

Framing Brand Identities on Social Media:

An analysis of meat substitute brands in the Netherlands.

Student Name: Norma Isabella Kalverkamp

Student Number: 591335

Supervisor: Dr. Vidhi Chaudhri

Master Media Studies - Media & Business

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication

Erasmus University Rotterdam

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ABSTRACT

People are growingly changing their diets towards more plant-based products and alternatives. From swapping their favourite hamburger patty for a Beyond Burger to interchanging the traditional latte for an oat milk latte. With the large increase in meat substitute consumption, there has been a considerable increase in online advertising from meat substitute brands. Each brand has a unique brand identity to stand out from competitors in the fast-growing meat substitute market, such identities are curated and communicated across social media platforms to enhance awareness, engagement, and sales. This research is crucial as it disseminates brand identities and examined the core value(s) used by brands in the meat substitute market, carrying great importance to the overall image of the brand. The research aims to answer the research question: *How do meat substitute brands frame their brand identity through social media marketing?* Furthermore, the analysis uncovers which social media marketing strategies are used to communicate such core values that underlie brand identities. More precisely, this research analyses Instagram posts from several meat substitute brands readily available in the Netherlands, with the aim of observing what content is most salient on their social media platform in regard to their core values.

There is a gap in existing literature on what core values underlie brand identity of meat substitute brands. This research is crucial as it disseminates brand identities, and focuses on core values which the brand focus on with great importance to the overall image of the brand along with social media strategies used to communicate such core values. This research looks at how brands use Instagram as a tool in framing brand identity, therefore, a qualitative research approach was used. A frame analysis was conducted with 150 Instagram posts, from 8 different meat substitute brands, and 2 dairy alternative brands, all present in the Netherlands.

This research contributes to the existing literature on how to create a brand identity on social media, as it builds on the existing theories of brand identity and framing by applying the core value belonging to the brand. The core values for meat substitute brands are established to be health, social, animal agriculture, and climate frames. The study further uncovers that a brand usually uses a dominant core value and pairs it with another core value. Therefore, brands use sub-frames to further enhance their brand story. Furthermore, the research uncovers which social media strategies are most commonly paired with certain core value frames. This knowledge creates further opportunities for meat substitute brands and marketers.

KEYWORDS:

Brand identity, brand values, framing, meat substitutes, social media marketing.

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List of Abbreviations

eWOM	Electronic word of mouth
UCG	User generated content
SMIs	Social media influencers
SMM	Social media marketing

1. Introduction

Awareness around animal welfare, health, and climate is drastically increasing, therefore, the meat industry is pushed to find solutions, especially in regard to the highly competitive meat substitute market (Bonny et al., 2015). Meat substitutes are using science and technology to design solutions that the meat market is currently facing. Meat substitutes represent a category of meat products but are not made from animals. Instead, they are usually made from soy or pea protein, spices, and natural flavours. Other meat substitutes include lentils, jackfruit, seitan, chickpeas, or vegetables and starches (Swann, 2020). Such meat replacements created from plant proteins and mycoproteins are increasingly becoming the biggest competitors, gaining higher percentages in the market (Bonny et al., 2015) while also creating solutions for current global issues.

With the immense growth of meat substitute consumption equally shown an immense growth in advertising around meat substitute products and brands on social media platforms (Janssen et al., 2016). Advertising through social media platforms, also known as social media marketing (SMM), allows brands to build an online brand identity, increase sales, drive traffic to their main website, and build a strong online community through online engagement (Janssen et al., 2016). For brands to increase exposure and build a strong identity, producing relevant content is essential. The biggest social media apps currently include Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube. When a brand enables a combination of platforms, the brand creates a blend of multichannel messages, which are spread to wider and larger audiences through different channels (Li et al., 2021).

Meat substitute products provide solutions for sustainability, animal welfare, and health issues pertaining to the meat market. Research by Bonny et al. (2015) found that farm animals are the main root of greenhouse gases which are associated with meat production, a solution would be to decrease the number of farm animals for food, to fix and decrease the requirements for climate sustainability (Bonny et al., 2015). A solution is increasing the consumption and production of meat substitute products, as meat substitutes help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (Bonny et al., 2015). Many ethical issues concerning the treatment of livestock and the usage of livestock are becoming increasingly bigger debates (Croney et al., 2012; Bonny et al., 2015).

Meat substitute products create solutions to such issues as it enables consumers to buy products that bear resemblance to animal meat, without the associations to animal agriculture issues (Richardson et al., 1994; Bonny et al., 2015). There are many health issues linked to animal meat, such as foodborne and pathogens like salmonella and Escherichia coli, which are illnesses that can be seriously harmful to one's health (Bonny et al., 2015). Furthermore, many diseases start in animal farming, and further agriculture industries, such as swine influenza. The risks are high and therefore create concerning health issues. The production of plant-based meat substitutes can be produced in a more controlled and sterile space, therefore, decreasing the risk of such illnesses and health issues that the traditional meat market face (Bonny et al., 2015).

SMM has played a vital role in the growing consumption of meat substitute products, the growing online awareness of the harmful effects of the meat industry on the climate and the treatment of farm animals has sparked an increasing awareness and online debate about consuming less meat. Social media enables interconnected communication as it allows every user to share their knowledge and opinions on certain topics. Such interconnectivity has led to an increase in scrutiny

and interest regarding the science and culture behind the meat substitute market (Gapper, 2018). This thesis is motivated by the increased awareness of the animal and climate issues surrounding the meat industry, along with the increase in meat substitute brands emerging from science and technology being invested in producing new types of meat alternatives. Meat substitute brands are the solution to many issues in the meat market, allowing for a versatile marketing and branding approach when creating brand identity. How brands use framing techniques to communicate their values and morals gives extensive insights into the brand identity.

1.1 Research questions

The meat substitute market is increasingly growing, becoming a strong competitor for each other and the meat market, therefore, with this growth it is important to examine ways in which meat substitute brands craft a brand identity on social media, through exploring the different SMM techniques used and how brands communicate the core values: Social, health, animal agriculture, and climate through frames on social media platforms. This thesis can provide valuable insights by performing a framing analysis on the frames used to form brand identity to distinguish oneself from competitors in the meat substitute market. The main aim of this study is to answer the following research questions:

RQ: *“How do meat substitute brands frame their brand identity through social media marketing?”*.

To further understand how brands curate specific frames to create a brand identity the following subquestions were created to guide the research question and analysis: SRQ1: *“What core values are predominately framed by meat substitute brands?”* And SRQ2: *“How do meat substitute brands use social media marketing as a tool in constructing online engagement?”*. In short, the first subquestion examines which of the four core values: Social, animal agriculture, climate, and health are most commonly used and whether several core values can be used together to frame a brand identity, further using Hallahan’s seven models of framing to understand which framing techniques are used to successfully frame which core value (Hallahan, 1999). The second subquestion examines the role that Instagram has as a tool in communicating brand identity and creating online engagement.

The study aims to understand how brands use framing to create and communicate their brand identity. Furthermore, the study aims to determine whether brands use different core values when framing their brand identity, as the core values help to set the brand apart from competitors. This study aims to understand how meat substitutes place themselves in the meat market. There seems to be a confusion whether meat substitutes are attempting to take on the brand of real meat, or propelling an identity of its own (Gapper, 2018). Moreover, meat substitutes use the same labels as meat. To combat confusion the European Court of Justice decided that labels like milk and cream could only be used for dairy products, except almond and oat milk (Gapper, 2018). The meat substitute market is experimenting with creating an identity: Trying to have a different identity to meat while

making substitutes that look identical to meat products, therefore, this research aims to understand the core values which are used by brands to create an identity.

In order to achieve the goal of this research, this study examines several meat substitute brands available in the Netherlands through the theory of framing. Online advertising uses frames to allow people to make sense of the information and create and curate perceptions (Heidenreich et al., 2019). Frame analysis is a concept that derives from framing theory. Framing theory entails the general concept of information that can be interpreted in different manners, consequently through involvement from the actions of the receivers (Heidenreich et al., 2019). Frames can influence and shape the wants and needs of the audience, therefore, it is vital to understand how a brand can achieve successful frames to create a fluent brand identity.

The core values that will be observed through examining frames, the following core values will be examined: Firstly, the health frame will be observed through, how brands communicate a healthy balanced lifestyle through their meat substitute products, ways in which brands attempt to bust negative myths around a vegetarian diet, such as, not gaining enough proteins and amino acids that are found in many meat sources. Secondly, the climate frame will be observed through educational content, award labels, and 'green' posts, observing how the brand positions itself on sustainability. Thirdly, the animal agriculture frame will be similar to the climate frame, as it will be observed through educational content and any links to farm animals. Further observing how the brand takes a stance towards livestock farming, and the ethical and moral views pertaining to animal agriculture. Finally, the social frame will be observed through how the brand makes itself applicable to social situations, this will be observed through engagement such as tags and collaborations, along with statements and storytelling.

This study aims to further investigate different meat substitute brands, observing exactly what is being communicated and the ways in which they do so. Further understanding how SMM plays a role in pushing the content further, through interactive hashtags, collaborations, and catchy captions.

1.2 Societal relevance

Meat substitutes are growing at a rapid pace globally, and in the Netherlands. Diet and food is an essential aspect of human survival, health, culture, travel, and social life. The demand for vegan meat is growing, according to CB Insights (2021) retail sales of meat alternative products reached \$7 billion in 2020, which was a major growth compared to previous years. While the beef industry has seen a considerable decrease in sales. In 2020 the beef industry estimated a \$13.6 billion loss in sales. Consumer behaviour have shifted due to increasing awareness emerging around the animal farming industry, as consuming meat is shifting its image to being unhygienic, unethical, and unhealthy. Therefore, more consumers are making the transition towards "clean meat". Vegan meat labs could one day replace farms, feedlots, and slaughterhouses (CB Insights, 2021).

More meat corporations are joining the transition towards vegan meat. For example, JBS is one of the biggest meat corporations, launched the brand Vivera in 2020, which is available across all supermarkets in the Netherlands (CB Insights, 2021). Alongside meat corporations, are new startups using technologies and science to engineer meat in labs. For example, in 2019, Beyond Meat

launched its Beyond burger, making the brand the biggest vegan meat brand. Beyond Meat changed the market by offering direct-to-consumer sales through partnerships with brands such as Yum! And Mcdonald's (CB Insights, 2021).

1.3 Academic relevance

In the Netherlands, meat substitutes are growing at a rapid pace, with an immense increase in meat substitute brands emerging from Dutch origin. The Netherlands is at the forefront of plant-based research and the production of vegan meat innovation. The Netherlands is becoming one of the first countries where meat substitutes are the norm, becoming the poster child and worldwide leader in plant-based proteins. To guide the shift, the Netherlands provides favourable governmental policies, and a thriving economy and community that is open to plant-based products, making it an enticing location for brands and start-ups. Therefore, making it a prime location to focus the research on.

This research is relevant to academia, as it investigates how the theories of brand identity and framing are represented through SMM techniques. Brand identity and framing are well-researched theories. However, little research analyses how the meat substitute market has integrated the theories framing and brand identity into its social media presence. Further, there has been a lack of research in the implementation of types of core values used to frame brand identity in the meat substitute market. Marketing and advertising carry great influence over consumer perspectives and can impact how people view what they eat and their lifestyles around food consumption, therefore, making it vital to understand the academic implications that play a role in creating societal changes. In addition, this research carries societal relevance, as consumers are increasingly gaining more motivation to switch towards plant-based diets, through the amount of awareness around the downsides of the animal farming industry, and its effects on health, climate, and animal agriculture. Therefore, highly relevant for brands and consumers to understand how meat alternative brands use different types of framing to create their strategically curated brand identity.

This research aims to understand how meat substitute brands incorporate brand identity frames through SMM, with the usage of promoting one or more of the core values: Health, climate, and animal agriculture. Another societal factor is the governmental push toward consuming less meat, through campaigns such as Meatless Mondays, and support for documentaries such as *Cowspiracy*, and *What The Health*. Thus, making it relevant to understand how marketers are promoting such brands through online platforms.

1.4 Outline

This thesis is divided into chapters. Firstly, the theoretical framework contributes in-depth insights into the key concept's core to this thesis. The focus is on framing analysis and brand identity, furthermore, how brands use framing to create brand identity. The second chapter, the Methodology presents an in-depth illustration of the execution of the study, in regard to the method of qualitative content analysis. Additionally, the chapter provides insights into how framing analysis was employed in the study. The third chapter, the results entails the findings which are illustrated through examples and existing literature discussed in the theoretical framework. The final chapter, the conclusion, out-

lines the theoretical and practical implications of the research, and discusses the limitations and potential directions for future research.

2. Theoretical framework

The following sections provide an overview of existing literature on both brand identity and framing. Firstly, focusing on brand identity, how to form a brand identity, and how social media can help to communicate brand identity. Secondly, framing is discussed through the power of specific storytelling and uncovers the seven models of framing by Hallahan (2008) —concepts core to this thesis.

Research by Balmer (2001, 2012b) has shown that forming brand identity involves a circularity in reasoning. Identities are described as framed contents of persuasive communication, and as cognitive systems of meaning, of which both are linked in a direct way (Cornelissen, 2012). Meaning-making involves the back-and-forth procedure of sending and receiving messages. According to Balmer (2012b), successful brand identity involves well-curated brand velocity which will reflect the brand identity, consisting of authenticity, believability, durability, profitability, and responsibility. Brands are not only consumed based on functionality but also for their symbolism (Elliot & Percy, 2007; Balmer, 2012b). Brands play a role in creating self-identity, labeled as self-symbolism. To create a brand identity is vital to use precise brand framing. Therefore, framing and brand identity work together as framing creates brand identity, and brand identity curates how the brand will be framed.

The circularity of sending and receiving involves language communication and perceptions of communication. Communication suggests the formation of a brand identity and the creation of meaning to the products and the brand. Brand identity is shaped by language and uses framing to create context (Cornelissen, 2012). Framing works as a performative character, which enhances the meanings which are created about the brand. Framing allows receivers to perceive the identity differently, allowing for ambiguity between receivers (Christensen and Cornelissen, 2011). Showing that no matter how finely curated the brand identity is framed, the receiver will always perceive the information through their own perceptions (Christensen and Cornelissen, 2011).

2.1 Brand identity

Put simply, a brand identity contains all things that makes the brand unique and relevant (Janonis et al., 2007). However, the concept of identity is not so straightforward. Identity includes the moral values, goals, and utility that fragment the core individuality of the brand, while able to differentiate from other brands (de Chernatony, 2002; Janonis et al., 2007). Brands with the strongest identity include emotional comfort, which along with the product which provides functionality gives strength to the brand. The brand's identity should provide self-expression which allows it to stand out from competitors, the self-expression reflecting the image of the target market (Aaker, 1996; Janonis et al., 2007).

Brand identity is an attribute that has emerged over a period of time and is long-standing (Balmer, 2012a). A company with a strong brand identity is more appreciated by stakeholders as they are fully aware of what the brand stands for, their behaviours, ethos, values, products, and services (Balmer, 2012a). Previous research by Balmer (2001) shows classic models of brand identity along with image and reputation to presume a one-way communication track from organisation to stakeholders, with images injected into the stakeholders' minds. However, contemporary research has

shown the models to be less linear and more complex. Balmer and Soenen (1999) found that there is an established representation of a company's identity that is translated through language, communication, and perception (Reddy, 1979). Therefore, a channel between the company's corporate identity and the cognitive image and representation that is remembered by stakeholders (Reddy, 1979). To understand the identity of a company it is necessary to understand the elements which pertain to curating brand identity.

The correct elements are what make up a well curated brand identity. Janonis et al. (2007) found that brand identity can be created by examining the following 6 questions: Firstly, what are the aims and visions of the brand? Secondly, what makes the brand distinguishable? Thirdly, how can satisfaction be achieved? Fourthly, what is the brand's equity? Fifth, what measures the brand's validity, legality, and qualifications? Lastly, what features makes the brand stand out and recognisable? Without a well curated brand identity, the brand will be overrun by the intense market competitions, therefore, actions need to be taken to manage brand identity and include all elements to clearly communicate the brand's attributes and equity (Janonis et al., 2007).

The overall basis of brand identity is that it is framed. To understand how brand identities are framed and to be able to identify such frames, it is importance to understand the sources of the brand identity. The following 6 sources are key to identifying how a brand frames their brand identity, and are used as a guidelines for examination. Firstly, goods and services, what is the brand selling, the brand identity should be formed around the goods and services as this ensures the transfers in equities into production and distributions, constituting the sales and revenue. Secondly, the brand's name should communicate the essence of the brand, the majority of brand names aim to reflect the attributes of the brand that are singled out. Thirdly, personage ensures that the brand is given a personality, making it more recognisable and a better understanding for both the brand and the consumer. Fourthly, visual symbols and logotypes create a personality to the brand which is frequently seen and remembered through graphic identity, the brand will be tied together with the logo, therefore be identified together. Fifth, the brand developer allows the brand to share a personal story about the brand and how it formed, the brand identity can be reflected in the identity of the producer. Finally, Communication through content allows for the brand to have a voice, and inform and educate the consumers, leading to building stronger relationships with the recipient.

Finally, as the concept of identity is so complex, it is important to understand the categories of identity as according to Aaker and Jochinsthaler (2003). Brand identity is categorised into three principles: Extended Identity blends all identities that are not included in the primary identity and are selected into subgroups based on their importance to the brand. Secondly, Principal brand identity reflects the construction strategy and the usefulness that differentiates the brand, seeking attention from consumers. Lastly, brand essence creates a more narrow identity which is an idea and advocates a brand soul. The three identity categories are essential in fully understanding the brand and at what stage they are in while framing their brand identity.

2.1.1 Brand identity and social media

To allow for new opportunities to grow a brand identity, social media platforms are vital as they are less linear models, allowing for a more transverse, interconnected method of storytelling (Cheng, 2018). Using social media to build brand identity allows for organisations and stakeholders to interact and influence at the same level (Cheng, 2018). SMM is an essential strategy that should be understood when looking at brand identity. An online presence is a necessity for brands and help in how companies create brand identity. SMM activities have shown to be most successful in creating brand awareness, brand loyalty, and creating brand image (Bilgin, 2018). The benefits of a successful brand identity are effectiveness in meeting stakeholder needs, supporting relationships, improving satisfaction, and enhancing organisational growth. Social media works as a tool to create accelerated interactions and communications between the brand and its public (Cheng, 2018). Brands can effectively use social media platforms for interactions with loyal and new stakeholders. However, through the increase in user-generated content (UGC), there is an increased risk and decreased amount of control over what is communicated which can lead to the risk of miscommunications (Coombs, 2014a; Cheng, 2018).

The usage of social media allows for brands to further enhance their brand identity through inviting the public to share their opinions about the brand and products. Sharing posts and content from the public is called user generated content, UGC is conducted through public accessibility of transmission media, such as social media platforms like Instagram. The UGC is a reflection of the public perceptions of the brand and the brand's identity (Skinner, 2018). UGC is a strategy vital to SMM as there is an overload to accessibility of UGC. Therefore, marketers have a decreased amount of control over what is being posted and communicated about the brand and products, making it important to understand UGC to be able to use it in the brand's advantage (Bing et al., 2007; Skinner, 2018). Images are a vital component of the overall experience and identity of a brand, therefore, understanding the effect of both positive and negative curated UGC is vital to the brand's identity creation (Skinner, 2018). With the immense growth of UGC, it has become easier for consumers to share images with each other. Thus, shows that the consumers play a role in constructing brand identity which can be best achieved by the brand through creating activities and co-creating through their social media platforms (Mariani et al., 2018; Skinner, 2018). UGC can be labelled as 'prosumption' which is vital for a new type of market, where products are still being developed and perfected, to create the best food experience for the consumer. Therefore, the honesty of UGC creates a more genuine experience for buyers who are interested in the brand (Li et al., 2017; Skinner, 2018).

Social media are a staple for brands that are curating a brand identity. To enhance the process and reach wider audiences, platforms like Instagram can make it easier through the enhancement of collaborations with an outside persona, opinion leaders, and other brands. Social media influencers (SMIs) and influencer marketing are growing rapidly to help promote products and brands (Zhou et al., 2021). SMIs have created many opportunities for the brand to enhance brand identity through online platforms and increase brand value through electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) posts, which is a vital aspect too effective influencer marketing. Extensive research by Zhou (2021) found that SMIs help boost brand awareness, which leads to brand innovation, building more intimate relation-

ships with consumers, and expanding the brand's reach. Although influencer marketing has many upsides, there are also challenges that brands may face when building brand identity through the usage of SMI. Such as brands that produce and work with influencers who create low-quality content, an overly commercial approach, and sponsorship disclosure can lead to mistrust and negative reactions from consumers (Audrezet et al., 2020; Zhou, 2021). Therefore, it is necessary that brands work together with influencers who fit the brand identity, and can add a more authentic voice to the brand through eWOM, through authentic storytelling and narrative (Zhou, 2021). It is essential for brands to have a strategised narrative prepared when working with influencers, which can surpass issues like cultural barriers, commercial and personal content, and sponsorship disclosures (Zhou, 2021). In all, working with SMI enhances the brand's identity through collaborating with personas that complements the brand.

Interaction and engagement with consumers through social media platforms are necessary for creating brand identity and getting the brand name out to the public. Besides UGC, other strategies can be implemented from within the platforms to create engagement, such as giveaways, polls, and voting strategies. Research conducted by Bitner and Albinsson (2016) found that posts that engaged the viewer increased purchase intentions and increased memory of the brand. Engaging content is a more active way to engage customers to learn about the brand and identify with the brand's identity. Furthermore, engaging content increased social acceptance and normalised meat substitute brands. Research by Gascoyne et al. (2021), found that higher frequencies of engagement were associated with social media content related to relevant food topics to specific online communities. A study by Onwezen et al. (2021) found that there is immense effectiveness in making informational claims on social media in driving acceptance. Messaging is a commonly used strategy to influence consumers' food choices. However, research by Septianto et al. (2022) expands the claim by adding visual features to be a less direct approach but a very successful and subtle technique towards creating online acceptance, as images play a large role on social media platforms and visual appeal of food is vital for consumer's perceptiveness of the meat substitute market (Septianto et al., 2022).

2.1.2 Brand identity in the food industry

Brands tend to categorise food into certain food groups, as it makes it easier for consumers to understand the brand and the product. A category is seen as a pattern of similar features and objects that have common categorisations, and functions. Categories can be formed in different manners, such as based on similar attributes, or can be grouped as they lead to the same outcome (Antonides & Van Raaij, 1998; Hoek et al., 2011). Products within a category share traits that are relevant and connected according to the consumer's perception. For example, red fruits are categorised together as they share the same colour, similarly, are round cookies categorised together for their similar shape. Within such categorisations there are further categories developed called taxonomic categories (Hoek et al., 2011). Taxonomic categories work with a hierarchal system which are dependent relationships, for example, oranges and strawberries can be categorised as fruit (Hoek et al., 2011). The features on which taxonomic categories can be based on an agreed classification, both scientific or professionally supported and learned by consumers to organise information. For example, the category 'vegeta-

bles' constitute foods that share nutritional value, while this may not be obvious from the outside perspective of the produce, it can still be used to classify products into categories (Nguyen & Murphy, 2003; Hoek et al., 2011). The categorisations made by the brand help create deeper understandings to the brand identity.

The ways in which food products are grouped depend on the categorisation of other types of products. Food products are the only realm in which both taxonomic and script-based categories can be created (Nguyen & Murphy, 2003; Hoek et al., 2011). The category of meat is an example of a strong taxonomic category that is further relevant to meat substitutes, and how meat substitutes are placed in the market, and advertised. Sustainable meat substitutes are considered replacements for animal products. Therefore, to engage with the narrative, the brand should discover how consumers perceive and categorise the types of products belonging to the brand. Secondly, it is important to understand whether the meat and meat substitute products are seen as separate categories or part of a shared category, as this will determine how the brand can form its brand identity around the products created and categorised, further enhancing the design and communication of the product. According to Hoek et al. (2011), meat substitutes which share a category with the meat will be more likely to be chosen and consumed.

Many factors go into curating brand identity, as pointed out by Rashid and Ghose (2015). Firstly, brand identity is created through an appropriate brand name which will increase the process of brand identity creation. Secondly, the personality of the market leader will strongly guide organisational culture. Thirdly, a consistent process of business and creativity intelligence should be consistently updated to create a distinctive brand identity. Fourthly, strong internal marketing and personal values are important in constructing internal culture which will further enhance the strength of the brand. Lastly, the cultural process is vital in developing internal and external brand identity, both being cohesive to the brand and each other. Furthermore, food and diets vary among cultures, nationalities, and ethnicities, meaning that meat substitute brands should go beyond focusing on consumption from consumers and integrating values, emotions, and symbolism into the identity (Chandler & Owen, 2002; Rashid & Ghose, 2015). Such factors play a vital role in understanding the market and creating a deeper and more meaningful brand as a whole.

2.2 Framing

Framing theory can be conceptualised as meaning construction, through active agency and contention around reality (Benford & Snow, 2000). Entman (1993) defines framing as a process of selecting features of a perceived reality and making those perceptions more principal in a narrative, to highlight a specific topic or issue for the described product or topic. Furthermore, Entman (1993) describes framing through four foundations: Firstly, to define a problem, by determining what causal agent is performing with the costs and interests, which are usually measured in cultural and social values. Secondly, to diagnose the causes, which entails identifying which forces are creating the issue. Thirdly, to suggest remedies, which involves evaluating the agents which are causing the issue and the effects. Lastly, to suggest remedies, which requires justifying the uses of the problems and determining the effects. A frame can perform more than one of the foundations and may in particular

contexts include none. Overall, a frame aims at highlighting bits of information about an event or item in the subject of a narrative — creating more meaningful and memorable narratives for audiences. The higher the salience of the frame the more likely the receivers will perceive the information, and articulate it (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Entman, 1993).

Applying framing theory to meat substitute brands can help brands to understand that consumers tend to change dietary behaviours once they are aware of how and why they should make the change (Schultz, 2002; Graham & Abrahamse, 2017). For example, environmental issues have many complex connections to individual actions, therefore, the link can help to understand the consumers' behaviour towards contributing to combating climate change (Gardner & Stern, 2002; Graham & Abrahamse, 2017). Information increases awareness of an issue and raises responsibility to create a behaviour change (Graham & Abrahamse, 2017).

Framing helps to combine a person's own motivations with communication. In this sense, framing helps to communicate information through different narratives, allowing for the receiver to interpret the information themselves based off of their own perceptions (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Graham & Abrahamse, 2017). Therefore, framing can effectively curate an intended outcome of a message. For example, Spend and Pidegion (2010; Graham & Abrahamse, 2017) show that information regarding environmentalism was predominantly framed in gains, in a way to motivate consumers to help make a change, this way of framing was effective in creating an influence over the perceptions and attitude towards the climate, as to framed that where curated in regards to losses, such as framing a situation under a negative lens.

2.2.1 The seven models of framing

According to Hallahan (2008), frames are used strategically in certain constructs, to uncover the frames pertaining to the context. Framing derives from textual, socio-political constructions, therefore the type of framing is dependent on the topic, and the aim of the message. Entman (1993; Hallahan, 2008) defined framing as a model that lacks clarity in conceptuality. To be able to utilise framing careful interpretation is required to successfully uncover the frames, framing's biggest weakness is also its biggest strength, as it can be applied to a broad range of communication and language. A close examination of the literature uncovered seven models of framing, which are applicable to the scope of marketing, advertising, and public relations (Hallahan, 2008). Such frames can be categorised as followed:

Framing of situations refers to the connection between the individuals and the situations from their daily lives. Framing of situations gives a frame to observing storytelling, through negotiation, debate, conversation, and further interactions (Putnam & Holmer, 1992; Hallahan, 2008). In all, the Framing of situations refers to the dialogue of storytelling, such as strategic framing where one side of the story is urged according to one individual's perception.

Framing of attributes is used to characterise an object, event, or person, as a prime strategy in advertising and promotional communication. For example, positive frames of attributes lead to more favourable and positive responses. Furthermore, the framing of situations can also be used by advertisers to frame a consumer problem as being a particular kind that can be solved by the recommended

solution (Ries & Trout, 1981; Hallahan, 2008). In all, framing of attributes refers to characteristics associated with the objects and humans which are heightened compared the objects and humans who are ignored. There is a bias in information processing (McCombs & Ghanem, 1998; Hallahan, 2008).

Framing of risky choices consists of the framing of a potential hazard, receivers tend to avoid risks when a choice is framed as a gain but will take larger risks when choices are framed in terms of losses (Hallahan, 2008). According to Kahneman and Tversky (1979; Hallahan, 2008), a frame is considered the perceptions of the decision maker, where the acts and outcomes are linked with a choice or a solution. Furthermore, claim that decisions are a non-rational process, as there is a higher impact of a loss than there is if the decision leads to a win.

Framing of actions entails how to suggest actions to achieve amenability with the targeted goal, such as shops that give a discount to subscriptions as they will gain more in the long run, over one-time purchases (Hallahan, 2008). Framing of actions focuses on persuasion by observing the likelihood that a receiver will act in a to maintain or reach a certain set goal which is influenced by positive or negative idioms (Smith & Petty 1996; Hallahan, 2008).

Framing of issues requires engagement in motivational framing processes which encourages support through frame alignment, often found in the activism of social and political issues (Hallahan, 2008). In all, framing of issues focuses on social issues and contentions which can be expressed in different ways by different parties who want their preferred definitions to be the most dominant outcome or definition of an issue (Best 1995; Hallahan, 2008).

Framing responsibility entails the process of identifying a particular investigative genre. According to Iyengar (1991; Hallahan, 2008), receivers' label causes internal or external aspects which are hinged on stability and authority. Receivers tend to see their role in such events in regard to their introspection, which leads to minimisation of benefits and minimisation of guilt or accountability (Iyengar, 1991; Hallahan, 2008). Receivers tend to relate certain causes to personal stances and motives, rather than attributing such causes to systemic problems or flaws in society.

Framing of news ultimately suggests how strategic framing interprets issues in the news and journalism further showing how such interpretations are portrayed and framed by the media, in an effort to explain certain cultural and abstract ideas. According to Gamson et al. (1992; Hallahan, 2008), media sources use similar themes which culturally echo information about certain events.

2.2.2 Frame mechanisms

Frame narratives increase salience through communicating associations with cultural and social symbols. If the narrative aligns with the receiver's beliefs, that idea is emphasised through the narrative, which is unnoticeably consumed and interpreted by the receiver. Therefore, salient frames are formed through interaction between the narrative and the receiver. Further research by Cornelissen & Werner (2014) suggests that cognitive frames are formed around knowledge structures that help people to understand information by arranging it into cognitive representations from memory. Therefore, the notion of language is key to frames and disseminating frames. Cornelissen (2014) states that frames tend to curate and release narratives as strategic messages through language which

can direct perceptions and convert symbolic positions with existing beliefs, along with cultural and social values. Thus, the taken-for-granted cognitive frames are uncovered through framing mechanisms, such as frame shifting, frame blending, metaphors, and analogies (Cornelissen, 2014).

Cornelissen (2014) states that frame shifting focuses on mobilising alternative frames that restructure the perceptions and experiences, anything that suggests different views to those reinforced by the existing frame (Werner and Cornelissen, 2014; Modell, 2019). Frame shifting allows for specific forms of inexact language, where the single actors have been normalised but promote and perceive another frame that is in contrast with the original knowledge (Cornelissen, 2014).

Unlike frame shifting, frame blending entails a shared adjustment between frames that are impacted by social actors and therefore shows a clear election of reconciliation of conflicting frames (Cornelissen, 2014). Frame blending shows a less complete frame which contains a start to the conflict between different meanings (Ansari et al., 2012; Modell, 2019). The influence of frame blending is less powerful and demands pinning down certain meanings, therefore, forming less concrete framing processing outcomes. In all, frame blending is the notion of examining language and comparisons through discursively iterating between the cognitive themes, further involving the past themes (Cornelissen, 2014).

Analogies are comparisons between one thing and another, usually with an aim to explain or clarify a certain topic (Cornelissen et al., 2011). According to Cornelissen et al. (2011) analogies are effective in communicating content of changes. Metaphors can be defined as a figure of speech that uses a word or phrase which is applied to an object or situation but is not literally connected. A crucial aspect of creating categories for change involves analogical and metaphorical frames that can expand understandings to create such changes. Analogies and metaphors can both be described as declarations of similarities in underlying relations between specific realms (Fauconnier & Turner, 1998; Cornelissen et al., 2011). The main difference between both mechanisms is that metaphors typically associated with more extended outreach to domains of language connotative into comparisons. Whereas, analogies are specifically used for alteration of casual structures (Cornelissen et al., 2011).

Framing mechanisms have shaped the meat alternative market and how they communicate its products. For example, frame shifting uses language to redesign the understanding of a set of constitutions and ways of thinking (Cornelissen, 2014). Frame shifting happens through language and communication, in the case of meat substitutes, keywords like “green” and “choose planet” can frame a new way of thinking about the meat industry (Weber et al., 2008). Furthermore, such set contexts give an opportunity for strategic framing to integrate certain storytelling of alternatives and competing values. Blending opportunities allow for a debate from other areas that can be imported and blended within such existing frames of the traditional diet (Cornelissen, 2014).

2.2.3 Framing values in the meat substitute industry

A frame can be split into consistent frames and thematic frames (Iyengar, 1991; Guenther et al., 2020). In food advertising it is important to observe whether brands promote one value and use a single frame to communicate, or whether they combine values, and use a more circular frame com-

bined with other frames to tell a story, this helps to understand what a brand prioritises when curating their overall brand identity.

Health frame, research by Guenther et al. (2020) and Von Sikorski & Nan (2012) find that health frames are extensively used by food brands as a way to influence lifestyle. For example, health representation in the media has different ways of impacting the receivers, each receiver has their own perception of how the health frame is transmitted to them (Guenther et al., 2020). Furthermore, framing helps create persuasive messaging to influence and guide receivers to carry out health-related mannerisms (Von Sikorski & Matthes, 2019; Guenther et al., 2020). For example, making statements about plant-based diets being healthier for one's cholesterol level, as meat-substitute products may contain less fat (Garner et al., 2005).

In a more traditional framing perspective in communicating health values, there are mainly representations of individual and societal acknowledgments, further highlighting ways in which health issues can be prevented through the representation of the product (Atkin et al., 2008; Guenther et al., 2020). Most communications in health focus on the effects of the gain and loss frames. According to O'Keefe and Jensen (2008; Guenther et al., 2020) gain frames highlight the desired outcomes which are associated with adherence to the recommended point of view. Whereas, loss frames emphasise the undesired ramifications which are associated with defiance. Therefore, for communicating health values it has been identified that gain-framed storytelling and communications show an increased effect in preventing certain behaviours (Guenther et al., 2020).

Climate frame, Climate has increasingly become a favoured frame across many markets, including the food market. However, research by Pew (2008; Nisbet, 2010) found that most active receivers tend to feel disengaged from climate change. A survey by (Maibach et al., 2008; Nisbet, 2010) found that less than the majority of participants adopted new diet and lifestyle behaviours to attempt to reduce greenhouse emissions. Softer and friendlier frames need to highlight climate change to gain the receiver's attention, over scientific frames. Consumers need to feel a sense of ability and power in the situation, and friendlier frames allow for more perceptual views for receivers (Nisbet, 2010).

Framing responsibility for climate values should be seen as a collective, over a personal endeavour. In the meat substitute industry, initiatives such as Meatless Monday and Veganuary have motivated groups of people to try and consume less meat. Such initiatives get shared online or through in work spaces and schools (Meatless Mondays, N.D.). According to Obradovich and Guenther (2016) such events create an increase in behavioural changes and creates a greater recognition for environmental groups. Further motivating consumers to willingly change towards environmentally friendly habits. Framing emphasises personal responsibility as a collective for climate change, which increases pro-climate behaviours and dampens the feeling of individual actions (Obradovich & Guenther, 2016). Individuals are more likely to care about climate when persuaded by the importance of pro-climate behaviours.

Animal agriculture frame, narratives, and storytelling shape what we want to eat and consume (Eden 2011; Sexton et al., 2019). The narrative portrayals are communicated through text and visual language through food labels, packaging, and forms of advertising from in-store to online marketing.

The aim of framing animal agriculture is to communicate a knowledge fix (Eden, 2011; Sexton et al., 2019) which encourages consumers to make more educated and informed choices when shopping for food — leading to better food choices. Animal agriculture frames attempt to connect consumers with food producers by highlighting the processes which need to be done to create a food network (Cool et al., 2004; Sexton et al., 2019). Thus, encouraging consumers to create a deeper understanding with the process of producing food. Furthermore, food storytelling sparks a more caring and sensitive relationship between humans and animals (Miele, 2011; Sexton et al., 2019), along with changing people's eating styles and diets, such as veganism, pescatarian, and vegetarian diets (Doyle, 2016; Sexton et al., 2019). However, as powerful as food storytelling may be, the narratives can cause miscommunication in their intended aim, which leads to confusion and indifferences among consumers and their everyday food consumption (Eden et al., 2008; Sexton et al., 2019).

2.3 Conclusions

To conclude, brand identity and framing are both theories vital to this research as they work circularly (Cornelissen, 2012). Brand identity is created through the frames curated and narrated by the brand. Framing allows for the ability to shape a meaning around a certain subject, a particular meaning or a set of meanings is required to create a frame around a topic (Milfeld et al., 2021). Therefore, framing can help shape or reshape how a brand and brand identity is communicated to the public (Chang & Lee, 2010; Milfeld et al., 2021). Identities are shaped through the realities that the brand aims to manifest, the identities are curated around what the brand stands for, this is shaped through frames and framed language (Balmer, 2012b).

The frames aim at resonating with the receiver and creating a long-lasting impact (Cornelissen, 2012). This research aims to fill the research gap in the types of frames used in the meat substitute market and the typologies brands narrate to create their brand identity. The analysis aims at analysing how meat substitute brands frame their brand identity through SMM.

Further examining what core values are predominant and how core values are communicated through the social media platform — Instagram.

3. Methodology

The following chapter underlies the overview of the process conducted to collect, operationalise, and examine the data to answer the research questions. The research followed a qualitative analysis of which a content analysis, which was led by a frame analysis. The frame analysis allowed to uncover certain methods of storytelling that meat substitute brands used to frame a brand identity through social media marketing.

3.1 methodology

Qualitative analysis was used to analyse the theories of framing and brand identity in depth. Qualitative methods allowed for flexibility and observance when examining the data (Hammersley, 2013). The frame analysis helped to identify how meat substitute brands used certain narrative frames to advertise. Advertisements are an extension to experiencing certain social phenomena which are curated through frames, the frames can take away from the overall picture of the product and brand (Goffman, 1974; Linström & Marais, 2012). Furthermore, the frame analysis investigated how certain narratives were framed to expand brand identity through SMM strategies.

The frame theory builds upon the agenda-setting theory similarly to the way examinations of brand communications are altered toward consumer perceptions (Linström & Marais, 2012). Additionally, according to Reese et al. (2001; Linström & Marais, 2012), a frame analysis encapsulates the narratives which are internal through employees and curated into advertising. Which was reductively measured with the aim of observing storytelling through keywords and metaphors. Research by López and Llopis (2010) found that metaphors are a powerful tool in framing certain values which are connected to the meat substitute market, therefore, both positive and negative metaphorical terms are powerful when communicating values through advertisements.

Furthermore, frame analysis allowed for an investigation into what topics and values were specifically included and more importantly, excluded from the frame (Linström & Marais, 2012). A frame analysis was best suited for the research as it helped to uncover the communicative structures of meaning making that could be further categorised through patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It was essential to examine what was excluded from the frame as frames impose a specific logic in disposing of other narratives, in a taken-for-granted manner, which entails accepting certain frames and narratives without any questioning or objection (Winslow, 2018). Therefore, the taken-for-granted cognitive frames were uncovered through frame shifting and frame blending, as both techniques focussed on normalised language which promotes a certain angle that is opposite to the original narrative. Secondly, frame blending focuses on examining language by iterating between cognitive themes (Cornelissen, 2014). Frame shifting and frame blending gained insights into a gap in research on how language was used as a tool to create underlying assumptions and meaning-making, through understanding the role of social cognitive frames which were commonly used in advertising.

Frame analysis worked as a tool to uncover the cultural and social symbols of each frame (Winslow, 2018). Identifying the frame was a crucial aspect of the research as it allowed a deeper understanding into social symbols which were active in the meat substitute market. Therefore, the

researcher followed the seven models of framing by Hallahan (1999; 2008) to observe potential frames in the data. The models were used as a guide to help identify the reasonings for each frame that was discovered in the advertisement, and the potential each frame had to target the brand objectives to the narrative of the frame (Hallahan, 2008). The following frames will be used to categorise the data: Firstly, *the framing of situations* refers to the dialogue of storytelling, such as strategic framing where one side of the story is urged according to one individual's perception. *Framing of attributes* is used to characterise an object, event, or person, as a prime strategy in advertising and promotional communication. For example, positive frames of attributes lead to more favourable and positive responses. Furthermore, the framing of situations can also be used by advertisers to frame a consumer problem as being a particular kind that can be solved by the recommended solution (Ries & Trout, 1981; Hallahan, 2008). *Framing of risk* consists of the framing of a potential hazard, receivers tend to avoid risks when a choice is framed as a gain but will take larger risks when choices are framed in terms of losses (Hallahan, 2008). *Framing of actions* entails how to suggest actions to achieve amenability with the targeted goal, such as shops that give a discount to subscriptions as they will gain more in the long run, over one-time purchases (Hallahan, 2008). *Framing of issues* requires engagement in motivational framing processes which encourages support through frame alignment, often found in activism of social and political issues (Hallahan, 2008). *Framing of responsibility* entails the process of identifying a particular investigative genre. Lastly, *framing of news* ultimately suggests how strategic framing interprets issues in the news and journalism.

3.2 Data collection

To answer the research questions and conduct the study, posts from Instagram were collected from 10 different meat substitute brands based in the Netherlands: De Vegetarische Slager, Beyond Meat, Oatly, Vivera, Quorn, Garden Gourmet, Valess, Strong Roots, Hands Off My Chocolate, and Tindle. The specific brands were selected as they are readily available in the Netherlands and have a specific Instagram page for followers who are based in the Netherlands and active in posting content. From each brand the following Instagram accounts were used for examination: @devegetarischeslager, @beyondmeat, @oatly, @vivera_nl, @quorn_nl, @garden_gourmet_nl, @valess_nl, @strongroots, @handsoffmychocolate, and @tindlefoods.

From each Instagram account an equal amount of posts of 15 posts was derived for analysis. Furthermore, the posts collected had to be spread over a set amount of time to make sure there was enough diverse content, such as national and international seasonal and holiday content to be part of the data set. This was managed by collecting every 1 in 5 posts that the brand posted. The posts could include anything from just an image of food with logos to overly narrated advertisements with many metaphors and shapes. All images collected were required to have been posted between 2022 and 2023 to ensure that the content was up-to-date and relevant. The Instagram posts were chosen as sufficient data can be collected, allowing for frame analysis to examine how certain narratives and values are portrayed by meat substitute brands, using SMM (Hallahan 1999; 2008). The posts were collected around the same time, 1 in 5 posts to ensure that all relevant topics and events were gathered, along with more general content, to allow for a better comparison of the brands. The table in figure

3.1 shows the activity that the brand has on social media, through active social media channels, followers on Instagram, and the year the brand was founded, giving a deeper understanding of the brand and its roots.

Figure 3.1: Data collection table.

Brands/ properties	De Vegetarische Slager	Beyond Meat	Oatly	Vivera	Quorn	Garden Gourmet	Vales	Strong Roots	Hands Off My Chocolate	Tindle
Number of followers	54,3k	26,1k	348k	12,1k	1.447	3.680	1.450	45,5k	23,8k	28,3k
Posts on Instagram	2063	466	1145	377	268	128	94	1191	2151	455
Other social media account	WEB: https://www.devegetarischelager.nl/ YT: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdevetarische_slager_8901 FB: https://www.facebook.com/DeVegetarischeSlager/ LI: https://www.linkedin.com/company/devetarische-slager/	LI: https://www.linkedin.com/company/beyond-meat/ WEB: https://www.beyondmeat.com/nl-NL/	TW: @oatly FB: @Oatly WEB: https://www.oatly.com/nl-nl/	TikTok: @QuornNL WEB: https://www.vivera.com/nl/	FB: @Quorn WEB: https://www.quorn.nl/	FB: @Gardengourmet WEB: https://www.gardengourmet.com/	FB: @Vales YT: @vales WEB: https://www.vales.nl/	LI: @strongroots WEB: https://www.strongroots.com/	LI: @hands-off-my-chocolate WEB: https://www.hands-off-my-chocolate.com/en/	FB: @tindlefoods LI: @TindleFoods WEB: https://www.tindle.com/uk/home/
Year founded	2010	2009	1994	1990		1986	2002	2005	2015	2020

3.3 Operationalisation

The conceptualisation derives from the frames Hallahan's (1999; 2008) seven models of framing. The operationalisation explains the processes of understanding the data, by explaining how to set interpretations concluded and decisions made (Neuman, 2014). The research aimed to uncover the frames used by meat substitute brands to form their brand identity, which was observed through how brands use Instagram as a communication tool. Brand identity and framing were analysed together, as they worked in a circular motion: Framing is the mechanism through which brand identities are constructed (Cornelissen, 2012). This research expected to uncover the following variables which were examined under the lens of Hallahan's (2008) framing models:

Firstly, the health core value was analysed through the framing of attributes lens (Hallahan, 2008) which will look for certain statements and narratives about a healthy lifestyle. Research by Soule and Sekhon (2018) found that many meat substitute brands use demarketing and anti-consumption narratives to curate a more authentic and pure brand, this will be applied to the research by observing the design, text, and metaphors used. Further analysing any claims that show statistics and award labels, even comparing the brand to other brand products.

Secondly, the social core value was observed through the framing of situations, as brands want to relate their products to the daily lives of consumers through storytelling and emphasising that such a diet can fit into their daily lives (Hallahan, 2008). Storytelling and the drawing of situations further examined how meat-substitute brands attempted to break any stereotypes around the identities which are linked to the meat-less diet (Nezlek and Forestell, 2020). Furthermore, the social core value was further observed through the framing of news, specifically looking at how brands use issues in the news and abstract cultural ideas to frame meat substitute brands together with the vegetarian social identity (Nezlek and Forestell, 2020).

Thirdly, the climate core value was observed through the framing of the risks model (Hallahan, 2008), as many consumers make decisions to explore meat substitute products based on the narrative that meat substitutes are better for the planet (Palau-Sampio et al., 2022). Furthermore, the climate frame was analysed through the framing of issues, through the usage of educational storytelling, along with the usage of figures and statistics. With the aim of framing the content in a motivational manner over a threatening manner.

Lastly, the animal agriculture core value was observed through the lens of framing risks and framing situations as according to Sexton et al. (2019) more animal agriculture narratives have been associated with the promotion of products such as plant-based milk and, plant-based proteins. Furthermore, investigating which frames play into gender politics, as research by Sexton et al. (2019) showed that there is currently a continual narrative towards meat products being hyper-masculine, and female consumers being more sensitive towards animal cruelty. To uncover gender politics within the narrative the framing of situations model will be applied (Hallahan, 2008).

To observe a deeper understanding of consumer engagement with the brands, an examination of the different SMM strategies were observed to answer the second subquestion. Strategies such as giveaways, polls, hashtags, influencer marketing, and collaborations were observed for patterns. The SMM strategies allowed for brands to further enhance engagement with consumers, along with increase awareness, and educational motivations. The analysis aimed at determining which strategies were best suited to which value frame through looking at which brands used which frame most often to communicate the brand identity.

3.4 Data Analysis

A coding frame was made which functioned as the analytical tool for the analysis. The coding frame consisted of concept-driven and sub-categories which formed the coding frame. Prior to establishing each of the categories through naming, defining, and creating examples, the frame was revisited and expanded, in the second phase, which entailed a close evaluation, making sure that no cate-

gories could overlap or be missed. The frame analysis was conducted to examine all aspects of the Instagram posts from image, location, hashtag, and text. With the aim to answer the research question and subquestions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A frame analysis provides immense flexibility that was applied to epistemological and ontological positions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Swain, 2018).

A combination of deductive: Providing some theoretical guidance, and inductive: Working from the bottom up allows for interpretive flexibility, and was employed in combination with each other to examine patterns in the data (Boeije, 2010). The frame analysis underwent four main steps according to Wimmer and Dominick (2006; Linström & Marais, 2012) and Braun and Clarke (2006):

The initial analysis immersed in the data and coded the data based on theories from the theoretical framework, observing and labelling potential frames through categorisation. Secondly, the process of condensing the data into categories, then expanding each of the main themes to be able to analyse the complexities refined the potential frames. The initial codes did not include more than 10-20 main categories — to make them more manageable. Thirdly, the categories were further developed through another careful examination round of the data, once the set was coded again, new changes were categorised and developed. The iterative practice of frame analysis required a continuous examination to be able to uncover the frames through observing themes and relationships within the categories. Finally, the research reached the later phases of analysis, by simplifying and developing the insights of the frames into a research report. To uncover the frames from the data, the software Atlas.ti was used for analysis.

3.5 Reliability and validity

Frame analysis combined with quantitative content analysis contains certain limitations, making the research subjective. Therefore, it was vital to remain transparent throughout the entirety of the study (Haynes, 2012). Self-reflexivity ensured that the researcher remained critical in their role through the process of coding (Silverman, 2022). The sample is focused on the Netherlands, excluding the international context and content, this allowed for a more explorative study on branding meat substitutes in a single nation. The researcher's knowledge of the Dutch language and Dutch culture worked as a benefit for the quality and understanding of the data collection. Furthermore, transparency was achieved through being aware of the prior understanding of the topic. Furthermore, to ensure reliability, observations were kept in a research diary and coding tables were reported in the analysis. The process was peer-reviewed to ensure inter-rater reliability (Silverman, 2022). Manual coding was a limitation, as the neutrality was decreased, which led the coding to be more subjective towards the researcher's own understanding (Haynes, 2012).

To ensure validity throughout the research the researcher made constant comparisons for each step of the coding process (Landsheer & Boeije, 2010), along with making sure the data treatment was completed and remained relevant to the theory-in-progress while the data was organised (Silverman, 2011). Validity was ensured through how the categories derived from the coding frames partly grounded in extensively described literature. However, frames remained abstract concepts (Haynes, 2012).

3.6 Ethics

This study is unobtrusive as there are no participants involved, making the ethical concerns very minimal. Throughout the writing process, ethical concerns could arise, as the accuracy of data explanation carries great importance regarding the data iteratively, discarding no interpretations out of the research. The writing process should be as transparent as possible to clearly show how the results were discovered (Flick, 2011). Furthermore, the findings could not be adjusted to meet the research expectations (Flick, 2011).

Burles and Bally (2018) state concerns regarding unobtrusive research as the majority of online content is not made for research, debate suggests that informed consent must be collected to be able to conduct research on online content. Nonetheless, such debate primarily attends to personal online content, and not what is publicly posted, such as advertisement posts. Therefore, it is of great significance for the researchers to examine whether the content that is being gathered could potentially hurt the author or the brand as mentioned by Burles and Bally (2018). Furthermore, the ethical principles regarding qualitative content analysis consist of autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, and justice (Pietilä et al., 2019). The ethical principles imply that the research should make claims which are morally correct.

4. Results

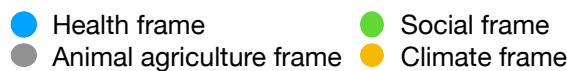
This thesis examines how meat substitute brands use Instagram to frame their brand identity, furthermore looking into specific frames and observing which type of social media strategies allow for further enhancement of the desired narrative. The following chapter reports the outcomes from the qualitative content analysis and the frames found from the Instagram posts from the 10 meat and dairy substitute brands in the Netherlands. The findings are illustrated through imagery and text as found in the dataset. The first section will provide general findings and will give an overview of the 3 main findings. The following sections go into depth on each of the main findings, using examples and figures from the data set.

4.1 Core value frames

The results show that brands incorporate a certain core value into the frames, ensuring the brands' main identity is formed around the selected core value. The most common core value frames derived from existing literature, included the animal agriculture, health, and climate frame. However, throughout the analysis, it became evident that the social frame should also be included as a common core value for the meat substitute market. Moreover, the results outlined how certain SMM strategies work best to communicate a certain core value, this was observed once the frames were identified and common patterns were prevalent among brands using similar frames. Such strategies included giveaways, influencer marketing, and opinion polls to boost engagement and spread awareness.

10 brands were collected and analysed throughout the research, each brand had its own unique brand identity which pertained to a specific core value frame. Table 4.1.1 shows the frames and which frames were favoured as the main frame by brands. The table shows that there was an equal spread of dominant frames, both health and the social frame had 30% which consisted of 3 brands using such frames as their most dominant identity. The climate and animal agriculture frames both had 20% which meant that in the data set 2 brands used such frames as their main identity. This shows that although all core values carry great importance to the overall story of the meat substitute market, most brands chose to use the social and health frame as it is viewed to be the most relatable and liked by communities, stakeholders, and founders.

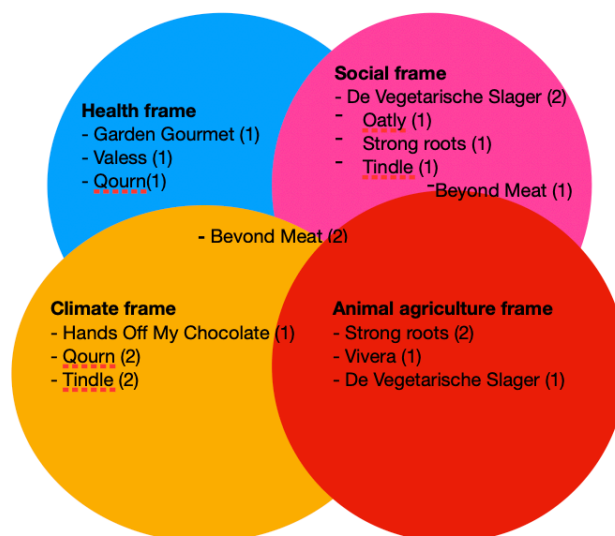
Figure 4.1.1: Common brand identity frames in the meat substitute market.



Once each brand had an identifiable core value, it became clear which story they were communicating, which will be further discussed in sections 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5. However, observing the data set certain patterns were discovered, as several brands paired their dominant identity frame with a sub-frame. This allowed for a more diverse and flexible storyline and diverse reach, the pattern applied to several brands. Subframes were most present on special occasions and organised events when guided brands to use a mixture of the core values.

The data found that all brands had a dominant frame that was used to curate and communicate the brand identity. All brands were found to have a dominant identity, which were placed in the dedicated frame circle. However, the data observed that 4 brands also used interconnected frames by using another frame as their subframe. For example, as shown in figure 4.1.2 the 4 brands were located in another frame as well shown on the figure with the number 2 next to the brand name, showing that the second frame circle was found to be the most present sub-frame. Furthermore, although most brands used 1 or 2 frames, the dataset found that Beyond Meat used a very diverse brand identity, as most posts had a diverse spread over all the frames, but the data found that the brand used the social frame as their dominant frame.

Figure 4.1.2: Interconnected frames with subframes.

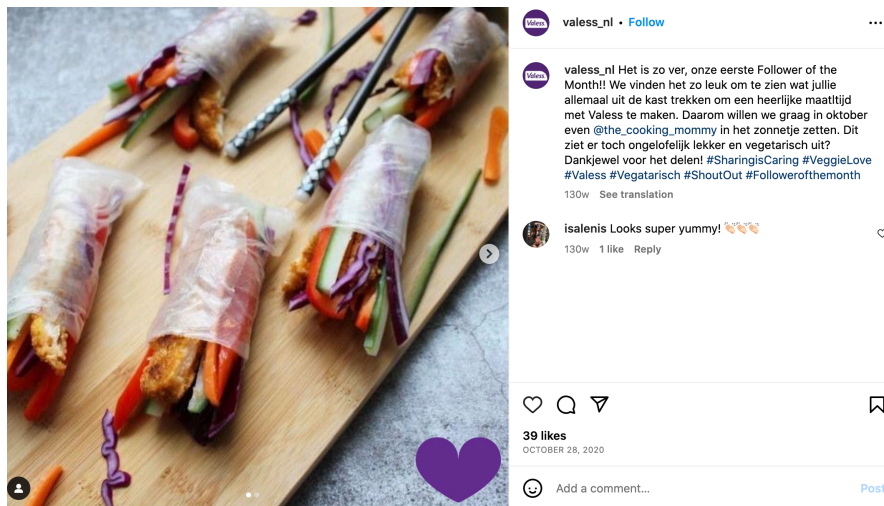


4.2 Health frame

The health core value is recognised throughout the dataset to be an identity constructed around healthy food, body, mind, and lifestyle. Brands that used health as their brand identity revolved their content around sharing recipes and sharing success stories about people who succeeded in reaching their health goals. Drawing on Hallahan's models of framing (2008), the health frame aligned most closely with the framing of attributes and the framing of situations. Framing of attributes was found to be used by brands using the health frame through using positive frames around sharing healthy

recipes using plant-based products, for example, Valess incorporated a follower of the month, where a post would be dedicated to the follower's favourite healthy recipe, as shown in figure 4.2.1, the caption mentions the follower of the month and how much the brand enjoys seeing what their followers are making with the products. The caption was paired with an image of the recipe, engaging a visual appeal to the caption.

Figure 4.2.1: Valess image 5 (2020).



Framing of situations was commonly found in the data set to create connections to daily life. For example, Garden Gourmet made seasonal posts about maintaining a healthy plant-based diet throughout the winter months, which is found to be something that people struggle with in their daily lives. In all, the health frame was communicated through signs and language, using strategic framing mechanisms such as metaphors (Cornelissen, 2011) which allowed the brand to make deeper interpretations about health without using a straightforward narrative, which could get repetitive. For example, instead of inspiring people to eat healthy, Garden Gourmet would use hashtags like “#sustainablecooking,” and “#newyearsresolutions2022” to communicate a healthy lifestyle without having to explicitly incorporate the narrative into their captions for each post. Furthermore, using strategic framing mechanisms such as analogies and metaphors (Cornelissen, 2011), allowing the brand to make underlying meanings about health and lifestyle without having to explicitly mention such a lifestyle, strategically placing metaphors to make unintentional connections to the receivers' intended lifestyle choices.

To further examine framing mechanisms used throughout the health frame, the majority of the posts communicating the health frame were structured through bold captions and aesthetic, the framing of health was straightforward in the narrative, there was an equal balance between more assertive content and euphemisms. The assertive health frames consisted of loud slogans such as, “plant-based food is a great source of protein” from the brand Garden Gourmet or “yummy was never this veggie” implying that veggie is a healthy synonym, from the brand Valess. The health frame further communicated an overload of health claims through award labels and content. The award badges and labels

allowed the brand to strategically place themselves as a loyal and trustworthy brand. The award labels and bold statements communicated health symbols. Such symbols come back in every aspect of the health community, people who are actively engaging in a healthy lifestyle will see such symbols and instantly make a connection with the brand.

As mentioned above, the framing of attributes in the health frame used negative frames to combat the negative stereotypes and myths linked to vegetarian and vegan diets. The bold claims and statements all consisted of breaking the stereotypes. Therefore, the research observed many frame-shifting claims and statements framed by the brands attempting to break and move away from the stereotypes. For example the slogan from Garden Gourmet, “Plant-based meat products has enough protein and amino acids for a healthy lifestyle.” Even though such frames can quickly capture the attention of the receiver, and increase motivational support, such claims can also cause potential hazards to the brand name, especially if the claims are not backed by medical research and claims. For example, Figure 4.2.2 shows a post by Garden Gourmet, the post states that a vegan diet can be very nutritious and low in saturated fats. Adding that it can also help in weight loss. This statement uses the word “can be” allowing the consumer to interpret it as a balanced vegan diet, but remained timid as opposed to “is a ...”. The caption used an analogy to make comparisons to the vegan diet and weight loss, which can be perceived and interpreted to be linked together. Therefore, when using framing mechanisms on a topic such as diet culture and health, brands need to be cautious of all the ways in which receivers can perceive the content. Therefore, it is vital for brands with a health identity to carefully strategise the underlying symbols and meanings of the captions.

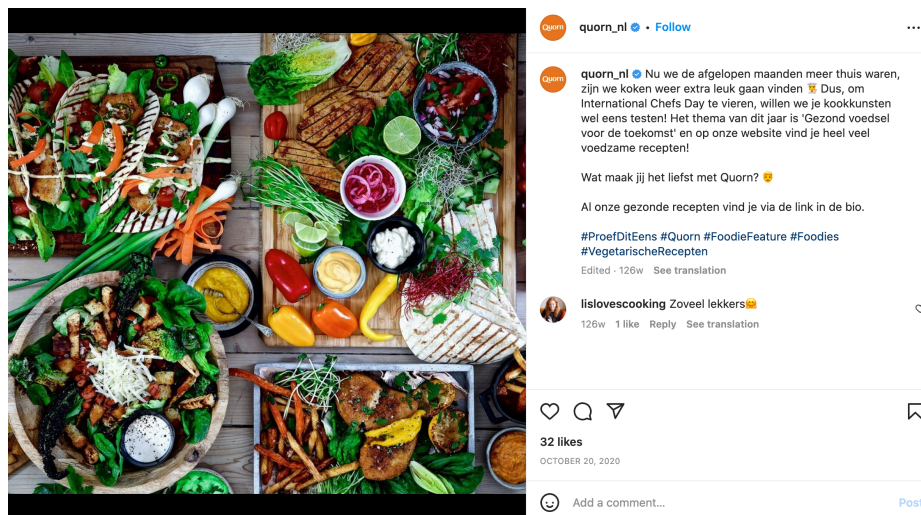
Figure 4.2.2: Garden Gourmet Image 7 (2022).



Visual symbolism was found to be a key aspect of the health frame, which creates a frameshift, as the brands’ main aim was to captivate the consumer through eye-catching images. The images were bold and appealing to look at, consisting of perfectly arranged tables with meat substi-

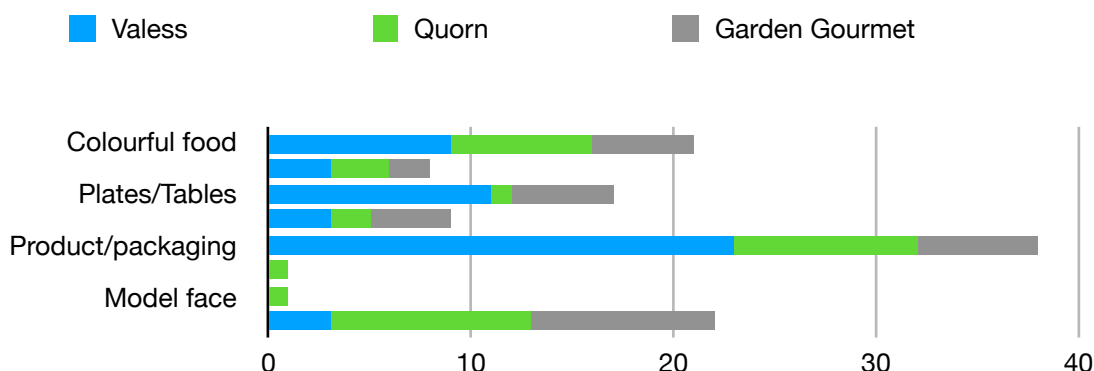
tute products surrounded by colourful fruits, vegetables, and herbs. However, whereas the captions were loud and bold, the aesthetic images were shifted to simplistic and beautifully curated images that carried a deeper strategised meaning through frame blending. As explained by Hoek et al. (2011) brands put food into categories, making it easier for consumers to apply the analogies to a food category. For example, figure 4.2.3 shows an image from the Garden Gourmet dataset, the posts highlights International Chefs Day, and the brand encourages people to show their cooking skills, by cooking something with the theme: “Healthy produce for the future.” The caption is paired with a colourful image with healthy produce surrounding the product, all signs in the image are a metaphor for what is mentioned in the caption. The post tells an engaging narrative and is motivational toward the health frame through the usage of healthy semiotics and narrative.

Figure 4.2.3: Quorn Image 15 (2020).



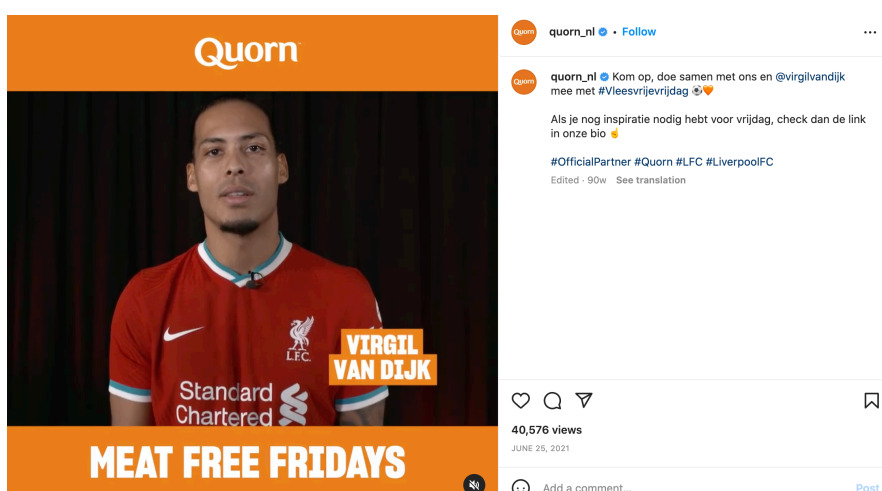
The brands Valess, Quorn, and Garden Gourmet were found to use the health frame as their brand identity, however, although the brand posted most content around the health frame, the brands were not strictly limited to the health frame. The table in Figure 4.2.4 highlights the analogies associated with health images. Throughout the coding process, the images were split up and all components of the image were categorised. The categorisations show the dynamics of the images used for each brand and gave insights into how the brands aimed to communicate their health identity. The symbols gave insights into how brands used the health frame to communicate different outcomes. For example, Valess was predominantly focused on showing brand packaging which showed that the brand had a more commercial aim. Whereas, Quorn used more colourful food, and seasonal content to communicate more storytelling content to the health frame. Garden Gourmet used more props to produce aesthetically pleasing images, thus communicating a more healthy lifestyle brand.

Figure 4.2.4: Visual health analogies.



The main outcome from observing the health frame showed that the primary focus was to communicate a healthy, active lifestyle through food. This was symbolised through captivating imagery and motivational captions and language. However, to complement the lifestyle aspect, it became clear through patterns in the dataset that many health posts were combined with the social frame. By adding on aspects of social identity, the meat substitute brands expanded the lifestyle theme. Figure 4.2.5 shows an example from Quorn, who used the health frame as their dominant frame, but paired the content with the social frame in many posts. The example showed a collaboration between Quorn and professional football player Virgil Van Dijk. The example creates a storyline that eating plant-based can be healthy and lead to an active lifestyle, especially when professional football player does the same. Van Dijk is a role model for many people, therefore, Quorn enhanced their health frame through using the social frame of a professional football player, which enhanced their reach to wider audiences and using the social identity of Van Dijk to promote Quorn.

Figure 4.2.5: Quorn image14 (2021).

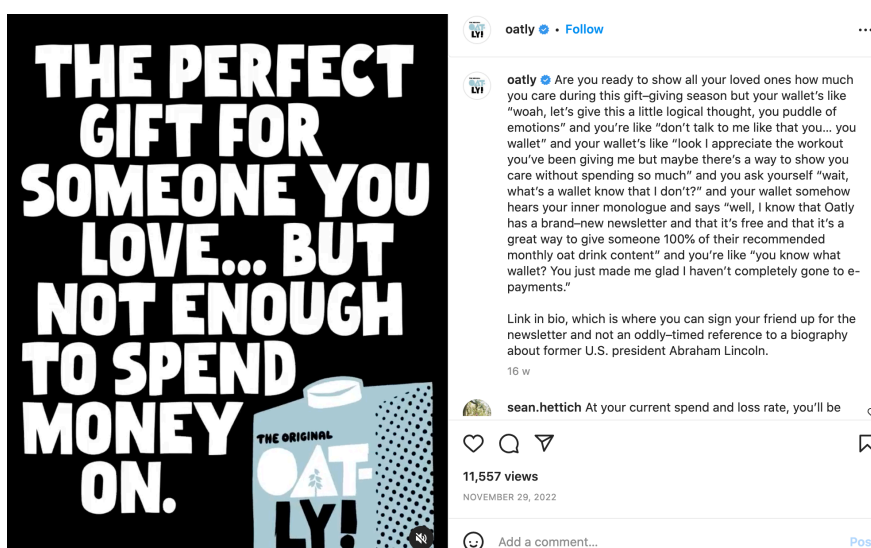


4.3 Social frame

While the health, climate, and animal agriculture frames were developed from a deductive approach gathered from existing literature, the social frame was developed from the analysis. Many themes such as community, identity, and oneness were prevalent in the dataset and did not fit within one of the pre-existing frames, therefore, these were classified as part of a social frame. Two themes were identified in the social identity: Firstly, how people identify with the vegetarian diet, and the meat substitute brands, creating a social identity in the market. Secondly, how meat substitute products could become part of the receiver's social life, and lifestyle, creating a social aspect to the frame.

As the research was guided by Hallahan's 7 models of framing the most common model observed in the social frames was the framing of situations. Many brands communicating social frames used storytelling as their main focus. For example, a brand that stood out, especially for storytelling was Oatly, the brand is a well-established oat milk brand, and storytelling is a vital aspect of its brand identity as it is found on the packaging, billboards, social media, and official websites. Figure 4.3.1 shows an example from the data set highlighting the social frame which Oatly communicated through using the framing of situations model. The post contains a large amount of text encouraging receivers to save their money on buying gifts but to gift someone the Oatly newsletter which is for free. The way that the brand tells the story is engaging, relevant, and relatable to the target market. The brand uses the art of storytelling as their social identity which turns a commercial post into a less forced and natural sales pitch.

Figure 4.3.1: Oatly image 4 (2022).



Furthermore, Social identity was a recurring theme throughout the data, social identity refers to the culture and community around the meat substitute market and the vegetarian diet as a whole. The social frame aims to expand the community by encouraging social support for the social identity of meat substitutes. The data set showed several labels and associations with the meat substitute

market. for example, De Vegetarische Slager created merchandise like sweatshirts and t-shirts with the brand slogans, thus allowing brands to expand their social identity. Further, posting about promotional events on their Instagram, allows receivers to physically interact with the brand and community. An example of De Vegetarische Slager promoting social identity through merchandise was shown in Figure 4.3.2 the caption highlights the importance of community and friendship. Furthermore, De Vegetarische Slager was found to use frame shifting throughout their brand identity, as shown in figure 4.3.2 the brand makes many references to meat products but then spelled incorrectly, the brand uses metaphors to connect their products to real meat products, as they aim to be similar but meat-free, without referencing the real meat products. The image showed the new sweater with the word “bofkip” on it this is a play on words, as it means a lucky chicken, an expression used regularly in the Dutch language. The metaphor shows that the De Vegetarische Slager is actively raising awareness about chicken farms, this slogan refers to their activist goals in a figure of speech. The slogan both connects the social identity frame with the animal agriculture frame to create a captivating storyline for the brand community.

Figure 4.3.2: De Vegetarische Slager image 5 (2022).



Through examining patterns among the brands the outcome showed that social identity was most commonly communicated through influencers. Influencer marketing allowed for a brand to work with an online persona who formed a strategically curated brand persona, this allowed for a meat substitute brand to find an influencer who matched perfectly with the brand identity. Thus, further expanded the brand identity reach as influencers were able to tell their personal experience with the brand and reasons for identifying with the brand identity and community. This form of communicating could be considered UGC which was also observed throughout the dataset. Brands who wanted to expand their social identity would repost and shine light on the feedback and comments that receivers shared about the brand, creating a more casual friendship-like feel to the brand.

Brands worked together with influencers to create content series, which would be posted over some time. Thus, allowing receivers to get used to the content and become intrigued with the story-line. Beyond Meat created a social identity community for individuals who want to step out of their comfort zone and go beyond the norm. The brand created branded content highlighting such individuals in the Beyond community. For example, Beyond Meat posted a series about a select group of athletic influencers who went beyond the norm. The influencers shared personal stories which were linked to motivating people to step out of their comfort zone by trying Beyond Meat or meat substitute products as a whole. Figure 4.3.3 shows an example of the influencer, Nono Konopka, the caption talks about how Konopka cycled from Berlin to Beijing, the overall message is not directly about Beyond Meat products but signifies the Beyond community and identity. The caption ends with a quote from Konopka encouraging people to try plant-based products, encouraging receivers to join the Beyond community though trying the diet.

Figure 4.3.3: Table outlining Beyond Meat social frame captions.

Social identity : Caption from Beyond Meat image 4

“We didn’t think long about going from Berlin to Beijing.”

For some people, stepping out of your comfort zone requires baby steps. For @nonokonopka it means grabbing a bike and riding it from Berlin to Beijing with little to no experience. However, you decide to go beyond, Nono knows from experience that the world is ready, you just need to be willing to go for it #GOBEYOND

“Plant-based is one thing everyone can do and everything one should try.”

Social life: Caption from Beyond Meat image 6

BIGGEST GIVEAWAY OF THE YEAR

If there were ever an excuse to have a party, here it is!

We’re offering you and your friends the chance to win a private party with our food truck, all the beyond delights included

If this sounds like a dream come true, here’s how to enter the giveaway:

- Follow @BeyondMeatEU
- Select your party crew by tagging them in the post
- ...: Tell us one big reason why you can throw the best party.

The second theme of the social frame was social life, this referred to the lifestyle of the community. The target consumer for the social frame were people who enjoyed sharing their food with friends and family and found it important to go out to restaurants and enjoy fast-food joints all while eating plant-based food. However, the stereotype among many communities entailed eating a plant-based diet to be hard and unsocial, as you always have to cook from home. The dataset found that many brands who communicated the social frame created strategies to combat this stereotype, by giving plant-based food a fun and social connotation. Furthermore, such connotations were observed

throughout the data, through interactive giveaways and hashtags. Giveaways allowed for receivers to interact with the brand with a set motivation and rewards. However, most brands asked receivers to follow the brand, share the post, and tag friends to be able to win, thus creating a social aspect of the giveaway. For example, figure 4.3.3 shows a social life example from Beyond Meat. The brand curated a party giveaway, where contestants could win a private Beyond Meat food truck, all they had to do to be able to win was follow the brand, tag a few friends, and share a personal story about why they thought they could throw the best parties. The brand made a fun and engaging giveaway, with proof that eating plant-based is a social activity through using the food truck as an analogy.

The mentioned examples and following examples of the social life frame pertain to the framing of actions model by Hallahan (2008). The posts were strategised to be engaging through the chance of winning or gaining something. This type of engagement worked on creating a deeper and long-term relationship with the stakeholders. For example, many brands in the social frame data would conduct collaborations with other brands. Most commonly observed, brands would make a product together or do giveaways together. This allowed for a combination of identities and showed a social aspect as two brands would work together to create a product or giveaway. Throughout the data, the most common strategy observed was collaborations, most brands aimed at doing several collaborations with different brands to create more awareness and reach for their own brand identity. For example, Beyond Meat worked with McDonald's to create a plant-based hamburger, and De Vegetarische Slager worked with Hellofresh to create fresh plant-based meals. De Vegetarische Slager also worked with Subway to create a plant-based Teriyaki sandwich and worked with Mora to create a plant-based range of deep-fried snacks. Figure 4.3.4 shows a post from De Vegetarische Slager which they posted together with Mora to announce their collaboration. The post was combined with a giveaway encouraging more awareness and engagement. The post highlights the social life theme as Mora snacks are a go-to snack for social gatherings in the Netherlands, so for De Vegetarische Slager to work with Mora gives the meat-substitute market a big leap towards the social connotation that it stereotypically lacks.

Figure 4.3.4: De Vegetarische Slager image 2 (2023).

mora_nederland and devegetarischeslager

mora_nederland GIVEAWAY 🌟 Did you get the taste during the National Week Without Meat? Then we have snacktacular news: we give away 10 snack packs with all our vegetarian snacks. How do you take a chance?

- 👉 Tag your best snack buddy
- 👉 Follow @devegetarischeslager and @mora_nederland
- 👉 Share this post on your story for extra chance

Who knows you might enjoy 1 of the 10 Mora x The Vegetarian Butcher snack packages, including: Vegetarian Croquettes, Bitterballs, Chicken Korn®, Mini Mix and Chickenfingers®. Taste 'Mmm and you won't believe it! 🍴

#vega #vegetarisch #vegetarischesnacks #vleesch #winactie #maakkans #Mora #MoraNederland #MmmvanMora #morasnacks #DeVegetarischeSlager #NWZW

Conditions of action:
The campaign runs from 13 to 19 March. The winners will be announced on Monday 20 March under the post and via DM. 10 packages will be given away.

👍 🗨️ 📌

👤 Liked by snackspert and 7,850 others

MARCH 13

🗨️ Add a comment...

Post

The social frame was a well-favoured frame by many brands. However, the social frame was often paired with other frames to add a further narrative to the brand identity. For example, Tindle is a plant-based chicken brand who used the social frame as the dominant frame, the data found that the brand remained close to the social frame. The brand put several professional chefs and role models from the food industry in the spotlight to discuss certain topics. Figure 4.3.5 outlines an example of Tindle who made a post about the founder of site Plant-based News Robbie Lockie. The post shares a motivational text from Lockie about being friendlier to this earth through living in harmony together and looking after the planet. The social frame of the post is combined with the climate sub-frame to further enhance the social aspect of the brand by making a series of diverse narratives through the usage of market role models.

Figure 4.3.5: Tindle image 12 (2022).



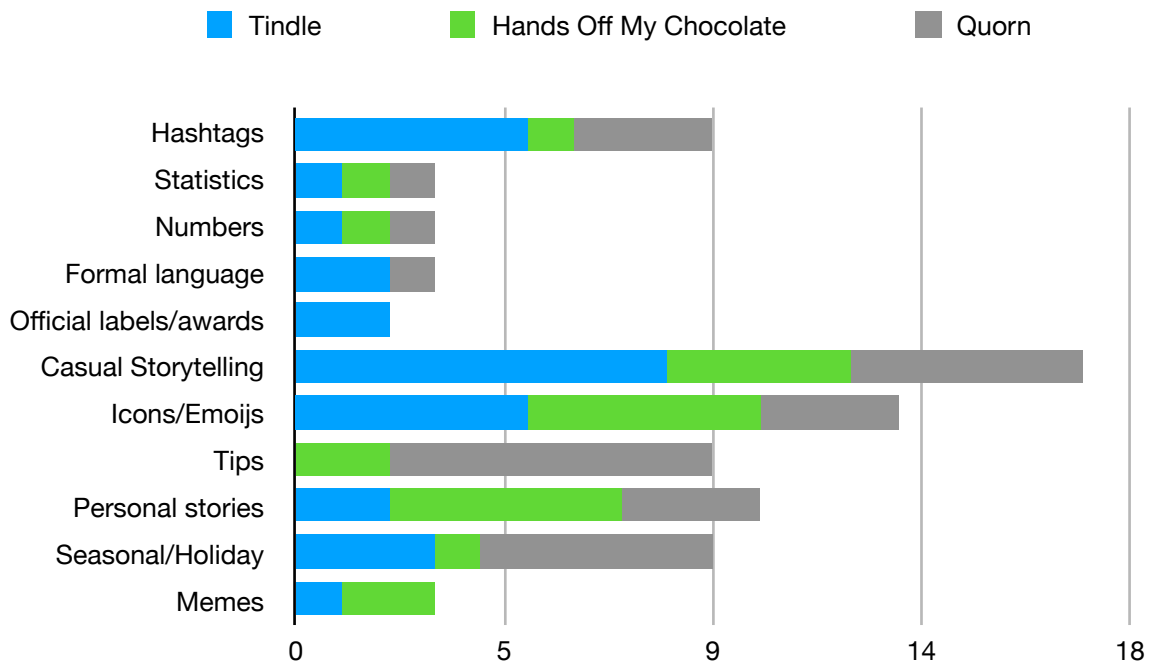
4.4 Climate frame

The climate frame consisted of prominent and determined narratives that were identifiable throughout the dataset. The climate frame was used by brands to address climate issues and curate sustainability aims as its brand identity. The climate frame aimed to motivate consumers to consume less meat as the animal farming and meat industry is found to be extremely damaging to the planet. Meat substitute brands that used the climate identity frame were eager to make changes and educate people on the matter. Therefore, brands focussed primarily on using an educational lens through the content. However, in some cases, brands would also use a more casual approach to share more light-hearted content, including tips and tricks to being more sustainable, allowing for a more relatable and attainable communication approach to the receivers.

Two recurring patterns were observed in the dataset. Firstly, educational content, concerning statistics, facts, and formal storytelling. Secondly, the storytelling content, focussed on engaging receivers with the topic through sharing tips, images, and a casual form of storytelling. Figure 4.4.1

shows the differences in communication between the two themes. The graph identifies that Quorn used a more educational framing approach, as they used more statistics, formal language, official labels, and hashtags. Whereas, Hand Of My Chocolate and Tindle used a more informal and light-hearted approach to framing the climate identity through using more personal and informal language, sharing tips, and focusing on seasonal events.

Figure 4.4.1: Educational and storytelling frames for climate.



The educational angle for framing the climate identity was observed to be straightforward and bold. The brand followed the framing of the risks model, as the aim of the content was to raise awareness and educate through sharing statistics and factual information. The brand had to remain aware of their position when making such educational claims and posts. For example, Quorn was a brand that was known to be active in educating on climate issues and plant-based solutions. The educational frame suits the brand well as people were aware of the active identity of the brand, and their efforts to climate activism. However, even though Quorn was considered a proactive brand, they aimed to communicate the educational content in an engaging manner, as shown in Figure 4.4.2, the post engaged the receiver by dedicating the Tuesday to being a sustainable day, encouraging receivers to join in on the day. The brand further mentions their new sustainability future goals, which were to have 0 CO₂ emissions for the company by 2030, and to have zero CO₂ emissions for all supply lining by 2050. The goals were serious and very educational for the receiver to be aware of. Furthermore, the post engaged with frame blending to connect the associated meaning of climate activism and sustainability to the brand's goals and products, as shown in the post the image shows a green earth held up by green hands, this image is paired with the sustainability goals of the brand, blending the narrative that Quorn and helping the planet go hand in hand.

Figure 4.4.2: Quorn image 13 (2022).

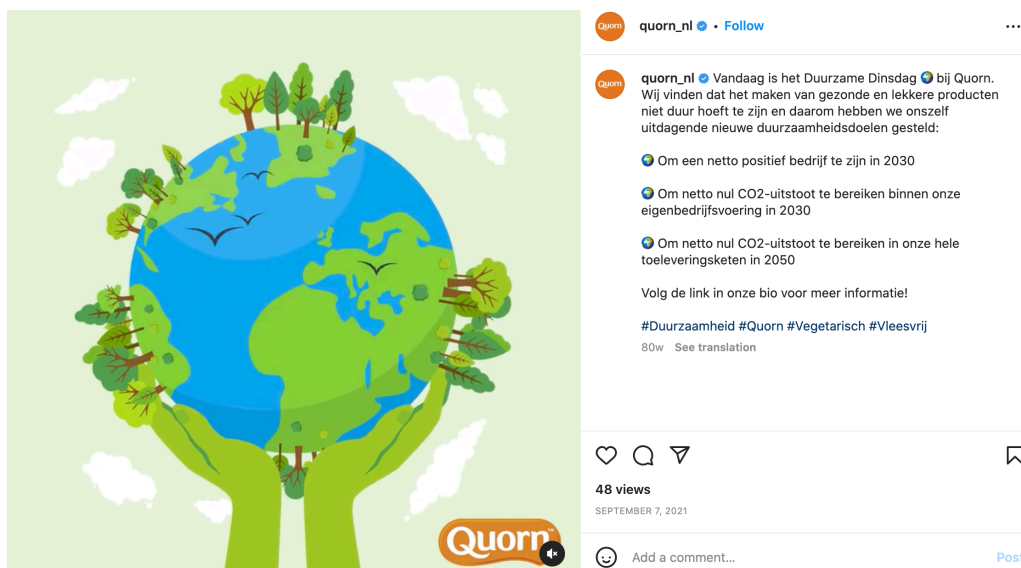


Figure 4.4.3 shows an informal climate frame post by Hands Off My Chocolate, the brand used the framing of issues model through educating receivers by engagement and sharing the percentages of co2 emissions when making chocolate with cow milk. The post was colourful, and pleasing to look at. Furthermore, the caption explains where the co2 emissions come from when producing chocolate, the caption described what is shown in the image. Further mentioning that the brand had adjusted their chocolate recipe to create 35% less emissions. The post is framed lighthearted and very casually but still communicated a very educational lens of the brand, therefore, the brand falls under the framing of issues model as they address a very important topic through sharing statistics and facts, but the layout of the post creates a very informal dynamic to the frame.

Figure 4.4.3: Hands Off My Chocolate 9 (2022).



The climate frame is vital for many brands to bring awareness to the toxic meat industry. Therefore, an important aspect for the brand was to understand their own brand identity and position to correctly communicate such content to receivers. The data observed that several brands using the climate frame as their dominant frame would pair it with a sub-frame. For example, the Hands Off My Chocolate brand's dominant frame was climate. However, the brand often used the social frame as their sub-frame to add a social component to the activism of the brand. Figure 4.4.4 shows an example of the brand using the social frame to promote their community and giving the spotlight to the farmers who ethically source and grow the cocoa beans for the brand's chocolate. The caption explains that the brand worked together with @cocoa-horizons to create a fair relationship between brand and farm, further stimulating ethical and sustainable agriculture through decreasing the amount of CO2 used to make chocolate bars. The caption combined the climate frame with the social sub-frame by sharing an image of the people who produce the chocolate, but also added an educational climate frame, by sharing how farms used a lot of land and resources to grow the cocoa beans and that this can be done more efficiently to reach the climate goals.

Figure 4.4.4: Hands Off My Chocolate image 13 (2022).



4.5 Animal agriculture frame

The animal agriculture frame refers to brands that curate their identity around raising awareness about animal farming and the unethical meat industry. Brands who used this frame brought light to the topic but also celebrated people who supported and helped the brands by growing the community. The animal agriculture frame used a similar framing construct to the climate frame. Analysis found that the climate and animal agriculture frames were often paired to enhance the moral of the story, as animal agriculture issues and climate issues communicate similar goals — to consume less meat. As the research was guided by Hallahan's framing models (1999) the following models were found to be most suitable for the animal agriculture frame. Firstly, framing of situations used story-

telling to connect to daily life allowing for emotional and impact storytelling. Secondly, the framing of responsibility was used by brands as an investigative genre to educate receivers on the issues. Lastly, framing of news allowed brands to use current issues in the news to raise awareness and share ideas. Close examination found that animal agriculture had similar framing themes as the climate frame, some brands focused more on educational content, whereas, other brands used more emotional storytelling to bring awareness to animal farming.

Educational content allowed brands to raise awareness of issues in the meat industry by sharing scientific and research-based statistics, engaging a serious tone to the brand. Further, the framing of risks model was applicable to the educational frame as the brands were well-researched and active in fighting for animal and farming issues. The educational angle to the animal agriculture frame made the brand seem trustworthy, this was usually enhanced by many brands through using award labels and honouring badges, such as the V-label from vegan.org, or badges from B Corp, an organisation celebrating businesses who aim to be forces of good, as shown in figure 4.5.1 from the brand Strong Roots. Strong Roots worked closely with B Corp to maintain the brand image of being engaged in activism. Furthermore, brands that used their platform for educational purposes used in-depth captions and well-researched content. Such content could bring difficulties when trying to maintain the attention of the audience. Working with outside organisations added a more interactive approach to the educational content as it allowed for the brand to work with other approaches and narratives to communicate the desired outcome, this was clearly shown in figure 4.5.1 by Strong Roots and their collaboration with B Corp.

Figure 4.5.1: Strong Roots image (2022).



The educational lens used in animal agriculture frames tends to interact with the receiver, encouraging people to interact with the content and apply the facts and statistics to their daily lives. The educational interaction made use of the framing of situations as the static educational content was framed to still be applicable and relatable to the receivers' daily lives and lifestyles. Table 4.5.2 shows a comparison between captions used by the educational lens and the emotional lens in the animal agriculture frame. The educational lens example is a caption taken from a post by De Vegetarische Slager. The image showed a cartoon drawing of a human hand high-fiving a chicken foot, the image was paired with a lengthy text celebrating the brand's 12th year in business. The caption further went into detail sharing large numbers of how many chickens they had saved and encouraged receivers to engage with a link to check how many animals they could save through eating plant-based. The example encouraged people to engage in their lifestyle to help increase the number of animals being saved. The caption is educational and creates an interactive and interesting component to the content.

Figure 4.5.2: Table outlining educational and emotional captions.

Educational lens: De Vegetarische Slager- Image 13	Emotional lens: Vivera image 11
4,5 MILLION CHICKENS SAVED - 12 YEARS DE VEGETARISCHE SLAGER“	[translated] Happy world animal day [green heart emoji] a beautiful day to take a moment for every month you eat plant-based, you save 3* animal lives [cow emoji].
This week The Vegetarian Butcher turns 12 years old. Therefore we have big news: The last 12 years with only the vegetarian chicken pieces 2,5 million chickens have been saved. THANK YOU!	Thank you for that, also from our own fans... Vera, Ariana and Toos! [pig emoji] aren't they cute? {heart emoji}
PS if you are curious how many animals you save check the animalmeter through the link in our bio.	

Emotional content used storytelling to trigger an emotional reaction from receivers. Brands who used the emotional lens when framing animal agriculture would share personal stories, or highlight specific animals by sharing their experience, their name, and where the animals were from. Brands engaged with receivers to give the stories a one-on-one feel, over a one-to-many structure which decreased the emotional impact of the story. Furthermore, brands used imagery and animal cartoons when promoting meat substitute products. For example, Vivera shared images from a few pigs who had been saved from the meat industry, the image was paired with a caption wishing everyone happy holidays during the festive season. Figure 4.5.2 outlined a coding table with snippets of captions which were taken from the brand Vivera and categorised into emotional and educational content. The results showed that emotional content was focused on storytelling and imagery, whereas, educational content used an impersonal and static approach with an easy-to-follow layout.

The animal agriculture frame made use of several framing mechanisms, however, the most common mechanism were metaphors, as shown in figure 4.5.3 the brand Vivera used metaphors to wish everyone happy holidays. The caption put the word “everyone” in all cap locks, while the image showed a pig looking happy while holding the plant-based bacon packaging. The image used a light-hearted metaphor to encourage stakeholders to consume less meat over the festive season. Using metaphors allowed the brand to make statements without implicitly having to mention them through language, therefore allowing for the post to remain light-hearted and fun.

Figure 4.5.3: Vivera image 6 (2022).



The animal agriculture frame was found to be a hard frame for brands to utilise, as the topic could be very emotional and painful to talk about as an identity. However, such a topic was seen to be very important, as many receivers remain unaware of the ethical issues regarding the meat industry. Brands using the animal agriculture frame would carefully curate between the educational and emotional lens to keep the balance and maintain a humane brand. It was noticeable that the brands used less commercial content promoting their products, merely focussing on storytelling and spreading awareness on the greater cause. In all, it was observed that brands using the climate and animal agriculture frame were more engaged in activism and spreading awareness of societal issues. Figure 4.5.4 showed an example from Vivera, the brand communicated the animal agriculture frame as their dominant frame, however, the data set showed that the brand used the climate frame as their sub-frame to enhance the activist narrative, giving more motivation towards eating a plant-based diet.

Figure 4.5.4: Vivera image 8 (2022).

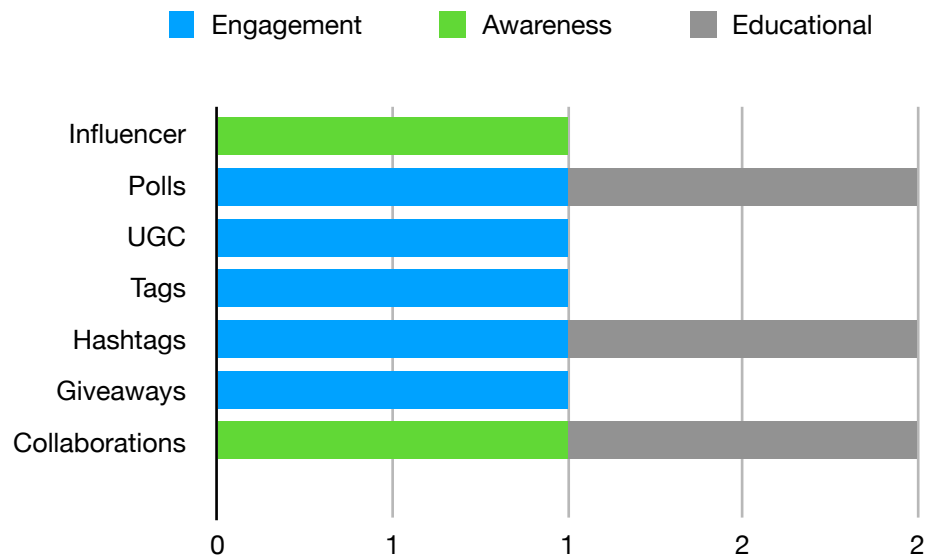


4.6 Social media marketing strategies

To provide an answer for how brands use SMM as a tool in constructing online engagement, SMM strategies were observed throughout the dataset. The brands would pair the appropriate SMM strategies to the content, image, and core value. SMM strategies helped to shape brand identity and curate the possibilities in which the narratives could be perceived. SMM strategies played a vital role in how a brand communicated certain categories. All components from the narrative, images, signs, and semiotics were vital to categorising the brand identity. Moreover, how the content was portrayed was equally as important. Therefore, SMM strategies played an immense role in how brands categorised their brand identity. For example, the dataset found that brands would focus on one product which they would turn into the poster child of the brand. For example, Tindle focused on vegan chicken, and Beyond Meat formed their identity around the famous Beyond Burger. Thus, making it easier for a consumer to link a product to the brand.

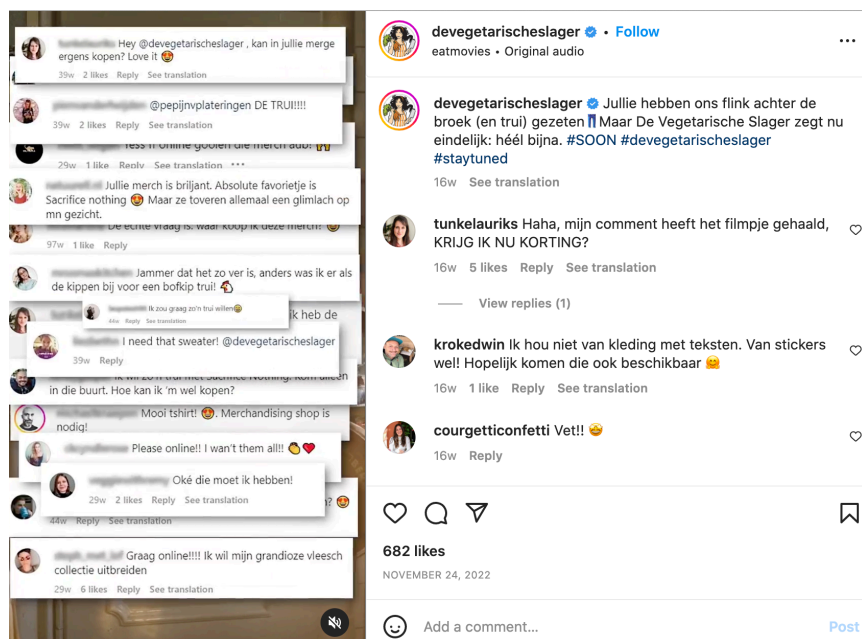
Frames were strategically used to communicate a certain narrative. SMM techniques were applied to help the brand reach their desired narrative. Therefore, the dataset discovered three different desired aims for how they approached the stakeholders: Engagement, awareness, and education. Firstly, engagement allowed for brands to create an activity with the receivers, secondly, awareness created attention to the brand and triggered long-term memory. Lastly, Education focussed on bringing awareness to certain issues in the market, and how people could help to solve such issues. Figure 4.6.1 outlined the most commonly used strategies for each content theme. The engagement was mostly commented on through polls, UGC, tags, giveaways, and hashtags. Awareness was most linked with influencer marketing, tags, and collaborations. Finally, educational content was mostly paired with polls, collaborations, and hashtags. Once the pattern was found, the data could be linked to which themes and strategies fit best with the identity of each brand.

Figure 4.6.1: SMM strategies linked to content themes.



Brands were able to combine strategies when combining themes. The combination depended on the narrative that the brand aimed to tell. For example, Figure 4.6.2 shows an example from De Vegetarische Slager where they combined UGC and hashtags to create suspense about a new product. The post showed the comments that users shared about the product launch, the UGC was paired with a hashtag to answer their questions, which was #SOON and #staytuned. The combination of strategies worked well to increase the desired aim of the post which was engagement.

Figure 4.6.2: De Vegetarische Slager image 15 (2022).



Furthermore, The combination of the strategies could reach several aims like raising awareness and education in one post, combining themes could create a different emotion or connotation. For example, educational content about animal agriculture often could come across as very downcast and serious. However, with the combination of the educational theme with another theme such as awareness, it could turn the post into a more lighthearted and relatable post. Therefore, to illustrate this with example from the data set, as shown in Figure 4.6.3. The post by Beyond Meat used a combination of engagement and awareness through collaborating with the brands Violife and No Fairytales, constructing the posts into giveaways. Which allowed receivers to engage with the product and the brand. To be able to win, the brand asked for receivers to follow all three Instagram accounts from the brands and tag a friend, the more friends tagged the larger the chance of winning the giveaway. The post further engaged with awareness by implementing another SMM tool, tags. The tags triggered awareness through a snowball effect, further creating eWOM about the brand as the receivers shared the brand with each other.

Figure 4.6.3: Beyond Meat image 5 (2022).



5. Conclusions

This thesis was motivated by the growing awareness of the animal and climate issues surrounding the meat industry, along with the increase in meat substitute brands emerging from science and technology being invested in producing new types of meat alternatives. Furthermore, social media has played a vital role in this growth of meat substitute brands as the platform allowed such phenomena to grow and take place. This qualitative research aimed to provide an answer to how meat substitute brands frame brand identity through SMM on Instagram. The research uncovered different frames to communicate brand identity, the frames helped create appropriate and relevant content most salient to their identity. Furthermore, the frames showed patterns of how brands used SMM strategies to enhance online engagement, different strategies were shown to be more suitable depending on the brand identity frame.

Overall, the results showed that brands choose the following frames: Health frame, social frame, climate frame, and animal agriculture frame to frame their brand identity around. The dominant frames were communicated, and subframes were used to create a more versatile brand. For example, a brand that had a social frame was more likely to link the social frame with a health sub-frame. Similarly, brands that used a climate frame would use the animal agriculture sub-frame, and vice versa. The frames enhanced how a brand would tell their story, and highlight the core values that they believed the brand represented.

The frames were uncovered using the framing models by Hallahan (1999), the models guided the understanding of the frame construction, which determined the outcomes brands aimed for. The models were used as a guide throughout the research to understand different themes used within the framed identity. Furthermore, the models were further applied to understand how the brands created brand identity according to the identity domains as explained by Balmer (2012). The domains were spotted within the dataset and applied to the findings. Many brands communicated a strong identity through the chosen identity frame, which was further enhanced through the products and brand vision. For example, Beyond Meat communicated a strong brand identity, which was enhanced by the famous Beyond Burger and their brand promise to keep researching new technologies and science to create more meat substitutes.

All content in the analysis was examined through text, imagery, and symbols. Even though the brands were aimed towards a Dutch audience most captions were written in English. The language structure was dependent on the tone of the message, however, overall it was observed that brands wanted to ensure that receivers could fully understand all captions and be able to relate to them. Most brands would engage receivers through probing questions. The language used fit within the scope of Instagram by using popular and appropriate abbreviations which link to popular culture. The popular culture created a sense of belonging in the online atmosphere of social media, which was important for brands to adapt to. Even though the posts primarily used the English language, it was observed that cultural topics were communicated in Dutch through enhanced symbolism, and traditional Dutch meals and holidays were communicated through imagery and highlights.

Furthermore, Symbolism was extremely important as it communicated themes without using words, showing that besides language non-verbal communication communicated just as powerfully. People tend to categorise symbols which led to a deeper understanding of the post. The symbols were observed to be a vital aspect of the frames. For example, brands with a health identity would incorporate herbs and vegetables in the posts to communicate health. Furthermore, symbols were further enhanced through the usage of labels or awards. The awards and labels communicated a trustworthy brand, this symbol was seen primarily among brands communicating the climate and animal agriculture frame. Labels were used by brands to communicate a sense of success, achievement, and recognition from outside sources. Therefore, brand identity was framed through a combination of verbal and non-verbal usages of communication.

Instagram was constructed around imagery, the visual posts were the first thing receivers perceived. Therefore, imagery was the most important aspect of communicating brand identity. For example, brands communicating the social and health frame posted more food-based images along with lifestyle-type images to further enhance the frame and how the brand could potentially fit into the lifestyle of the receiver and vice versa. The climate and animal agriculture frame images were more focused on triggering reaction and emotion, the images had to capture the receiver to spark interest towards the narrative. In all, images played a vital role for brands in framing identity, especially on an image based platform such as Instagram.

SMM strategies entailed how a brand communicated the complete message. Brands aimed to increase certain goals, such as awareness, engagement, and education through SMM strategies. However, certain strategies were more suitable depending on the desired outcome of the brand. Therefore, the results found that depending on the type of goal the brand aimed for, certain SMM strategies were a better fit. As the results showed, the strategies best suited to create engagement were polls, UGC, tags, giveaways, and hashtags. To create awareness, brands would use influencer marketing, collaborations, and tags. Finally, for educational communication brands would incorporate polls, collaborations, and hashtags. Brands had to be aware of the overall aim of individual posts to determine which goal would be best suited for the each post and the message it communicated.

In all, brands narrow their brand identity to a certain frame that they deem most suitable for the brand. The content created to communicate the identity was framed specifically to the brands' identity domains and desired outcomes, along with understanding the market community and receivers. SMM helped brands to engage with communities and give the brand identity a bigger persona. As the results highlight, each core value frame had specific strategies to communicate the desired outcome to its fullest potential.

5.1 Implications

This research provides insights into ways brands use social media as a tool in framing brand identity, with a focus on brands in the meat substitute market, which is a fast-growing and competitive market with great potential to create brand identities. Social media has a lot of influence, therefore, brands must use this influence to their advantage by understanding which type of posts are most

salient to which identity frame. The practical implications suggested were found through the outcomes of this research.

Firstly, the content shared on the accounts were curated to communicate the brand storyline which were framed to be more commercial and profit-oriented. A suggestion derived from the research is for meat substitute brands to be more open about the science and work that goes into producing meat substitute products. Stakeholders feel more connected to brands that share raw and unfiltered content from behind the scenes. Therefore, brands should use the casual atmosphere of Instagram to their advantage to create communities and bonds between brands and stakeholders.

As shown in the results, brands who collaborated with other brands increased awareness and brand acknowledgments in the long run. Furthermore, creating more opportunities and products for the meat substitute community. Therefore, a recommendation is for brands that use the same core value frames to work together and combine their influence and online presence. This will make the brands stronger together. As shown in the results, brands use interconnected frames, therefore brands with a health identity can collaborate with brands using the social identity to create a further enhanced circular brand identity, further strengthening the community.

5.2 Limitations and future directions

Overall, the results of the research offered some insightful findings about framing brand identity in the meat substitute market. Even though the research was conducted accordingly, there were some limitations which will be addressed in the following section. The subjective approach in qualitative research was mentioned to be a limitation, as the researcher was the one analysing the data. Even though all the codes and findings were put into tables and backed with examples, the research remained prone to subjectivity.

Several limitations were found within the scope of the research. Firstly, the research could have been expanded by incorporating and observing several social media platforms and official websites of the chosen brands. A future direction would be to conduct a comparative study on how brand identity is communicated across different social media platforms and the main websites.

Secondly, another limitation was that there was no further research besides the content analysis. Therefore, for future research supplement the content analysis with further analysis, such as interviews or consumer surveys to allow for a more in-depth and rounded discussion on the topic. Furthermore, besides analysing several social media platforms, further research could analyse the perspective of consumer engagement with brand identity on social media, by analysing comments, likes, and engagement with the brand.

Finally, this research focussed solely on the types of identities framed by meat substitute brands through SMM in the Netherlands. However, further research should consider comparing the identities of Dutch meat substitute brands compared to the brand identities of brands in other countries. This could offer new cultural insights into the meat substitute market, and provide suggestions for framing brand identities across the globe. Additionally, the meat substitute market is vastly growing and creating new products, it remains an interesting topic how identities might change over time, especially through social media.

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Appendix A

Table 1: Operationalisation table:

Health frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Framing of attributes- Metaphors, framing mechanisms	Observing claims, statistics, official labels, and comparisons to other brands and products.
Social frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Framing of situations- Framing of news- Frame blending, frame mechanisms	Observing cultural symbols, stereotyping and breaking stereotypes.
Climate frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Framing of risks- Framing of situations- Frame shifting, frame mechanisms	Observing how framing is used to enhance emotional storytelling, and educational storytelling.
Animal agriculture frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Framing of risks- Framing of situations- Frame shifting, frame mechanisms	Observing how brand frame emotions and education into their storylines.
Social media marketing	SMM strategies	Observe with strategies where used for the intended outcome of the brand identity.

Appendix B

Table 2: Atlas.TI code book table:

Framing animal agriculture	27
Framing climate	28
Framing health	59
Framing social	11
Dutch culture	14
Education	13
Personal stories	23
Lifestyle	38
Holidays/ festive season	16
Trends	27
Meat substitute culture	11
Framing of attributes	73
Framing of issues	41
Framing of responsibility	34
Framing of situations	57
Framing of news	45
Framing of risks	52
Framing of actions	34
Frame blending	10
Frame shifting	21
Analogies	9
Metaphors	11