

Master's Thesis Internship – master Sustainable Business and Innovation

The potential of co-branding with meat processing companies as a strategy for the suppliers of plant-based meat substitutes to address the barriers to increased consumption of plant-based meat substitutes

Date: 18-12-2020

Wordcount: 28.381

Hendrik Hagedoorn – 6619215

h.j.p.hagedoorn@students.uu.nl

UU supervisor: Dr. Taneli Vaskelainen

Second reader: Prof. Dr. E.H.M. Moors



Universiteit Utrecht

Summary

A transition towards a diet with more plant-based protein instead of animal meat is essential due to the negative effects of meat consumption on the environment, human health and animal welfare. An approach to succeed in this is replacing animal meat with plant-based meat substitutes (PBMSs). However, the suppliers of PBMSs are facing several barriers to increased consumption of these products among consumers. This research proposes co-branding with meat processing companies (MPCs) as a strategy for the suppliers of PBMSs to address these barriers. Consequently, this research aims to get a deeper understanding of the barriers to increased consumption of PBMSs and how co-branding partnerships with MPCs could help the suppliers of PBMSs to address these barriers. Hence, one supplier of PBMSs was chosen and three corresponding co-branding partnerships with MPCs were selected. To gain a deeper understanding of the researched phenomenon, a comparative case study design is employed with a co-branding partnership as unit of analysis. Online news articles and press releases about these partnerships were collected and interviews with managers of the supplier and industry experts were conducted. In addition, an abductive research approach was used which allowed the researcher to use existing literature on these barriers and the benefits of co-branding as a guide to gather and analyse the data. From the data analysis five main barriers emerged to increased consumption of PBMSs: the taste, high prices, negative associations, the availability and the social context. The benefits of co-branding can be classified in three main categories, namely market, symbolic and financial benefits. The findings show that the benefits of co-branding with MPCs have high potential for the suppliers to address these barriers. Whereas the market benefits have the potential to address the availability, negative associations and the social context barrier, the symbolic benefits have the potential to address the taste, price and negative associations barrier. Additionally, the financial benefits have the potential to address the price and taste barrier. The findings of this study contribute to the literature by providing an overview of the current barriers to increased consumption of PBMSs, providing a clear overview of the benefits of co-branding from a strategic brand management perspective and by proposing a strategy for the suppliers of PBMSs to address the barriers to increased consumption of PBMSs. The contribution to society is that more insight in strategies to address these barriers could stimulate the required protein transition.

Key words: Co-branding, plant-based meat substitutes, supplier plant-based meat substitutes, barriers to increased consumption, meat processing companies, strategy to address barriers to increased consumption

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Abbreviation list

BM	Beyond Meat
CBBE	Customer Based Brand Equity
MPCs	Meat Processing Companies
PBMM	Plant-Based Meat Market
PBMSs	Plant-Based Meat Substitutes
SMEs	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
VB	Vegetarian Butcher
UN	United Nations

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1. Introduction

Changing the society's meat consumption is essential due to its negative impact on human's health, food security, animal welfare and its unprecedented levels of agricultural resource use and greenhouse gas emissions (Curtain & Grafenauer, 2019; Thakur, 2019; Gravely & Fraser, 2018). Consequently, the United Nations (UN) stated that "meat is world's most urgent problem" (UN Environment, 2018). Evidence suggests that these problems cannot be solved by production-based improvements only (Clark & Tilman, 2014). Therefore, a transition towards a diet with more plant-based protein instead of animal meat is becoming increasingly important (Gravely & Fraser, 2018; Apostolidis & McLeaf, 2016)

An approach to accomplish this is to replace meat with plant-based meat substitutes (PBMSs) (Michel, Hartmann & Siegrist, 2020). According to He et al. (2020), it is last decade that a new generation of PBMSs is developed which are especially designed to target meat lovers. The suppliers of these products argue that to succeed in the protein transition, targeting vegans and vegetarians is not sufficient (Michel et al., 2020; He et al., 2020). Therefore, these substitutes aim to mimic the taste, texture and appearance of meat products and are produced to take the place of animal-based meat (Osen et al., 2014; Apostolidis & McLeaf, 2016). Although numbers show increasing interest in these PBMSs and the plant-based meat market (PBMM) is expected to grow with 1000% in the next decade (Barclays, 2019), global meat consumption has increased with 58% between 1998 and 2018 and is expected to increase with 70% by 2050 (Choudhury et al., 2020).

Previous research identified a number of barriers to increased intake of PBMSs instead of animal meat among consumers (Lea, Crawford & Worsley, 2006b; Graça, Godinho & Truninger, 2019). These barriers vary from a lack of taste and experience of PBMSs (Hoek et al., 2011; Niva, Vainio & Jallinoja, 2017), the high prices of these products (Graca et al., 2019; Michel et al., 2020), habits and eating routines of consumers (Niva et al., 2017; Jallinoja, Niva & Latvala, 2016), lack of availability of PBMSs (Pohjolainen, Vinnari & Joiknen, 2015; Curtain & Grafenaur, 2019) and negative associations that consumers have with PBMSs (Markowski & Roxburgh, 2019; Niva et al., 2017).

For the suppliers of PBMSs to address these barriers and become widely accepted, innovative strategies are needed. Such an innovative strategy could be co-branding, which is a strategic branding strategy where two brands develop a new product or service together which has both brand names displayed on the packaging and promotional activities (Leuthesser, Kohli & Suri, 2003; Helmig, Huber & Leeftang, 2008; Besharat & Langan, 2014). Subsequently, it

can be used to “increase the scope and influence of their brands, enter new markets, embrace new technologies, reduce costs through scale economies and refresh their image” (Blackett & Russell, 1999, p.6). What is more, co-branding strategies with meat processing companies (MPCs) could be especially interesting for the suppliers of PBMSs. These co-branding partnerships could help them to reach their customer segment, the meat lover, better by sharing each other’s customers bases. Moreover, the availability of their products can increase by gaining access to new markets and the resulting brand awareness will potentially increase the familiarity with their products (Leuthbesser et al., 2003; Uggla & Asberg, 2010). The right co-branding partnerships can also benefit the brand image of the supplier and the general image of PBMSs product category by leveraging each other’s brand equity (Simonin & Ruth, 1998; Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). Additionally, it can serve as a tool to position your brand and differentiate your product offerings (Palmatier et al., 2016). Lastly, it can result in financial benefits due to increased sales, economies of scale, shared marketing budgets and lower R&D costs (Blackett & Russell, 2000; Chiambaretto & Gurău, 2017).

Although sufficient research is conducted on the barriers to increased consumption of PBMSs and the acceptance of these products, literature about it is still fragmented (Graca et al., 2019). Moreover, despite sufficient studies on technological improvements (Kyriakopoulou et al., 2019), different types of PBMSs (He et al., 2020) and the positive effects of PBMSs (Curtain & Grafenauer, 2019), there is a lack of research on potential strategies for the suppliers of PBMSs to address these barriers (He et al., 2020). Literature on co-branding suggests that co-branding can be used as a strategic option for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) to attain growth (Chiambaretto, Gurau & Le Roy, 2016), as an entry strategy to overcome financial and cultural barriers (Abrat & Motlana, 2003) and as a strategy to encourage purchase intentions among consumers (Helmig et al., 2008; Jamar, 2020).

Consequently, this paper proposes co-branding partnerships with MPCs as a potential strategy for the suppliers of PBMSs to address the barriers to increased consumption of PBMSs and thus help the PBMM to move from a niche market to a mainstream market. Considering the research gap outlined above, this paper aims to answer the following **research question and sub-questions:**

How could co-branding with meat processing companies help the suppliers of plant-based meat substitutes to address the barriers to increased consumption of plant-based meat substitutes?

Sub-question 1: What are the barriers to increased consumption of plant-based meat substitutes?

Sub-question 2: How could the benefits of co-branding with meat processing companies help the suppliers of plant-based meat substitutes to address these barriers?

A qualitative research method is applied, which suits the exploratory nature of this research. Moreover, a comparative case study design is used with three different co-branding partnerships between a supplier of PBMSs and MPCs. Consequently, the unit of analysis in this study is a co-branding partnership. Archival data and interviews are used, which both give the option to analyse internal as well as external data sources and therefore result in high levels of the data triangulation. The data collection and analysis will be done following an abductive approach, which allows the researcher to use existing literature as a guide to gather and analyse the data and helps to build a better understanding of the researched phenomenon.

Answering the research question contributes to the literature on PBMSs and co-branding. It contributes to the literature on PBMSs by giving an overview of the current barriers to increased PBMSs and by proposing a strategy for the suppliers of PBMSs that could address these barriers. Moreover, this study contributes to the literature on co-branding by providing a clear overview of the benefits of co-branding from a strategic brand management perspective. These are currently scattered across multiple research domains (Uggla & Asberg, 2010). The societal contribution of this paper is due to the fact that a better understanding of the benefits of co-branding and the potential barriers addressed with these can stimulate the required protein transition. This will in turn have great impact on our society by decreasing the negative impacts on the environment, animal welfare and human health. Finally, more insights on the potential of co-branding to address such barriers could also be interesting for other industries that suffer from similar barriers.

The remainder of this paper is structured as followed. Chapter 2 elaborates on the background of the PBMM and the chosen supplier. Thereafter, the theories that helped to execute this research are explained in Chapter 3, followed by the methodology of this research in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5 the findings are presented, which are further discussed in Chapter 6. This paper ends with the conclusion in Chapter 7 and the acknowledgments in Chapter 8.

2. Contextual factors

This paper focusses on PBMSs as the PBMM has the potential to move from a niche market to a mainstream market with significant opportunities within the food industry to resolve the environmental and health concerns (Curtain & Grafenauer, 2019). Food choices are strongly linked with the health of our environment and human health, with exaggerated meat consumption regarded as detrimental for both (Curtain & Grafenauer, 2019). The production of meat is responsible for a strong contribution to world's most pressing environmental problems, such as climate change, loss of biodiversity and the degradation of water and land quality (Pohjolainen et al., 2015). Regarding the detrimental impact on human health, research shows links between high intakes of meat and increased risks of all-cause mortality, colorectal cancer and cardiovascular diseases (Curtain & Grafenauer, 2019; Lea et al., 2006b). What is more, consuming less meat helps in treating diabetes, high levels of cholesterol and weight related problems (Thakur, 2019; Pohjolainen et al., 2015). Whereas last decades mostly vegans and vegetarians were aware of these concerns, this decade a new group appeared called "Flexitarians". Vegans are individuals who avoid the consumption of all animal products, while vegetarians are individuals that only avoid the consumption of animal meat (Markowski & Roxburgh, 2019). Flexitarians in turn are individuals who reduce their intake of animal meat, but not on a daily basis. They adopt this approach to reduce their environmental impact and to improve their nutrient density (Curtain & Grafenauer, 2019). The motivations for reducing the consumption of meat for vegans and vegetarians are mostly due to health concerns, compassions towards animals and their ethical treatments (Hoek et al., 2004).

Due to the increased numbers of vegans, vegetarians and mostly flexitarians, the supply side of the PBMM is rapidly expanding since many start-ups as well as established food companies are trying to enter this niche market (Boukid, 2020). However, the market value of the processed meat industry is expected to be over 1.5 trillion US dollars in 2022 compared to 17.5 billion US dollars of plant-based meat substitutes (Statista, 2019). Consequently, this makes it difficult for the suppliers of PBMSs to compete with the meat industry (Boukid, 2020). Furthermore, according to the literature several barriers arise to increased consumption of PBMSs. By barriers this research means individual and structural concerns that make it more difficult to increase the intake of PBMSs and decrease the intake of meat products for consumers (Michel et al., 2020; Vaino & Jallinoja, 2017). These barriers vary from the bad taste of PBMSs, the high prices for these products, habits and eating routines of consumers, lack of availability of PBMSs, negative associations that people have with them and many

more. However, the opinions about these barriers widely differ among scholars (Graca et al., 2019). Although the consumption of plant-based foods can be traced back to ancient history, over the years different types of PBMSs were development (He et al., 2020). On the one hand, there are traditional meat substitutes brands that aim to reach vegetarians and vegans by replacing meat with other types of burgers made of vegetables, tofu and/or beans for example. On the other hand, last decade there are meat substitutes brands that actually aim to reach meat eaters by mimicking popular meat products with the usage of new technologies (He et al., 2020).

A pioneer in the latter is the Vegetarian Butcher (VB). With savvy marketing the VB aims to target these meat lovers who are willing to decrease their intake of meat by actually trying to replicate the taste and experience of meat products. The VB is a Dutch company established in 2007 by Jaap Korteweg and Nikko Koffeman. Jaap is a ninth-generation farmer and a huge meat lover but when the swine flu swept through the Netherlands, he decided to become a vegetarian. Nikko Koffeman is a politician and a vegetarian by birth. In the following years they created a broad variety of substitutes for nostalgic meat products, which are multiple times heralded by juries of butchers and culinary journalists as they can compete with actual animal meat in terms of taste, nutritional value and texture. Jaap Korteweg his main goal with the VB is to get rid of all animals in the food chain by becoming the largest butcher in the world. To succeed in the latter, Jaap sold the VB to Unilever in the end 2018 as he needed the network and strength of the British-Dutch multinational. However, to actually turn this niche market into a mainstream category, joint efforts between suppliers, retailers and restaurants are needed (Barclays, 2019). Therefore, co-branding partnerships between the suppliers of PBMSs and MPCs could play a key role in this. These MPCs are companies that process meat, but do not produce it. Consequently, for these companies it is easy to change towards plant-based meat as they do not own cattle themselves. In addition, they serve the right customer segment for the suppliers of PBMSs, have an interesting image to the public and offer multiple financial possibilities. Therefore, collaborating with MPCs could be of special interest for the suppliers of PBMSs in order to address the barriers to increased meat consumption and turn this niche into a mainstream category.

3. Theoretical Framework

The following chapter outlines the theoretical foundation of this research. It explains the theories used to execute this paper. For being able to use the concept of co-branding, this chapter first touches upon brand management and brand equity literature to gain a better understanding of branding in general. Thereafter, strategic brand management practices are outlined to see which place co-branding has within the brand management literature and the definition for co-branding used in this paper is given. Subsequently, the benefits and risks of co-branding are discussed. At last, the conceptual framework created on the basis of the theoretical framework is shown in the synthesis section.

3.1 Brand management

Although brand management has been an important activity for companies for decades, it is in recent years that branding emerged as a top priority for management teams (Aqeel, Hanig & Malik, 2017). In the increasingly complex market, business and individuals are facing growing amounts of choices while having seemingly less time to make these choices (Heding, Knudtzen & Bjerre, 2009). As a result, having a strong brand has become increasingly important as it has the ability of simplifying the consumer's decision making, differentiate your products and reduce risk (Keller, 2003; Heding et al., 2009; Aqeel et al., 2017). According to Keller (2003) a brand can be defined as "A name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or groups of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition" (p.7). The value of a brand can be expressed in different ways, namely through the brand value and the brand equity approach. This research will use the brand equity approach, since this approach goes further than only the financial attributes of products that make out a brand (Heding et al., 2009). This approach is especially interesting for this research as with co-branding the partnering companies leverage each other's brands equities. So, next to the financial attributes, also the symbolic attributes are important. Consequently, a better understanding of a brand's equity will give indications towards the co-branding concept and its ability as a strategy to address the barriers to increased consumption of PBMSs. Therefore, the concept of brand equity will be further discussed in the next section.

3.1.1 Brand equity

Brand equity is highly acknowledged in both the academic field as well as the business world and it is about the "additional value" that a brand gives to a product or service (Keller, 2003;

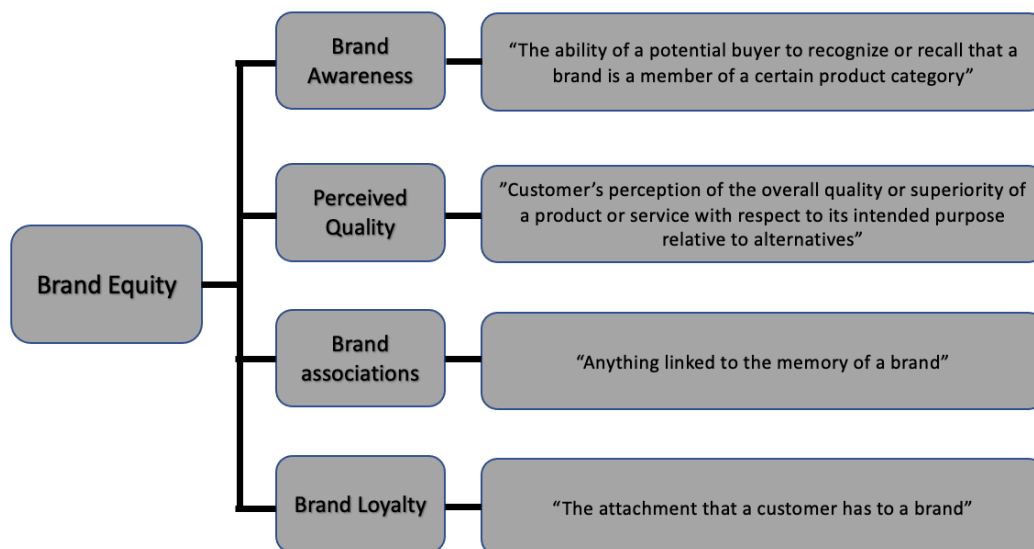
Aqeel et al., 2017). Although an exact definition of brand equity is missing, the most comprehensive and generally accepted definition is the one provided by Aaker (1991). Aaker (1991) defines brand equity as “a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm’s customers” (p.15). Having a high brand equity can lead to favourability compared to other products, increased acceptance of premium prices, higher profit margins, lower marketing needs and improved possibilities for brand extensions (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993; Keller, 2003). Moreover, evaluating the brand equity of a brand can help the brand to improve their marketing efficiency and establish stronger relationships between the brand and their customers (Keller, 1993; Aqeel et al., 2017).

There are two approaches to analyse brand equity, which are the financial perspective and the customer-based perspective. Whereas the financial perspective aims to establish accurate financial estimates of a brand’s equity, the customer-based perspective highlights brand equity on the basis of the perceptions of customers towards a brand (Keller, 1993; Aaker, 1991). This research will use the latter as the aim of this study is to research how co-branding strategies between the suppliers of PBMSs and MPCs could help to address the barriers that customers have to increased PBMSs. Consequently, the Customer Based Brand Equity (CBBE) is used since this approach offers the possibility to evaluate collaborations between different brands and provides indicators to see if it will increase or decrease the brand equity of the partnering brands and how it does so (Keller, 1993; Aaker, 1991).

3.1.2 Customer Based Brand Equity (CBBE)

Although there is some disagreement on the definition of brand equity in this complex field of research, most researchers agree that brand equity has to be separated in different dimensions for being able to understand and analyse customer’s responses (Atilgan, Aksoy & Akinci, 2005). Two influential scholars in this field are Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993). Whereas the approach of Keller (1993) is mostly focussed on the cognitive analysis behind the creation of a brand’s equity, the approach of Aaker (1991) tends to be more applicable for measuring brand equity by giving indications for evaluation and for understanding purchase intentions. Since the focal point of this study is not about identifying a brand’s association, perception or personality itself but about the effects of co-branding on the partnering brands, this paper will use the brand equity dimensions suggested by Aaker (1991). These four dimensions and their definitions are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The Brand Equity dimensions and definitions (Aaker, 1991)



3.1.2.1 Brand awareness

Brand awareness is about how well known a brand is to the public and therefore is a key determinant of a brand's equity (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2003). It conceptualises the strength of the brand's manifestation in the customer's mind. The higher the level of brand awareness, the more likely it will have an impact on the decision process of a customer when purchasing the product (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2003). This also depends on the level of involvement of customers in the buying decision process (Radder & Huang, 2008). For example, lower levels of brand awareness can already drive buying decisions of low involvement products such as milk, soap or bread. However, for influencing high involvement decisions such as electronics, cars or clothing higher levels of brand awareness are crucial (Radder & Huang, 2008).

3.1.2.2 Perceived quality

The perceived quality dimension is about whether or not a brand is known or expected to deliver products and/or services of good quality. The concept is driven by customer's priorities and perceptions of the features of the product and therefore differs from objectively defined concepts of quality (Aaker, 1991). Research shows that the perceived quality of brands is very influential in the purchasing process of customers (Aaker, 1991; Atilgan et al., 2005). Furthermore, it can be leveraged when exploiting brand extensions. Here, it can help to enter new markets and/or product categories by influencing the likelihood of success as well as the possibility of reach (Aaker, 1991). Since brand extensions are related to co-branding (Helmig et al., 2008), which will be discussed in section 3.2.1, this is of special interest for this study.

3.1.2.3 Brand associations

Brand associations are about the feelings and thoughts that customers have with a brand when they come in contact with it. There are three main classifications for brand associations; product related, company related and thirdly personality related brand associations (Aaker, 1991). When these are grouped together, this will create the brand image of a brand (Aaker, 1991). Thus, these brand associations are of key importance of a brand its image which in turn helps to process information, can function as point of differentiation from competition, create positive attitudes and feelings, generates increased purchase reasons and a potential foundation for brand extensions (Aaker, 1991; Chen, 2001). In that sense, when a company has a high brand equity this implies that customers have strong and positive associations with the brand. Again, as co-branding is a brand alliance, brand associations are an important aspect to keep in mind as they can spill-over between the partnering brands (Simonin & Ruth, 1998).

3.1.2.4 Brand loyalty

The last dimension of Aaker (1991) is brand loyalty, which is about how likely it is that a customer will switch to another brand. Although brand loyalty is important for the brand equity concept, for this research it will be neglected. Whereas brand awareness, perceived quality and brand associations can also be held by consumers who never actually tried a brand and thus can spill over, this is not the case with brand loyalty as it about the actual involvement of customers (Aaker, 1991).

3.2 Strategic brand management practices

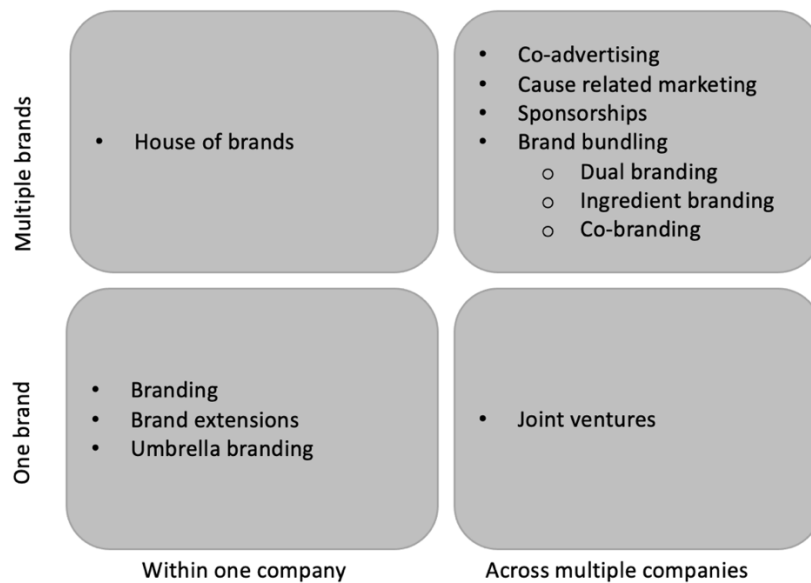
While reviewing existing literature about co-branding and brand alliances, many different practices of strategic brand management were found which are all closely linked to each other (Besharat & Langan, 2014; Chiambaretto & Gurău, 2017). Therefore, these are shortly discussed before co-branding and other types of brand alliances are outlined and compared. Additionally, a clear definition for the co-branding concept used in this study is provided.

3.2.1 Brand alliances and other strategic brand management practices

To be able to take advantage of the global commercial opportunities that arise with the technological changes and the great expansion of world markets, engaging in strategic brand management practices has become interesting for brands (Kippenberger, 2000; Besharat & Langan, 2014). Especially in either very mature markets or developing markets as often only the largest companies have enough resources to enter and/or dominate these markets (Uggla &

Asberg, 2010). Therefore, brand alliances especially offer great potential for smaller brands to benefit from these growth opportunities (Kippenberger, 2000). Besharat and Langan (2014) developed a brand management framework that outlines the differences between brand alliances and other strategic brand management practices, which is shown in Figure 2. Additionally, the framework is useful for highlighting the scope that co-branding has within the brand management domain. The x axis shows the number of companies involved and the y axis shows the number of brands that are involved.

Figure 2: Overview strategic brand management practices (Besharat & Langan, 2014)



As can be seen in Figure 2, brand alliances can be found back in the higher right quadrant. Thus, brand alliances represent the involvement of multiple brands between multiple companies. They differ from Joint Ventures (JVs) because then a new brand is created by multiple companies. In addition, brand alliances offer the possibility to enter new markets with reduced risk and investments compared to for example JVs, which are associated with high financial investments (Kumar, 2005). Furthermore, brand alliances differ from the house of brands strategy as in that case multiple brands from the same company create a new entity. Umbrella branding, branding and brand extensions occur with one brand and within the same company (Besharat & Langan, 2014).

3.2.2 Co-branding and other types of brand alliances

Since brand alliances are becoming increasingly popular in recent years, the concept is widely debated among researchers. Due to the various applications of the concept, literature about

brand alliances and so co-branding is fragmented. As a result, co-branding is interchangeably used with other types of brand alliances (Besharat & Langan, 2014; Chiambaretto & Gurău, 2017). From the reviewed literature six types of brand alliances can be derived, including co-branding. To begin with, as they are all brand alliances, they are all a collaboration between multiple brands and across multiple companies. The difference between them is due to the level of involvement since this leads to different time horizons, different interrelationships and thus a different overall outcome of the collaboration (Helmig et al., 2008; Besharat & Langan, 2014). Co-branding is when at least two different brands from different companies work together with the intention of developing a new product (Leuthesser et al., 2003; Kumar, 2005; Kippenberger, 2000; Helmig et al., 2008; Besharat & Langan, 2014; Chiambaretto & Gurău, 2017). Moreover, the physical integration of the partnering brands in the product is an essential criterion for a co-branded product (Helmig et al., 2008; Chiambaretto & Gurău, 2017). Furthermore, as co-branding involves the development of a new product, they are generally medium- to long-term agreements (Helmig et al., 2008; Besharat & Langan, 2014). Another essential aspect of a co-branding is that the partnering brands have to be visible to the consumers. Therefore, each brand name and/or logo should be presented on the product itself and/or on the packaging (Besharat & Langan, 2014; Chiambaretto & Gurău, 2017). All in all, the definition this research is for co-branding is when:

“Two independent brands across different companies work together on the creation of a new product in which both brands are physically integrated and both brand names and/or logos are displayed on the packaging as well as on the promotional activities”.

Table 1 gives an overview of the definitions of the other identified brand alliance types and the similarities and differences between them and co-branding. Co-branding differs from sponsorships and cause related marketing due to the transactional instead of relational agreement between the brands. Moreover, sponsorships are mostly focussed on events or activities while cause related marketing links a brand to particular causes (Besharat & Langan, 2014). Co-advertising and dual branding partnerships lack a new mutually created product or service. In addition, co-advertising is only a short-term agreement (Leuthesser et al., 2003). Ingredient branding is the one that is the most similar to co-branding. However, it differs due to the limited ownership for the other partnering brand as the final product belongs to the host brand only and so both brands do not have to be visible on the product and/or packaging (Besharat & Langan, 2014). Although all types of brand alliance strategies can be used in the

food industry, for this research co-branding is the most interesting. This will be further elaborated on in the next section.

Table 1: Overview types of brand alliances (Adapted from Besharat & Langan, 2014 and Helmig et al., 2008)

	Ingredient branding	Co-advertising	Dual branding	Sponsorship	Cause related marketing
Definition	A key product of one brand is incorporated in the final product of an other brand	Joint promotional activities by two independent brands	Two brands sharing one store location	The pairing of two brands for an event or purpose	Partnering with a good cause
Similarities	Part of newly created product and quality signalling	Potential improvements for brand image due to signalling	Shared brand associations and long-term agreement	Image and association transfer	Introduction of a new or existing product
Differences	No ownership of the created product for the host brand	No newly created product and short-term agreement	No newly created product	Transactional relationship - focus on event or activity	Transactional relationship - linked to a particular cause

3.3 Co-branding

The concept of co-branding already exists for years, it is only recently that it is used as a legitimate way of developing your brand and useful for attaining and maintaining competitive advantage (Kippenberger, 2000; Besharat & Langan, 2014). Consequently, co-branding strategies have grown annually by 40 percent (Besharat & Langan, 2014; Chiambaretto & Gurău, 2017). Co-branding partnerships particularly occur in the food and drink, air travel, financial services and retail industry (Kippenberger, 2000; Besharat & Langan, 2014). In their research on co-branding strategies Helmig et al. (2008) defined the key objectives of co-branding as “The economic success of the co-branded product” and “The positive effects on the partnering brands” (p.370). According to Besharat and Langan (2014) a successful co-branding partnership is one that “provides a strong value exchange for each member involved in the co-branding arrangement” (p. 117). Although this research is focussed on the benefits of co-branding, the risks are shortly discussed as well to gain a deeper understanding of a co-branding.

3.3.1 Benefits

The benefits for brands to establish co-branding partnerships depend on the environment and context the brands are operating in (Besharat & Langan, 2014). As this paper is focussed on co-

branding partnerships between the suppliers of PBMSs and MPCs, the potential benefits for them to engage in co-branding partnerships are discussed and why these could be interesting for addressing the barriers to increased consumption of PBMSs. These benefits are grouped in three classifications, which are market, symbolic and financial benefits. However, it has to be mentioned that a completely clear distinction between the benefits is not possible since they all interrelate with each other.

3.3.1.1 Market benefits

When entering in a co-branding partnership, brands give each other access to their customer bases with the created product (Leuthesser et al., 2003; Uggla & Asberg, 2010). Whereas the supplier of PBMSs will gain increased access to meat lovers, the MPCs will gain access to customers that prefer plant-based options. By creating a product with high complementary, it can help both brands to achieve greater customer reach in their targeted customer segment (Leuthesser et al., 2003).

Next to reaching new customers, also new markets tend to be reached with co-branding. These markets can be new geographical markets such as new regions, countries or even continents, but also new product categories (Blackett & Russel, 1999; Leuthesser et al., 2003; Uggla & Asberg, 2010). These new markets would have been difficult to access alone as even major brands find it challenging to enter new and unfamiliar markets. The investments needed for entering a market can exceed the brand's financial resources (Blackett & Russel, 1999). What is more, when a brand enters a new market by itself, the growth of their brand awareness is likely to require a large amount of time (Uggla & Asberg, 2010; Chiambaretto & Gurău, 2017). Therefore, for a new and unknown brand co-branding with a well-established brand in the right market is an effective strategy for PBMSs to enter new markets and product categories as it maximizes the chances of success (Uggla & Asberg, 2010; Park et al., 1996; Chiambaretto & Gurău, 2017). Additionally, by entering new markets the number of touchpoints with customers will increase (Gammoh, Voss & Chakraborty, 2006). As these touchpoints act as gatekeepers between the supplier and the end-user, they can determine the success of the suppliers of PBMSs (Gammoh et al., 2006; Uggla & Asberg, 2010; Palmatier et al., 2016).

The above-mentioned benefits will in turn result in increased brand awareness, which is a third important potential market benefit of co-branding. As each brand in the co-branding partnership brings its own customer base and potentially gained access to new markets, they will not only reach more customers physically, it also results in increased brand awareness among consumers (Leuthesser et al., 2003; Uggla & Asberg, 2010). When the brand awareness

increases this will result in increased familiarity and manifestation of the suppliers of PBMSs in the customer's mind. Consequently, this could have a positive impact on future purchase decisions of the customer. As food products are regarded as product choices of low involvement, this increased brand awareness could already have a great impact for suppliers of PBMSs (Aaker, 1991; Radder & Huang, 2008). To increase brand awareness in both the domestic market as foreign markets, Abratt and Motlanay (2002) recommend a co-branding strategy with an established brand. The market benefits of co-branding can be found in Table 2.

Table 2: Market benefits

Market benefits	Strategic implications
Gain access to each other's customer base	Increased reach targeted customer segment
Entry ticket new markets	Increased availability
	New geographical markets
	New product category
	Increased touchpoints
Increased brand awareness	Increased familiarity
	Higher purchase intentions

3.3.1.2 Symbolic benefits

Next to delivering multiple market benefits, co-branding has the potential to deliver several symbolic benefits. These symbolic benefits are the benefits that arise due to the spill-over effects between the brands and the resulting effects on the co-branded product, both brands and the product category (Simonin & Ruth, 1998; Ugglå & Åsberg, 2010; Besharat & Langan, 2014)

First of all, using co-branding as a strategy has the potential to take advantage of quality perceptions by making the partnering brands look similar in quality (Rao & Ruekert, 1994; Abrat & Motlana, 2002). Rao and Ruekert (1994) explain that co-branding provides credibility signals to the marketplace. Thus, when a relatively unknown brand collaborates with a reputable brand, consumers tend to assume that the overall quality of the co-branded product is sufficient

as the reputable brand signals sufficient quality. McCarthy and Norris (1999) explain that the quality perception of the brand that has the highest quality perception in general, will influence taste perceptions, product evaluations and purchase intentions. There are also studies that suggest that co-branding provides greater assurance of a higher quality perception of the created product than each brand would have had alone (Park et al., 1996; Helmig et al., 2008; James, 2005). This is important for the suppliers of PBMSs since higher quality perceptions of the co-branded product and the brand can strongly influence taste perceptions and so future purchase decisions (Aaker, 1991). Next to enhanced perceptions of the quality of the co-branded product and the partnering brands, co-branding can also lead to spill over effects of (positive) brand associations between the partnering brands and thus increase their brand equity. This is stressed by Washburn, Till and Priluck (2000), who state that consumers are likely to form favourable impressions towards the constituent and unknown brands in a co-branding partnership with well-established partners. This is due to the fact that familiar and well-known brands typically have a variety of associations in the mind of consumers. Thus, when these well-known brands collaborate with relatively unknown brands, consumers will extend these associations about the well-known brand to the relatively unknown brand (Washburn et al., 2000; Besharat & Langan, 2014; Rao & Ruekert, 1994; Leuthesser et al, 2003; Vaidyanathan & Aggarwal, 2000). Consequently, when consumers identify a well-established brand in a co-branded product, they tend to include this in their decision making when they have to choose among the potential alternatives (Besharat & Langan, 2014). Research conducted by Simonin and Ruth (1998) explains that the associations and quality perceptions that consumers have towards each brand will influence the evaluation of the created product. Furthermore, they add to this that their attitudes towards these brands and the created product will in turn influence their attitudes towards the parent brands, also after their partnership (Simonin & Ruth, 1998; Leuthesser et al, 2003; Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). So ideally, successful co-branding partnerships will in turn result in the situation where the less known brand also without the co-branding partner experiences increased familiarity, trust and credibility (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010).

Furthermore, the positioning of a brand and its products have a significant impact on its success. As a result of the above explained spill over effects, co-branding can be used as a useful tool for creating a convincing and unique position for the co-branded product and the partnering brands (Leuthesser et al., 2003; Uggla & Asberg, 2010). Consequently, a strong brand positioning can increase the customer acceptance of premium prices for their product (Uggla & Asberg, 2010). This could be interesting for the suppliers of PBMSs as the prices of PBMSs are an important barrier to increased consumption.

Lastly, these spill over effects between the brands and from the mutually created products can also spill over to the product category (Uggla & Asberg, 2010). So, in this case the PBMSs product category. This is of special interest for the suppliers of PBMSs due to the negative associations that a vast part of the populations has. The symbolic benefits of co-branding can be found in Table 3.

Table 3: Symbolic benefits

Symbolic Benefits	Strategic implications
Shared quality perceptions and associations	Higher quality perceptions
	Positive brand associations
	Higher taste perceptions
Brand positioning	Creating unique and convincing position
	Higher price premiums
Positively influence product category	Positive image PBMSs industry

3.3.1.3 Financial benefits

The financial benefits are tightly related to the market benefits. First of all, due to the access to each other's customer base, entrance to new markets and increased touchpoints more sales will be generated (Uggla & Asberg, 2010). These increased sales in turn help in achieving economies of scales. This is particularly interesting for the suppliers of PBMSs as the prices of PBMBs are currently too high. Economies of scale are the cost reductions that arise when production increases (Blackett & Russell, 2000).

Next to shared and lower production costs, marketing budgets can be shared (Chiambaretto et al., 2016). This is again especially interesting for PBMSs as Lea et al. (2006b) argued that the plant-based food industry encounters a lack of funds to be able to run big marketing campaigns, especially compared to the meat industry. Blacket and Russell (2000) add to this that because the product is branded by two brands there will be less need for great investments in promotion and advertising in general.

Lastly, since knowledge and technologies can be shared the R&D costs for developing the new products will be lower (Chiambaretto et al., 2016). Moreover, this access to each other's technologies and knowledge can assist the partnering brands with creating more

appealing products as they can inherit the most desirable qualities of both brands, which in turn will increase consumer satisfaction (Basharat & Langan, 2014; Leuthesser et al, 2003). The financial benefits of co-branding can be found in Table 4.

Table 4: Financial benefits

Financial benefits	Strategic implications
Economies of scale	Increased sales
	Lower production costs
Shared marketing budgets	More promotional activities
	Lower marketing costs
Shared knowledge and technologies	Lower R&D costs
	More appealing products

3.3.2 Risks

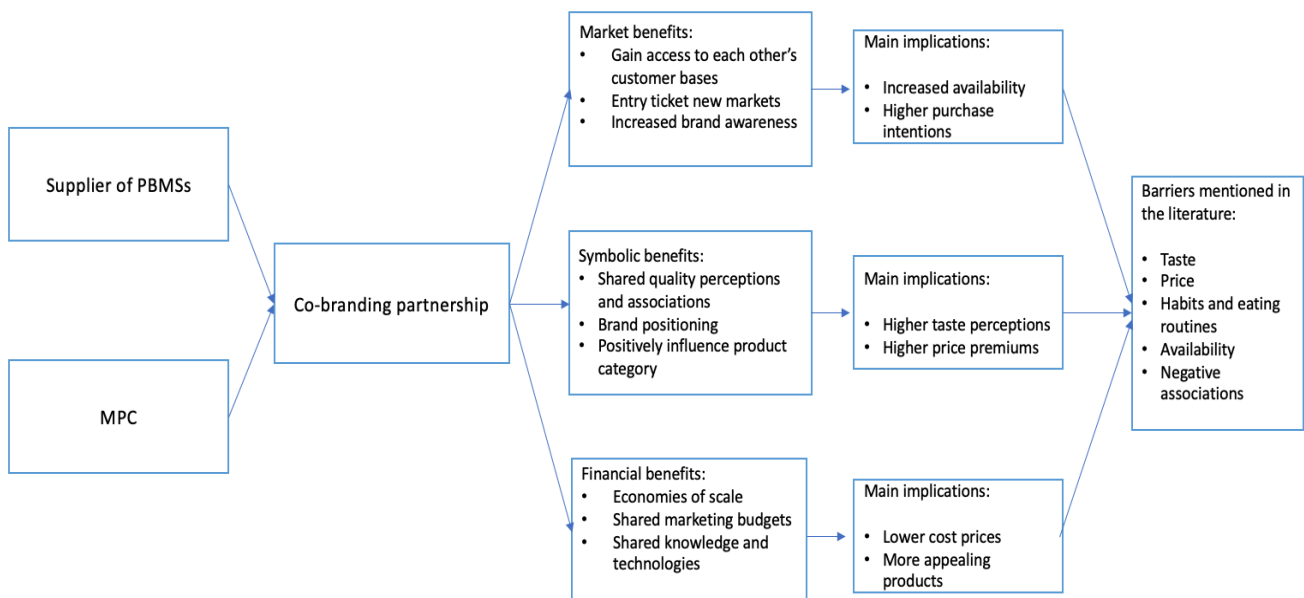
While it now seems that most co-branding partnerships only have potential benefits, this is not the case. Several main risks can be derived from the literature that can lead to the failure of a co-branding partnership. First, it is possible that the created product is not satisfactory. For example, due to the fact that it is likely that when two brands are going to collaborate this will increase customer expectations which in turn are more difficult to meet and lead to unsatisfying performances (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010; Besharat & Langan, 2014). Secondly, it is possible that consumers do not see the additional value of the co-branded product and the partnership and therefore no new customers and markets will be reached (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010; Besharat & Langan, 2014). The third and most important risk is because of the pooling of the brands. Thus, if problems arise both brand equities will suffer (Simonin & Ruth, 1998; Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). So far only positive spill over effects are discussed, but when customers have negative perceptions and/or associations with the partnering brand, this will in turn determine the consumer's associations and perceptions of the supplier as well (Palmatier et al., 2016; Uggla & Åsberg, 2010; Besharat & Langan, 2014). Although these can be found out in advance most of the time, scandals and other bad publicity are always lurking (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010; Chiambaretto et al., 2016). Therefore, the partner selection is essential since the selection of

wrong partnerships can result in long-lasting disadvantages (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010). For example, this can lead to deterioration of the brand its connection with its target group and loss of their product differentiation (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010; Palmatier et al., 2016; Elzerman et al., 2011).

3.4 Synthesis

In summary, the theoretical framework is aimed to give a deeper understanding of the co-branding concept and the place it has within the brand management literature. Furthermore, it provides the basis of how the benefits of co-branding with MPCs could help the suppliers of PBMSs to address the barriers to increased consumption of PBMSs. This is the research gap this study aims to fill as little research is conducted on strategies for the suppliers of PBMSs to address these barriers. The conceptual framework established on the basis of the theoretical framework is shown in Figure 3. It highlights how the benefits of co-branding with MPCs and the main implications that are of special interest for this study could address some of the possible barriers to increased consumption mentioned in the literature. The next chapter will explain the method that is used in this study for answering the research question.

Figure 3: Conceptual Framework



4. Methodology

In this chapter the methodology of this research is explained. To start with, the chosen research design is outlined. Secondly, the data types and sources are discussed and how these are collected. Subsequently, the analysing process of this study is explained before the validity of this research is discussed.

4.1 Research Design

This study aimed to research the barriers to increased consumption of PBMSs and how the benefits of engaging in co-branding partnerships with MPCs could help the suppliers of PBMSs to address these barriers. As this was a research area with limited prior research, a qualitative research method was used. This method was chosen since qualitative research specifically suits exploratory research questions that focus on new fields of study (Bryman, 2016; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Consequently, a qualitative approach allowed for more understanding of the underlying principles of the benefits for the suppliers of PBMSs to engage in co-branding partnerships and how these benefits could help them to address the barriers to increased consumption of PBMSs.

Additionally, this research followed an abductive research approach as it did not test a theory, but it did use theory and literature about existing barriers to increased consumption of PBMSs and co-branding as a guide to gather and analyse the data. This helped the researcher to get a better understanding of the researched phenomenon and so increased the understanding of what to look for in the data. Moreover, priori specification of the literature was useful as it helped to measure potential constructs more accurately and therefore increased the empirical grounding (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Furthermore, a comparative case study design was used for this research. This approach fits the research question as multiple cases and comparing them with each other to examine differences and similarities resulted in the fact that better theoretical constructs and midrange theories were created from the empirical evidence (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2009). Moreover, employing a comparative case study is beneficial when the study is of exploratory nature due to the resulting comprehension after comparing different cases (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Choosing the unit of analysis is an essential step in comparative case study research as it acts as the boundary of the case (Yin, 2009). The unit of analysis in this research is a co-branding partnership. As co-branding partnerships can act on national, international and global level, no geographical delineation was necessary.

4.2 Sampling

The sampling technique used in this research is theoretical sampling. As the number of cases that are studied is limited, theoretical sampling is important since then these cases are more likely to extend or replicate the emergent theory (Eisenhardt, 1989). Therefore, it was important to be specific with selecting the cases. To find a suitable supplier for this research, an extensive desktop research was conducted on potential suppliers of PBMSs. However, the suitable supplier had to meet several requirements for being able to be studied. First, it had to be a supplier of PBMSs which aims to mimic the taste of meat since these are more applicable for co-branding partnerships with MPCs. Subsequently, the supplier was required to have at least three different co-branding partnerships with MPCs. Only two brands met these requirements. First of all, the VB. The co-branding partnerships with MPCs chosen for the VB are the partnerships with Unox, Mora and Burger King. These were chosen as all three partnerships met the requirements of the co-branding definition used in this paper, which is defined in section 3.2.2. In Appendix A images of the product packaging and/or promotional activities can be found. The second brand that met the requirements was Beyond Meat (BM). However, after collecting the data and during the analysis BM was dropped out of the study due to a lack of explanatory power of the archival data.

4.3 Data and data collection

For being able to answer the research question and the sub-questions, archival data and interviews were used. As with most strategic brand management practices, there is an intended message by the brands and a received message by the public. Therefore, having internal and external sources was interesting for this study to see what the objectives and intentions of the suppliers of PBMSs are to engage in co-branding partnerships MPCs and how the public perceives these partnerships. Thus, as both the benefits of co-branding as well as the barriers to increased intake of PBMSs are related to the public, they are both taken into account in this research.

The archival data sources consist of press releases and online news articles. Whereas the press releases were interesting as internal data source since they showed the intentions, motivations and expectations of the suppliers of PBMSs, the online news articles were interesting to find out how the co-branding partnership is received by the media and the public. Next to archival data, also interviews with managers from the VB, BM and industry experts were conducted. These were semi-structured interviews following an interview guide which

was developed on the basis of the theoretical framework and the existing gaps in the archival data. The semi-structured nature allowed the researcher to go more in depth when specific and interesting topics were addressed. Consequently, a more thorough understanding of the benefits for the suppliers to engage in co-branding partnerships with MPCs was developed and how these could address the barriers that emerged from the data. By having both internal data sources as well as external data sources, data triangulation increased. Moreover, collecting and analysing multiple types of data, archival data and interviews, also increased data triangulation. Consequently, this increased data triangulation in turn resulted in stronger substantiations of this research's constructs (Eisenhardt, 1989).

However, it is important to mention that whereas the first sub-question "*What are the barriers to increased consumption of plant-based meat substitutes?*" is mostly answered on the basis of second-order data, the second sub-question "*How could the benefits of co-branding with meat processing companies help the suppliers of plant-based meat substitutes to address these barriers?*" is mostly answered on the basis of first-order data. Thus, although the archival data and interviews with managers and industry experts gave a clear understanding and overview of the barriers to increased consumption of PBMSS, this study did not study consumer directly. On the other hand, by interviewing managers of the suppliers of PBMSs the intentions and benefits of co-branding with MPCs were directly studied.

4.3.1 Data collection archival data

For all three co-branding partnerships archival data was collected. First of all, the press releases per partnership were collected. These were collected via the company website of the VB. Whereas for the partnership with Unox and Mora one press release each was found, for the partnership with Burger King two press releases were found. The collection of the online news articles was a more complicated process. For collecting the online news articles about each specific partnership, the LexisNexis® database was used. The LexisNexis® database is a useful for collecting online news articles as it contains regional, national and international news sources from 1990 onwards and it has an advanced search function. The search term "Vegetarische Slager and Unox" resulted in 216 articles which all mention both companies at least once. The search terms "Vegetarische Slager and Mora" and "Vegetarische Slager and Burger King" resulted in 152 and 204 hits respectively. However, among these articles many appeared insufficient for this research's aim as these were for example recipes, random price comparisons or both brands were just mentioned once on the side without further notice. Therefore, the search term was filtered down to articles where both companies were at least

mentioned twice and only newspapers, web-based publications and magazines. This was in line with the abductive research approach chosen for this study. Consequently, this resulted in sufficient useful online news articles for all three partnerships, which can be seen in Table 5. The last step was filtering out the articles that appeared more than once.

Whereas Unox and Mora are both Dutch companies, Burger King is an international company. So, for being able to gather as much useful data as possible the same process as described above was done for the search term “The Vegetarian Butcher and Burger King” to also gather international news articles about the partnership. Moreover, via the website of the VB and own desktop research more useful news articles were collected from marketing and business websites such as Marketingtribune and Adformatie. These were added to the articles collected through the LexisNexis® database.

Table 5: Overview of the collected archival data

Partnerships	Mentioned once	Mentioned twice	Without double articles	Total collected
Unox	216	48	21	25
Mora	152	42	19	24
Burger King (Dutch)	209	47	17	23
Burger King (English)	383	97	12	14

4.3.2 Data collection interviews

The collected interviews can be divided in two different groups, which are the employees of the VB and the industry experts. To start with, employees from the VB were contacted. Two out of the three contacted employees were open for an interview. Furthermore, during the collection of the archival data several authors turned up multiple times. Consequently, these were contacted if they were open for an interview. This resulted in two interviews. At the end of each interview participants were asked for relevant suggestions for other interesting interviewees, also known as snowball sampling (Heckathorn, 2011). As a result of these suggestions, a fifth interview was conducted. As BM was part of the original study, employees of BM were contacted. This resulted in one extra interview. Although the archival data of BM is excluded, the collected interview with a manager from BM was included in the analysis as it

provided the researcher with interesting information. Therefore, this interviewee will be treated as an industry expert. Two interview guides were developed since the questions slightly differed between the different types of interviewees. The interview guide for the employees of the suppliers of PBMSs can be found in Appendix B and the interview guide for the industry experts can be found in Appendix C. The interviews with the industry experts were useful for developing a more general understanding of the barriers and benefits, while it also allowed the researcher to make a distinction between the specific benefits of the co-branding partnerships of the VB and more common findings. Consequently, data triangulation increased while the external validity enhanced (Yin, 2009). All interviews were conducted online due to COVID-19 between August and October 2020 with varying lengths between 30 and 60 minutes. The six conducted interviews are listed in Table 6. Finally, each interviewee is given a letter which is used for referencing throughout this paper.

Table 6: Overview of the Interviewees

No	Interviewee	Position	Institution	Medium
1	A	Global Brand Manager	Vegetarian Butcher	Call
2	B	Global Business Development Manager	Vegetarian Butcher	Call
3	C	Account manager	Beyond Meat	Call
4	D	Founder & CEO	Green Food Lab, de Hippe Vegetarier and Nationale Week Zonder Vlees	Call
5	E	Senior Marketing Editor (Food & Retail)	Adformatie	Call
6	F	Senior Editor (Food & Retail)	Marketingtribune	Call

4.4 Data Analysis

When the archival data was collected, the analysis started. During the analysis of the archival data the interviews were collected and subsequently analysed. The analysis of this research consisted out of three parts: coding, a within-cases analyses and a cross-case analysis.

4.4.1 Coding

The first part is coding. This is an appropriate method as textual data was the basis of this study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At the start of each interview participants were asked for permission to record the interviews which allowed the researcher to transcribe the interviews afterwards. For the coding process NVivo was used, which is a useful analytical tool for analysing qualitative data in a systematic manner (Bryman, 2016). From the theoretical framework an initial coding scheme was developed. Therefore, open coding was skipped which relates to the research approach chosen, namely abductive. Additional adjustments to this coding scheme were made during the process of coding as this allowed the researcher to take emergent themes into account and take advantage of additional opportunities (Eisenhardt, 1989). The coding was an iterative process where the researcher alternated between the data and theory to keep the coding scheme up to date and measure the potential constructs more accurately. The final coding scheme can be found in Appendix D. In the coding process the pertinent information was separated from not pertinent information (Bowen, 2009).

4.4.2 Within-case analysis

The second part of the analysis was the within-case analysis. Each co-branding partnership was analysed individually on the basis of the coded archival data and within-cases were written. These within cases were supplemented with the interviews when the partnerships were specifically mentioned. The partnerships were analysed in chronological order as by this way the researcher was able to better understand the context and so to be able to see if there was a change regarding the benefits of co-branding as the company experienced growth. The within cases of this study followed the structure proposed in the theoretical framework. As a result, the within cases give a clear overview of each co-branding partnership and the corresponding benefits. Analysing each case individually helped to gain familiarity with the data and resulted in the generation of preliminary theory of each unique case. This accelerated the cross-case comparison and more importantly helped the researcher to handle the staggering amount of data (Eisenhardt, 1989).

4.4.3 Cross-case analysis

The third part was the cross-case analysis. After all cases were analysed individually, the logical next step in a case study research is the cross-case analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2009). It is important to look at the data in multiple divergent ways to succeed in making a good cross-case comparison and avoid premature and false conclusions. A successful tactic for this is to search for similarities and differences between the within case analyses as this increases the possibility of extracting findings (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2009). Therefore, the focus in the cross-case analysis was on comparing and contrasting the cases on the basis of the three main benefits. This resulted in a clear overview of the potential benefits of co-branding between the suppliers of PBMSs and MPCs, which were subsequently linked to the potential barriers addressed. Lastly, significant quotes from the interviews with industry experts were added after the comparison to establish a less company specific view of the benefits and thus increased the generalizability of the findings.

4.5 Validity of the research

As the research is of qualitative nature, the validity needs to be assured. The quality assurance criteria of Yin (2009) were used for this, which are useful criteria for measuring the validity of qualitative research. The criteria and how they are applied in this research are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. The positivist quality criteria of Yin (2009)

Validity measure	Description of Measure	Applied to this research
Construct validity	The identification of appropriate operational measures for the created concepts that are being studied	With the continuously alternation between the data and the theory, emergent theories were tied to existing literature and so enhanced the construct validity. By this way emergent constructs were either verified or dismissed as invalid.
Internal validity	Searching for causal relationships where certain conditions are likely to	By using archival data as well as interviews and internal as well as external mediums of

	result in other conditions. Thus, in contrast with spurious relationships	communications, data triangulation helped in establishing internal validity by checking if relationships were causal or spurious.
External validity	Determining the domain to which the findings of a study can be generalized	By comparing the multiple within cases in the cross-case analysis, the external validity and generalizability enhanced. Moreover, the interviews with industry experts also enhanced the external validity. Lastly, linking the emergent theories with existing literature also sharpened the generalizability.
Reliability	Demonstrating that the operations of a study, such as the data gathering and analyses procedure, can be repeated and with the same results	Reliability is reached as all steps undertaken are documented, summarized and published in the method section and in the Appendix. Therefore, the replicability and the reliability of this research enhanced. In addition, archival data is popular due to its unobtrusive and non-reactive character, which makes the research more reliable.

5. Findings

In this chapter the findings of this research are presented. First, the barriers that emerged from the data will be outlined in order to answer the first sub-question. As the barriers are not partnership specific, they are presented in a separate section. Thereafter the within case analysis are presented according to the structure suggested in the theoretical framework. These within cases give an overview of the benefits per partnership. To answer the second sub-question, the presented within-cases of the partnerships and their benefits are compared in the cross-case analysis. Subsequently, the cross-case analysis shows how these benefits of co-branding with MPCs could help the suppliers of PBMSs to address the barriers mentioned in section 5.1. The full citations of the quotes from the news articles used in the findings can be found in Appendix E.

5.1 Barriers

In this section the barriers that emerged from analysing the collected data are presented. Five main barriers have been identified, which are presented in the order of importance.

5.1.1 Taste

The first barrier and the most frequently mentioned one in the data is the taste of PBMSs. Although the taste is getting better due to innovative technologies and brands such as the VB and BM, it is still perceived as the most important barrier to increased consumption of PBMSs. Despite the fact that due to the growing awareness of the negative effects of meat consumption more consumers are willing to experiment with PBMSs, the lacking resemblance to the taste of actual meat remains decisive for them. When a reporter asked Jaap Korteweg, the founder of the VB, in an interview if he thinks that taste is the most important barrier, he answers “Yes, maybe the only one. If the taste is good the rest will come naturally” (Van der Pol, 19.11.2018). He further elaborates this by stating that “Most vegetarians do not stop eating meat because they don’t like the taste, it is because they don’t like the way it’s made” (Visser, 20.12.2018). When a reporter asked a customer what he perceived as most important barrier, the customer answered with “If the taste will be the same, it would be an easy choice for me” (Van der Pol, 19.11.2018). The importance of the taste is also stressed in the interviews. Whereas Interviewee B states that “You can endlessly propagate how bad meat is, at the end the taste needs to be great for succeeding”, Interviewee A mentions that “The reason that people eat meat is not because people like slaughtering animals, they just really love the taste and experience.

Otherwise, falafel would have been the most popular food already”. Therefore, the main goal of the VB is to mimic the taste and experience of meat to remove this barrier and to make sure that taste is no longer an excuse. The taste of PBMSs in general is very important as the suppliers of PBMSs still suffer from bad products in the past. Interviewee D mentions this by stating that “The taste perception is so enormously important. Especially for the first experience as otherwise people will be extremely disappointed and have written off the entire shelf.”. That is also the reason that the VB welcomes more suppliers of PBMSs as long as they produce tasty products, otherwise consumers maybe get traumatized PBMSs. All in all, for PBMBs to get accepted and more frequently consumed by a major part of the population the taste needs to improve as then things can go quickly. This is also stressed by Interviewee E who stated that “When plant-based meat really equals animal meat in taste, appearance and texture, you will really get a flywheel effect and then the market will explode”.

5.1.2 Price

The second barrier that can be derived from the data are the high prices of PBMSs. Although people argue that PBMSs will come naturally when the taste is good, this will not be the case as long as the prices of PBMSs remain high. The latter is stressed by a spokesman of the Green Protein Alliance, who states that “The argument that when the meat substitutes are good enough, everyone will start eating them by itself is a misunderstanding” (Van Dinther, 17.07.2017). He mentions that for PBMSs to become mainstream the price has to decrease. This is also mentioned by Interviewee F, who states that “plant-based meat substitutes have to be tasty, but for coming anywhere close to the tipping point the prices have to decrease”. Interviewee B mentions that she still thinks taste is the most important barrier, but the price argument follows closely. Especially compared to the meat industry the prices have to decrease as the price differences between PBMSs and their meat variants are too high to convince people to decrease their meat consumption. These high price differences are mostly due to economies of scale as it is now “David versus Goliath when it comes to meat substitutes and the meat industry” (De Lange, 09.10.2018). According to Interviewee E, the production of animal meat is so efficient due to both economies of scale and technologies that the prices are difficult to compete with for PBMSs. Consequently, he mentions that “For example for families with many children and an average income meat substitutes are not a feasible option now.” (Interviewee E). Moreover, it comes forward from the data that for vegans and vegetarians these price differences do not form an obstacle due to their strong motivations to avoid the intake of meat. However, since for meat lovers and so the vast majority of the population the economic

incentive is still decisive, the required protein transition will only occur when the prices of PBMSs decrease. This is also highlighted by Interviewee C, who states that “For vegans and vegetarians the price differences do not matter as they have deeper motivations for refusing the intake of meat. On the other hand, meat lovers who are open to decrease their intake occasionally mention that they are not willing to pay extra for that”. However, when production of PBMSs will increase and so economies of scale will be reached then things will move quickly. Especially since “In essence plant-based food is cheaper to produce” (Visser, 20.12.2018).

5.1.3 Negative associations

The third barrier that emerged from the data analysis is the negative associations that consumers have with plant-based foods and the superiority and masculinity associations consumers they have with animal meat. Since the 1950’s people started to eat more meat. Whereas back then it was a luxury product, it soon became an indispensable ingredient for almost every dinner. As a result, “People see meat substitutes as a direct attack. Most consumers don’t let that go so quickly, but there is some movement going on” (De Lange, 09.10.2018). However, vegetarian food is still seen as “chunks of rubbery tofu” (Bijl, 12.10.2016) by many consumers and for a long-time vegetarians were “fobbed off with an omelet with cheese and tomato” (Van den Eerenbeemt, 20.12.2018). Vegans, vegetarians and other consumers that were avoiding the intake of meat were therefore regarded as “old-fashioned” and “boring” (Interviewee F). Thus, vegetarians and vegetarian food are depicted negatively for a long time which subsequently keeps people from trying PBMSs. Interviewee C mentions this as well by stating that “The current perceptions and associations of vegetarian food is still rather negative, which has a hampering effect on its consumption”. Due to these negative associations people have with plant-based foods, they are always surprised if PBMSs actually taste nice. Interviewee B elaborates further on this that it does not only prevent consumers from trying, but also that “Due to these negative associations people have with meat substitutes you actually only have one change as a supplier of plant-based meat. When they try it, and it is of bad quality their associations are confirmed in their belief. While with steak, they you eat one that is not really tasty, they will still buy it again and again”. The negative associations people have with vegetarian food is also mentioned by Interviewee D. She states that “Vegetarian products these days are actually really good. However, for a vast part of the population the fact that it is labelled as vegetarian already results in an opposing attitude as they do not want to perceive themselves as a vegetarian. Purely on the basis of the packaging and labelling”. In other words, the fact that

products are labelled as vegetarian in combination with the negative associations that consumers have with vegetarian foods withholds consumers from eating PBMSs.

5.1.4 Availability

A fourth important barrier is the availability of PBMSs and so the reach of the suppliers of PBMSs. Although the society is becoming more aware of the negative effects of meat consumption, the availability is rather limited and therefore reaching the broader public remains a problem for the suppliers of PBMSs. As stated by Interviewee D, “I think most supermarkets show a considerable amount of meat substitutes these days, but that does depend on where you live. In the cities this will be more than in the provinces for example”. What is more, despite the fact that the availability is increasing in the supermarkets, the positioning of the vegetarian shelf is still problematic. For instance, Interviewee B mentions that “These vegetarian shelves are still most of the time badly located in the supermarkets in the sense that consumers really have to know about it in order to come in contact with the products”. Moreover, she adds that “This is one of the main problems for us because when people accidentally come into contact with it and they try it, they often like it. But to really take the step to walk to the vegetarian shelf and grab it remains a too high barrier” (Interviewee B). Therefore, both Interviewee B as D mention that placing PBMSs next to or even in the meat shelf will strongly increase its consumption and sales. As described by Interviewee B, “Then you see whole other types of people buying your products compared to the people who normally buy our products”. This is line with the fact that “Vegetarians and vegans are willing to go an extra mile for plant-based alternatives, but a major part of the world’s population is not.” (Meeuwssen, 07.03.2020). So, for reaching the meat lover it is important to be available at places where meat lovers come, which at the moment is not always the case according to Interviewee E. Consequently, although the availability in supermarkets and restaurants is increasing, many other food hospitality establishments, events, sport clubs and schools for example still lack plant-based options. This is also stressed by Interviewee C as he shares that “Next to increased availability in supermarkets and restaurants, the availability at more public spaces and for example sport events would help as this is currently neglected”.

5.1.5 The social context

For a vast majority of the world’s population the consumption of meat products is still deeply rooted in the social context. This social context can be for example having dinner with friends, family or colleagues. For individuals that want to avoid the intake of meat it is hard to refuse

animal meat in such situations. Interviewee F also stresses the importance of the social context by stating that “The social context of an individual has the potential to influence their dietary choices, either positive or negative”. So, during family meetings where meat is the central ingredient it can be hard for individuals to refuse. This is also mentioned by Interviewee D who states that “people are creatures of habit and the social environment is still mostly prone to meat. It is therefore difficult for individuals to avoid the intake of meat in certain situations”. For example, traditional events such as Christmas is an event that most Dutch people associate with meat. The fuss over *Allerhande*, a small Dutch magazine, when it contained a number of vegetarian and vegan recipes for Christmas, showed how important meat is during those days in the Netherlands. When a reporter asked to Jaap Korteweg if this will ever change, he answered “Change is difficult. People should not feel that something is being taken away from them. That resistance comes from the fear of losing things.” (Visser, 20.12.2018). In that sense, consumers are still often still guided by their surroundings and as people do not want to miss out by for example going out of diner, the social context can be counterproductive. Moreover, the same accounts for the food sector. Although the availability in restaurants increases according to Interviewee D, she also mentions that “The food environment is still really focussed on meat. So, in restaurants for example where they do have it, the menu will be divided in meat, fish and then vegetarian. As a result, before you even reached the vegetarian section consumers already made their choice”. To summarize, in Table 8 an overview of the above-described current barriers to increased consumption of PBMSs can be found.

Table 8: Overview of the barriers to increased consumption of PBMSs

Barriers	Main problem/Definition
1. Taste	Since meat is strongly appreciated by the majority of the population for its taste, the negative effects of meat consumption are irrelevant for them as long as these substitutes suffer from a lack of taste compared to animal meat. As a result, for turning the PBMM into a mainstream market the taste of PBMSs have to improve.

<p>2. Price</p>	<p>The high prices of PBMSs are problematic, especially compared to the meat industry. While for vegans and vegetarians their environmental, health and animal welfare motivations outweigh the higher prices, for most consumers the price remains decisive. Thus, for PBMSs to actually get accepted and consumed by the public the prices of PBMSs need to decrease.</p>
<p>3. Negative associations</p>	<p>Whereas PBMSs encounter negative associations as “Boring”, “Rubbery tofu” and “Disgust”, meat is associated with superiority and masculinity. Hence, these negative associations have a hampering effect of the consumption of PBMSs, both prior as after the consumption of these products.</p>
<p>4. Availability</p>	<p>Although the availability is increasing in supermarkets and restaurants, the positioning remains problematic. Moreover, in most restaurants, public institutions and events PBMSs are still missing. Consequently, it is difficult for the suppliers of PBMSs to actually reach the broader public instead of only the vegans and vegetarians.</p>
<p>5. The social context</p>	<p>Since people are sensitive for their social surroundings and as the social context is still mostly steering towards the consumption of animal meat, it can be hard for individuals to avoid the intake of animal meat in social occasions.</p>

5.2 Within case analysis

In this section the benefits of each co-branding partnership will be presented in a within case. This will be done along the three main benefits mentioned in the theoretical framework, namely the market, symbolic and financial benefits.

5.2.1 Unox

5.2.1.1 Market Benefits

Gain access to each other's customer base

On world Vegetarian Day in 2016, the VB and Unox launched their first co-branded product, the Vegetarische Gehacktballetjes in satay sauce. According to a spokesman of Unox, Unilever conducted a research from which the results show that Two-thirds of the Dutch population wants to eat at least one day a week meatless. Subsequently, he mentions that this is the customer segment they want to reach to with their co-branded products (Van Dinther, 17.07.2017). Jaap Korteweg, comments on the partnership by stating that:

“Our ideal is to let meat lovers experience that they don't have to miss anything at all if they leave the meat behind for one or more days. Unilever reaches millions of people in the Netherlands and this step together with Unox will make it attractive for even more people to become acquainted with vegetarian food in an easy and accessible way.” (Unilever, 08.06.2017).

The latter is very important for the VB since in the beginning their growth was mostly due to vegans and vegetarians, but as the number of vegans and vegetarians is generally steady, they have to reach meat lovers to sustain growth. Therefore, this co-branding partnership and the resulting access to Unox its customer base was very important for them as “now we reached very large groups of our targeted meat lovers in one go” (Interviewee B). Furthermore, as stated by Jaap “Unilever has brought lasagne to the Netherlands, why would we together not be able to do the same with plant-based meat” (Van Dinther, 17.07.2017).

Entry ticket new markets

Moreover, they also entered the meat shelve with this partnership. Consequently, the co-branding partnership with Unox was described as “The next step in making the meat section

more vegetarian” (Olthuis, 01.10.2018). The importance of entering this new shelf is stressed by Interviewee B as before this partnership “We could only be found in organic shops or somewhere hidden in the supermarket, while with this partnership we entered the meat shelf for the first time”. Moreover, according to Interviewee A this entrance was very important as this increased their availability in general and on the meat shelves in particular. The latter is important as they see the meat industry as their main competitor. The benefit of entering a new product category with co-branding and the importance of this is also mentioned by Interviewee D. She mentions that “The integration of meat substitutes on other shelves, in other products and in other categories such as their partnership with Unox is essential as by this way you make it easier and more attractive for consumers to decrease their meat intake.” (Interviewee D).

Brand awareness

The increased brand awareness resulting from the above-mentioned benefits is very important for the VB. By entering the meat section new and more consumers came in contact with the VB as a brand. This is stressed by Interviewee B, who states that “First, we only had one shelf with the Vegetarian Butcher, which was the vegetarian shelf. Thus, people only came in contact with our products when they were at the vegetarian shelf. Now with this partnership we came out of this vegetarian bubble and got into different shelf with a very large audience. As a result, a lot of people came in contact with our products and suddenly we became a bit more mainstream” (Interviewee B). So, not only more people came in contact with their product, also other consumers than vegans and vegetarians were confronted with their brand for the first time. Jaap mentions the importance of this by stating that “The protein transition will not work if we continue to preach in front of our own parish. Therefore, our market is not the vegetarian, but the meat lover” (Van Dinther, 17.07.2017). So, by collaborating with Unox they do not only have physical access to more customers, the customers are also becoming more familiar with PBMSs in general and the VB as a brand. This is essential for the suppliers of PBMSs as this is needed for the fact that people are actually going to try and buy their products. In addition, according to Interviewee B, it was due to the successful partnership with Unox and the resulting increase in brand awareness that Mora approached them for a collaboration.

5.2.1.2 Symbolic benefits

Shared quality perceptions and associations

Next to the above-mentioned market benefits, the partnership also resulted in several symbolic benefits. For example, marketing guru Mark Ritson responded to the co-branding partnership between the VB and Unox with “Awesome! I could use this in class tomorrow as it is such a great example. With co-branding magical things can be done because you share each other’s brand associations. Whereas Unox gets a bit of modernity with a premium plant-based option, for the Vegetarian Butcher there is an association with an established name” (Mirande, 13.03.2018). Especially for the VB that is interesting as by then it was still a quite unknown company at that time while “Unox is a leading and traditional Dutch brand in shelf stable meat with a strong position in the Dutch food culture” (Interviewee A). As a result, the created products are perceived to be of high quality due to the brand signals of Unox and so be more attractive to try for consumers as this influences their taste perceptions. Moreover, the co-branded products are a plant-based version of well-known and popular products which already exist for years. So, associations and perceptions at both product as company level will spill-over. As a result, dietician Mary Stottelaar responded to this partnership with “For the die-hard meat eater intermediate steps are needed towards a more plant-based diet” (Meeuwssen, 07.02.2020). About these spill-over effects of quality perceptions and associations between the brands, Interviewee B explains that “Brands as Unox and Mora are brands that simply have been on TV for decades and are typically Dutch brands that people simply trust 100%. So, if you make a partnership with them, you benefit from their brand associations and perceptions”. Thus, next to increased brand awareness of the partnering firms, the partnership also resulted in increased quality perceptions, brand associations and taste perceptions.

Brand positioning

Furthermore, the above-mentioned spill over effects strengthened the brand positioning of the VB and the differentiation of their products from other suppliers of PBMSs. This is mentioned by Interviewee B, who mentions that “The partnership with Unox was one the first confirmations that we actually succeeded in mimicking the taste and experience of popular meat products” (Interviewee B). Such a confirmation that they succeed in mimicking the taste of meat is of key importance for the VB, especially when it is by a commercial sausage giant as Unox which already sells 22 million Rookworsten alone every year and has a strong position in the Dutch food culture (Kamsma, 22.12.2018). This is interesting for the VB as it could lead to higher customers’ acceptance of premium prices, which remain problematic for the suppliers of PBMSs.

Influence image product category

Another important benefit for the VB is the positive influence on the general image of PBMSs product category. In recent years meat substitutes were characterized as “Chunks of rubbery tofu” (Bijl, 12.10.16), “swampy falafel balls” (Bijl, 12.10.16) and “Burgers and schnitzels of indeterminate beige-brown colour, made from soy, moulds or other vegetable raw materials” (Van Dinther, 17.07.17). With their partnership with Unox, which is a company that you do not directly associate with vegetarian food, the VB wants to change the image of vegan and vegetarian food. Correspondingly, the partnership was described as “The love baby of an unlikely duo: The Vegetarian Butcher and sausage giant Unox.” (Luiten, 19.06.2016). Furthermore, marketing departments of other food convenience companies are also responding to this shifting image and will likely starting to offer vegetarian options as well (Bijl, 12.10.16). People who are already vegetarian for some years do not necessarily need substitutes that mimic the taste and experience of meat. However, for die-hard meat eaters and people that have negative associations with the plant-based meat industry, co-branding partnership such as the one between the VB and Unox can be “a great intermediate step towards changing perspectives” (Meeuwsen, 07.03.2020).

5.2.1.3 Financial benefits

Economies of scale

Another very important benefit for the VB to collaborate with other brands is achieving economies of scale as this will result in lower cost prices. As two million units of the cobranded products have been sold within two years, this partnership resulted in a huge boost for the sales of the VB and strongly contributes to achieving economies of scale. As Jaap stated “Now the plant-based meat we make is still expensive, but that has everything to do with the small scale. Basically, it is cheaper to produce. After all, you use the same ingredients - beans and cereals - but you only need half, or less, of them. What's more, the machine we now use to make the meat structure fits in an average living room and can produce 1 million kilos of vegetable chicken or meat in a year's time” (Unilever, 08.06.2017). Therefore, Interviewee B mentioned economies of scale as an important motivation and benefit for collaborating with Unox. She further explains that “When these will be reached it will further stimulate the protein transition and will eventually make plant-based meat the norm and animal meat the niche” (Interviewee B). Additionally, as Unox has their own factories, the VB can produce more products without using their own production facilities and capacity. According to Interviewee B, this was

especially important in the first years of their partnership as the VB did not have his own fabric yet.

Shared marketing budgets

Although the VB was slowly getting popular, it was still an unknown brand without a clear structure and having any budgets at that time. This is stressed by Interviewee B as she mentions that “In the beginning we consisted out of a small team, made our choices on the basis of our feelings and had little to none budget for marketing”. So, for them to collaborate with companies that do have big marketing budgets is very beneficial as they cannot do this on their own. Consequently, Interviewee B mentions that “being shown in the newspapers, on the television and other types of advertising would not have been possible without the marketing budget and power of Unox”. The importance of these shared marketing budgets at that time is also stressed by Interviewee D, who states that “These marketing budgets are important for the Vegetarian Butcher, because especially as a small party you basically do not have that”.

Shared knowledge and technologies

The third financial benefit is the shared knowledge and technologies. Whereas Unox benefits from the VB’s expertise of vegetarian foods, the VB benefited from the knowledge Unilever has. This resulted in better products and reviews such as “Miraculously how they managed to mimic the soft structure of meat” (Karin Luiten, 2016). The latter is also stressed by Interviewee F, who states that “These collaborations are interesting for the customers as by sharing their knowledge, most of the time better products are created than when produced alone”. However, the benefits of lower R&D costs due to collaborating with Unox are not mentioned in the data.

5.2.1.4 Conclusion

To summarise, the co-branding partnership between the VB and Unox has several market, symbolic and financial benefits. The market benefits of this partnership consist of gaining access to each other’s customer bases, an entry ticket into a new product category and increased brand awareness. By collaborating with Unox the VB increased their reach to meat lovers as Unox its customer base mainly consists of meat lovers. On the other hand, Unox gained increased access to flexitarians, vegetarians and vegans with the co-branded product. Moreover, the VB entered a new product category, namely the shelf stable meat section. As a consequence, the availability increased and so did the brand awareness of the VB. Subsequently, the familiarity increased with the VB in particular and with PBMSs in general. The first symbolic

benefit is the shared quality perceptions and associations. The quality perceptions and associations that consumers have with Unox will spill-over to the co-branded product and eventually to the VB. This was for the unknown VB very interesting at that moment as it increased the taste perceptions of their products. Moreover, collaborating with a leading brand as Unox was the first confirmation that they were succeeding in mimicking meat products. This is interesting as consumers tend to accept premium prices for stronger brands and products. The above-mentioned symbolic benefits in turn resulted in a positively changing image of the PBMSs product category. Mostly due to the market benefits, the sales of the VB strongly increased and so the partnership contributed to achieving economies of scale. This is important as by this way production costs and so cost prices will decrease. Furthermore, as the VB did not have its own production facilities by that time, sharing these was very important for them. The same accounts for the shared marketing budgets. The VB was at that time a small brand without any marketing budgets. Thus, collaborating with a company with sufficient marketing budgets and expertise is very interesting. Lastly, by sharing knowledge and technologies more appealing products were created, which is interesting for the customers. The benefits and the strategic implications are summarized in Table 9.

Table 9: Summary benefits within case Unox

Main benefits	Sub-benefits	Strategic implications
Market	Gain access to each other’s customer base	Increased reach targeted customer segment
	Entry ticket new markets	Increased availability
		New product category
		Increased shelf space
	Increased brand awareness	Increased familiarity
Symbolic	Shared quality perceptions and associations	Higher quality perceptions product
		Higher quality perceptions brand
		Positive brand associations

		Higher taste perceptions
	Brand positioning	Strengthened brand positioning
		Higher price premiums
	Influence image product category	Positive influence image PBMSs product category
Financial	Economies of scale	Increased sales
		Lower production costs
		Shared facilities
	Shared marketing budgets	More promotional activities
		Less marketing costs
Shared knowledge and technologies	More appealing products	

5.2.2 Mora

5.2.2.1 Market benefits

Gain access to each other's customer base

In September 2018 Mora and the VB announced that they are starting a co-branding partnership. Their first co-branded products are plant-based croquettes, bitter balls and a vegan kipcorn that in order to succeed in reaching meat lovers are “Indistinguishable to the naked eye from their sisters who do have chicken or beef in them” (Den Hollander, 12.04.20). Jaap comments on this partnership by stating that “Every Dutch person is entitled to have a vegetarian frikandel, if only because it is such a typical Dutch product. With this iconic product we again succeeded in making a vegetarian version accessible to the broader public, which is even convincing for the biggest meat lover” (Van Woensel Kooy, 13.01.2020). Moreover, as a result of their co-branding partnership whole families can go to the snack bar again and can enjoy these popular snacks. As the director of Mora explained “Within a family nowadays you have carnivores, flexitarians and vegetarians. They can all go to the snack bar together.” (Van Gelder,

17.01.2020). This is important as in the past vegans and vegetarian were not able to go to such places and resulted in complex social situations. Finally, “For some vegetarians, a bitter ball is the only thing they cannot resist. That argument is now also no longer valid” (Kamsma, 16.02.2019).

Entry ticket new markets

Next to access to each other’s customer bases, also new markets are reached. First of all, new regions are reached by the VB. Whereas before this partnership the VB was already well presented in the retail and in some restaurants and cafeterias across some parts of the country, these co-branded products are supplied to company canteens, cafeterias, gas stations and other hospitality establishments across the whole country. Furthermore, the VB also enters the snack category with this partnership and especially the deep fry product category. This is very interesting for the VB since in 2018 only already 600 million frikandellen and 350 million croquettes were consumed (Van Rijswijk, 13.01.2020). These numbers emphasize the popularity and size of this product category. Moreover, entering this new product category with one of the key market players is especially interesting. As stated by Interviewee A, “By creating vegetarian options for these products with Mora, the number one snack manufacturer in the Netherlands, the VB can enter this gigantic market”. Since they enter both new geographical markets as a new product category, their number of touchpoints strongly increased as new channels and increased shelf space are established. This increased availability and its importance is mentioned by Interviewee B who states that “Only four years ago we were only to be found in organic shops, now we can be found across the whole country in all types of stores”.

Increased brand awareness

Due to the increased reach and availability, their brand awareness increased. The importance of this increased brand awareness and the resulting increase in familiarity with their brand and PBMSs is stressed by Interviewee A. She explains that “We really want to work with the biggest players in the market that have a very wide reach and with which a of meat lovers are familiar. So, in that sense, collaborating with a company is certainly important.”. Furthermore, for the introduction of the plant-based croquettes Cora from Mora and Jaap went to the country together in a food truck. Interviewee B explains about this campaign that “We came on the television with Cora from Mora and Jaap, that was absolute gold. Everyone knows Cora and then suddenly we were there”. Additionally, the introduction of the vegetarian frikandel was

picked up by an even larger amount of media. They launched the product together at the Horecava, which is a yearly event where thousands of visitors come for the newest trends, products and services in the hospitality sector (Van Gelder, 17.01.2020). As a result, more and more consumers were getting familiar with the VB in a very short notice. This familiarity is important as it leads to trial. Since more consumers are becoming aware of the VB due this co-branding partnership, consumer will become more triggered to try them according to Interviewee B. In other words, higher brand awareness will result in higher purchase intentions of consumers. This is also stressed by Interviewee D, who states that “The next and just as important as the increased familiarity step is the trial, people actually have to buy the products”.

5.2.2.2 Symbolic benefits

Shared quality perceptions and associations

The spill-over effects of quality perceptions and associations is also an important benefit of collaborating with Mora for the VB. Mora and its products are perceived as top quality and are associated with tasty snacks and fun (Van Woensel Kooy, 13.01.2020). Since they are “hacking iconic snacks”, also product related associations will spill-over. The promotional activities of the product launches were picked up by multiple media sources and therefore resulted in a lot of positive media attention and quality perceptions of the products. Moreover, the fact they came on the television with Cora did not only increase their brand awareness and quality perceptions, but also resulted in the fact “people actually associated Cora from Mora with our brand, who is characterized with fun and humor” (Interviewee B). Interviewee F mentions that “the credibility and trust feelings will spill-over from Mora on the VB by collaborating with them”. Thus, whereas Mora gets associated with a popular and premium producer of meat alternatives, the VB gets associated with Netherlands most famous snacks and snack manufacturer. As a result, by creating plant-based versions of the most popular snacks in the Netherlands with a leading company as Mora even gets the "hardcore snacker to switch to meatless alternatives” (Van Rijswijk, 13.01.2020). The importance of hacking these particular products is also mentioned by Interviewee D, who states that “Croquettes and frikadellen serve such a large target group in our society, that by collaborating with the number one brands that produce these products is necessary for carnivores to finally try some PBMSs and show that it is not as bad as they think.”. So, due to the higher taste perceptions these products offer a great entrance to a first (positive) experience with PBMSs for meat lovers. Interviewee D further adds that “If you eat a decent vegetarian product nowadays, you just can’t say that it is really

disgusting”. So, these first experiences are likely to be positive, which is key for the rise of PBMSs.

Brand positioning

These types of co-branding partnerships such as the one with Mora where they make plant-based versions of already existing popular meat snacks, perfectly matches and even strengthen their brand positioning and their product proposition. It does so since their proposition is “We are a butcher: we hack iconic meat products. We do not come up with falafel, tempeh or tofu, we are firmly convinced that these products are not going to convince people either.” (Interviewee B). As a consequence, collaborating with the number one snack manufacturer to “hack” croquettes and frikandellen is very beneficial and can contribute to the acceptance of premium prices of PBMSs. Interviewee D stresses this as well by stating that “If your aim is to mimic meat products that sizzle in the pan, bleed when you cut them and smell like meat, working with a company as Mora definitely shows you are succeeding in this and consumers will be more likely to pay a bit more for your products.”

Influence image product category

Co-branding partnerships with companies like Mora can positively influence the negative associations that people have with a vegetarian lifestyle, plant-based products and the PBMSs product category in general. The cafeterias where they can be found now, also called “snack bars”, have an important role in the Dutch culture and their customers can be regarded as big meat lovers (Van Asselt, 17.09.2020). In the past almost the entire product offerings for the fryer and so in these snack bars consisted out of meat snacks. As Jaap described “For many of these meat eaters, meat substitutes were a kind of terrifying specter” (Den Hollander, 12.04.2020). Recent years this is slightly changed, thanks to the rise of equivalent vegetarian alternatives. As a consequence, vegetarian options are now entering places such as cafeterias and canteens which were normally strongly associated with die hard meat eaters. Thus, even the “hardcore snacker” is confronted with plant-based alternatives now (Van Rijswijk, 13.01.2020). Although the VB is approached by a lot of other niche vegetarians and vegan brands to collaborate, they consciously choose to only collaborate with big players in dominate markets. They do so as “We don’t want to be a niche within a niche. As the plant-based meat market itself can still be regarded as niche market, working with those brands does not provide us with a better image and a bigger market. Therefore, large and non-niche market players are interesting for us to collaborate” (Interviewee A).

5.1.2.3 Financial benefits

Economies of scale

The partnership with Mora gave a large boost to the VB their sales as the launched products already account for 10 à 15 per cent of their revenues (Van Gelder, 17.01.2020). Jaap Korteweg mentions that working with MPCs such as Unox and Mora is interesting as “They do not have chickens or cattle, but they make sausages and croquettes. That is also possible with our new 'meat'. And thanks to their factories, we can produce much more" (Visser, 20.12.2018). This is in turn important for reaching economies of scale and thus lower cost prices. Their first launch of their croquettes, bitter balls and kipcorns resulted in over one million sales within one year (Van Rijswijk, 13.01.2020). Thus, by establishing co-branding partnerships with MPCs the production can scale up really quickly. Moreover, selling vegetarian snacks at these volumes would not even be possible without Mora due to their production facilities and too high costs. This is stressed by Jaap who stated that “The vegetarian frikandel was already there, but together with Mora we managed to produce it on a large scale” (Den Hollander, 12.04.2020). Additionally, for the VB it is also interesting that these brands also profit from making the plant-based options equal in price to the animal-based versions. This is explained by Interviewee D, who mentions that “The brands with whom the VB collaborates also benefits from high production levels since they will never make plant-based options way more expensive than the meat versions as otherwise there is no benefit of adding it to their assortment, it needs equal chances for succeeding”. As in essence plant-based meat is cheaper because you need less to produce the same product, economies of scale will play an important role in this process. Jaap Korteweg believes that with food technologies PBMSs will become cheaper than animal meat and when this happens, “The market will reach its turning point” (Van Woensel Kooy, 23.10.2018).

Marketing budget

The created products were accompanied with a major marketing campaign, which would have never been possible for the VB alone when launching new products. These campaigns consist of the earlier mentioned food truck, commercials on television and demos in stores. About this campaign interviewee B states “That was absolutely not possible for us on our own at the time, you do not want to know what it costs.” So, people come in contact with your product in a completely different way that was otherwise never possible. Interviewee F also stresses the

importance of these shared marketing budgets by stating that “These types of partnerships such as the one with Mora result in much more marketing possibilities for the VB, but also marketing expertise”.

Knowledge and technologies

Furthermore, both brands have specific knowledge and expertise that can reinforce each other. The Director of Sales & Logistics at Mora for example stated that “Two strong brands join forces. We have the technology and the factory, and The Vegetarian Butcher has the know-how of vegetarian food and ideology.” (Redactie Distrifood, 20.12.2018). The director of Mora adds that “It all went really quick when the teams started working together. Our product developers have other knowledge and skills as they look at the crispness of the crust or the smoothness of the filling, while Jaap's experts pay much more attention on how well this version looks like the version with meat” (Den Hollander, 12.04.2020). According to him they have succeeded in this as he shares the following anecdote “A guest of a restaurant once complained about our meatless croquette. How was it possible that he received a meat croquette! At a vegetarian restaurant. Shame. Wonderful. You can't really get a bigger compliment.” (Den Hollander, 12.04.20). Consequently, by sharing each other’s knowledge and expertise, they offer great value to each other and more appealing products to the customers at lower costs when produced alone. Interviewee B explains that “We would never succeed in copying the threads in the croquettes and bitter balls for example without Mora its expertise and technologies, but also financially”.

5.2.2.4 Conclusion

All in all, the co-branding partnership with Mora resulted in multiple market, symbolic and financial benefits. To begin with, the partnering brands both gained access to other’s customer bases as the VB gained more access to meat lovers and Mora gained access to flexitarians, vegetarians and vegans. Moreover, with the partnership new geographical markets as well as a new product category is entered, namely the deep fry snack category. The resulting brand awareness from the increased availability resulted in a strong increase in familiarity among consumers. Furthermore, it comes forward from this case that this familiarity will lead to trial due to higher purchase intentions, which is of special importance for the suppliers of PBMSs. Regarding the symbolic benefits, the partnership resulted in shared quality perceptions and associations, strengthened brand positioning and positive influence on the image of the PBMSs product category. The shared quality perceptions and associations between the brands resulted

in increased higher quality perceptions of the product and brand, while also positive associations are shared. Due to these shared perceptions and associations the taste perceptions of their products and PBMSs increased. Collaborating with a snack giant as Mora also strengthened their brand positioning and positively influenced the image of the PBMSs product category. The first is interesting as firms with a strong brand positioning encounter higher acceptance among consumers for premium prices. The financial benefits of this partnership consist of increased sales which in turn results in lower production costs due to economies of scale. The shared facilitates again appeared to be important for the VB as at that time they suffered from limited capacity. The shared marketing budgets were also important as VB did not have any budget for marketing, while Mora is known for its strong marketing budgets and activities. Lastly, due to the shared knowledge and technologies more appealing were created which would not have been possible alone and at lower costs. The benefits are summarized in Table 10.

Table 10: Summary benefits within case Mora

Main benefits	Sub-benefits	Strategic implications
Market	Gain access to each other’s customer base	Increased reach targeted customer segment
	Entry ticket new markets	Increased availability
		New geographical market
		New product category
		Increased channels
		Increased shelf space
	Increased brand awareness	Familiarity
Trial		
Symbolic	Shared quality perceptions and associations	Higher quality perceptions product
		Higher quality perceptions brand

		Positive brand associations
		Higher taste perceptions
	Brand positioning	Strengthened brand positioning
		Higher price premiums
	Influence image product category	Positive influence image PBMSs product category
Financial	Economies of scale	Increased sales
		Lower production costs
		Shared facilities
	Shared marketing budgets	Less marketing costs
		More promotional activities
	Shared knowledge and technologies	More appealing products
		Lower R&D costs

5.2.3 Burger King

5.2.3.1 Market benefits

Gain access to each other’s customer base

In November 2019 the VB and Burger King announced their co-branding partnership and introduced the Rebel Whopper. They introduced the Rebel Whopper with the following statement in their joint press release:

“It’s been developed specifically with meat lovers in mind – people who want to leave meat out of their diet for a couple of days a week, but don’t want to compromise on flavour. In the past, plant-based diets were the preserve of vegetarians and vegans. But demand has grown with the mainstream emergence of consumers who choose plant-based products for a variety of reasons. To appeal to the core meat-eaters, plant-based

products must be as good as, if not better than, what they're intending to replace. We believe we've achieved this with the Rebel Whopper patty" (Unilever, 12.11.2019).

From this statement it comes forward which customer segment they tend to reach, namely meat lovers. The new CEO of the VB marks this partnership as "The next step in winning the hearts of meat lovers around the world. It's also the next step in the greatest food revolution of all time" (Mirande, 09.09.2020). All in all, where can the hearts of meat lovers better be won than by collaborating with a fast-food chain from which the blood is spattering off the menu and that is mainly there for "meat eaters who want to see scorch marks from the barbecue on their hamburger" (Van den Eerenbeemt, 13.11.2019). It was always one of the ambitions of the VB to make a deal with one of the major fast-food chains since a large impact could be made with these partnerships due to their enormous customer bases. Consequently, in an interview about this partnership a spokesperson of the VB stated that "It has always been a wish to be able to offer meat-free products to a large and wide public. It does not have to be a niche." (Sevil, 12.11.19). What is more, in most friend groups there is at least one vegetarian these days. Whereas in the past going to the Burger King was not feasible for that person, now whole friend groups can go to the Burger King again. Interviewee B stresses this and adds to this that "When they are all going to the Burger King together again, there is a change that this vegetarian convinces his friends to try the Rebel Whopper, when that happens and it is a positive experience, things can go quickly" (Interviewee B).

New markets

Whereas before this partnership the products of the VB could be found in about 4000 shops and restaurants in 17 countries, with this partnership they expand their reach with 2500 restaurants across 25 countries in once and thus strongly increase their availability. Due to their own channels, great marketing and their co-branding partnerships with Unox and Mora, the VB is an established brand in the Netherlands nowadays. Thus, international expansion is the next step. Niko Koffeman highlights this by stating "We are very successful in the Netherlands, but for real international expansion we require a lot more" (Van den Eerenbeemt, 13.11.2019). A co-branding partnership with such a well-known international company as Burger King is an ideal way to succeed in this with their approximately 14.000 stores across 100 countries. Interviewee A highlights this by stating that "To enter new countries with a fast-food chain is very effective, especially if we accomplish in collaborating with one of the biggest players in the market". The same accounts for entering a new product category, such as the fast-food

industry, it is useful and effective to collaborate with one of the key players in that product category. Finally, co-branding partnerships with fast food companies are an essential part of the marketing strategies of American producers of PBMSs, which turned out to be a very successful strategy (Van den Eerenbeemt, 13.11.2019).

Increased brand awareness

The co-branding partnership with Burger King is described as “a tipping point for the Vegetarian Butcher. This is likely to give the Vegetarian Butcher a huge boost both inside as outside the Netherlands.” (Van den Eerenbeemt, 13.11.2019). This boost is expressed in two ways, namely in increased availability and in increased brand awareness. The latter is stressed several times by both Interviewee A and B as one of the main motivations for them to engage in co-branding partnerships with MPCs as it leads to trial and so positively influences the purchase intentions of consumers. This trial resulting from increased familiarity is of essential importance and it is therefore that the roll-out of the Rebel Whopper through Europe is accompanied with one of the largest marketing campaigns in the history of Burger King. Despite the fact that the plant-based option is now available in these countries, it remains important that people are actually going to try and taste the product. Thus, it is essential that the product gets activated with a large marketing campaign which happened with the launch of the Rebel Whopper. Furthermore, after the launch of the Rebel Whopper, also retail sales went up. This is mentioned by Interviewee A, who states that “Due to the increased brand awareness resulting from the Burger King deal, our retail sales immediately went up. So, in that sense, the increased familiarity leads to trial and could even let to acceptance”. About this acceptance Interviewee B explains that “Whereas with Unox and Mora it was to increase familiarity with the brand in mostly the Dutch retail sector, now co-branding is actually used as an entry strategy in new countries to increase our brand awareness. Co-branding with companies in the food service sector is a very effective way to introduce your brand to consumers in new and unknown countries”. Consequently, when a certain level of brand awareness is reached then can go more on their own as they are accepted by the public. She further explains that “In the Netherlands we can do now more on our own without other companies since we are accepted by the public. Whereas first we needed Unox’s name to make a sausage that customers would actually buy, we can now do that on our own” (Interviewee B).

5.2.3.2 Symbolic benefits

Shared quality perceptions and associations

First of all, the fact that the co-branded product is linked to the iconic Whopper already results in high-quality perceptions of the product. The Whopper is their signature product since 1957 and as it “Looks exactly like the hamburger and the name will sound like music to lovers' ears” (Hakkenes, 12.11.2019) and “It is indistinguishable from the original Whopper” (Mirande, 09.09.2020), the quality perceptions will increase and therefore also appeal to people who do not eat PBMSs normally. Moreover, Burger King’s plant-based whopper was a “smash hit” in the US and as a result it was brought to Europe as the “Holy grail of plant-based fast food” (Adam Leyland, 16.11.2019). Therefore, for the VB being linked with the iconic Whopper results in beneficial associations and quality perceptions of the product. Consequently, this results in higher taste perceptions of the product. According to Interviewee A this is very important because it helps to ensure that people have a great first experience with vegetarian meat. She further explains that “Consumers that normally dislike plant-based meat substitutes will be more likely to try a Rebel Whopper as it is linked to the normal Whopper and when that person is very surprised about the great taste, that person will automatically have more trust in our brand and plant-based food in general due to the fact that it can actually taste really good”. Furthermore, by partnering with the Burger King, you do not only supply one of the biggest fast-food chains in Europe, it also ensures the VB with credibility as a meat brand. Interviewee A explains about the latter that “When working with such iconic meat companies as Mora and Burger King, the taste of our products must be good. In that sense we borrow a bit of their credibility and trust in the field of meat”. This is also mentioned by Interviewee B, who explains that “When a company as Burger King embraces us and actually offers a plant-based option shows that global companies are behind your products and brand. That is very important for us because now the meat industry cannot longer ignore us. Whereas in the begin we suffered from a lack of reach and negative associations, we can now be found at one of world’s largest fast-food chains. That gives us the right to exist as a brand”. Due to these reasons, it is important to collaborate with companies that give high priority to taste and quality as well. Therefore, Interviewee A states that “Working with the Burger King which is the number one flame grilled burgers worldwide is very interesting, but we would not collaborate with chains that have dubious reputations”.

Brand positioning

The above-mentioned spill-over effects are also important for the brand positioning of the VB as this partnership again strengthens their brand positioning and their product differentiation to their customers, competitors and the public. This is also highlighted by their new CEO who states that “At the Vegetarian Butcher we offer delicious plant-based alternatives to popular meat dishes including beef, pork, chicken and fish. Powering the Rebel Whopper is a fantastic step towards our goal to become the biggest butcher in the world” (Ridler, 15.01.2020). Consequently, the higher quality perceptions and positive brand associations in combination with the stronger brand positioning will result in higher customer acceptance of premium prices. This is mentioned by Interviewee F, who states that “Engaging in these types partnerships contributes to the brand positioning and image of the VB. When you are known and associated with quality and success, people will be willing to pay a bit extra”.

Influence image product category

Although PBMSs still suffer from negative associations, now they are on the menu of a giant fast-food chain as Burger King between as many as twenty variants of animal meat and where mostly passionate carnivores come. This is important as meat consumption serves as the central element in most gastronomic cultures. Therefore, meat substitutes need to get higher on the menu and associations with and perceptions about them have to change. Co-branding with companies such as Burger King, the second-largest burger chain in the world, is a useful and effective strategy for that. For the VB and the PBMM in general, this partnership is therefore described as “The international deal of The Vegetarian Butcher with Burger King seems to be the next station in the rise of the meat substitute.” (Van den Eerenbeemt, 13.11.2019), “The Home of the Whopper® has officially bought its ticket and hopped on the plant-based bandwagon” (Ridler, 15.01.2020) and “Getting a hungry wolf eating soy” (Van den Eerenbeemt, 13.11.2019). As stated by Interviewee F “Instead of being associated with old-fashioned and boring, the associations of the plant-based industry are currently changing, also due to partnerships between companies like Burger King and the Vegetarian Butcher”. The fact that Burger King mentioned the introduction of their plant-based option in the US one of their most successful introductions ever also stresses this shifting image (Le Clercq, 12.11.2019). According to Interviewee A, it is therefore that these type of co-branding partnerships can in turn contribute to the further spread of plant-based meat alternatives to eventually change the PBMM from a niche to a more mainstream and dominant market.

5.2.3.3 Financial

Economies of scale

The co-branding partnership with Burger King so contributes to achieving economies of scale as the fast-food chain expects to sell 650.000 units of the Rebel Whopper annually (Mirande, 09.09.2020). Collaborating with companies in the food service industry is very interesting for the suppliers of PBMSs as the volumes and margins in this sector are much higher than in retail. Interviewee D therefore mentions that “Collaborating with the Burger King is absolute gold for the Vegetarian Butcher. Working with fast-food chains is extremely profitable and the food service sector has much higher volumes.”. According to Interviewee A it is thus important to go after iconic products with big chains as these are likely to have big impact on their production. The Rebel Whopper is now a little bit more expensive than the normal version, but when economies of scale will be reached, it is likely to become just as expensive as the normal whopper. According to Interviewee B, experiments from the VB show that when a normal burger and a plant-based burger are priced the same, also the sales were equal. She explains that “When you ask people if they would buy it, they say no, but when it is there and it is priced the same, they will actually consider it” (Interviewee B). Next to that, because purchase prices of plant-based food are more expensive, it is for food chains more interesting to sell meat burgers instead of plant-based burgers. Thus, when prices will get equal, it will not only be more interesting for consumers to buy PBMSs, it also gets more interesting to sell PBMSs for restaurants and chains. This is highlighted by Interviewee B, who mentions that “Due to this partnership we will come closer to achieving economies of scale. When this is reached, the prices compared to animal meat will become equal or even cheaper and then Quick Service Restaurants will no longer care which they sell more” (Interviewee B).

Shared marketing budgets

Regarding the shared marketing budgets, it has to be mentioned that the VB is now part of Unilever. Whereas for the other co-branding partnerships this was still a very important motivation and benefit, the importance of these shared marketing budgets did decrease according to interviewee B since they are part of Unilever as they have a large marketing budget and network now as well. However, Interviewee A stressed the importance of the fact that this product launch is accompanied with such a large marketing campaign that it is still very important for them. This is also stressed by Interviewee D, who states that “The benefits of

shared marketing budgets and expertise with brands as Burger King will always be interesting for brands to collaborate”.

Knowledge and technologies

The co-branding partnership also resulted in the exchange of knowledge and technologies, which resulted in more appealing products. Together they namely succeeded in making the first “Flame-grilled” plant-based patty and developing a plant-based burger that “Finally is fast food chain worthy” (Interviewee F). In addition, Interviewee D stressed the importance of shared knowledge in the form of data, which is especially interesting for the VB. She argues that “For the Vegetarian Butcher data of the buyers of the Rebel Whopper could be very important for gaining more insight into their customers and consequently adapt their strategy more specifically when needed” (Interviewee D).

5.2.3.4 Conclusion

To conclude, the co-branding partnership between the VB and Burger King resulted in multiple market, symbolic and financial benefits. First of all, both brands gained access to each other’s customer bases since the VB again increased their reach to meat lovers with the partnership, while Burger King gained access to mostly flexitarians by offering a premium plant-based option on their menu. With the partnership the VB strongly increased their availability by entering multiple new countries, entering the fast-food industry and increased channels. These in turn lead to strongly increased brand awareness for the VB, which is important for them due to the increased familiarity with their brand, the resulting trial of their products and maybe eventually even acceptance of their brand. The symbolic benefits of this partnership consist of shared quality perceptions and associations, strengthened brand positioning and positive influence on the image of the PBMSs product category. Due to the spill-over effects both the quality perceptions and associations of the co-branded product as the brand improved. Consequently, consumers will have higher taste perceptions of their products. Additionally, working with a leading meat brands as Burger King strengthens the brand positioning of the VB, which leads to higher acceptance of premium prices. Lastly, the image of the PBMSs product category improved. The first financial benefit of the partnership is the contribution to achieving economies of scale for the VB. Due to the large volumes in the food service sector, this partnership will strongly contribute to increasing the production scale and so lower the production costs. Although due to the acquisition by Unilever the VB has a large marketing network and budget now, the fact that the product launch was accompanied with Burger King’s

largest marketing campaign in their history is still an important benefit for the VB. Finally, due to the shared knowledge and technologies they succeeded in creating a more appealing product by making the first flame grilled plant-based meat burger. Access to more data is also mentioned as important benefit for the VB. The benefits are summarized in Table 11.

Table 11: Summary benefits within case Burger King

Main benefits	Sub-benefits	Strategic implications	
Market	Gain access to each other's customer base	Increased reach targeted customer segment	
	Entry ticket new markets	Increased availability	
		New geographical market	
		New product category	
		Increased channels	
	Increased brand awareness	Familiarity	
		Trial	
		Acceptance	
	Symbolic	Shared quality perceptions and associations	Higher quality perceptions product
			Higher quality perceptions brand
Positive brand associations			
Higher taste perceptions			
Brand positioning		Strengthened brand positioning	
		Higher price premiums	
Influence image product category		Positive influence image PBMSs product category	
Financial		Economies of scale	Increased sales

		Lower production costs
	Shared marketing budgets	More promotional activities
		Less marketing costs
	Shared knowledge and technologies	More appealing products
		Data

5.3 Cross-case analysis

In the previous section the cases are analysed individually to see which benefits arise per partnership. In the following section the within cases are compared along the three main benefits to detect similarities and differences. This gives a more in-depth insight on the benefits of engaging in co-branding partnerships with MPCs for the suppliers of PBMSs. Subsequently, these benefits are linked to the potential barriers addressed, which are mentioned in section 5.1. Finally, quotations from the interviews with the industry experts are added when significantly contributing for coming to a less company specific view of the benefits.

5.3.1 Market benefits

The market benefits consist of three benefits, which are gaining access to each other's customer base, entry ticket to new markets and increased brand awareness. All three the cases resulted in these three benefits and show high resemblance on the strategic implications. However, some small differences exist among the cases. In the following section the three market benefits will be discussed more elaborately on the basis of the within cases and linked to the potential barriers addressed.

5.3.1.1 Gaining access to each other's customer base

When comparing the within-cases it can be concluded that in all three the co-branding partnerships both brands gained access to each other's customer bases. Whereas the supplier of PBMSs increased its reach to their targeted customer segment with each partnership, namely the meat lover, the MPCs increased their reach to the flexitarians, vegetarians and vegans. Therefore, co-branding can be regarded as an effective strategy for brands when they want to increase their reach to their targeted customer segment and especially when these targeted customer segments are otherwise difficult to reach. This is also stressed by Interviewee D as

she mentioned that “Take for example the target groups of Unox, Mora and Burger King, those target groups would normally be very difficult to reach by the Vegetarian Butcher on its own”. Consequently, it is important to choose a partner which has a large customer base and even more importantly which has a customer base that consists of the targeted customer segment. This is also stressed by Interviewee C, who mentions that “Co-branding is a useful strategy to for reaching large numbers of customers that normally do not buy your products. In that sense, it is important to collaborate with the right partners with the right target group as otherwise it would be less effective”. Since for the suppliers of PBMSs it is essential to reach meat lovers and to increase their availability to make an actual impact and sustain growth, co-branding with MPCs appears to be very effective. As a result, the reach of the suppliers of PBMSs strongly increases in a short notice which contributes to increased availability of PBMSs and thus to addressing the availability barrier discussed in 5.1.4.

5.3.1.2 Entry ticket new markets

From the within-case analysis it comes forward that all cases resulted in the entrance to new markets. These new markets can be new geographical markets, new product categories or both. Whereas two out of the three cases resulted in the entrance to new geographical markets, all cases resulted in the entrance into a new product category. Moreover, the touchpoints with customers increased in all cases. These touchpoints can be increased shelf space and/or increased channels. Consequently, the availability of PBMSs increased in each case and thus the availability barrier is addressed. More specifically, the availability in the meat section increased in two cases. This of special importance since PBMSs are still badly positioned in the supermarkets while the Interviewees mention that placing PBMSs in the meat shelf will strongly increase the consumption as more customers come in contact with their products. What is more, due to these co-branding partnerships they are also available at fast-food restaurants, cafeterias and company canteens, places where PBMSs were currently neglected. As a result, as whole families and groups of friends can go to places such as the Snack bar and Burger King again due to these market entrances, it also has the potential to addresses the social context barrier. It does so since it becomes easier for individuals to avoid the intake of PBMSs without encountering pressure from their social surroundings and missing out on social activities. However, the fact if new geographical markets or a new product category is entered and if the shelf space increased or the number of channels increased, is partner specific. Consequently, in all three cases the importance of working with an established brand and creating a product with high complementarity is stressed for succeeding in these market entrances.

5.3.1.3 Increased brand awareness

Next to the above-mentioned physical market entrances and access to each other's customer bases, it comes forward from the within-case analysis that all cases resulted in increased brand awareness for the suppliers of PBMSs. Moreover, it becomes clear that this increased brand awareness is of key importance for them since the VB was first mostly known by vegans and vegetarians and fairly unknown among the broader public. Due to the collaborations with Unox, Mora and Burger King, more consumers and mostly meat lovers started to get familiar with the brand. This is also stressed by Interviewee D, who states that "due to co-branding with these companies they really have an entrance to the mind of consumers that they would otherwise never reach.". In addition, all product launches were accompanied with large marketing campaigns, which especially for the VB resulted in a lot of attention and increased familiarity. Besides, it is due to their successful co-branding partnership with Unox and the resulting brand awareness that Mora approached them. So increased brand awareness does not only lead to more familiarity among the public, but also among other brands for potential more partnerships. The within cases show that this increased familiarity will in turn lead to higher purchase intentions among consumers and thus the fact that consumers will actually try the products. This is also mentioned by Interviewee D, who states that "Due to the increased familiarity of the VB among consumers, consumers are likely to try the products at least once and then they have an experience. As a result, the Vegetarian Butcher is top of mind". This is also what happened after their co-branding partnership with Burger King since research shows that after the product launch of the Rebel Whopper, also retail sales went up as people were curious to try their products. This trial is very important for PBMSs as consumers still have negative associations with them and they are still not accepted by a vast majority of the population. Consequently, it is important that consumers get familiar with the brand, try the products and eventually maybe even accept the brand and PBMSs in general. Co-branding turns out to be an excellent tool for this, especially when you are still small and unknown brand. Interviewee B stressed this as well that "Co-branding is especially interesting for increasing brand awareness and market entries. When you reach a certain level of brand awareness you can do more on your own". Therefore, it is again important to engage in partnerships with brand partners that have high levels of brand awareness. An overview of the market benefits and co-branding, its strategic implications and the potential barriers addressed is shown in Table 12.

Table 12: The market benefits of co-branding and the potential barriers addressed

Market benefits	Strategic implications	Potential barriers addressed
Gain access to each other's customer base	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased reach targeted customer segment 	<p><u>4) Availability</u></p> <p>As a result of the market benefits the availability of their products strongly increased in general and in the meat section in particular, which is important for the positioning of their products. Besides, they are now available in fast-food restaurants, cafeterias and company canteens. Consequently, this will address the availability barrier.</p> <p><u>3) Negative associations</u></p> <p>Due to the increased brand awareness the familiarity with their brand increases among consumers. This increased familiarity will in turn address the negative associations and result in trial of the products. In other words, the increased brand awareness results in higher purchase intentions among consumers and can eventually lead to the situation where you are accepted as a brand by the public.</p> <p><u>5) The social context</u></p> <p>By being available at locations such as fast-food chains, it also becomes easier for individuals to avoid the intake of meat without missing out on social occasions.</p>
Entry ticket new markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased availability • New geographical markets • New product category • Increased channels • Increased shelf space 	
Increased brand awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarity • Trial • Acceptance 	

		Therefore, it could address the social context barrier.
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5.3.2 Symbolic benefits

The symbolic benefits are the benefits that arise by leveraging each other’s quality perceptions and brand associations. From the within-case analysis, it can be concluded that all three cases resulted in shared quality perceptions and brand associations, a strengthened brand positioning of the VB and a positive effect on the image of the product category of PBMSs. In this section, these symbolic benefits are discussed more elaborately and their potential for addressing the barriers mentioned in section 5.1.

5.3.2.1 Shared quality perceptions and brand associations

By engaging in co-branding partnerships with MPCs, the VB benefits from the quality perceptions and associations that consumers have with these brands due to spill over effects. For the suppliers of PBMSs this is especially important as they and their products still experience negative associations. Companies such as Unox, Mora and Burger King are such established names that when you collaborate with them as a smaller brand, you capitalize on their brand successes. For instance, on the quality perceptions that consumers have with these brands and their products. These established brands are already in the market for decades and thereby have created feelings of safety and trust among consumers. So, when you collaborate with these brands, the co-branded products will be perceived of the same quality and will benefit from such feelings due to brand signalling. What is more, by “hacking” popular and iconic products that already exist in the market, they also benefit from the quality perceptions and associations of the product itself. For example, the Whopper is such an iconic product that it can be seen as a brand itself. Thus, when creating a plant-based version for such an iconic product, this will bring its own quality perceptions and associations as well. This occurred in all three the cases. Additionally, brand associations such as credibility, fun, convenience, tasty and affordable will also spill-over between the brands. These quality perceptions and associations normally take years to develop. More importantly, these higher quality perceptions and positive associations in turn lead to higher taste perceptions, which for the suppliers of

PBMSs is interesting for addressing both the taste barrier as well as the negative associations barrier. Due to the resulting higher taste perceptions these products function as a great intermediate step to let “Hardcore snackers” come in touch with vegetarian food and so will increase the consumption by addressing the hampering effect that negative associations have on the consumption of PBMSs. The importance of the shared quality perceptions and brand associations due to co-branding is also highlighted by Interviewee C. He mentions that “As a young company as Beyond Meat we were fairly unknown, which also means the public has no perceptions of and associations with your brand. When collaborating with the right partner, let’s say McDonald’s, you can take advantage of theirs and give a powerful signal in a very short notice.” (Interviewee C).

5.3.2.2 Brand positioning

In all three the cases the co-branding partnerships have a positive effect on the brand positioning and product differentiation of the VB due to the above-mentioned spill-over effects. Since they target meat lovers by mimicking a broad variety of existing meat products, collaborating with leading MPCs at national and international level signals to the public that they succeed in this. This is also stressed by Interviewee C as he mentions that “At Beyond Meat we aim to try to mimic meat in order to replace animal meat, so when we collaborate with companies that are pretty much known for their meat products definitely strengthens our proposition”. Therefore, for the suppliers of PBMSs that target meat lovers co-branding with MPCs offers great potential for the positioning of their brand compared to other suppliers of PBMSs, but also compared to the meat industry. A strong brand positioning is important for a brand it’s success and increases customer acceptance of premium prices, which is interesting for potentially addressing the price barrier. Although these higher quality perceptions, positive brand associations and thus stronger brand positioning do not lower the price of PBMSs, consumers might be willing to pay a bit more for these products and so consumption increases. However, again the importance of choosing the right partner is stressed since it can also have negative impact when choosing the wrong partner that does not match your brand proposition.

5.3.2.3 Influence image product category

A third important symbolic benefit that can be derived from all three the cases is the positive effect on the PBMSs product category. A vegetarian lifestyle and plant-based products still suffer from negative associations, especially from die-hard meat lovers who see PBMSs as a “terrifying specter”. Co-branding with brands such as Unox, Mora and Burger King, which are

brands you do not directly associate with plant-based foods, can change this image in a positive manner. In addition, by mimicking such iconic products and stick to the product name, they show that even the most traditional meat snacks can be tasty with plant-based ingredients. As a result of this type of partnerships the conversations in the media about vegetarianism changes in a positive way. Interviewee D stresses this by stating that “The fact that even fast-food chains and other companies that are characterized by meat are introducing plant-based options is very important for the normalisation of plant-based foods and a vegetarian lifestyle”. What is more, as these fast-food chains successfully introduce plant-based meat options on their menu, they encourage each other to do the same. This will in turn again further stimulate this process of becoming more mainstream and normalized. As mentioned in the within cases, it is therefore that VB only wants to collaborate with brands in dominant markets which can help them to get out of this niche market. This is also highlighted in the interview with BM as he states that “We only collaborate with companies that can help us to become more mainstream and leave the plant-based niche market. Co-branding is a perfect tool for succeeding in this and so help to normalize plant-based meat” (Interviewee C). An overview of the symbolic benefits of co-branding, its strategic implications and the potential barriers addressed is shown in table 13.

Table 13: The symbolic benefits of co-branding and the potential barriers addressed

Symbolic benefits	Strategic implications	Potential barriers addressed
Shared quality perceptions and associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher quality perceptions product • Higher quality perceptions brand • Positive brand associations • Higher taste perceptions 	<p>1) <u>Taste</u></p> <p>Due to the higher quality perceptions of both the co-branded product as the brand and the positive brand associations, the taste perceptions of their products will increase. This will address the</p>
Brand positioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthened brand positioning and product differentiation • Higher price premiums 	

<p>Influence image product category</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive influence image PBMSs product category 	<p>taste barrier and so results in increased consumption of their products.</p> <p>2) <u>Price</u> Having a strong brand positioning and product differentiation has the potential to address the price barrier. Although it does not lower the prices of their products, it does increase the customer acceptance of price premiums and thus could result in increased consumption of their products.</p> <p>3) <u>Negative associations</u> As a result of the shared quality perceptions and associations, also the PBMSs category encounters positive associations. This stimulates the normalization process of PBMSs and the PBMM and thus addresses the negative associations barrier.</p>
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5.3.3 Financial benefits

The financial benefits in all cases consist of economies of scale, shared marketing budgets and shared knowledge and technologies. In the following section these benefits are discussed more elaborately on the basis of the within-case analysis and subsequently linked to the potential barriers addressed.

5.3.3.1 Economies of scale

From all cases it comes forward that for the suppliers of PBMSs achieving economies of scale is of key importance. As mentioned in section 5.1.2, the price of PBMSs is after the taste the

most important barrier. These high prices are the result of the high production costs due to low production scales. Due to the market benefits the sales of the VB increased drastically in each case. As a result, the production levels strongly increased which eventually will lead to lower cost prices. The co-branding partnership with Burger King is even more interesting as the margins and volumes in the food service sector are multiple times higher than in the retail sector. These higher production scales are essential for the PBMM as “The sooner we control 20% of the meat market, the sooner plant-based meat substitutes are able to compete with meat from animals due to economies of scale and maybe even become cheaper as plant-based meat in essence is cheaper. When this is the case, we will grow to 80% really quickly” (Visser, 20.12.2018). It is highlighted in all cases that when the prices of PBMSs equals that of meat products, consumer will be more ready to opt for the plant-based option. Moreover, for supermarkets, restaurants and fast-food chains PBMSs will also become more interesting to sell as now selling meat products remains more profitable for them. It is therefore that all Interviewees mentioned economies of scale as an important benefit as it will address the price barrier and thus contributes to making plant-based the norm instead of animal meat since for persuading meat lovers to eat plant-based meat prices have to decrease. This is also stressed by Interviewee C, who states that “Due to high investment costs for our products the prices are too high at the moment, but when demand increases this will change. Co-branding partnerships with for example McDonalds gives an immense boost to our production and so helps us to achieve these economies of scale”. Another interesting aspect that comes forward from the within cases were the shared facilities. In two of the three cases it is mentioned that next to the increasing the production scales, producing these amounts would not even have been possible due to lack of production capacity. For the co-branding partnership with Burger King this became less important due to the acquisition by Unilever. Thus, for smaller brands with low-capacity levels co-branding can function as an important tool for reaching higher production scales without having facilities.

5.3.3.2 Shared marketing budgets

According to the within-cases the shared marketing budgets is an important benefit for the suppliers of PBMSs, especially for the first two partnerships. This can be explained by the fact that in the beginning the VB did not have high marketing budgets as they were still a small brand, so collaborating with companies that did have high marketing budgets was interesting for them in order to increase their brand awareness and compete with the meat industry. The importance of these shared marketing budgets is perfectly explained by Interviewee D as “What

you see is that the brands they work with are typical meat brands with a marketing budget that is 300 times as large as their own. Moreover, these brands want to show to the public that they also do good things by offering a plant-based option, so these will come with huge promotional activities at levels that would just not be financially possible at all for the supplier alone”. However, from the interviews it comes forward that with the acquisition of Unilever this became slightly less important. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that shared marketing budgets are a very important benefit for the suppliers of PBMSs to engage in co-branding partnerships as it in each case leads to more promotional activities at lower costs. Although this benefit does not have the potential to directly address one of the barriers it does strongly contribute to the increased brand awareness benefit. Moreover, as the marketing costs are lower and shared it can be assumed that it can result in lower cost prices and/or higher profit margins.

5.3.3.3 Shared knowledge and technologies

A third financial benefit that can be derived from the within-case analysis is that more appealing products at lower costs are created due to shared knowledge and technologies. Especially the first comes forward as an important benefit. Although lower R&D costs is mentioned in one of the within cases and it is likely that this will be the case, the fact that the partnerships resulted in more appealing and tasty products emerged as more important for the supplier of PBMSs. Subsequently, this will address the taste barrier mentioned in 5.1.1 since the partnering brands each have specific knowledge and technologies that can reinforce each other. Consequently, this will result in enhanced products with high complementarity. Another strategic implication that came forward from one of the within cases is access to more data. This is for the supplier of PBMSs interesting to get a better picture of their clients and so adjust their strategy and marketing activities to this. In Table 14 an overview of the financial benefits of co-branding and the potential barriers addressed is shown.

Table 14: The financial benefits of co-branding and the potential barriers addressed

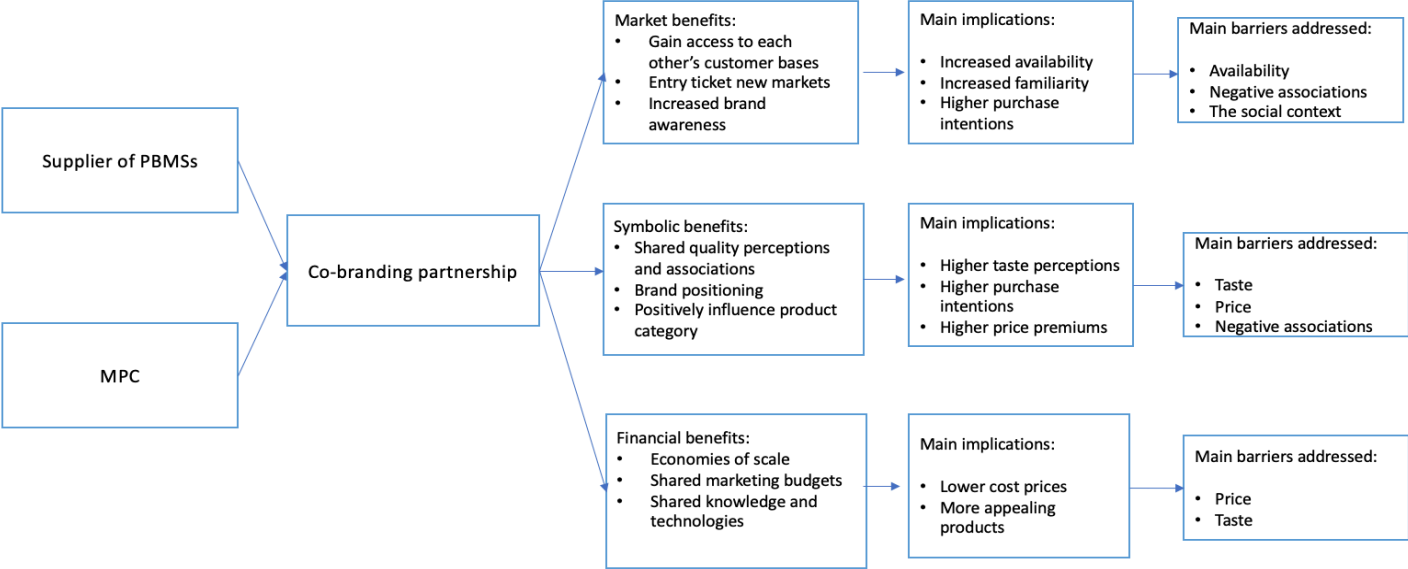
Financial benefits	Strategic implications	Potential barriers addressed
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Economies of scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased sales • Lower production costs • Shared facilities 	<p>1) <u>Price</u></p> <p>Co-branding partnerships with MPCs strongly contribute to achieving economies of scale and so lower production costs. Moreover, shared marketing budgets can result in lower marketing costs, while shared knowledge and technologies have the potential to lower the R&D costs. Consequently, the cost prices of the products will decrease and so address the price barrier.</p> <p>2) <u>Taste</u></p> <p>Due to the shared knowledge and technologies more appealing products with high complementarity are produced that would have been difficult or even impossible alone. Consequently, these more appealing products will address the taste barrier.</p>
Shared marketing budgets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More promotional activities • Lower marketing costs 	
Shared knowledge and technologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More appealing • Lower R&D costs • Data 	

5.3.4 Synthesis of the findings

The aim of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how co-branding partnerships with MPCs could help the suppliers of PBMSs to address the barriers to increased consumption of PBMSs. Based on the barriers that emerged from the findings, the benefits of co-branding with MPCs and the potential of these benefits to address the emerged barriers, a holistic model is created which is illustrated in Figure 4. The Figure visualizes the most important findings shown in Table 12, 13 and 14.

Figure 4: Overview of how the potential benefits of co-branding with MPCs could address the barriers



6. Discussion

In the previous chapter the findings of this study are presented. These give interesting insights in the benefits of co-branding with MPCs and how these could help the suppliers of PBMSs to address the barriers to increased consumption of PBMSs. In this chapter, the theoretical implications of the findings are discussed. Additionally, the limitations of these study are outlined and suggestions for future research are given.

6.1 Theoretical implications

The theoretical implications of this study are divided into three parts. First, the barriers that emergent from the data are discussed in the context of existing literature on the customer acceptance of PBMSs. Secondly, the benefits of co-branding from a strategic brand management perspective are discussed. Lastly, the applicability of co-branding with MPCs as a strategy for the suppliers of PBMSs to address the barriers to increased consumption is discussed.

6.1.1 Barriers to increased consumption

The findings of this study identified five main barriers for the suppliers of PBMSs to increased intake of PBMSs, which differ in the degree of importance.

First, the findings of this study show that the taste of PBMSs is the most important barrier to increased consumption of PBMSs. Therefore, the ethical, health and environmental aspects will not be decisive for these consumers as long as the taste does not equal that of their meat variants, especially when targeting meat lovers. This is also stressed in the literature by Hoek et al. (2011), who state in their paper that for these consumers the negative impacts on our environment, health and animal welfare are not relevant as long as the product attributes such as taste, and sensory appeal do not show more resemblance to animal meat. Additionally, their research showed that “The less consumers were using meat substitutes, the more they wanted these products to be similar to meat” (Hoek et al., 2011, p.662). Therefore, mimicking the taste of meat is complex challenge, especially since meat is strongly appreciated for its unique taste, sensory properties and texture (Hoek et al., 2011; Graca et al., 2019; Michel et al., 2020). This research adds to the discussion in the literature on the fact if the taste or the price of PBMSs is the main barrier to increased consumption. Whereas a large part of the literature argues that the price is more important for PBMSs to get accepted (Mäkiniemi & Vainio, 2014; Konttinen et al. 2013), another vast number of authors argue that the taste needs to improve for being

accepted (Hoek et al., 2011; Graca et al., 2019; Niva et al., 2017). Consequently, the findings of this study add to the latter since they indicate that the high prices of PBMSs are the second most important barrier. Especially compared to the meat industry the prices of PBMSs are too high and so withholds meat lovers from both trying the products as well as eating them on a more regular basis because the price barrier weights more for them than their ethical motivations. Thus, when targeting meat lovers price forms a substantial barrier (Mäkinieniemi & Vainio, 2014; Graca et al., 2019; Michel et al., 2020).

The third important barrier highlighted in the findings of this study are the negative associations that a major part of the population has with PBMSs. In the findings PBMSs are described as “chunks of rubbery tofu”, “old-fashioned” and “boring”. This adds to the study conducted by Michel et al. (2020), which shows that people associate PBMSs with “tofu”, “vegan” and “disgust”. These negative associations of PBMSs have a hampering effect on its consumption, either by refusing to eat PBMSs or the confirmation when eating a less tasty products. The fact that some consumers still think that the daily intake of meat is required for their health and it’s given superiority status is also discussed in the literature. Research on PBMSs shows that plant-based products are associated with weaknesses, usually woman and oversensitivity (Pohjolainen et al., 2015; Potts & Parry, 2010), while meat is associated with strength, masculine power and as a primary source of protein (Hoek et al., 2017; Pohjolainen et al., 2015).

The fourth identified barrier is the availability of PBMSs and thus the reach of the suppliers of PBMSs. The findings of this study highlight that the availability of PBMSs is still problematic in most hospitality venues, but also in company canteens, events and schools. Subsequently, it is hard for the suppliers of PBMSs to reach more of their targeted customer segment, namely the meat lover. Although this is slightly changing in recent years and the availability in the supermarket is strongly increasing, it is mentioned that the vegetarian shelf is still badly located in the supermarkets most of the time. These aspects are also highlighted in the literature. Whereas Pohjolainen et al. (2015) and Niva et al. (2017) state that the availability and offering of PBMSs is still limited in most public venues such as workplace canteens, school canteens and public cafeterias, research of Curtain and Grafenauer (2019) shows that the shelf space for PBMSs is rather limited and that positioning them differently would be very beneficial. Consequently, this study adds to the cry for better positioning of PBMSs in supermarkets as multiple interviewees mentioned that this would be beneficial for the sales of PBMSs. Research in America confirms this as it shows that when PBMSs are positioned on the meat shelf between its meat variants, the sales increased with 23% (Trouw, 2020).

The fifth barrier identified is the social context. The findings of this study indicate that meat is still the central element in most traditional events such as Christmas and is regarded as an essential element in most gastronomic cultures. Therefore, it is difficult to avoid the intake of animal meat for individuals as their social context strongly influences their dietary choices. The resulting social pressure on these individuals works counterproductive. This is difficult for them as sharing food serves a broad variety of important functions and that these meals most of the time prominently feature meat products (Markowski & Roxburgh, 2019; Niva et al., 2017). Although in this research the social context barrier seems not that substantial, a lot of research suggests it is. Multiple scholars argue that the resulting fear of stigmatization is perceived as one of the main barriers to increased consumption. They argue that individuals who want to avoid meat in their diet are stigmatized for severally disrupting the social conventions that are related to food (Leo & Worsley, 2003; Potts & Parry, 2010; Markowski & Roxburgh, 2019; Niva et al., 2017; Pohjolainen et al., 2015). A possible reason that this did not come forward to this extent in this study could be due to the fact that these barriers strongly differ between socio-demographic values (Pohjolainen et al., 2015). As for this research mostly data from the Netherlands is used and food innovations and thus PBMSs are generally more accepted here than in other countries and cultures (Hoek et al., 2013), this could explain this difference.

6.1.2 Benefits of co-branding

The findings of this study secondly touch upon the literature of co-branding. Since currently the benefits of co-branding are scattered across multiple research domains, this research adds to the literature on co-branding by providing a clear overview of the potential benefits from a strategic brand management perspective. As described in the theoretical framework and as structured in the findings chapter, the benefits are classified in three main categories. In this section the benefits that emerged from the findings are discussed in the context of existing literature.

6.1.2.1 Market benefits

Regarding the market benefits the findings of this study show that co-branding is a successful strategy for gaining access to each other's customer bases, entering new markets and increasing brand awareness.

First of all, the findings of this study show that co-branding results in access to each other's customer bases. This is in line with the studies conducted by Leuthesser et al. (2003)

and Uggla and Asberg (2010). Both studies mention access to each other's customer bases as an important benefit of co-branding. Moreover, with co-branding customer segments can be reached which would have been difficult or not possible to reach alone. Leuthesser et al. (2003) stressed this as well and proposes two ways for co-branding to be used effectively. On the one hand, it can be effectively used as a market-development strategy, which means that the targeted customer segment of the co-branded product and the partnering brand is substantially different than the supplier its own existing customer base. On the other hand, it can be used as a market penetration strategy, that is when the targeted market of the co-branded product and partnering brand is substantially the same (Leuthesser et al., 2003). Therefore, in this study co-branding is effectively used by the supplier of PBMSs as a market development strategy to increase their reach to the meat lover. Thus, co-branding can be regarded as a successful market development strategy for brands.

Secondly, from the findings it comes forward that co-branding can be used as a strategy for entering new markets. These markets can be new geographical markets, a new product category or both. The findings show that next to the importance of entering these new markets, working with established names is very important for succeeding in this. This is also in line with the research of Uggla and Asberg (2010) who state that by leveraging the brand awareness of the master brand, the partnering brand can extend into a new product category or market. Therefore, collaborating with an established brand useful. This is also highlighted in the interviews that for entering new markets and product categories where the entering brand is still quite unknown, co-branding with key players in the market maximizes the chances of success. Especially when consumers may question the entering brand its abilities (Abratt & Motlana, 2002).

The fact that the above-mentioned benefits result in increased brand awareness, increased familiarity and so higher purchase intentions is also grounded in both the findings of this study as well as in the literature (Uggla & Asberg, 2010; Leuthesser et al., 2003). The increased familiarity will lead to higher purchase intentions among consumers since the findings show that it also resulted in the trial of their products. The findings of this study extend the importance of the increased brand awareness resulting from co-branding since it shows that it can even led to acceptance as a brand when this first experience is positive.

6.1.2.2 Symbolic benefits

The symbolic benefits of this study are linked to the effects of co-branding on a company it's brand equity, brand positioning and the product category it is in. Following the approach of

Aaker (1991), a brand equity consists out of the brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations and brand loyalty dimension. Since the findings show the potential of co-branding to improve three out of the four dimensions, co-branding offers interesting possibilities for brands to improve their brand equity. This is line with the research conducted by Washburn et al. (2000), which states that co-branding can successfully be used to increase the brand equities of the partnering brands.

The effect that co-branding has on the brand awareness dimension is already discussed in the section above, in this section the benefits that arise due to increased quality perceptions and brand associations are shortly discussed. The findings show that co-branding has the potential to enhance the quality perceptions and associations of the co-branded product, the partnering brands and the product category. This is in line with the literature on co-branding as it makes the products and partnering brands look similar in quality due to spill over effects (Rao & Ruekert, 1994; Abrat & Motlana, 2002). The fact that in all cases plant-based versions of successful products are created is an interesting insight for the literature to enhance the changes of success for co-branding as this turned out to be a successful aspect. Furthermore, the findings of this study suggest that the benefits of co-branding seem larger for the supplier of PBMSs than for the MPCs. Consequently, this research confirms the stream of literature that argue that smaller brands benefit more from co-branding than the established brands (Simonin & Ruth, 1998). However, the findings also show that although these effects are larger for the smaller brand, it also offers significant benefits for the larger brand. Again, the importance of the partner selection is stressed in the findings since it is mentioned that regarding the quality perceptions and brand associations, the selection of a wrong partner could result in multiple problems, such as a deteriorated connection to your customers (Uggla & Åsberg, 2010; Palmatier et al., 2016). This also comes forward from this study as by collaborating with MPCs, they lost connection with a part of the vegan and vegetarian customer segment.

Furthermore, the findings show that co-branding is a useful tool for the positioning of your brand and the differentiation of your products. When choosing the right partner, it will result in a stronger brand positioning and increased product differentiation which is important for a company it's success. This allows for higher customer acceptance for premium prices, which is in line with the research conducted by Uggla and Asberg (2010).

6.1.2.3 Financial benefits

The financial benefits of this study consist of economies of scale, shared marketing budgets and shared knowledge and technologies.

From the findings it comes forward that co-branding will result in increased sales and so contributes to achieving economies of scale. Consequently, it will result in lower production costs, which is also stressed in the current literature (Uggla & Asberg, 2010; Blackett & Russell, 2000). An interesting aspect that is not highlighted in the current literature on co-branding is the shared facilities. These turned out to be of special interest for the VB in the beginning as they suffered from limited capacity levels at that time. So, the findings highlight the potential of co-branding for smaller brands that face capacity problems but do want to increase their production scales. This is currently neglected in the literature on co-branding.

The second important benefit that came forward from the findings is the shared marketing budgets. This benefit is especially interesting for the smaller brand as they suffer from a lack of budgets for marketing purposes, which is in line with the research of Chiambaretto et al. (2016).

Lastly, whereas the literature suggests that lower R&D costs are an important benefit of co-branding (Chiambaretto et al., 2016), the findings do not highlight this to the same extent as it is only mentioned in one of the three cases. On the other hand, the benefit of more appealing products due to shared knowledge and technologies is mentioned in all the cases as an important benefit. This is in line with the research conducted by Basharat and Langan (2014), who also mentions that these more appealing products will in turn increase the customer satisfaction.

6.1.3 Co-branding as a strategy to address the barriers

As currently little research is done on strategies for the suppliers of PBMSs to address the barriers to increased consumptions of PBMSs, this research proposed co-branding as a potential strategy to do so. From the findings it can be concluded that co-branding with MPCs has the potential to address the five derived barriers to increased consumption.

First, the benefits of co-branding with MPCs show the potential to address the taste barrier in two ways. On the one hand, by sharing each other's knowledge and technologies more appealing products with high complementarity are created that show higher resemblance to their meat variants. Consequently, this will increase the customer satisfaction and so addresses the taste barrier. This is also highlighted in the literature as this suggests that when PBMSs show higher resemblance to animal meat products, the consumption will strongly increase (Hoek et al., 2011; Niva et al., 2017; Michel et al., 2020). Additionally, the enhanced quality perceptions and positive associations due to the spill over effects are essential for the suppliers of PBMSs. These will influence the taste perceptions of the products and the brand which in turn will stimulate the consumption of PBMSs. This is also highlighted in the research

conducted by Graca et al. (2019), who argue that higher taste perceptions of the products will lead to increased consumption of PBMSs.

Secondly, it shows two approaches to address the price barrier for the suppliers of PBMSs. Since co-branding can result in lower cost prices due to economies of scale, potential lower marketing costs and potential lower R&D costs, it could address the price barrier. Consequently, when the prices of PBMSs will decrease the consumption will increase, especially among meat lovers for which the higher prices of PBMSs remains decisive (Mäkiniemi & Vainio, 2014; Graca et al., 2019). Additionally, as the brand positioning can be strengthened with co-branding it can also result in higher customer acceptance of premium prices. Although this does not lower the prices of PBMS, it could result in increased consumption as consumers are willing to pay a bit extra for brands with a strong brand positioning.

Co-branding with leading MPCs can also address the negative associations barrier in two different ways. First, the increased brand awareness will in turn result in increased familiarity, which has the potential to address the negative associations as people come more often in contact the products. This is also mentioned by Hoek et al. (2011) as their research shows that next to the taste of meat substitutes the relatively unfamiliarity with these products also forms an important barrier. Increasing the availability by entering new markets and product categories will increase familiarization with plant-based products and contribute to the development of a more positive image of PBMSs (Niva et al., 2017; Michel et al., 2020). Second, as a result of the spill-over effects between the partnering brands, the quality perceptions and positive associations will enhance the associations that consumers have with PBMSs, the suppliers of PBMSs and the PBMSs product category in general. These enhanced quality perceptions and associations are essential for the suppliers of PBMSs as this will influence the taste experience of the products and when shared with others, contribute to a positive attitude towards PBMSs (Graca et al., 2019).

The fourth barrier, the availability of PBMSs, can also be addressed by the suppliers of PBMSs with engaging in co-branding partnerships with MPCs. As co-branding is an effective strategy for reaching new customer segments, the entrance of new geographical markets and new product categories, the availability of PBMSs will increase. By entering the meat shelves the positioning of PBMSs in the supermarket improves and it becomes easier for the suppliers of PBMSs to reach the meat lover, which will result in increased consumption of PBMSs (Curtain & Grafenauer, 2019).

The last barrier derived from the data and potentially addressed with co-branding is the social context. As the availability increases in more food locations, whole friend groups and families with a vegetarian among them are able to go to these places again. This is interesting for the suppliers of PBMSs as existing literature stresses the importance of the social context for individuals. For example, research shows that family, partners and/or friends are often unwilling to change their habits for people who try to avoid the intake of meat and so form an important barrier (Lea et al., 2006b; Hoek et al., 2017; O’Keefe et al., 2016; Graca et al., 2019). With the availability in more places and product categories, this becomes easier. Finally, the familiarity will increase as explained which subsequently will contribute to a more positive attitude towards PBMSs. The latter in turn could create a social context which is favourable to increased consumption of PBMSs, which is also mentioned by Graca et al. (2019).

6.2 Limitations and suggestions future research

The findings of this research resulted in interesting insights. However, the study also has its limitations, which are discussed in this section and subsequently suggestions for future research are given.

First, this study aimed to research how co-branding with MPCs could help the suppliers of PBMSs to address the barriers to increased consumption of PBMSs. The findings give an interesting understanding about how this could be the case, which is line with the exploratory nature of this study. However, for future research it would be interesting to actually measure the benefits and the effects that these benefits have on the barriers. As mentioned, the barriers to increased consumption in this research are on the basis of second order data. Therefore, for gaining a deeper understanding of the effects of co-branding on the dimensions of brand equity and on aspects such as taste perceptions, a customer perspective would be interesting next to the supplier and industry perspective. More specifically, quantitative research would be interesting to measure the actual effects and provide numbers instead of descriptions.

Secondly, although the three cases give a comprehensive overview of the benefits of co-branding, for future research more cases would be interesting as the benefits of co-branding differ per partnership. Therefore, insights from more suppliers and corresponding co-branding partnerships would be interesting as this research was now mainly focussed on one particular supplier. As this was a Dutch supplier, most of the collected data was focussed on that supplier and on the Netherlands. Consequently, the scope of this study and so the generalizability of the results is limited. However, the interviews with the industry experts partly rectifies this.

Additionally, the three chosen cases in this research can be regarded as successful co-branding partnerships since in all three the partnerships value was created for each member in the partnership (Besharat & Langan, 2014). Thus, further research on the success factors of these cases would be interesting, such as the partner selection process. More research on the partner selection process would be interesting and useful as the importance of a well-chosen partner brand is stressed in the findings as well as in the literature as crucial for co-branding to be successful.

Extending the time span would also be interesting for future research. Since all partnerships are established in a relatively short period ago, extending the timespan would give interesting insights since co-branding also involves several risks for the partnering brands. For example, scandals and bad publicity which are difficult to assess in advance. Moreover, it could be possible that short after the introduction consumers are very enthusiastic about the partnership and the co-branded product, but that this calmly fades away and it still becomes a failure. As a result, extending the time span could increase the understanding of co-branding and give important insights in how the benefits of co-branding evolve over time.

Lastly, this research mostly focussed on the benefits of co-branding with MPCs from the supplier perspective. To get a more holistic view of the benefits of co-branding, data from the partnering brands about these benefits would be interesting. Additionally, the findings of this study suggest that although the benefits are larger for the smaller brand, it also offers significant benefits for the larger brand. More information about these significant benefits would be interesting and useful.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to identify the barriers to increased consumption of PBMSs and to investigate how co-branding strategies with MPCs could help the suppliers of PBMSs to address these barriers. For this purpose, one supplier of PBMSs was chosen and three corresponding co-branding partnerships with MPCs were selected. Furthermore, this study is of exploratory nature employing a comparative case study design. Following an abductive approach, archival data was collected about the partnerships and interviews with employees of the VB and industry experts were conducted. Subsequently, the collected data was analysed in order to answer the following **research question and sub-questions**:

How could co-branding with meat processing companies help the suppliers of plant-based meat substitutes to address the barriers to increased consumption of plant-based meat substitutes?

Sub-question 1: What are the barriers to increased consumption of plant-based meat substitutes?

Sub-question 2: How could the benefits of co-branding with meat processing companies help the suppliers of plant-based meat substitutes to address these barriers?

To answer the first sub-question, the findings identified five main barriers to increased consumption of PBMSs which differ in their degree of importance.

First of all, the taste is perceived as the most important barrier to increased consumption of PBMSs in this research. Although the negative impacts of meat consumption are widely known recent years, these will not be decisive for the vast majority of the population as long as the taste of PBMSs does not show more resemblance to the taste animal meat. Secondly, the high prices of PBMSs are identified as second most important barrier to increased intake of PBMSs, especially compared to meat products. The findings highlight that whereas vegetarians and vegans are willing to pay higher prices for PBMSs due to their ethical motivations, meat lovers still attach great value to the price. A third important barrier highlighted in the findings are the negative associations that consumers have with PBMSs. Whereas PBMSs are associated with terms as boring, old-fashioned and chunks of rubbery tofu, meat is associated with superiority, masculinity and power. These associations have a hampering effect on the consumption of

PBMSs, both prior as after consumption. The fourth barrier mentioned in the findings is the availability of PBMSs. The findings indicate that although the availability of PBMSs is increasing in recent years, it remains problematic. While in most supermarkets the growing vegetarian shelf is still badly located, in most restaurants, cafeterias, events and public institutions they are still absent. The last barrier that emerged from the findings is the social context. Since meat is still prominently featured in meals and sharing meals functions as an essential social activity, individuals find it hard to decrease their intake of meat.

To answer the second sub-question, the benefits of co-branding with MPCs are identified and subsequently linked to the potential barriers addressed. Following the three main benefits outlined in the theoretical framework, co-branding with MPCs shows high potential for addressing the above-mentioned barriers for the suppliers of PBMSs.

First, the market benefits consist of gaining access to each other's customer bases, the entrance to new markets and increased brand awareness. By sharing each other's customer bases and the entrance to new markets, the reach of the suppliers of PBMSs to meat lovers increases and so does the availability of PBMSs. Moreover, the brand awareness increases and so does the familiarity with the brand and PBMSs in general. By increasing the familiarity with PBMSs, the negative associations appear to decrease. Additionally, by entering new product categories such as the snack and fast-food industry, whole families can go to these places again and thus the social context barrier could be addressed.

Secondly, the symbolic benefits consist of shared quality perceptions and associations, strengthened brand positioning and positive influence on the image of the PBMSs product category. By collaborating with leading MPCs, higher quality perceptions and positive associations spill-over between the brands. Moreover, by hacking "iconic" meat products also quality perceptions and associations of the product will spill-over. Subsequently, whereas PBMSs are perceived as bad quality and suffered from negative associations, now they encounter increased quality perceptions and positive associations such as convenience, credibility and trust from the MPCs due to co-branding. As a result, the taste perceptions of their products and PBMSs increases which in turn could address the taste barrier. Since the brand positioning of the suppliers of PBMSs strengthens as collaborating with leading MPCs confirms that they succeed in mimicking animal meat products, consumers will be more likely to accept premium prices. Although this does not result in lower prices, it could increase the acceptance of the higher prices of PBMSs and so address the price barrier. Furthermore, the spill-over effects will also positively affect the negative image of the PBMSs product category.

Lastly, the financial benefits highlighted in this study are economies of scale, shared marketing budgets and shared knowledge and technologies. Collaborating with MPCs contributes to achieve economies of scale due to increased sales, but also the fact that facilities are shared. When economies of scale will be reached, the cost prices will decrease and thus the price barrier will be addressed. The benefits of shared marketing budgets appeared to result in more promotional activities at lower costs, which was especially useful in the beginning when the supplier of PBMSs was still a smaller brand. Although this does not directly address a barrier, it does strongly contribute to the increased brand awareness benefit and it can be assumed that lower marketing costs contributes to lower cost prices and/or higher profit margins. What is more, by sharing each other's knowledge and technologies more appealing products with high complementarity can be created that show high resemblance to meat product and thus addresses the taste barrier.

All in all, the findings of this study contribute to literature on PBMSs by giving an overview of the current barriers to increased consumption of PBMSs, which are currently fragmented in the literature. Moreover, it proposes co-branding with MPCs as a strategy to address these barriers for the suppliers of PBMSs. Little research on strategies for the suppliers of PBMSs to address these barriers is currently done. Additionally, by proposing co-branding as a strategy to address the barriers, this study contributes to the literature on co-branding. It does so by giving an overview of the benefits of co-branding from a strategic brand management perspective, which at the moment are scattered across multiple research domains. The contribution to society is due to the fact that increased consumption of PBMSs instead of animal meat shows high potential to address environmental, human health and animal welfare problems that we are currently facing. This paper ends with giving several suggestions for future research, which vary from including first order data from customers, expanding the number of cases, more research on the success factors of these cases such as partner selection, extending the time span of the research and including the MPCs. These all will contribute to a better understanding of co-branding and thus on its potential to address the barriers to increased consumption of PBMSs.

8. Acknowledgments

By this way I want to thank everyone who supported me during the process of writing this thesis. Although multiple setbacks in these difficult times, I am really proud of the result. However, I would have never accomplished in this without the support I received. First, I want to thank my supervisor Dr. Taneli Vaskelainen for all his help throughout the process, both as a supervisor and on personal level. Second, I would like to thank the interviewees for sharing their knowledge and providing me with interesting information. Lastly, I would like to thank my family, roommates and friends for their support.

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10. Appendix

10.1 Appendix A: Images of the co-branded products





10.2 Appendix B: Interview guide suppliers

Interview Guide | Vegetarian Butcher & Beyond Meat

Thesis research question:

“What are the co-branding strategies of the suppliers of plant-based meat substitutes?”

Allereerst hartelijk dank voor je tijd en medewerking. Het interview zal tussen de 30 en maximaal 60 minuten duren. Wees gerust dat je persoonlijke gegevens vertrouwelijk worden gehouden. Daarnaast is deelname niet verplicht en mag de deelnemer het interview altijd stopzetten. De inhoud van het interview wordt gezamenlijk gepresenteerd in de vorm van een MSc. Scriptie, zonder je persoonlijke gegevens. Als laatst zou ik willen vragen of het ok is als ik het interview opneem?

Ik zal nu kort mijzelf en mijn afstudeeronderzoek introduceren. Ik ben Hendrik Hagedoorn, 25 jaar oud en woonachtig in Amsterdam. Ik zit in de laatste fase van mijn tweejarige master Sustainable Business and Innovation in Utrecht. Ik heb tijdens mijn master een sterke interesse in de plantaardige vleesvervanger industrie en businessmodellen gekregen. Daarom ben ik onderzoek gaan doen naar de co-branding strategieën van de producenten van plantaardige vleesvervangers. Hiervoor heb ik Beyond Meat en de Vegetarische Slager als casestudies gekozen. Dit doe ik aan de hand van het analyseren van persberichten, online nieuws artikelen en interviews met werknemers van de desbetreffende bedrijven.

Het interview is als volgt ingedeeld, na een korte introductie zullen we het hebben over Vegetarian Butcher / Beyond Meat en de plantaardige vlees industrie. Vervolgens zullen jullie co-branding partnerships behandeld worden en zullen de criteria voor het aangaan van deze partnerships besproken worden om vervolgens het interview af te sluiten.

1. Introductie

- a) Zou je willen beginnen met het kort introduceren van jezelf?
- b) Een korte introductie van Vegetarian Butcher / Beyond Meat (Grootte van het bedrijf, aantal werknemers, visie, etc.)?
- c) Een korte samenvatting van je werkzaamheden als (positie)?

2. Vegetarian Butcher / Beyond Meat

- a) Wat is de waarde propositie van jullie producten?
- b) Is deze anders dan die van jullie concurrenten? Zo ja, waarin verschilt het?
- c) Wie zien jullie als jullie concurrenten?
- d) Welke customer segmenten proberen jullie voornamelijk te bereiken?

3. (Plantaardige) vleesvervanger industrie

- a) Wat zijn jouw verwachtingen voor de komende jaren betreft de markt voor plantaardige vleesvervangers? Ook ten opzichte van de vleesindustrie?
- b) Hoe zou je over het algemeen de consumenten van plantaardige vleesvervangers typeren? Zie je hier een verandering in?
- c) Wat zijn volgens jou de voornaamste barrières voor vleesvervangers?

4. Co-branding partnerships

In een korte tijd hebben jullie een grote naamsbekendheid weten op te bouwen en een exponentiele groei doorgemaakt.

- a) Hebben jullie co-branding partnerships hier een bijdrage aan geleverd?
- b) Helpen deze partnerships bij het bereiken van jullie customer segmenten?
- c) Spelen de partnerships een rol in jullie productdifferentiatie ten opzichte van zowel andere vleesvervangers als de vleesindustrie?
- d) Hebben deze partnerships een invloed op jullie merk reputatie?

Lang heerste er een negatief stigma rond vegetarisch en veganistisch vlees doordat het werd beschouwd als inferieur ten opzichte van echt vlees en onhandig tijdens het koken.

- e) Zien jullie hierin een rol weggelegd voor jullie co-branding partnerships? Zoals die met Burger King?
- f) Hoe groot schat je het belang van co-branding partnerships met vlees bedrijven in het algemeen in voor de vegetarische vleesindustrie?

5. Criteria voor het aangaan van co-branding partnerships

- a) Welke aspecten kijken jullie naar bij het aangaan van nieuwe partnerships?
- b) Vinden jullie hierbij bepaalde aspecten belangrijker dan andere?
- c) Wat is uiteindelijk de belangrijkste motivatie is voor de Vegetarische Slager om zulke co-branding partnerships aan te gaan?

6. Einde

- a) Is er iets dat je toe zou willen voegen wat nog niet is besproken?

- b) Is er iemand anders waarvan je denkt dat ze mij zou kunnen helpen en wie ik zou kunnen interviewen?
- c) Zou ik contact met je op kunnen nemen als ik opheldering nodig heb over een besproken kwestie?

Dan wil ik je hartelijk danken voor je medewerking en het delen van jouw kennis. Indien je geïnteresseerd bent in het ontvangen van het eindonderzoek in oktober, deel ik deze graag met je!

10.3 Appendix C: Interview guide industry experts

Interview Guide | Industry Experts

Thesis research question:

“What are the co-branding strategies of the suppliers of plant-based meat substitutes?”

Allereerst hartelijk dank voor je tijd en medewerking. Het interview zal tussen de 30 en maximaal 60 minuten duren. Wees gerust dat je persoonlijke gegevens vertrouwelijk worden gehouden. Daarnaast is deelname niet verplicht en mag de deelnemer het interview altijd stopzetten. De inhoud van het interview wordt gezamenlijk gepresenteerd in de vorm van een MSc. Scriptie, zonder je persoonlijke gegevens. Als laatst zou ik willen vragen of het ok is als ik het interview opneem?

Ik zal nu kort mijzelf en mijn afstudeeronderzoek introduceren. Ik ben Hendrik Hagedoorn, 25 jaar oud en woonachtig in Amsterdam. Ik zit in de laatste fase van mijn tweejarige master Sustainable Business and Innovation in Utrecht. Ik heb tijdens mijn master een sterke interesse in de plantaardige vleesvervanger industrie en businessmodellen gekregen. Daarom ben ik onderzoek gaan doen naar de co-branding strategieën van de producenten van plantaardige vleesvervangers. Hiervoor heb ik Beyond Meat en de Vegetarische Slager als casestudies gekozen. Dit doe ik aan de hand van het analyseren van persberichten, online nieuws artikelen en interviews met werknemers van de desbetreffende bedrijven.

Het interview is als volgt ingedeeld, na een korte introductie zullen we het hebben over de plantaardige vleesvervanger industrie en daaropvolgend zullen we het belang van (co-branding) partnerships bespreken. Hierna zullen de mogelijke criteria voor het aangaan van deze partnerships besproken worden om vervolgens het interview af te sluiten.

1. Introductie

- a) Zou je willen beginnen met het kort introduceren van jezelf?
- b) Een korte introductie van (Bedrijf) (Grootte van het bedrijf, aantal werknemers, visie, etc.)?
- c) Een korte samenvatting van je werkzaamheden als (positie)?

2. De plantaardige vleesindustrie

- a) Wat zijn jouw verwachtingen voor de komende jaren betreft de markt voor plantaardige vleesvervangers? Ook ten opzichte van de vleesindustrie?
- b) Hoe zou je over het algemeen de consumenten van plantaardige vleesvervangers typeren? Zie je hier een verandering in?

- c) Wat zie jij nog als main barriers voor een transitie naar meer plantaardige proteïne?

3. De Vegetarische Slager en Beyond Meat

- a) Wat maakt deze twee plantaardige vleesproducenten zo uniek? Zowel in termen van hun producten als hun strategieën.
- b) Wat vindt u van andere plantaardige vleesproducenten?

4. Co-branding partnerships

- a) Hebben hun partnership strategieën een belangrijk aandeel gespeeld in hun groei denk je?

Voor dit onderzoek ben ik geneigd om mij te focussen op “co-branding” channel partnerships en de motivaties hierachter. Dit zijn partnerships waar zij samen met een ander merk een product op de markt brengen waarbij beide merklogo's te zien zijn of genoemd worden. Bijvoorbeeld de Rebel Whopper met Burger King, de vegetarische snacks met Mora en Vegetarische Gehacktballetjes met Unox.

Motivations & benefits:

- b) Helpen deze partnerships bij het bereiken van hun/nieuwe customer segmenten en markets?
- c) Hebben deze partnerships een belangrijke invloed op hun naamsbekendheid? En reputatie?
- d) Zijn complementary resources and skills een belangrijke reden voor ze?
- e) Helpen deze partnerships bij het bereiken van economies of scale (schaalvoordelen)?

Lang heerste er een negatief stigma rond vegetarisch en veganistisch vlees doordat het werd beschouwd als inferieur ten opzichte van echt vlees en onhandig tijdens het koken. Gelukkig is dit tegenwoordig aan het veranderen.

- f) Zie jij hierin een rol weggelegd voor dit soort co-branding partnerships? Zoals die met Burger King?
- g) Hoe groot schat je het belang van co-branding partnerships met vlees bedrijven in het algemeen in voor de plantaardige vleesindustrie?

5. Motivaties/Criteria voor het aangaan van co-branding partnerships

- a) Zijn er nog andere motivaties/aspecten denk jij die belangrijk zijn om naar te kijken bij het aangaan van nieuwe partnerships?

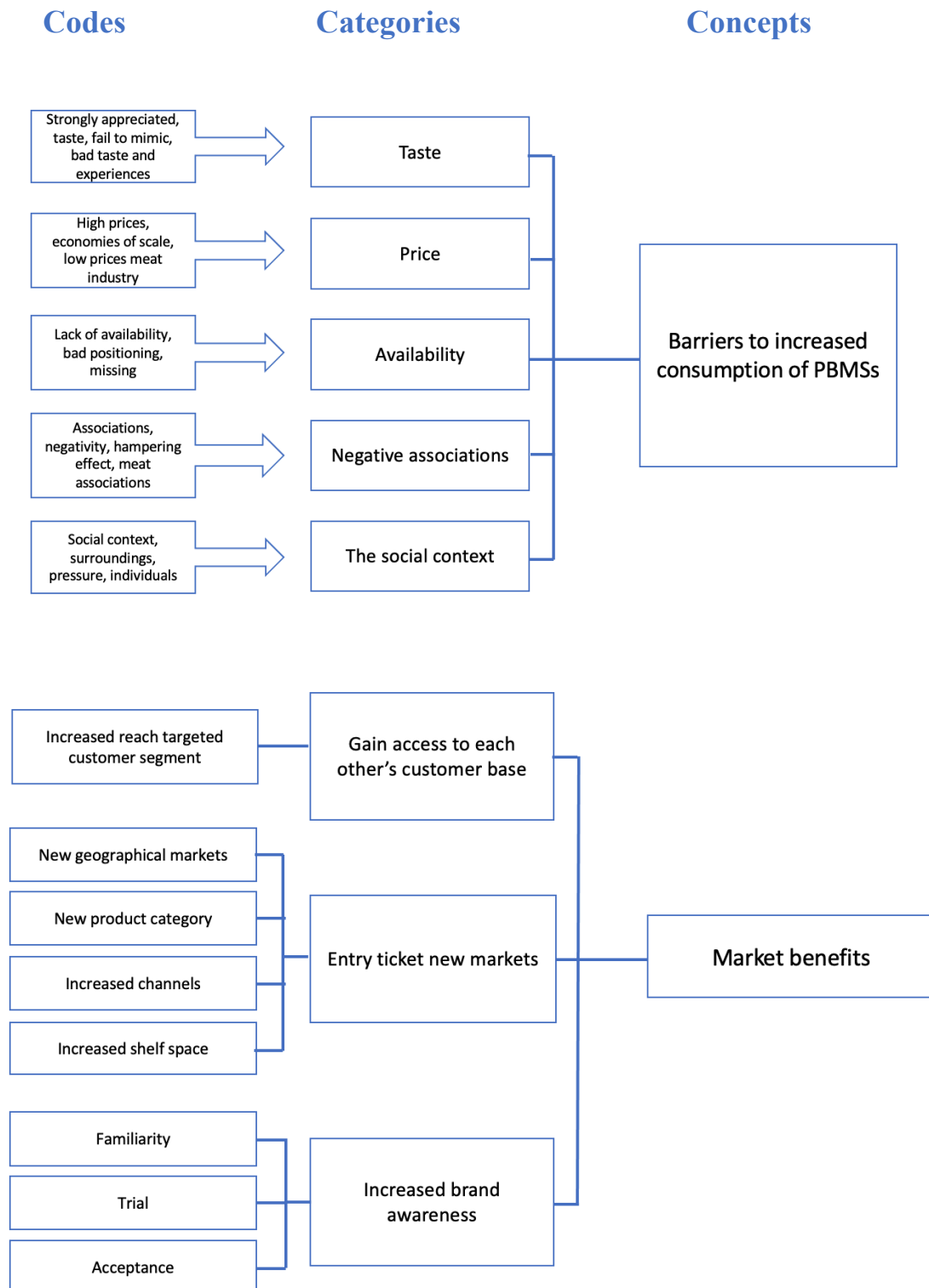
- b) Zijn er hierbij bepaalde aspecten belangrijker dan andere?
- c) Wat denk jij dat het belangrijkste motivatie(s) is voor de Vegetarische Slager en Beyond Meat om zulke co-branding partnerships aan te gaan?

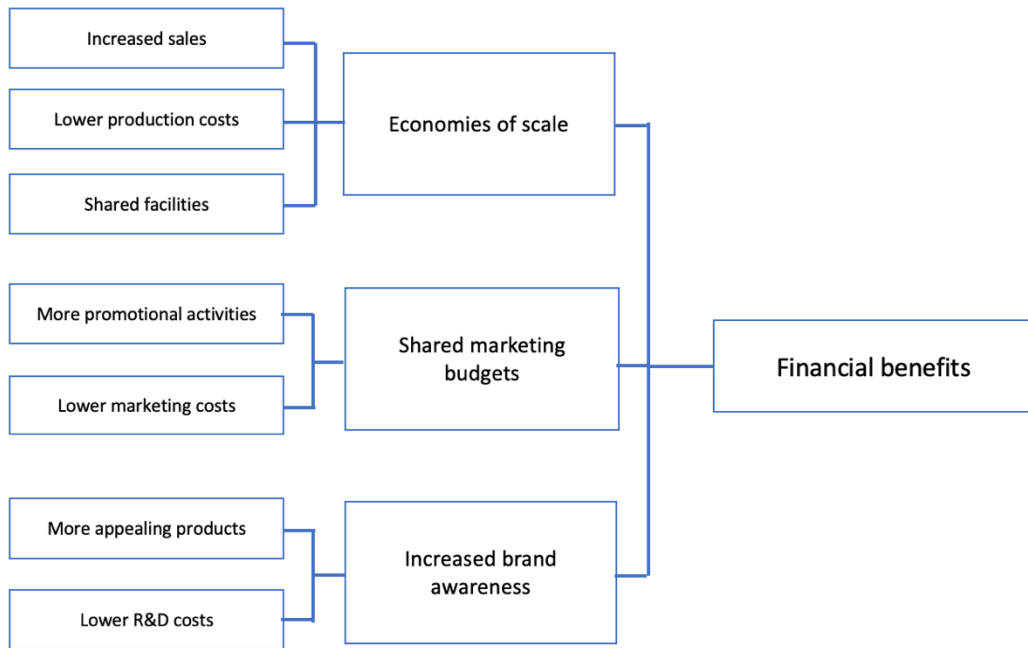
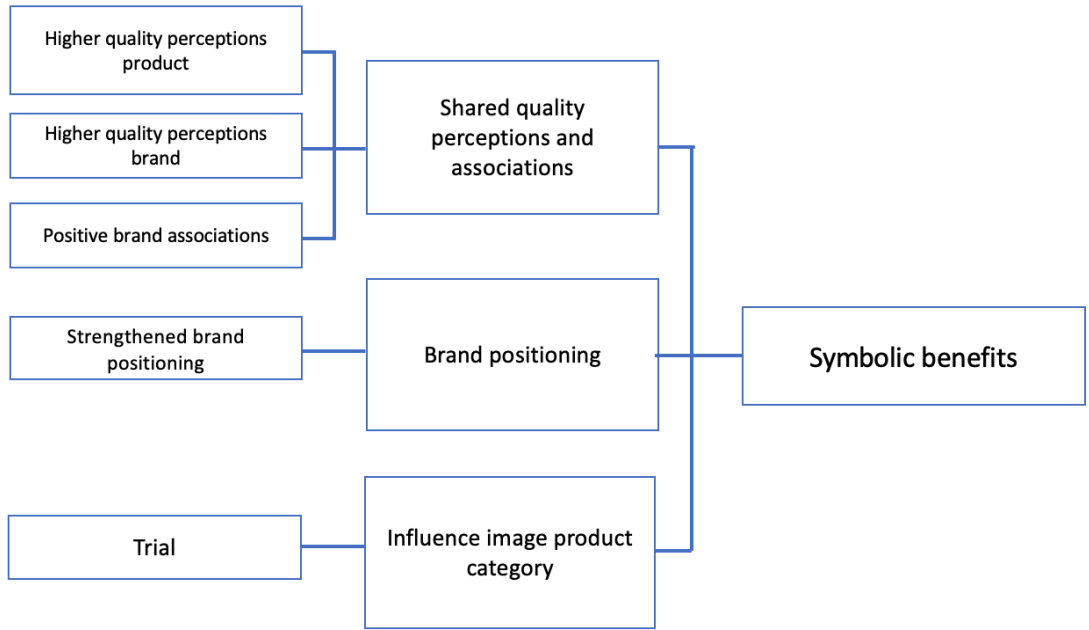
6. Einde

- a) Is er iets dat je toe zou willen voegen wat nog niet is besproken?
- b) Is er iemand anders waarvan je denkt dat ze mij zou kunnen helpen en wie ik zou kunnen interviewen?
- c) Zou ik contact met je op kunnen nemen als ik opheldering nodig heb over een besproken kwestie?

Dan wil ik je hartelijk danken voor je medewerking en het delen van jouw kennis. Indien je geïnteresseerd bent in het ontvangen van het eindonderzoek in oktober, deel ik deze graag met je!

10.4 Appendix D: Final coding scheme





10.5 Appendix E: Cited news articles and press releases

Date	Title of the article	Author
19.11.2018	Hoe De Vegetarische Slager vleesvervangers sexy maakt	Matthijs van der Pol
20-12-2018	Plantaardig vlees wordt groter dan vlees van dieren	Marlou Visser
23.10.2018	(interview) Marketeer Vegetarische Slager: "Foodtech helpt wereld te verbeteren"	Peter van Woensel Kooy,
17.07.2017	Vlees maken zonder dieren	Van Dinther
09.10.2018	Bedrijven zien brood in kunstvlees	Ilona de Lange
07.03.2020	Dit is de beste vegetarische rookworst uit de supermarkt	Matthijs Meeuwssen
12.04.2020	‘Snacks zonder vlees - de lékkere dan - gaan enorme vlucht nemen’	Ellen Den Hollander
12.10.2016	Zakje dat recht van de soepproductielijn lijkt af te komen	Hanna Bijl
20.12.2018	Unilever ziet brood in vegaslager	Marc van den Eerenbeemt,
30.09.2016	Marianne Thieme blijkt de ultieme marketingtool voor het miljoenenbedrijf van haar man	Stijn van Wonderen
08.06.2017	De Vegetarische Slager vat de koe ‘anders’ bij de hoorns	Unilever

01.10.2018	Vega-rookworst gaat er niet in	Loethe Olthuis
13.03.2018	Marketinggoeroe Mark Ritson fileert Nederlandse campagnes	Roderick Mirande
19.06.2016	Balletjes in Saté saus (niet plantaardig, wel anders-dan-anders)	Karin Luiten
07.10.2016	Stop geld in de vegaburger	Annemieke van Dongen
02-10-2018	Vleesmerken versnellen op vegetarisch	(Mirande, 02.10.2018).
15-01-2020	The new plant-based Rebel Whopper®, aimed at flexitarians, has landed	James Ridler
12.11.2019	Unilever to make Burger King's soya Whopper; Food & Beverage	Leilla Abboud
09.09.2020	Plantaardige Whopper nu ook in Nederland te koop	Roderick Mirande
13.11.2019	Een hongerige wolf aan de soja: whopper De Vegetarische Slager wordt in heel Europa geïntroduceerd	Marc van den Eerenbeemt
12.11.2019	Heel vegaminend Europa gaat aan de nepvlees - Whopper uit Breda	Emiel Hakkenes
12.11.2019	The Vegetarian Butcher announced as supplier of the	Unilever

	plant-based Rebel Whopper® to Burger King® across Europe	
13.11.2019	De Vegetarische Slager krijgt eigen Whopper bij Burger King	Lisa van der Velden.
13.01.2020	Mora voegt iconische snack toe aan vega-assortiment	Peter van Woensel Kooy
16.02.2019	Echte draadjes; In het schap	Martine Kamsma
21.09.2018	Nog meer co-branding Vegetarische Slager; nu met Mora	Roderick Mirande
12-03-2020	Snackpilaar	Pay-Uun Hiu
17-09-2020	Alles over frituursnacks in de cafeteria	Dennis van Asselt
12.11.2019	Vegetarische Slager levert vegaburger aan Burger King	Paul Le Clercq