-based products but also pointed out what they were doing to help the climate for a more serious note. Moreover, an interesting new theme appeared: dairy comparison focus.

In total, twenty-four themes were identified, from which the most relevant ten themes are discussed in this section. The most relevant selective codes, and thus final themes, are environmental focus, dairy comparison focus, health focus, healthy additional foods, usages, recognizable product, people as endorsers, ingredient & nutrition focus, taste & texture focus, and Swedish focus.

4.2.1 Environmental Focus

The focus on environmental issues and raising environmental concerns in this Facebook dataset was quite remarkable. Eight out of twenty posts from Oatly have an environmental focus. This focus is mostly used in the text above the picture. For example, Oatly states that other food producers are not transparent about their numbers and emission but they raise awareness by saying that nature needs help and that species are disappearing. Alpro employs the environmental focus theme as well, identified in three out of twenty posts. Alpro, for example, gave attention to Earth Hour to encourage people to save electricity (Figure 4.17). To show followers that the brand is contributing to a better environment, Alpro stated that they want to cultivate more than 50% of soy in Europe instead of outside Europe to decrease transport emissions (Figure 4.18). The last example of Alpro contains a statement that they claim to have been striving for a better planet for the last thirty-five years. Contrary to Oatly, Alpro uses illustrations and pictures to support the text. All these examples seem to go beyond promoting non-dairy milk based on its green qualities and, in addition, emphasize a green brand image in general.
4.2.2 Dairy Comparison Focus

This theme emerged based on the recurrence of the comparison of dairy milk with plant-based milk in both text and image. This was noticed on Oatly’s Facebook account, as this theme appeared in four out of twenty posts. Oatly, for example, stated that choosing oat products over dairy would decrease CO2 emissions by 69% and when choosing oat drink instead of cow’s milk, people contribute to 80% less greenhouse gas emissions. This is also illustrated in a bar graph (Figure 4.20). Alpro also allocated one post stating that people can contribute to a better planet by eating a more plant-based diet. Since the recurrence of this comparison stood out, a new theme was created. However, this theme still has an environmental focus, because the examples compare dairy and non-dairy milk regarding emissions and a better planet, which is about the environment. Therefore, this theme, dairy comparison focus, is a sub-theme in the environmental focus theme.
4.2.3 Health Focus

Health was represented throughout the dataset as pictures of exercising and events, such as a yoga evening (Figure 4.23) and the rude awakening event (Figure 4.24), which looks like a relay race. These events are encouraged by Rude Health and tickets for these events can be won by followers as well. This way, Rude Health wants to be associated as healthy in general, not only through their products but also through a lifestyle that fits their image. Oatly focuses less on health; only one picture from the dataset referred to yoga (Figure 4.22) and thus exercising or health. The posts from Alpro’s dataset did not contain a health focus at all.

4.2.3.1 Healthy Additional Foods

A sub-theme of health focus is healthy additional foods, which Alpro used a lot in the dataset (Figures 4.25, 4.26 and 4.27). Alpro showed healthy foods such as fruit, nuts and oatmeal. The axial codes such as nuts and fruits were identified in the pictures. These kinds of healthy foods are very important in Alpro’s strategy as they, together with the plant-based milk, create a healthy image. The healthy additional foods showed which (healthy) ingredients are in a recipe, drink or meal. It also conveyed a certain freshness, as if the berries are just picked from the garden.
4.2.4 Usages

This theme was created because many posts show examples of how plant-based milk can be used. Sixteen out of the twenty posts that were selected for Alpro belonged to this theme. Alpro showed a lot of variety in the different ways their products could be used; from cocktails, to coffee to ice cream. Most of the time, their product was visible in the post, explicitly showing that their product was used in the drink, snack or meal (Figure 4.28 and 4.29). Oatly employed this theme in four out of the twenty posts. Just like Alpro, a breakfast bowl is presented together with their oat milk (Figure 4.30). The text accompanied by the picture in Figure 30 also explained how to use their oat milk by giving three examples of usages. Two other examples of usages in Oatly’s dataset pertained to coffee. Rude Health also showed how their plant-based milk can be used in ice-coffee and breakfast, in two out of twenty posts.
4.2.5 Recognizable Product

The packaging of different kinds of plant-based milk appeared in the dataset. The products from Alpro were predominantly presented in a kitchen setting; on the counter or a kitchen table. Oatly’s posts were less conventional and predictable and, for example, showed the product in an unconventional setting such as outside (Figure 4.33). These posts with a clearly recognizable product in the picture could try to promote that one particular product. One third of the whole dataset showed noticeable packaging of plant-based milk; seven in Oatly’s selection, ten in Alpro’s selection and three in Rude Health’s selection.

4.2.6 People as Endorsers

Twenty per cent of the dataset employed the theme ‘people as endorsers’. These posts represented people as users, so people represented together with the product and as supporters, who clearly support the brand and approve of its mission (which is mentioned in the description of the post). In addition, there are people in their own environment not
using or drinking the brand’s products and from which there is no other trace that they support the brand. However, in Figure 4.35 for example, there is a woman reading in a hanging chair with Alpro’s chocolate ‘milk’ next to her. This picture creates an image of a lifestyle that could speak to an audience with a similar decorating style and likes to read, a lifestyle in which Alpro’s plant-based milk fits.

Figure 4.35. Post retrieved from @Alpro

4.2.7 Ingredient & Nutrition Focus

The posts on Facebook sometimes emphasized certain ingredients or nutritional values in the plant-based milk such as protein, calcium and fiber. The lack of sugar or the presence of natural sugars in the plant-based milk was also mentioned in the description in two out of the twenty posts from Alpro. The fact that there is calcium in plant-based milk is probably of interest to people who want to switch from cow’s milk to plant-based milk, as cow’s milk is known for its calcium, which is good for the bones. When people know there is also calcium in plant-based milk, it could be easier to switch because the nutritional values are similar. Oatly used this theme in one post but Rude Health did not use this theme at all on Facebook.

4.2.8 Taste & Texture Focus

The emphasis on taste and texture was mentioned in three posts from Oatly, in three posts from Alpro and one from Rude Health. The foamability of Oatly barista edition is for example emphasized in one post. This tells something about the texture of the oat milk and is an objective statement. Alpro, on the other hand, emphasized the delicious taste of their soy barista ‘milk’ and their soy original in two posts, which was by all means subjective.
4.2.9 Swedish Focus

The Swedish character of Oatly as a brand was emphasized in two out of the twenty posts from the selection. This focus was only highlighted in the description of two of the twenty posts, by saying that they were a small Swedish company and that the oats used in their ‘milk’ were Swedish. Heritage was something that they seemed quite proud of, and wanted to distinguish their brand based on their locally grown products from bigger plant-based milk companies who produced their products globally.

4.3 Results and Interpretation: Print Advertising

Although the advent of social media and the internet has been challenging for traditional media (Chandra & Kaiser, 2014), advertising is a powerful tool which can be used to affect brand identity (Meenaghan, 1995). However, consumers are not passively consuming advertising. Additionally, people are more and more taking control of which ads they select to see when they are in a private space (Nunes & Merrihue, 2007). But, people are not always in a private space. When they are outside in a public space, they do not have control over the ads they get to see. Ads in unexpected places get more attention than other forms of advertising (Nunes & Merrihue, 2007). Outdoor advertising as well as advertising in printed magazines will be analysed in this section.

The data for print advertising was gathered from Google images, using search queries “alpro print ads”, “oatly print ads” and “rude health print ads”. These queries were used in the second week of March 2020 to look for printed advertisements from the brands regarding plant-based milk. After nothing appeared on the initial search query for Rude Health, the queries “rude health print advertisement”, “rude health magazine ad”, “rude health newspaper ad”, “rude health outdoor ad” and “rude health milk advertisement” were added. Unfortunately, still no printed advertisements from Rude Health emerged, which is why this brand is not discussed in this section.

The search for Alpro’s printed advertisements yielded six advertisements. More search terms were added for Alpro as well to see if there were more. The search terms “alpro newspaper ad” was added, which had a result, but originated from 2003, which was too old. The search term “alpro magazine ad” was used, which yielded an advertisement for soya cuisine, which was not the subject of this study, and so was not used. One other magazine advertisement about plant-based milk was found and used in the dataset. The ads from Alpro that were used in this dataset were a billboard and five
other ads from a magazine or other printed work. The search for Oatly’s printed
advertisements yielded a lot of examples, as their printed ads created a lot of commotion
and were subject to a lot of attention. Since there were too many examples to analyse,
twelve outdoor advertisements that appeared frequently in different environments were
purposefully picked by the researcher. Thereby attention was paid to the variety of
examples.

So, in total, nineteen printed advertisements were analysed for this section. What
stood out particularly is that Oatly’s advertisements most of the time did not refer
textually to the product in any way, shape or form. Moreover, the advertisements were
very clean; a black or white background was used, with white or black text. Alpro’s
approach was different; the colours green and blue were used in their ads, which were the
same colours that were used in the logo. The ads from Alpro were also quite full with
textual and visual elements. Therefore, the themes overlapped a bit with Alpro’s
Instagram and Facebook themes. Twelve themes emerged out of this dataset, from which
the most relevant and interesting seven are discussed below. These themes are: dairy
focus, recognizable product, comparisons, personal approach, referencing nature and
ingredient focus. The other five will not be discussed due to lack of frequency and lack of
contribution to this study.

4.3.1 Dairy Focus

Two out of twelve advertisements from the dataset from Oatly focused on dairy.
Figure 4.36 shows a milk bottle with the text “ditch milk”, together with “swap to oat
drink and save 72% in CO2e”. So, the visual reference, the bottle of milk, together with
the statement to not drink milk anymore supported by an environmental reason not to,
creates a bold advertisement that does not necessarily promote Oatly’s own product, but
promotes drinking plant-based milk in general. Figure 4.37 on the other hand does
promote Oatly’s oat drink, by showing three different versions of their product together
with the text “it’s like milk but made for humans”. This advertisement attacks the dairy
industry by saying that milk is not supposed to be drunk by humans; it is actually meant
for baby cows.

This advertising campaign was launched in Sweden in 2015. The Swedish dairy
industry, LRF Mjölk, sued Oatly for the slogan “milk but made for human” (Goldberg,
LFR Mjölk won the case and Oatly was prohibited to refer to their product as milk and was ordered to stop mentioning that milk is not supposed to be consumed by people.

![Ditch Milk](https://www.adformatie.nl/merkstrategie/oatly-pain-ass-van-de-zuivelindustrie)


### 4.3.2 Recognizable Product

Taking the advertisements from Oatly and Alpro from the dataset together, 89% of the advertisements contains a recognizable product, the packaging of plant-based milk. It is important to show the product clearly in an advertisement to show people what is being promoted. The products in the advertisements from Oatly however are not being promoted for its qualities. The product sometimes seems detached from the rest of the advertisement, which is quite unconventional (Figure 4.38). The product in combination with the text in Oatly’s advertisements presumably creates brand recognition.
4.3.3 Comparisons

This theme emerged due to the many advertisements that compared different mediums or different styles for the advertisement itself. Three out of the twelve advertisements from Oatly belong to this theme. For example, one advertisement states that if people saw this poster on Instagram they would like it more than they would see this as a printed outdoor advertisement. This mocks Oatly’s own strategy and use of print outdoor advertising. Another example is an ad that states that the street art style would make people like the ad better than if it were just an ad. These examples pertain to a certain group of young and hip people who like street art and are active on Instagram.

4.3.4 Personal Approach

The posters from Oatly in this dataset frequently started with the words “we made” as can be seen in Figures 4.39, 4.40 and 4.41. The word “we” expresses a form of collectivity. Although Oatly is a corporate entity, it does not want to convey that to the consumers. This gives the advertisements a human touch. Moreover, the use of the pronoun “we” in advertising creates a feeling of closeness with a brand and thereby enhances brand attitudes (Cruz, Leonhardt, & Pezzuti, 2017).
4.3.5 Referencing Nature

Three out of the seven advertisements in the dataset from Alpro contained a reference to nature. This is found in, for example, the presence of green leaves which can be seen in Figures 4.42 and 4.43. In Figure 4.43, the leaves are even forming a heart, in which the products are positioned. This heart connotes love, so a possible meaning could be that nature loves Alpro. The reference to nature and the use of green leaves also refers
to the fact that the drink is made of plants. This is also emphasized in the text in Figure 4.45, which states that Alpro is 100% plant-based.

4.3.6 Ingredient Focus

The ingredients the plant-based milk is made from is presented in three out of the seven advertisements from Alpro. Figure 4.44 shows a picture of a cow, made from almonds. The almonds are the ingredients that are used in almond drink. A cow normally produces dairy milk, but if the cow is made from almonds, it probably produces almond ‘milk’. Figure 4.45 shows even more explicitly where the ‘milk’ is made from; it is coming straight out of the hazelnut into the glass. This focus on the main ingredient the drink is made from is important, as that is the fundamental aspect that differs from dairy milk.
4.3.7 Usages

The theme usages appeared because Alpro presents different ways to use their plant-based milk. Five out of the seven advertisements in the dataset from Alpro showed examples of usage. In Figure 4.46, a bowl with cereal and fruit is presented, together with Alpro’s almond milk. This gives the audience an idea of how to use plant-based milk and that it can replace dairy milk, as dairy milk is often used in a bowl with cereal.

![Alpro](Image)


4.4 Results and Interpretation: TV Advertising

Television is still a relevant medium for advertising, however, companies are spending less budget for advertising in this medium (Nunes & Merrihue 2007). Advertising plays a central role in informing the consumer about the benefits and qualities of the product and thereby influences the brand image (Meenaghan, 1995), which is why it is important to analyse TV advertising.

The data for television advertising was gathered from the YouTube accounts of the brands, and the videos were selected in the second week of March, based on their availability. For Alpro, ten, and for Oatly seven videos were selected based on the following criteria: Dutch or English spoken, showing plant-based milk in the video and uploaded between January 2015 and January 2020. Unfortunately, the YouTube account of Rude Health did not contain any commercials, only videos of recipes and people talking about food at a food festival. Googling “Rude Health commercial” did not yield any results either. Therefore, this section will only discuss the commercials of Oatly and Alpro.
So, for this part, seventeen commercials with a duration of ten to thirty seconds were analysed. The difference between the two brands was noteworthy. Alpro seemed to focus on happy, average families and individuals who live a normal life with routine, for whom consuming Alpro is a relaxing moment. Oatly, on the other hand, did not focus on a storyline but promoted its products in a simple video of one shot. From these advertisements, ten themes emerged, from which the most relevant eight will be discussed in the section below. These discussed themes are: Recognizable product, Consuming and Preparing Alpro, Health Focus, Convenience Focus, Usages, Taste and Texture Focus, Routine and Way of Transportation.

4.4.1 Recognizable Product

In every video from the analysed dataset, the promoted product, the plant-based milk, was presented visibly. The plant-based milk was predominantly placed in a scene facing the front of the packaging. This way, viewers were able to distinguish which sort of milk was used and know how it looks in the supermarket. Alpro sometimes presented their different sorts of plant-based milk together, next to each other (Figure 4.47). This showed how much variety there is when choosing plant-based milk.

![Figure 4.47](image)

Figure 4.47. Still from YouTube video Alpro | Plant-based coffee | Change a little, enjoy a lot with Alpro (0:05)

![Figure 4.48](image)

Figure 4.48. Still from YouTube video Alpro | How it starts depends on you (0:27)
4.4.2 Consuming and Preparing Alpro

Consuming and preparing a meal or drink made with Alpro is demonstrated in nine out of the ten videos from Alpro in this dataset. Axial codes such as preparing Alpro breakfast, preparing Alpro milk and drinking Alpro breakfast are merged together as these activities mostly took place after another and were related to each other. The process of making breakfast, or a smoothie or coffee is shown clearly in the videos of Alpro. Most of the time, the breakfast meal, smoothie or coffee is already prepared with only the milk missing (Figure 4.49 and 4.51). This action of adding milk as the last ingredient into a meal or coffee is what is focused on in the videos from Alpro.

![Figure 4.49. Still from YouTube video Meet Simon He's one of life's triers... #GoodForYou, Simon (0:05)](image)

![Figure 4.50. Still from YouTube video Meet Simon He's one of life's triers... #GoodForYou, Simon (0:25)](image)

![Figure 4.51. Still from Youtube video Alpro Jouw moment om te genieten (0:09)](image)
4.4.2.1 Convenience Focus

A subtheme of consuming and preparing Alpro is Convenience Focus, which is present in six out of the ten videos from Alpro. Axial codes such as emphasizing easiness, time and little effort were identified in order to create this theme. Alpro clearly showed that their products are easy to use, and also when you are in a rush to work or when you want to keep a smoothie in the fridge for when you need it. The emphasis on convenience was also expressed through the text “quick & easy” and the green clocks (Figure 4.53), which are used in three out of the ten videos from Alpro.

4.4.3 Routine

A few videos from Alpro presented a structured start of the day, which is why the theme routine was identified. Three out of the ten videos from Alpro presented routine-like actions. The start of a daily routine and continuing with a daily routine (after consuming Alpro) are axial codes that were found. For example, different videos showed different storylines, each starting with different people waking up, starting the day with either showering, rushing or exercising. Then, breakfast was made, using Alpro products
and after that was consumed, the storylines continued with, for example, going to work or school or continuing with painting the house. Alpro’s plant-based milk seemed to create a relaxing moment in this busy, daily routine, whether the milk is used in breakfast or coffee and provides energy for the rest of the day.

4.4.4 Health Focus
A health focus was used throughout the dataset. Six out of the seventeen videos contain a health focus. Emphasizing healthiness, exercising and comparing product to fruit are axial codes that were found to fit into this theme. Healthiness was emphasized by the text “good for you”, “nutritious” and “healthy” in the videos from Alpro. In one video, the presence of calcium in the plant-based milk was emphasized as the reason for being nutritious. These texts focused on the plant-based milk, so the milk was promoted as healthy. In one video from Oatly, the plant-based milk (mango edition) was placed on
a market, next to other fruit (Figure 4.57). This gave the sense as if the plant-based milk is the same as fruit, and just as healthy. The axial code exercising was found in three out of the ten videos from Alpro; in two videos people were running and in one video kids were jumping on the trampoline.

4.4.5 Usages

The selective code usages refers to a scene when a meal or drink is presented without someone eating or drinking it. For example, in Figure 4.59, different styles of coffee made with different Alpro plant-based milks are presented, but are not consumed by anyone. Another way to communicate how Alpro’s products can be used is through the texts “blend” and “pour” that appeared in a video. So the axial codes “visual example of usage” and “textual example of usage” belong to this theme. Six out of the ten videos by Alpro employ this selective code.
4.4.6 Taste & Texture Focus

The focus on taste and texture was a recurrent theme in this dataset. Seven out of the total seventeen videos had a taste or texture focus. The delicious taste or the foamable texture was mostly conveyed through text. Emphasizing taste by stating that the plant-based milk is delicious was done in four out of the ten videos from Alpro. Also, the letters "mmm" were used by Alpro multiple times to mimic the sound a person would make when eating or drinking Alpro’s products, connoting a pleasant taste (Figure 4.60).

The foamability of plant-based milk is crucial if people want to use it in their cappuccino, which is why it is emphasized in Figure 4.61, where Oatly’s Barista edition (especially made for baristas) is being promoted. Not every sort of plant-based milk is foamable, whereas dairy milk is very easily foamable. So, the combination of plant-based milk and foamability is something that is special and valuable.
4.4.7 Way of Transportation

Three out of the eight videos from Oatly showed different ways of transportation: a moped, a pogo (Figure 4.62) and a skateboard (Figure 4.63). These vehicles were used by individuals to transport plant-based milk. The skateboard and pogo are motion-driven vehicles and quite hip. The fact that the plant-based milk is the only product that was transported (as far I could see) emphasized the effort one is willing to take to go to the supermarket only for Oatly’s plant-based milk. Furthermore, the titles of the videos corresponded with these means of transport, so the video with the pogo stick was titled Pogo.

4.4.8 Habit Focus

A theme that is quite small, but still interesting is habit focus. The text in the videos from Alpro sometimes fociusses on making a little change in one’s diet or breakfast. “The same coffee every morning?” followed by “change a little” is a good example of this theme. Also “ready to shake up breakfast” exemplifies the need for a change in one’s eating habits. Alpro encourages people who drink the same coffee or eat the same cereal every day to change it up a little by using their products. Three out of the ten videos from Alpro use this approach.

4.5 Results and Interpretation: Packaging

According to the European food information law, certain information is mandatory to provide on packages of food and beverages (Voedingscentrum, n.d.). These mandatory parts are the name of the food, list of ingredients, allergens, the number of ingredients, net quantity of product, expiration date, storage conditions, name and contact details of manufacturer, country or place of origin, alcohol percentage and a nutrition declaration (Voedingscentrum, n.d.). These required parts of information were found on
the back of the packages in this sample, providing fewer interesting aspects to analyse regarding the branding of the products.

Putting aside the required information that needs to be put on all packaging, a lot of space is left for creativity and design that fits within the brand’s identity. Packaging is one of the most essential elements of a product and its role in marketing has been growing because of the growth of competition and consumers’ expectations and needs (Baruk & Iwanicka, 2016). Holmes and Paswan (2012) state that package design is very important for the consumer’s purchase intention of a low-priced convenience product in a supermarket because it plays a fundamental role in the first decision to examine the product further.

The experience the consumer has with the package has a notable effect on the consumers’ attitude towards the packaging and on the opinion of the product inside of the packaging (Holmes & Paswan, 2012). According to Lewis (1991) packaging should represent the values of a brand and therefore forms the core of the brand’s identity. Good packaging design can increase sales, which is why food packaging has become more and more refined (Vazquez, Bruce, & Studd, 2003). Moreover, the packaging is a medium that can be used if there is not a big budget, which is why Oatly started their strategy with the packaging first (Eatbigfish, 2016).

The data for the packaging was gathered on the official websites of Oatly (oatly.com), Alpro (alpro.com) and Rude Health (rudehealth.com). Thirty packages were purposively picked by the researcher from these websites, ten for each brand. The websites provided pictures of the front of the packaging. Additional data for the sides and backs of the packaging were gathered from taking pictures from the products themselves in supermarkets and other online grocery stores.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to gather every single side from thirty different packages because not every iteration is sold in supermarkets in the Netherlands and the websites only provide a picture from the front of the packaging. For Oatly, four packages were analysed completely, for Alpro, eight packages were analysed completely and for Rude Health three packages were analysed completely. The aim was to analyse thirty packages. In total, fifteen packages were analysed completely (front side, left side, right side and backside) and for the remaining fifteen packages, only the front side was analysed.

It became clear that Oatly, Alpro and Rude Health differ very much in their packaging. Oatly used neutral colours such as blue, black and white, while paired with a
simple but fun front side. The left side of the packaging was used to convey a story about the company, including what they stand for and believe. Alpro used a white background with mostly bright colours as details and showed pictures of the ingredient where the drink was made from, together with ideas on how to use the product in a drink or meal. Rude health was the most consistent regarding packaging. All the packages use bright colours as a background and presented a face and hand together with a glass of milk or a cup of coffee as if that person were drinking it. Rude Health also provided ideas on how the drink can be consumed on the left side.

Despite the differences among the brands, overlapping themes were discovered. The analysis provided ten themes, from which the eight most relevant themes are discussed below: content focus, colour use, usages, reference to origin 'milk', environmental focus, health focus, dairy focus and taste & texture focus. The themes that will not be discussed are “personal approach” as this theme appeared rarely, and “miscellaneous” because this theme contains axial codes that did not fit within the other themes, but was still coded to account for requisite exhaustiveness.

4.5.1 Content Focus
The most frequently used theme is “content focus”. The packaging of the three brands showed different textual elements that all pertain to the content in that the text says something about plant-based milk. On the one hand, what is not present in the drink, such as sugars, milk, soy and thickeners, was emphasized on the packaging. On the other hand, what is present in the product, nutritional values, was also emphasized. Furthermore, a vegan focus was employed in a way that it was mentioned frequently that the milk is plant-based. This is logical because this is probably the most important aspect of the drink. Oatly, for example, stated on its packaging that its product is totally vegan or 100% cool for vegans. Another axial code regarding the content of the milk is the production method. Rude Health, for example, stated on its packaging that the product is organic.

4.5.2 Colour Use
The brands used colour on the packaging in very different ways. Bright and neutral use of colour were distinguished as axial codes. Alpro, for example, used a touch of bright colours such as blue and red against a white, neutral background. Rude Health used mostly bright colours such as pink, orange, blue and yellow as the background on
the packaging. Oatly used neutral colours for the background and text on the packaging, except for the mango edition, which is orange. These neutral colours have a grainy pattern, that resembles the carton as if it were made of recycled materials.

4.5.3 Usages

The theme “usages” arose because both visual and textural features communicated different ways to drink the plant-based milk, for example in a cup of coffee or incorporated in a meal, such as breakfast. Visual and textual features were used together on the side of Alpro’s packaging to give examples of usages (Figure 4.64). Rude Health showed a person drinking ‘milk’ straight from the glass or a cappuccino, on the front of every package, exemplifying the use of the product (Figure 4.65). On the sides, different textual examples of usage were provided. Oatly also showed a glass or cup on the front side of every packaging (Figure 4.66), but it was two dimensional and more abstract. Nonetheless, this image showed a representation of the product in use, so it was categorised under this theme.

4.5.4 Reference to Origin ‘Milk’

This theme appeared only on the packaging of Alpro. References to what the plant-based milk is made from are illustrated through the presentation of ingredients such as almonds, coconuts and soybeans and the leaves from the corresponding plant. Alpro used the combination of the leaves and the ingredients together to point out where the plant-based milk is derived. This also makes it easy for the consumer because it is
obvious whether it is almond drink or coconut drink, based on the pictures on the packaging.

4.5.5 Environmental Focus

An environmental focus was used in different ways. Oatly’s packaging, for example, contains a mark with the CO2 emissions for the drink. This number expresses the emissions that the oat drink produces from the field to the store, including transportation. Oatly encourages other companies to do the same and advocates transparency for CO2 emissions, which is argued on the packaging. So, the axial codes “detail about emission” and “advocate transparency for CO2 emissions” were identified in the dataset, which can be seen as an environmental focus because emissions are bad for the environment and Oatly wants to improve this area.

Alpro also focused on the environment, but a bit subtler. Alpro emphasized that the product was good for the environment as they literally mention “good for the planet” and “doing a favour for the planet”, highlighting that the product is good for the environment, or at least harms it minimally. This message is very straightforward and clear, which makes it easy for consumers to decide to buy the product when they are in the supermarket.

4.5.6 Health Focus

A health focus was identified in this dataset as all three brands emphasized healthiness on its packaging or linked eating good food to health. Oatly phrases the healthiness of their products in a subtle way, for example, on the side of the packaging Oatly stated that they promise to make balanced products that will help people upgrade their lives. This is more implicit than what Alpro and Rude Health did. “Good for you” and “eat right, stay brilliant” seem more direct and simplistic as people will understand that message.

4.5.7 Dairy Focus

Oatly and Rude health used a dairy focus on their packaging. This means that the brands referred to cow’s milk on their packaging. Oatly for example put “wow no cow” on its packaging, insinuating that it is surprising that there is no dairy in the drink, something that consumers would not expect. Rude Health pointed even more directly at
dairy products by stating “a refreshing alternative to milk” on the front of six of the ten packages.

4.5.8 Taste & Texture Focus

Alpro and Rude Health described the taste and texture on the packages of their drinks. The description of texture on Alpro’s packages was predominantly reserved for the barista editions, for which a foamy texture was pointed out on the sides and back of the packaging. Rude Health used descriptions like “creamy” on the side of the packaging. Regarding taste, the sweet and nutty taste of Rude Health’s almond drink was emphasized. Alpro used terms such as delicious and soft to describe the taste of their plant-based milk.

4.6 Comparison

The four previous sections presented a thorough and substantial analysis of the three brands and different mediums. For an even more complete analysis, the results of the social media posts, printed advertisements, TV advertisements and packaging are compared and contrasted in this section building toward answering the research question. The themes that emerged from the previous analyses “Environmental Focus” and “Health Focus” will be given extra attention because these themes refer back to the main research question.

4.6.1 Environmental Focus

Since the 1990s, there has been a growing demand for goods that are sustainable (Sirieix et al., 2013). In particular, society has become aware of the negative relationship between agriculture and the environment, which has led to a change in consumption (Sirieix et al., 2013). Researchers have proposed a paradigmatic shift from meat and dairy to a plant-based diet, which is seen as a pragmatic solution to climate change (Beverland, 2014). A glass of dairy milk produces approximately three times more greenhouse gas emissions and uses nine times more land than a glass of plant-based milk (McGivney, 2020). Thus, one of the reasons why people choose to drink plant-based milk over dairy milk is because of environmental reasons (O’Connor, 2017). It is reasonable that producers of plant-based milk use this as a selling point as part of a branding strategy by inspiring people who actively want to contribute to a better environment.
In the analysed Instagram posts, Oatly mostly used an environmental focus by showing that their packaging can be recycled and making their followers aware in the captions of little things they can do or modify to stop climate change. Oatly continued this course on Facebook. Alpro did not explicitly refer to climate change or the environment on Instagram, however, on Facebook Alpro does. However, the focus is on a better environment in general, showing followers that Alpro as a brand is contributing to a better climate. Thus, the brands emphasize creating better climate themselves and encourage people to do so too, but there is no direct link established from drinking particular plant-based milk to a better environment.

An interesting subtheme that was found in the “Environmental Focus” theme was “Dairy Comparison Focus”. This theme arose in the Facebook dataset as a subtheme because the plant-based milk was compared with dairy milk regarding climate and emissions. In these Facebook posts, plant-based milk and a plant-based diet were presented as better for the climate than dairy. Oatly stated, for example, that by choosing oat drink instead of cow’s milk, people contribute to 80% less greenhouse gas emissions. This way, oat drink, in general, is presented as environmentally friendly, and not as Oatly’s oat drink per se.

The printed advertisements and TV advertisements showed no clear environmental focus at all. The reason why the TV advertisements show no environmental focus is unknown and no plausible reasons for this choice were found. The packaging of the analysed plant-based milk did have an environmental focus. Oatly, again, communicated the most explicit and direct environmental focus. The front of their packages showed how much CO2 was emitted to produce one plant-based milk and put in the store for sale. Moreover, Oatly advocated more transparency in the food industry in general on the side of their packaging. Alpro put text on the packaging that communicated to people that the product was good for the planet. For Oatly, the environmental focus was quite important because this was used very frequently on its social media platforms and packaging. However, it was not predominant in print and television advertisements.

As indicated in Table 4.1, the environmental focus in the posts on the social media platforms of Oatly and Alpro showed different ways to create a better environment, not just by drinking plant-based milk alone, but also by saving electricity and encouraging other companies to be more transparent about emissions. Rude Health did not use an environmental focus on any platform. The fact that Oatly and Alpro focus
on sustainability in general. This suggests that they were looking at the bigger picture and appeared honest about their mission to contribute to a better climate, even when people are not necessarily encouraged to buy their products. The environmental focus on the packaging of the products was more related to the plant-based milk itself, compared to the social media posts.

Table 4.1. Overview of findings regarding environmental focus for brands and platforms

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Oatly</th>
<th>Alpro</th>
<th>Rude Health</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>General environmental focus</td>
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<td>Facebook</td>
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<td>Print advertising</td>
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<td>TV advertising</td>
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<tr>
<td>Packaging</td>
<td>Product linked to environment + general environmental focus</td>
<td>Product linked to environment</td>
<td></td>
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4.6.2 Health Focus

Health is an important concern in society and consumers who are worried about healthy eating would like to make a change in their eating habits (Grunert, 2013). Growth has been identified in the consumer desire to live healthier lives (Rogers, 2018). Following a plant-based diet would decrease the chances of suffering from chronic diseases (Beverland, 2014). Previous research describes that products that are marketed as healthy use health and nutrient content claims, which positively impact the perspective of the healthiness of a product (Chrysochou, 2010; Chrysochou & Grunert, 2013). Health imagery is also used to communicate healthfulness which is effective to derive benefits from the product (Chrysochou & Grunert, 2013).

A wide perspective on health was used to ascertain a health focus from the data in the performed thematic analysis. Both textual and visual cues were taken into account. A
health focus was used in the social media posts on both Instagram and Facebook to show or encourage a healthy lifestyle that consisted of working out, mostly running. Rude Health used this focus the most of the three brands. The subtheme “Healthy Additional Foods” that was identified on both Instagram and Facebook was also important, as healthy eating can also be seen as part of a healthy lifestyle. These healthy additional foods, such as berries, herbs and nuts, were presented as if they were freshly picked from the garden. Fresh, safe and natural products are associated with health and are demanded by consumers (Lawrence, 1999). Nevertheless, there was no explicit communication about the health benefits of plant-based milk on Instagram or Facebook.

The printed advertisements did not use a health focus. The TV advertisements did use a health focus, however, not in the same way as was done on social media. In the TV advertisements from Alpro, the plant-based milk was explicitly called healthy and nutritious. Additionally, a healthy lifestyle was also presented in TV advertisements, as two videos showed that people went running. Running and eating healthily are both parts of a healthy lifestyle that Alpro wants to portray. This two-sided health focus of stating that the product is healthy and presenting a healthy lifestyle seemed to strengthen each other.

The packaging of all three brands emphasized the healthiness of the product. Rude Health and Alpro used the short and simple quotes “good for you” and “eat right, stay brilliant” on the packaging to communicate the healthiness of the product. The codes in the theme “Content Focus” refer to textual cues that say something about the content of the packaging, the plant-based milk. Nutritional values such as protein or lack of sugar and the organic production method were placed under this theme, as this was categorised as not necessarily as healthy, but more practically. Drawing from the literature discussed above, these cues are health claims as well.

So, as presented in Table 4.2 the clearest connection from plant-based milk to improved health was shown in the TV advertisements from Alpro as the ‘milk’ was explicitly called healthy and nutritious. The healthiness of the product was also explicitly emphasized on the packaging of Alpro and Rude Health. In contrast to this, the posts on the social media platforms from Alpro and Rude Health seemed to focus on the bigger picture regarding health and a healthy lifestyle in general. This healthy lifestyle consists of eating healthy food such as fruits and nuts and exercising, according to the data.
Table 4.2. Presentation of findings regarding health focus compared with brands and platforms

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<td>Facebook</td>
<td>General health focus</td>
<td>General health focus</td>
<td>General health focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print advertising</td>
<td>No available data</td>
<td>No available data</td>
<td>No available data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV advertising</td>
<td>Product linked to health + general health focus</td>
<td>No available data</td>
<td>No available data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Packaging</td>
<td>Product linked to health</td>
<td>Product linked to health</td>
<td>Product linked to health</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.6.3 Other Noteworthy Themes

Although the themes pertaining to environment and health are the most important regarding this research, other themes that appeared in the analysis seem noteworthy as well and might contribute to answering the research question or for directions of future research. Therefore, these themes are discussed below, comparing the results of social media, advertising and packaging together.

4.6.3.1 Consuming and Preparing Alpro

Fuentes & Fuentes argue that “meat and dairy substitutes are often intended to become part of already-established practices of shopping, cooking and eating” (2017, p.530). The selective code “Consuming and Preparing Alpro”, which concerns practices of cooking and eating, was an important theme in the TV advertisements from Alpro based on the analysed dataset. The people in the commercials prepared, ate and drank meals that could have been made with dairy milk as well. So, the already established practice of making a cappuccino with dairy milk, for example, is the exact same practice as making a cappuccino with plant-based milk, which is shown in the commercials.

4.6.3.2 Convenience Focus

Grunert (2013) states that “In a US survey, 55% of respondents indicated that convenience is ‘very important’ in their food purchases” (p.25). Convenience in this context can mean saving time and physical or mental energy during preparation and
consumption. In the commercials from Alpro and on the Instagram account from Alpro, a convenience focus was identified. Alpro showed for example that their plant-based milk was perfect for breakfast, and people can prepare a smoothie before and store it in the fridge for when it can be consumed.

Grunert (2013, p. 28) concludes that “Convenience has been an ongoing trend for some time and will continue, but the speed will largely depend on the industry realizing that convenience means different things to different people and that there is a need for more products that combine convenience with healthiness and good sensory and culinary properties”. The combination of convenience and healthiness was not the main message that was communicated when looking at the data and analysis. However, the convenience and healthiness of Alpro’s products were indeed emphasized separately.

4.6.3.4 Dairy Focus

A dairy focus was identified on the printed advertising and on the packaging. This theme was not categorised as a subtheme under health focus or environmental focus as it did not address these themes. The textual cues “wow no cow” and “a refreshing alternative to milk” refer to cow’s milk, but do not necessarily promote drinking or buying plant-based milk over cow’s milk. This theme, therefore, is not pertinent enough to contribute to answering the research question but still remarkable because of the way the products are promoted considering that cow’s milk is a competitor.

4.6.4 Themes and Platforms

As was seen in the results and the comparison of the results, certain themes were emphasized more on certain platforms. For example, a health focus on Instagram showed pictures of people exercising, and healthy meals and drinks. In the TV commercials, sometimes text was used to emphasize the healthiness of the product, but most of the time, images of a healthy lifestyle were presented. Whereas images were predominantly used to represent health, an environmental focus was primarily represented through text. The text with an environmental focus on Facebook and on the packaging addressed actions consumers could take in order to be more sustainable, as well as advocating more transparency in the food industry and emphasizing the difference in CO2 emissions between dairy and non-dairy drinks. So, the representation of health was used more on a visual platform such as Instagram, while the representation of sustainability was used more on platforms that facilitate or focus more on the use of text such as Facebook and
the packaging.

This chapter showed, discussed and compared the different results from the performed thematic analysis on Instagram, Facebook, print advertising, TV advertising and the packaging from the three brands. The discussion and comparison of these results laid the foundation for this study and thus the research question. In the next chapter, the conclusion and the key findings will be presented with an answer to the main research question. Subsequently, the research will be reflected upon and recommendations for future research will be made.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Main Findings

Plant-based milk, like other plant-based food, is increasingly becoming popular. This growing demand for plant-based milk is caused by people’s different motivations. The two most prevalent motivations are ethical and health concerns. Consumers have become more active and demanding, wanting healthy products for themselves, but also the environment. Food and beverage producers have responded to this change by providing different variations of vegetarian ‘meat’ and dairy-free products. The present study aimed to show how three European brands, Oatly, Alpro and Rude Health, branded their plant-based milk by particularly taking ethics and health into account.

This research was divided into three different parts, related to the three sub-questions: (1) How has social media been used by companies to encourage the consumption of plant-based milk in Europe? (2) How has advertising been used to encourage the consumption of plant-based milk in Europe through different mediums? (3) How has packaging been used to encourage the consumption of plant-based milk in Europe? This combination was made to account for a complete image of the branding strategies of the three companies. Moreover, it helped to break up the main research question into three smaller sub-questions. A qualitative content analysis was performed to translate the text and images on social media, advertising and packaging into codes and overarching themes. Through this method, an answer was constructed to the main research question: “How has the appeal of health and ethics been used in branding to encourage the consumption of plant-based milk in Europe in the last five years?”

The results showed the two social media accounts emphasize both a general health and environmental focus. Followers were addressed in the text attached to the social media posts to be more aware of small choices that impact the environment. The most important observation was that the brands try to communicate a green image in general on their social media channels. So, it is not necessarily the products being branded in a green way, but Alpro and Oatly want to carry out a brand image that is concerned with climate change and wants to take care of a better climate together with the consumers whether they buy the product or not. Regarding health, the results of the social media posts also showed a bigger picture, a healthy lifestyle. This healthy lifestyle was portrayed by exercising and making healthy meals with fruit and nuts. So, interestingly, the posts on the social media platforms Instagram and Facebook did not
show a direct or explicit link from buying or drinking the plant-based milk to either a better environment or improved health.

The results from the analysis on print advertising did not show a coherent ethical, environmental or health focus. The results from the analysis on TV advertising, however, showed an apparent focus on health, which was directly linked to the plant-based milk. The plant-based milk was described as healthy, nutritious and good for you, by Alpro. Moreover, running as an exercise was shown, as well as preparing healthy meals together with plant-based products. So, a healthy lifestyle, in general, and a direct link from the plant-based milk to improved health was portrayed in the commercials. The commercials did not show an association with ethical or environmental topics.

The results from the analysis of the packaging of the three brands demonstrated ties to both the environment and health. An environmental focus was used through emphasizing that the plant-based milk in the packaging is good for the planet by presenting the amount of CO2 emissions on the packaging and advocating for more transparency about emissions in the food industry. A health focus was used through sentences on the packaging referring to good or improved health related to consuming the products from the brands. Thus, the packaging predominantly emphasizes a direct link from either health or sustainability to the product itself.

As noted before, the results showed that the different channels (and brands) have different focuses. Oatly and Rude Health seemed to have the clearest thematic focus in their branding as Oatly particularly addressed the environment and Rude Health particularly addressed health. Alpro used both appeals on different channels. On Instagram, for example, only a health focus was used by Alpro. Instagram is a visual platform, which allows the presentation of images that reflect a healthy lifestyle. An image that reflects environmental concerns is more difficult to represent, as this is a more abstract concept, therefore Facebook suits an environmental focus better, as this platform focusses less on images and more on text compared to Instagram.

Furthermore, the distinction between a general health and environmental focus and an explicit link between health or environment and the product was noted on respectively social media and the packaging of the plant-based milk. This can be explained by the fact that social media can represent a brand in general, whereas the packaging only focusses on the product itself because the consumer needs to be persuaded to buy that particular product in the store. Moreover, social media has no limit to posting messages or images, whereas the packaging of a product has a limited amount...
of space that needs to be used as efficiently as possible. Therefore, it seems reasonable that on social media an extensive image concerning the brand is portrayed and, on the packaging, a specific and direct image concerning the product is portrayed.

To conclude, the branding of Oatly, Alpro and Rude Health all showed ties to both the ethics (environment) and health, with differences in quantity and depth among the mediums that were analysed. Two different approaches regarding the environment and health were identified in this research. Firstly, a general green brand image and healthy lifestyle were presented on social media by not particularly referring to plant-based milk. Secondly, the plant-based milk as a product was branded as healthy, nutritious and good for the environment in commercials and on the packaging. With these intangible appeals, the brands try to distinguish themselves from other plant-based milk brands, but also from dairy.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

Due to the lack of extensive research in the area of marketing or branding regarding vegan food and beverages, it was difficult to find theories to apply directly to the collected data. Nonetheless, literature was found to substantiate the results and conclusion. Fuentes and Fuentes (2017) argued that meat and dairy substitutes are marketed as ethical, sustainable and healthy, however it was not clear in exactly what way. The present research found that the investigated dairy substitutes are marketed as sustainable and healthy, thus confirming their argument. Furthermore, this research adds specific examples of how dairy substitutes are marketed as ethical, sustainable and healthy.

New contributions to this niche area of marketing regarding dairy substitutes were developed. Theoretical insights on how exactly health and sustainability are used in the branding strategy of brands that produce three plant-based milk beverages were discussed thoroughly in this research. Furthermore, a new important convenience focus was identified in the branding of plant-based milk. Convenience was already found to be an important factor in the process of buying food (Grunert, 2013), but no evidence had been identified for vegan substitutes particularly.

Since the results illustrated a healthy lifestyle, the theory on lifestyle branding could be connected to the results as well. Food can be a means to express an identity (Poole, 2012). Healthy food and meals were found in the results, which pertains to people who are aware of their diet. The plant-based milk expresses values that go further than a
healthy diet alone as it expresses a value of sustainability and caring about the future of the planet. So, when people buy plant-based milk, it can be seen as a statement (Artisan Coffee & Food Marketing, 2017). This present study confirms this argument as the three brands, especially Oatly, show on their social media platforms and packaging that they stand for a more sustainable and healthy alternative option compared to dairy.

5.3 Limitations

This research is subject to some limitations. Firstly, given the fact that this study used a qualitative approach, the results are to a certain extent subjective and biased as the analysis was performed based on the researcher’s frame of reference of what is healthy or environmentally conscious. To try to make the analysis as credible as possible, steps were taken and the way of thinking in gathering and analysing the data were explained as detailed and transparently as possible. No trial coding was performed, which decreases reliability and validity. Reliability could also be improved by using software such as Atlas.ti to ensure more structure in the process of analysing.

Limitations regarding data gathering were found in the process of this study. Firstly, the year 2015 and the first two months of 2016 were not represented in the Facebook dataset from Oatly, as the page only goes back to March 1, 2016. Secondly, Rude Health was not presented in either the dataset for printed advertising or TV advertising, as this brand did not use any advertising on those platforms to promote their plant-based milk. Thirdly, the sample from the packaging was not entirely complete. I tried to gather every side of the packaging for the three brands, but due to a lack of pictures from the sides of the packaging on the brands’ websites, it was impossible to collect every side.

5.4 Future Research

The existing literature on the marketing or branding of plant-based milk belongs to a relatively new research area and is therefore quite limited. Therefore, future research on plant-based milk or non-dairy products is desirable to extend the body of literature. This present study focused on the branding of three European brands and was an exploratory study. As not only people in Europe switch from cow’s milk to plant-based milk, research could be conducted on other brands from the United States or Asia. This could contribute to a better understanding of whether and how cultural differences play a role in branding vegan beverages. Another interesting perspective would be to investigate
the consumer side instead of the business side of branding and how much the environmental and health cues in a branding strategy influence consumers to buy the product.
References


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHXIWOa_x4k


OpenUrlRefId=info:xri/sid:wcdiscovery&accountid=13598


Perkins, A., Vander Elst, M. and Croxson, H. (2002). From bland to brand: how the dairy council showed it was made of the white stuff. Advertising Effectiveness Awards.


## Appendix A - Example Code Tree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selective code</th>
<th>Axial codes</th>
<th>Open codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Consuming and Preparing Alpro | making drink with Alpro | - man adding Alpro milk to his coffee  
- woman pours Alpro almond in glass |
| | drinking drink with Alpro | - man drinking coffee  
- woman drinking coffee  
- woman drinking soy milk |
| | making Alpro breakfast | - person making breakfast with cereal and Alpro soy drink  
- woman pours Alpro almond into cereal bowl  
- man makes plant-based smoothie  
- family makes cereal and glass of soy milk for kids |
| | eating breakfast | - woman eats plant-based breakfast at work  
- woman eats granola bowl in garden  
- man eats smoothie |
| Routine | continuing with daily life | - woman going to work  
- the family leaves for work and school |
| | start of daily routine | - kid jumps on parent’s bed  
- woman wakes up from alarm  
- woman takes shower |
| Health Focus | emphasizing healthiness | - nutritious  
- source of calcium  
- healthy |
| | exercising | - man attempts to run  
- kids jumping on trampoline  
- woman runs near water |
| Convenience Focus | emphasizing little effort | easy  
|                  |                           | quick and easy  
| emphasizing time | clock  
|                  | woman rushing  
| emphasizing easiness | woman takes alpro to work  
|                  | puts smoothie in fridge  
| Habit Focus | changing breakfast | change a little  
|              | a little change, a lot of variety  
|              | ready to shake up breakfast  
| repetitiveness in diet | same coffee every morning  
|              | same breakfast every morning  
| Usages | visual example of usage | smoothie made of alpro oats and berries  
|        | different bowls of porridge  
|        | showing different coffee styles with different ingredients  
| textual example of usage | blend  
|              | pour  
| Taste & Texture Focus | emphasizing taste | delicious  
|                          | mmmmm  
|                          | delicious ice cold soy drink  
|                          | a subtle taste of almonds  
| emphasizing texture | smooth and simple soya  
|                          | softness of oats  