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The consumption and attitudes of protein supplements among young adults in Finland

DEGREE PROGRAMME IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS
2021

Author(s) Jarva Elisa	Type of Publication Bachelor's thesis	Date November 2021
	Number of pages 55	Language of publication: English

Title of publication
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Degree Programme
International Business

Abstract

The objective of this thesis was to examine the consumption patterns and attitudes of young Finnish adults towards protein supplements. The aim of this research was to give insight on how 18 to 29 years old Finnish are as consumers, what are their brand preferences, which factors and who influence their purchase decision, and which product attributes they value in protein supplements.

The theoretical part of the thesis was based on the concepts of consumer behavior and studies related to the field, with the focus on factors that affect consumers' purchase decision, also referred to as "heuristics".

To reach the objectives, mainly quantitative research method was exploited. An online survey was created and shared via email to students at Satakunta University of Applied Sciences, as well as the author's acquaints. The survey, which targeted Finnish between the ages 18 to 29, collected 90 responses.

The research findings showed how young Finns prefer foreign and well-known protein supplement brands and like to stick to brands they are already familiar with. The consumption of protein supplements was clearly associated with exercise, and the product attributes the respondents found the most important were taste and price of the product. When it comes to the people who influence the purchase decision of young Finns, a surprising finding was that it is the family members and friends whose recommendations they listen to, not influencers or authority figures.

Key words
Consumer behavior, protein supplements, Finnish consumers, young consumers

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

When thinking about protein supplements, one might associate them with professional athletes and bodybuilders. The importance of diet on muscle growth first caught people's attention in the last few decades of the 20^{th} century. During that time, people involved in resistance training started to promote high consumption of raw foods containing protein, such as eggs and meat. (Lowery & Antonio, 2012, p. 2.) Moreover, the start of the protein supplement industry can be traced back to the 1950s when the first products came to market. Competitive bodybuilders started to use egg protein to increase muscle mass, and soon after that, whey protein also came to market, and was consumed for muscle building, weight loss and as a meal replacement. Soy protein and pea protein followed, and nowadays there are a lot of different protein products to choose from on the market. (Parkinson, 2016.)

The purpose of this thesis is to research the consumption patterns, brand preferences and attitudes of young Finnish adults (under 30 years old) towards protein supplements. The research will give insight into the consumer behavior of Finnish Millennials and Generation Z, their brand preferences, and the product attributes they value in protein supplements. The research topics include, for example, the reasons behind protein supplement consumption, the factors and people affecting purchase decisions and the importance of product attributes such as taste, price, and packaging.

This thesis consists of eight chapters. As a data collection method, this study included an online survey, which was created by Google Docs and shared via email to students at Satakunta University of Applied Sciences, as well as the author's acquaints. The research findings are presented in chapter 5 and analysed more closely in chapter 6. This research could provide companies and suppliers with a better understanding of what makes their products attractive to a young audience: They could develop their products based on the results concerning effective advertising and preferred product attributes.

2 RESEARCH PROBLEM AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Research problem and objectives

The objective of this thesis is to examine the consumer buying behavior of young Finnish adults towards protein supplements. The main research question is: “what are the consumption patterns and attitudes of young Finnish adults towards protein supplements?”

To reach the objective, the following sub-problems are targeted:

1. How often do the respondents purchase protein supplements?
2. Why do they purchase protein supplements?
3. What brands do they usually purchase?
4. Which factors affect their purchase decision?
5. What are the product features that the respondents consider while purchasing the products?

2.2 Boundaries of the thesis

The biggest challenge with this thesis was narrowing the topic, which is why the author decided to narrow it to protein supplements and exclude dietary supplements since otherwise the product category would have been too wide.

The research targets protein supplements found on Finnish grocery stores, fitness and wellness stores and online stores, meaning that foreign and less known brands that are not commonly found on Finnish markets were excluded from the research.

Another challenge was finding information about the consumer behavior of young Finnish adults since there is not a lot of research on the topic and none of them were specifically concerning protein supplements, but rather general research on the target group.

2.3 Conceptual framework

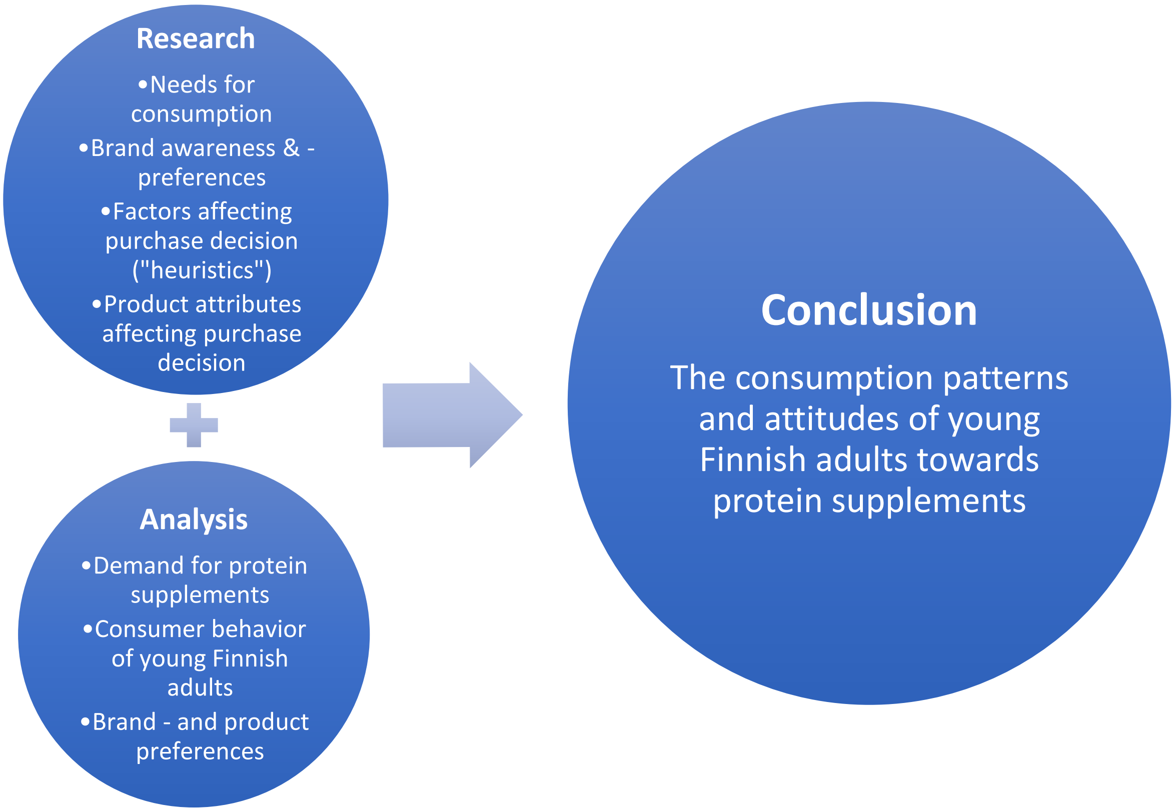

Figure 1. Conceptual framework: the consumption patterns and attitudes of young Finnish adults towards protein supplements (Author of the thesis, 2021)

The figure above, conceptual framework, demonstrates the process and the key concepts of the thesis.

The research was conducted by collecting data through an online survey. The survey, which consisted of 28 questions, consisted of questions examining respondents' needs - the reasons behind - protein supplement consumption, their brand awareness and - preferences, the product features they find the most important and the factors influencing their purchase decision. In this research, the factors influencing purchase decision will be referred to as "heuristics" which are, according to Jansson-Boyd (2010, p. 132), mental shortcuts consumers unconsciously use to make purchase decisions since it is too time-consuming for them to process all the available information about a product.

After the survey was conducted, the demand for protein supplements, the consumer behavior of young Finnish adults and their brand – and product preferences were analyzed.

As a result, the author managed to get more information about the consumption patterns and attitudes of young Finnish adults towards protein supplements. The results were also compared to secondary data, consisting of theories and research related to consumer behavior by other parties.

3 CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

3.1 Consumer decision-making process

In order to affect consumer behavior, it is important to understand the consumer decision-making process. The process consist of five stages, each of which marketers can influence in order to maximize their profit. (Millwood, 2021.)

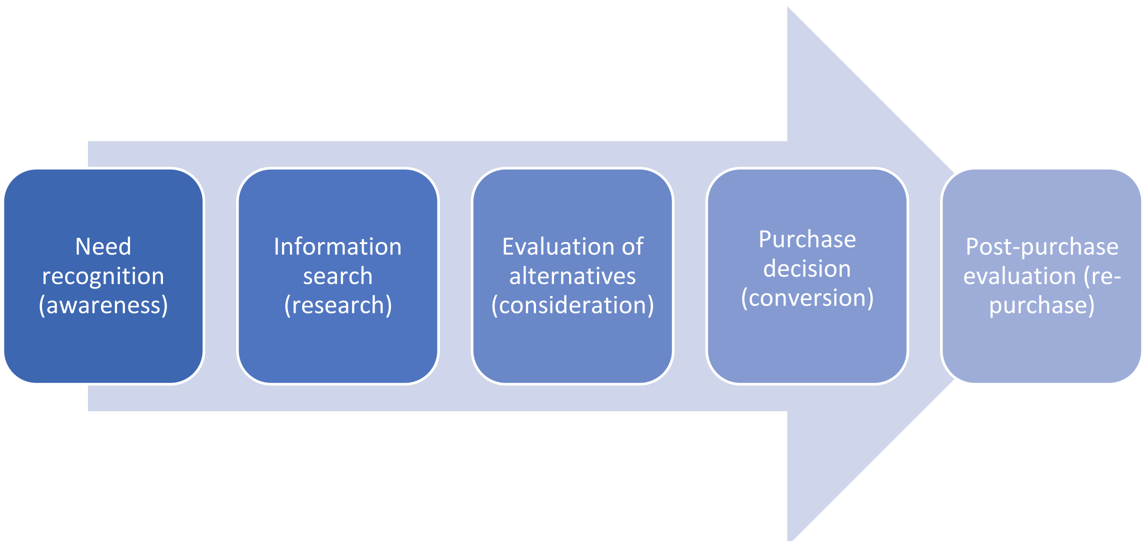

Figure 2. The five stages of decision-making process (Created by the author of the thesis, adapted from Millwood, 2021)

The first stage of the process is **need recognition (awareness)** – the consumer becomes aware of a need for certain product or service. Most of the needs are triggered by **internal stimuli** (functional, emotional or physiological need, such as hunger) or **external stimuli** (advertisement or another external observation driving for the purchase). (Millwood, 2021.)

In the second stage, **information search (research)**, consumers start to search for information about their alternatives. The nature of the situation, complexity of the alternatives, internal information (information consumers already have about the product or brand) and external information (information from friends and family, reviews, etc.) affect how much information they need to search for. In order to optimize business, marketers should make sure they have a high visibility, for example, by making sure that their company and products show up in online search results. (Millwood, 2021.)

The third stage is **evaluation of alternatives (consideration)**. Consumers start evaluating and comparing their options to see which of them meet their needs the best, and to make sure they end up choosing the best alternative. The evaluation can be influenced by two characteristics; **objective** (e.g. product attributes, price) or **subjective** (feelings caused by previous experiences and other consumers' experiences). The objective characteristics are weighed first, as consumers weigh the product attributes, whether the product is easy to use, and wether it fits their budget. After that, the subjective consideration takes place, as consumers consider whether the product is valued by other consumers and whether they have had any difficulties with the product, or noticed any product attributes missing. During this stage, marketers must convince consumers that their product is the best choice and better than competitors', for example, by making sure they have competitive prices and clear values. (Millwood, 2021.)

The fourth stage is **purchase decision (conversion)**. This is when the consumer makes the final decision about which product to purchase and from where. In this stage, the purchasing experience plays an important role and marketers need to build trust, as consumers might still have second thoughts, for example, about whether the product is missing attributes and if it can be returned in case their needs are not met. If the doubts take over, consumers return to the research stage. (Millwood, 2021.)

The final stage of the process is **post-purchase evaluation (re-purchase)**. In this stage, consumers evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of the bought product to see whether it was worth the purchase. They consider whether to recommend it to others and what kind of feedback to give, and whether they would purchase it again. In this stage, it would be important for marketers to encourage the customers to leave a review in order to engage with them as well as attract new customers. (Millwood, 2021.)

3.2 Factors affecting consumer behavior

There are multiple factors impacting consumers' purchase decisions, and it is important for marketers to understand them in order to reach their target market effectively. (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p. 131.)

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2018, p. 159), there are four factors affecting consumer behavior that are mainly out of marketers' control; **cultural, personal, psychological** and **social factors**.

3.2.1 Cultural factors

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2018, p. 159), **culture** affects consumer behavior since it holds values and behavior that are learned by individuals from the surrounding society. This learning process starts as a child observes perceptions and behaviors from family members and other institutions while growing up. However, cultures are constantly changing, as the values and interests of consumers change. These changes, *cultural shifts*, also affect consumer behavior since the nature of demand for certain product groups changes along. Within cultures, there are also smaller **subcultures** that consist of people with mutual values and other similarities, such as nationalities and religions, and who often live in same geographic regions. It is important for marketers to consider the needs and values of these subcultures while targeting these markets. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, p. 160.)

Another cultural factor affecting consumer behavior are **social classes**, divisions of members within societies based on their similarities, such as level of income, occupation and education. The members of different social classes tend to exhibit similar consumer behavior and preferences when it comes to products and brands. However, depending on the society, the members of social classes are not always bound to their roles but can move to higher or lower classes within the hierarchy. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, p. 162.)

3.2.2 Social factors

Within societies, sometimes a few or more people who share mutual goals form **groups**. There are different types of groups, such as *membership groups,* characterized by feeling of belonging and direct influence, and *reference groups* that impact individuals' attitudes or behavior by appearing as points of reference. There are also *aspirational groups*, groups that individuals do not belong to but wish they did. Understanding reference groups is especially important for marketers since they have an influence on people's consumer behavior, by exposing them to new ideas, influencing their attitudes and preferences and adding pressure to comply. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, p. 162.)

Another social factor influencing consumer behavior is **word-of-mouth influence,** the influence of personal requests and recommendations coming from those we have an emotional attachment to, such as family members and friends. According to one research, consumers tend to trust their acquaints and other consumers more than commercials and authority figures such as salesmen, as only 49 % of the participants claimed they trust advertising, whereas 72 % trusted online reviews and 72 % their family and friends. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, p. 163.)

Opinion leaders, members of reference groups, that are used by marketers to socially influence others, are individuals who have expertise in certain areas or have other skills or personality that help them influence others. An example of opinion leaders are brand ambassadors, who advertise companies' products. This type of marketing is referred to as *Buzz marketing*. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, p. 163.) It is defined as a marketing technique in which opinion leaders, nowadays more commonly known as **influencers**, advertise products to other consumers, for example, on social media platforms. (Ehrens, 2015.)

Another social factor marketers have to take into account is how to market on **online social networks**, online communities such as social media platforms (e.g. Instagram, LinkedIn, Youtube), blogs and online stores (e.g. Amazon.com). On these platforms, people exchange information and share opinions, so they provide marketers a good market place and "word-of-web" opportunities to advertise their products and build customer relationships. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, p. 163.) Especially now, during the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increase in online shopping while people have tried to avoid physical contact to others, and this has also been the case in Finland. (Laine, 2020.) This might also affect the results in this research, as one of the survey questions is about where young Finns purchase protein supplements from and the answer options include "grocery strores", "fitness/wellness stores" or "online stores".

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2018, p. 164), **family** is society's most important buying organization and family members can influence consumer behavior a lot. Especially the family members' roles (e.g. children, wife) and their influence on buying behavior are examined by marketers - there are differences in how involved they are concerning different product categories and the stages in buying process. However, if the consumer lifestyles evolve, the buying roles can change along.

3.2.3 Personal factors

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2018, p. 167), **occupation** is one of the personal factors that influence which products and services are bought, and marketers tend to group people according to their occupation, identify the ones interested in their products and produce products for certain occupational groups. An example of occupational groups are blue-collar workers, defined as those who work in manual labor such as manufacturing or construction, and white-collar workers who typically make more money and work in non-physical jobs, for example, in service industries (Parietti, 2021). According to Kotler and Armstrong (2018, p. 167), an example of how these groups affect products bought is how work clothes are often purchased by blue-collar workers, whereas business suits by executives.

Another two personal factors influencing consumer behavior are **age** and **life stage** - as people age and their life stages change, their taste and product preferences change too. Changes in life stage are caused by life-changing events, such as starting a family, marriage, divorce, retirement, switching apartments or changes in income. When marketers define their customers according to their life-cycle stage, it is easier to know how to market and develop suitable products for them. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, p. 167.)

Consumers' **economic situation** also affect their product choices, which is why marketers need to take matters as changes in interest rates, consumers' income and their spending habits into account when it comes to pricing tactics. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, p. 168.)

Regardless of similarities people in same subcultures and social classes might have, their lifestyles might differ a lot. People's activities, interests and opinions all give insight about their **lifestyle** - a person's pattern of living, acting and interacting. By examining consumers' lifestyles, marketers receive information about their changing values and their affect on consumer behavior. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, p. 168.)

Another personal factor affecting consumer behavior is **personality.** It is what distinguishes a person from others – the psychological characteristics, such as self-confidence, sociability, adaptability and aggressiveness, that are unique about a person. It affects consumer behavior, as it affects a consumer's product and brand choices: it is said that brands also reflect personalities and that consumers are attracted to brands that match their personality. These *brand personalities* are a mixture of human traits allocated to a brand. The five brand personality traits identified are *sincerity* (pragmatic, honest, cheerful), *excitement* (dauntless, spirited, imaginative), *competence* (trustworthy, intelligent, successful), *sophistication* (elegant, charming) and *ruggedness* (outdoor person, tough). (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, p. 168-169.)

Self-concept or self-image on the other hand, holds the idea that people's possessions impact and reflect their identities, which is why it is important that marketers understand the link between the two, to understand consumer behavior. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, p. 169.)

3.2.4 Psychological factors

One of the psychological factors affecting consumer behavior is **motivation. A motive** is a need that directs a person towards a satisfaction. People have many needs, some of which are biological (e.g. hunger) and some psychological (e.g. need for esteem). When a specific need reaches a strong intensity, it becomes a motive. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, p. 169.)

The two most well-known theories of human motivation are from Sigmund Freud and Abraham Maslow, which hold fairly different meanings for marketing and consumer behavior. According to a theory by Sigmund Freud, there are subconscious motives, that not even the consumers may understand, that affect their buying decisions. Abraham Maslow, on the other hand, aimed to explain why certain needs at certain times affect people, and found that people's needs, including physiological -, safety -, social -, esteem -, and self-actualization needs, can be arranged in hierarchy. This hierarchy can be seen in the figure below, presenting the most critical needs at the bottom and the least critical at the top. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, p. 169, 171.)

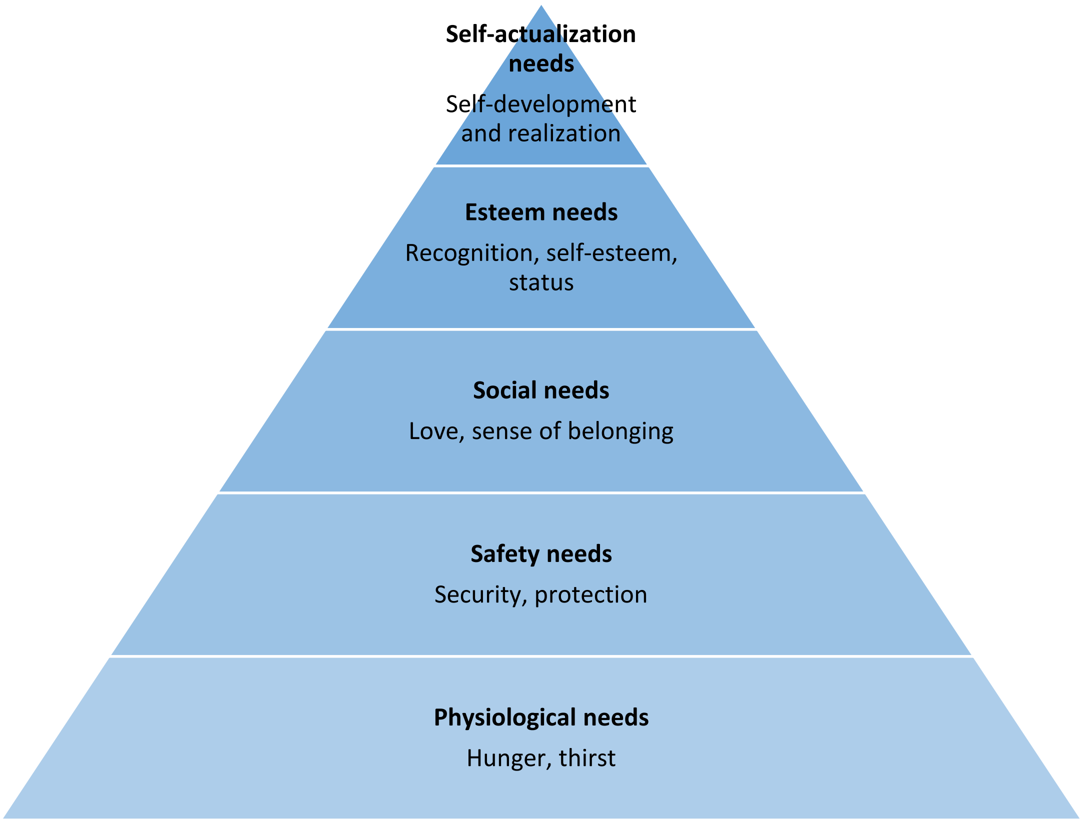

Figure 3. Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Created by the author of the thesis, adapted from Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, p. 171)

Another psychological factor, **perception**, affects how the person acts. Perception is the process of selecting, organizing and interpreting sensory information (gathered by the five senses; hearing, sight, smell, taste, touch) in order to form a picture of a stimulus. People's perceptions differ depending on the three perceptual processes, which makes it difficult for marketers to pass on messages to their target audience. *Selective attention* occurs when consumers are exposed to information but reject most of it, which makes it hard for marketers to attract their attention. In s*elective distortion*, on the other hand, consumers interpret and retain information that supports their already existing beliefs and attitudes. These consumers tend to forget a lot of information they have learned. In the third perceptual process, *selective retention,* consumers tend to remember information about their preferred brands but forget information about competing brands. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, p. 172.)

Learning, on the other hand, is behavior which describes the changes in a person's behavior resulting from experience. It occurs through the interaction of drives, cues, stimuli, responses, and reinforcement. When a drive - an internal stimulus that encourages for action - targets a certain stimulus object, it becomes a motive. A strong drive for something might motivate a person to purchase a certain product that will satisfy the drive. Cues, on the other hand, are small stimuli that affect how, when and where a person responds to the idea of the purchase. Cues can be any observations surrounding the consumer which might affect the interest in purchasing something, such as hearing that the product in question is in discount. If the consumer feels like the experience was rewarding, it is likely that he or she uses the product a lot and that the response is reinforced - the next time the consumer is looking for a product in the same product category, it is likely that he or she ends up choosing the same brand. When it comes to learning's impact on consumer behavior, marketers can increase demand by taking advantage of strong drives, cues and positive reinforcement, and associating them to products. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, p. 173.)

Beliefs and **attitudes** also affect consumer behavior. Beliefs are either emotionally – or non-emotionally charged thoughts that a person has about something. They can be based on, for example, opinions or knowledge. Beliefs that consumers have about products and services affect the product and brand images, and therefore affect consumer behavior. If consumers hold wrong beliefs, the marketers might launch campaigns in order to correct them and increase sales. Attitudes, on the other hand, are people's feelings, tendencies and evaluations toward objects or ideas, for example, religions, politics or food. Attitudes affect wether a person likes or dislikes something and whether he or she approaches or avoids them. Attitudes might be difficult to change and changing an attitude might require adjustments in other ones, which is why companies should fit their products into attitude patterns that already exist, instead of attempting to change attitudes. However, if a company wants to extend their brand, changing attitudes is necessary. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, p. 173.)

3.3 Factors affecting purchase decision

Now that the factors affecting consumer behavior that are, for the most part, beyond the control of consumers have been discussed, it is time to focus on factors influencing consumers' purchase decisions that they unconsciously choose and can affect. In this thesis, the factors influencing purchase decisions will be referred to as heuristics. According to Jansson-Boyd (2010, p. 132), it is too time-consuming for consumers to process all the available information about a product, which is why consumers unconsciously choose only some of the attributes, and use these mental shortcuts, called heuristics, to make purchase decisions. However, while heuristics might ease the decision-making process, they also simplify it when the consumer only trusts a small part of information over all of it, which may lead to errors and poor judgement. These factors are divided into four main groups: prediction -, persuasion -, compliance - and choice heuristics.

3.3.1 Prediction heuristics

Prediction heuristics are used in situations in which the consumers attempt to predict an outcome. There are four types of prediction heuristics. (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p.132.)

The representativeness heuristic refers to the consumer's tendency to judge one thing based on its similarity to others; if a product has a feature similar to another one the consumer may expect it to be the same and overlook the new or different attributes (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p. 133).

The availability heuristic refers to one's habit to make judgements based on past experiences and memories - it is an assumption that what has happened before is likely to happen again in the future (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p. 133-134). For example, negative product or brand experiences that are still fresh in consumers' memory, might affect the future purchase decision of that same product or brand.

According to **the simulation heuristic,** consumers are more tempted to purchase products after imagining buying them - when they imagine a certain situation or event, such as purchasing a certain product, their belief towards it actually happening increases (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p. 134-135).

According to **the anchoring-adjustment heuristic,** consumers develop an initial judgement of the product or brand based on first impression, and even if they may adjust it along the way, the final judgements are often similar to the original one. This confirms that consumers may find it hard to change their first impressions of the product. (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p. 135.)

3.3.2 Persuasion heuristics

Persuasion heuristics originate from research, according to which there is a difference in how rapidly or extensively consumers process the available information (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p. 135).

The length-implies-strength heuristic refers to the belief that an advertisement that contains a lot of facts and figures implies that the product is of high quality (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p. 136).

According to **the liking-agreement heuristic,** consumers tend to agree with those they like (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p. 136). For example, a product recommendation from a best friend or a favorite celebrity could affect the purchase decision.

The consensus-implies-correctness heuristic occurs when consumers trust the opinion of the majority (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p. 136). In this research, for example, a consumer might choose a certain product or brand just because it was the most well-known one or the most purchased one.

3.3.3 Compliance heuristics

Compliance heuristics determine how likely consumers comply with requests. There are six compliance heuristics. (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p. 136.)

The commitment-and-consistency heuristic implies that consumers are likely to stick to a request - be consistent - after committing to it, even if it changes along the way (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p. 136).

The reciprocity heuristic refers to a consumer's tendency to subconsciously return a favour, without being asked. For example, buying a product as a favour for receiving a free sample. (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p. 136.)

The scarcity heuristic refers to wanting something that others cannot have. This applies to limited-edition products and is often used as an advertising gimmick. (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p. 136.)

The social validation heuristic refers to peer pressure - how consumers are pressured to purchase a product because many others have brought it (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p. 136-137).

According to **the liking heuristic,** whether the consumer likes another person or not impacts how they comply with their requests (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p. 137).

The authority heuristic takes place when consumers let the request from authority figures or people seen as "experts" impact their purchase decision (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p. 137). In this research, this could apply to professional athletes and health experts promoting protein supplements.

3.3.4 Choice heuristics

When consumers are less motivated and engaged in processing information, they use choice heuristics. This applies particularly to purchase situations in which the products are considered ordinary or unexciting. (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p. 137.)

The lexicographic heuristic occurs when consumers choose one product attribute that they consider more important than the others and make the purchase decision based on that (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p. 137). In this research's context, a consumer might, for example, have a bad financial situation at the time of the purchase and therefore choose the cheapest product available, regardless of considering other options higher in quality.

The elimination-by-aspects heuristic occurs if consumers find the attribute considered as most important in multiple available products. They then first eliminate the products lacking the desired feature, and after that, choose a second most important product attribute to look for. If that one is also found in multiple products, the cycle continues until the consumer manages to find a special feature in one of the products that none of the others contains. (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p. 137-138.)

In **the additive-difference heuristic,** the consumer compares the different attributes of two brands and makes the purchase decision between them based on which one has the most important attribute (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p. 138).

The conjunctive and disjunctive heuristic is often used when the consumer is in a hurry. The consumer will then choose the first acceptable brand/product he or she considers good enough. The conjunctive heuristic guides the consumer to choose the product containing the minimum requirement, whereas the disjunctive one goes to a slightly larger extent for the desired features in a product. (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p. 138.)

3.4 Buying behavior

There are also differences concerning consumers' buying behavior – including how involved they are in the situation, how strongly their emotions affect the buying decision and how much information they seek. These buying behaviors can be divided into four types; complex buying behavior, dissonance-reducing buying behavior, variety-seeking buying behavior and habitual buying behavior. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, p. 174.)

	High involvement	Low involvement
Significant differences between brands	Complex buying behavior	Variety-seeking buying behavior
Few differences between brands	Dissonance-reducing buying behavior	Habitual buying behavior

Figure 4. Four types of buying behavior (Created by the author of the thesis, adapted from Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, p. 174)

3.4.1 Complex buying behavior

The most time-consuming type of the four, complex buying behavior occurs when the consumer is deeply as well as emotionally, involved in the buying process and sees significant differences between brands. It usually concerns products that are expensive or bought infrequently. The consumer will first develop beliefs and attitudes about the product or brand and, after high consideration, make the purchase decision. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, p. 174.)

3.4.2 Dissonance-reducing buying behavior

Similar to complex buying behavior, the consumer is highly involved in the purchase process but does not see a lot of difference between brands - when evaluating the brands, the consumer may choose quite quickly because he/she does not see significant differences in brands. These consumers' buying decisions will often be based on just price or convenience. However, there is a risk of after-purchase dissatisfaction; **post-purchase dissonance**, when consumers start to notice disadvantages in the product they did not notice before purchase or hear about other brands that could have been better. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, p. 174.)

3.4.3 Variety-seeking buying behavior

In variety-seeking buying behavior the level of involvement is low but there is a strong emphasis on brand differences - consumers of this group tend to switch brands and continuously try new brands instead of sticking to the same one. This is not because of dissatisfaction with the brands purchased in the past, but simply for the sake of trying something new. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, p. 175.)

3.4.4 Habitual buying behavior

Habitual buying behavior often concerns cheap, ordinary, and frequently purchased products. Characterized by low involvement as well as little brand differences, consumers of this group make repeated purchases for a habit, not brand loyalty. They do not engage in finding information about the product neither do they usually evaluate the products after purchase. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, p. 174.)

3.5 Young Finnish adults as consumers

The target group of this research are Finnish between the ages of 18 to 29, which means there are consumers in the sample group who belong to Generation Y, also known as Millenials (those born 1981–1996), but also to Generation Z (those born 1997-2012). (Dimock, 2019.)

According to research conducted by Salesforce, what these two generations have in common is the emotional attachment to brands - 60 % of Millennials and 57 % of Generation Z consider brands important and are willing to pay for them. Both generations also found the authenticity of brands very important. However, there was a difference in how much they trusted the authenticity of companies - 61 % of Millennials found companies authentic, whereas Generation Z was more sceptical, with only 53 % finding them authentic. (Young, 2021.)

The main difference between the two generations was their standards for customer experience - 66 % of Millenials and 53 % of Generation Z had high expectations for customer service, whereas 76 % of Millenials and 71 % of Generation Z were ready to pay extra for good customer experiences (Young, 2021).

4 METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the author explains the research methods, research design and a sample group of the study. The structure of the survey will also be examined more closely.

4.1 Research method

There are two types of research methods, qualitative and quantitative. The qualitative method is non-numerical and includes data collection methods that are verbal, for example, interviews. Qualitative data is usually gathered by observing the research subjects in their natural environment. The quantitative method, on the other hand, is numerical. Common quantitative data collection methods include questionnaires and tests, and the method is especially useful when the sample group is large. (Kelley, 1999, p. 27-29.)

The main data collection method for this thesis was quantitative research. The data collection method was an online survey, and the results are numerically represented. However, even if most of the survey questions gathered numerical data, there were also open-ended questions that gathered qualitative data.

4.2 Sampling method and sample size

Sampling is the process of obtaining information from **a sample** - a small portion of a larger group (population) that is selected to represent the target audience and is examined for research purposes. Sampling methods can be divided into two categories: probability - and nonprobability sampling. In probabibility sampling, people from the population are preselected into the sample in a way that anyone can be accepted, whereas in nonprobability sampling the selection process is not as equal as the people are not chosen by equal chance but for certain criteria, such as convenience. (Stevens, Loudon, Ruddick, Wren, Sherwood, 2005, p. 182, 185 & 188).

The sampling method for this research was convenience sampling, which is a nonprobability sampling technique. Its advantages are that it is quick and cheap to implement, and the sample is chosen of people that are easy and quick to reach. However, there is no predesignate method for it, which is why there is a possibility of sampling errors, as it might be hard to confirm whether the sample truly represents the target population and whether it reflects to it accurately. In addition, estimates about accuracy and confidence level cannot be made. (Stevens, Loudon, Ruddick, Wren, Sherwood, 2005, p. 188.)

The sample for this research consisted of Finnish citizens between the ages of 18 to 30. The size of the sample was 90 respondents and consisted of people from different genders and age groups. The respondents were easy to reach, as they consisted of the author's acquaints and students from the same university as the author.

4.3 Survey design

The online survey was made with Google Docs. The survey was only available in English and all the responses were anonymous and confidential and were only used for research purposes.

The survey started with a brief introduction of the author and the survey's structure. The first two questions were demographic, asking about the gender and age of respondents.

The survey consisted of two sections - the first section was about the consumption habits, brand awareness and - preferences of the respondent. Some of the questions were multiple choice where the respondents could only choose one of the available options, and some checkboxes where they could choose all the options that applied. Most of the questions were also open-end questions, which means that the respondents could specify the answer in their own words in case none of the available answer options were appropriate.

In the table below, the brands chosen for the research are presented. The following brands are the most common protein supplement brands sold in the Finnish market (grocery stores, fitness/wellness stores and online stores). In addition to these, the respondents could also mention other brands in the open-ended answer choice.

Table 1. Brands included in the research.

Puhdistamo	Leader
Star Nutrition	Barebells
Rawbite	Fast
M-Nutrition	Supermass Nutrition
SportLife Nutrition	Sportyfeel
BE-KIND	Maxim
Biotech USA	

The second section measured the attitudes and preferences of the respondents towards protein supplements. The respondents were asked to rate the importance of product and brand attributes on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 meant ‘not at all important’ and 5 meant ‘extremely important’.

4.4 Data collection and data analysis

There are two main types of data: primary - and secondary data.

Primary data refers to the data that is collected for the first time by the researcher. Primary data can be collected by many different methods, one of which is surveys. (Kothari, 2004, p. 95-96.)

Secondary data, on the other hand, means already existing and analyzed data, collected by the other parties. This type of data can be published or unpublished data and can be found from various sources, for example, books, reports and public records. (Kothari, 2004, p. 95, 111.)

Both primary and secondary data were used for this research. The primary data was gathered through the online survey, which was shared via email to students in Satakunta University of Applied Sciences, as well as the author's acquaints. The secondary data consisted of a literature review and research conducted by other parties that were related to consumer behavior.

To analyze the collected data, both the frequency - and the percentages of the survey responses will be calculated and presented through charts in chapter 5, and analyzed more closely in chapter 6. Regarding the questions in the second section, in which respondents are asked to rate each factor affecting their purchase decision on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, the results will be presented in a table in which the average rate for each factor has also been calculated.

4.5 Reliability and validity

Reliability measures the consistency of research results. In case the research is repeated within the same circumstances and the correlation between the takes remains the same, meaning the results remain the same, they are considered consistent and therefore reliable. (Kelley, 1999, p. 113-115.) Validity, on the other hand, measures how well the research measures what it is supposed to. It can be measured by comparing the research results to other data. When the other data or theory related to the research supports the research results, they are considered valid. (Kelley, 1999, p. 118.)

As mentioned before, using convenience sampling may compromise the reliability of the research since it might be hard to confirm whether the sample truly represent the target population. As an attempt to ensure the reliability, the survey included a brief introduction and instructions in which it was stated that to qualify as a respondent, the respondent has to verify that he or she has at least tried protein supplements before and is a Finnish citizen in the age range from 18 to 29. Also, one of the first few survey questions was a question confirming the respondent's age.

When it comes to validity, the survey was tested with one person beforehand, feedback was collected and the test answers were cleared afterwards before the survey was open for the audience. This was done to ensure that the survey effectively measured what it was supposed to, and that it could be used to obtain data, which, after analysis, could be used to answer the research problem and sub-problems of this research. The research findings were also compared to secondary data in order to see the correlation. The secondary data supported the research findings, which is one factor from which it can be concluded that the results are valid.

5 RESEARCH FINDINGS

The survey included 28 questions in total and was divided into two sections, the first of which focuses on consumption habits and brand preferences, and the second one on attitudes and preferences towards product and brand features, as well as factors impacting a purchase decision.

The survey received a total of 90 responses, which was close to the target of 100 responses. It was shared with the author's close circle and with SAMK students via email, and therefore, most of the respondents were students.

1 - Gender of respondents

Number of responses: 89

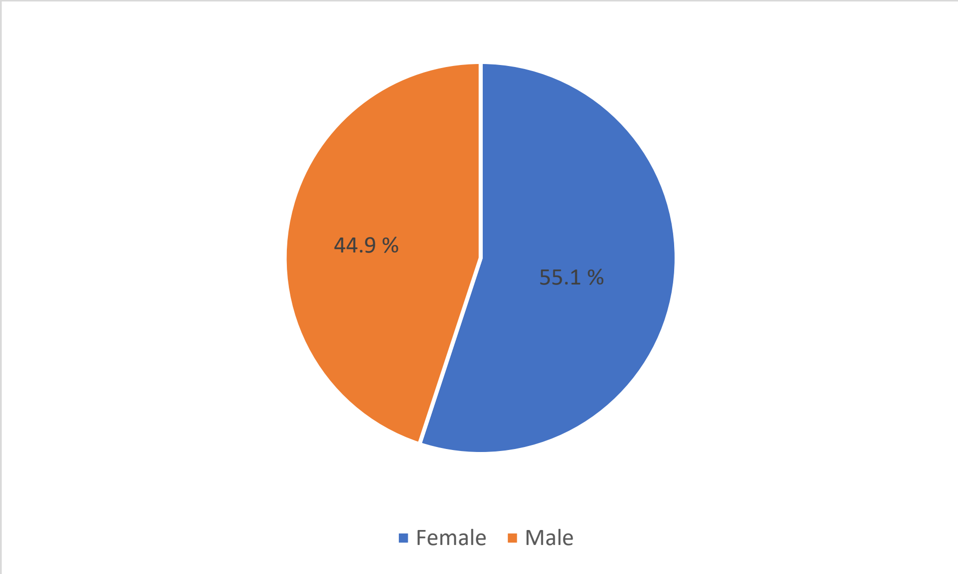

Figure 5. Question 1: What is your gender? (n = 89)

The first question was about the respondent's gender. Gender distribution was fairly even - 55.1 % of the respondents were women and 44.9 % men.

2- How old are you?

Number of responses: 90

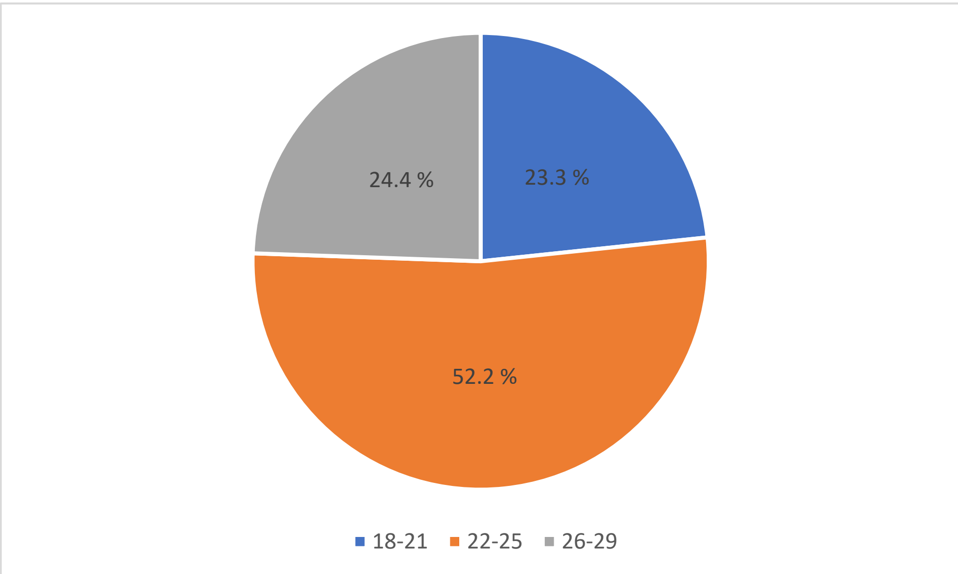

Figure 6. Question 2: How old are you? (n = 90)

The second question included three age groups. Around half of the respondents, 52.2 %, belonged to the age group 22-25, whereas 24.4 % to 26-29 and 23.3 % to 18-21.

3- Which of these protein supplements do you use? (Choose all that apply)

Number of responses: 88

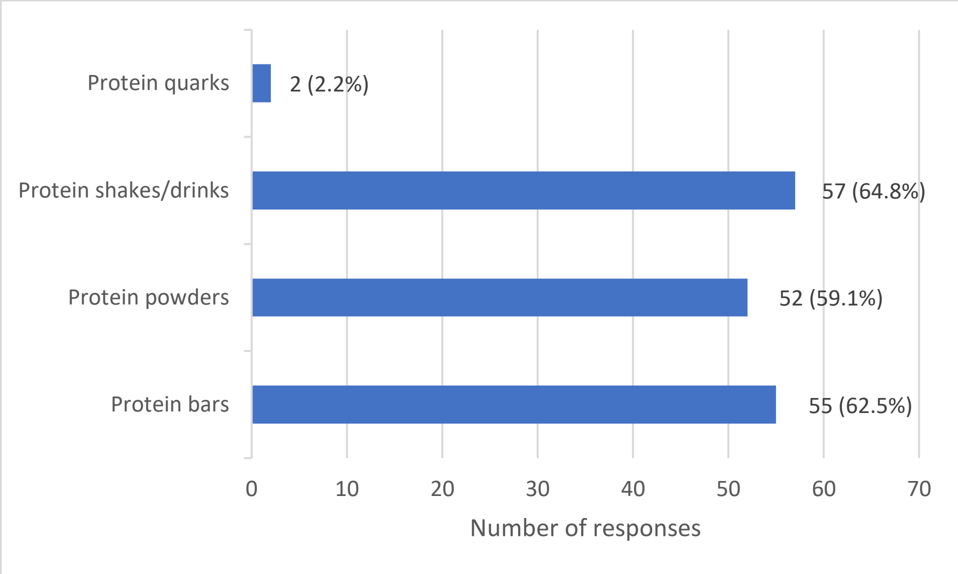

Figure 7. Question 3: Which of these protein supplements do you use? (n = 88)

This question included three product categories to choose from; protein shakes and drinks, protein powders and protein bars. However, the respondents were also able to mention categories that were not included.

Protein shakes and drinks were the most chosen category with 64.8%, with protein bars coming as a close second with 62.5 %. Protein powders were 59.1 %. Other product categories that a few respondents mentioned included protein ice cream, capsules, BCAA, EAA, arginine, aswagandha and protein curd.

4- How often do you buy protein supplements?

Total number of responses: 90

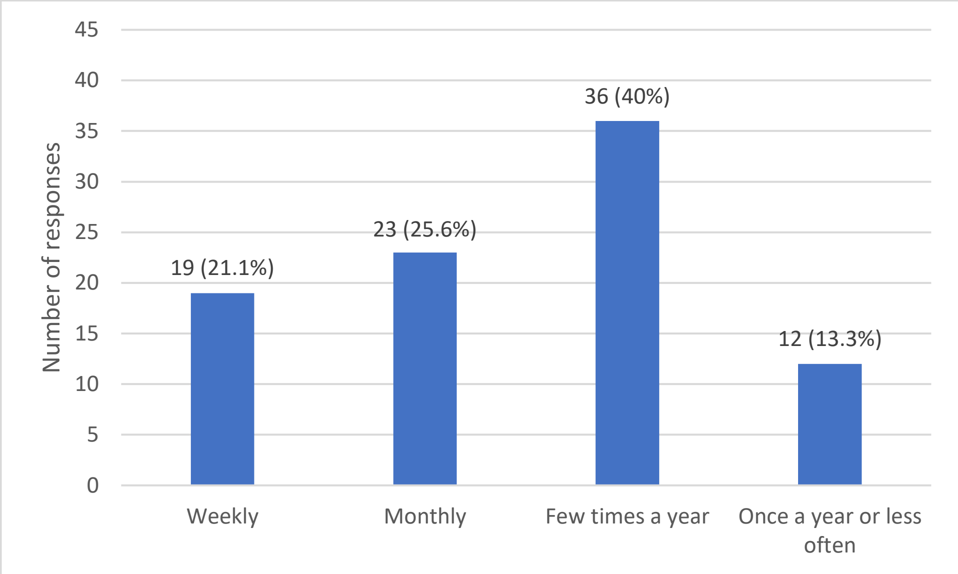

Figure 8. Question 4: How often do you buy protein supplements? (n = 90)

Question four was "how often do you buy protein supplements". Almost half of the respondents, 40 %, responded that they use them a few times a year, 25.6 % monthly, 21.1 % weekly 21.1 %, and 13.3 % once a year or less often.

5- Where do you buy protein supplements from? (Choose all that apply)

Number of responses: 90

Figure 9. Question 5: Where do you buy protein supplements from? (n = 90)

The clear majority of respondents (73.3 %) buy protein supplements from grocery stores. Online stores ranked high as well (46.7 %), whereas fitness/wellness stores were 20 %. Some of the other mentioned places included a drugstore, and “from the gym’s automat”.

6- How often do you use protein supplements?

Number of responses: 90

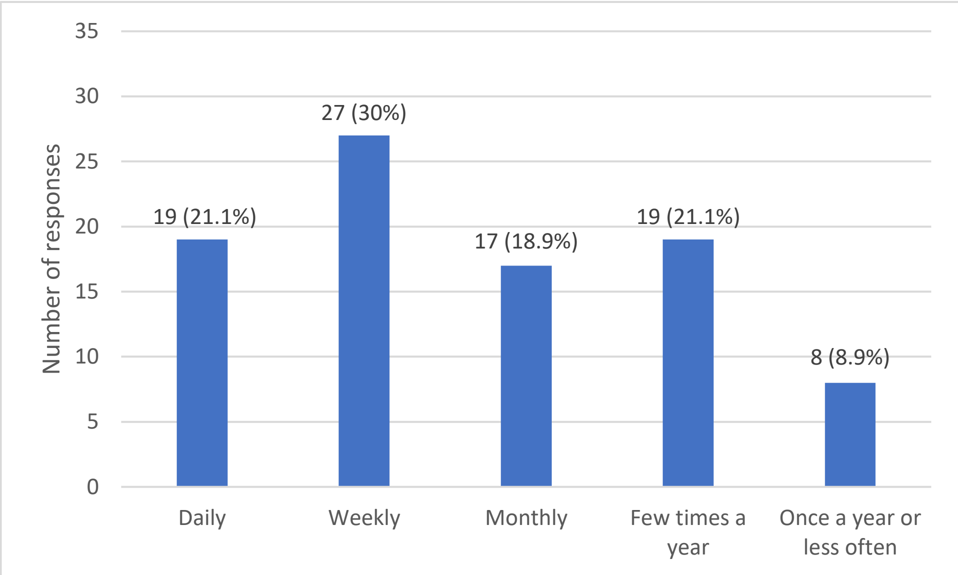

Figure 10. Question 6: How often do you use protein supplements? (n = 90)

The majority of the respondents uses protein supplements weekly, whereas “daily” and “few times a year” both scored 21.1 %. 18.9 % use them monthly, and only 8.9 % once a year or less often.

7- Why are you using protein supplements? (Choose all that apply)

Number of responses: 88

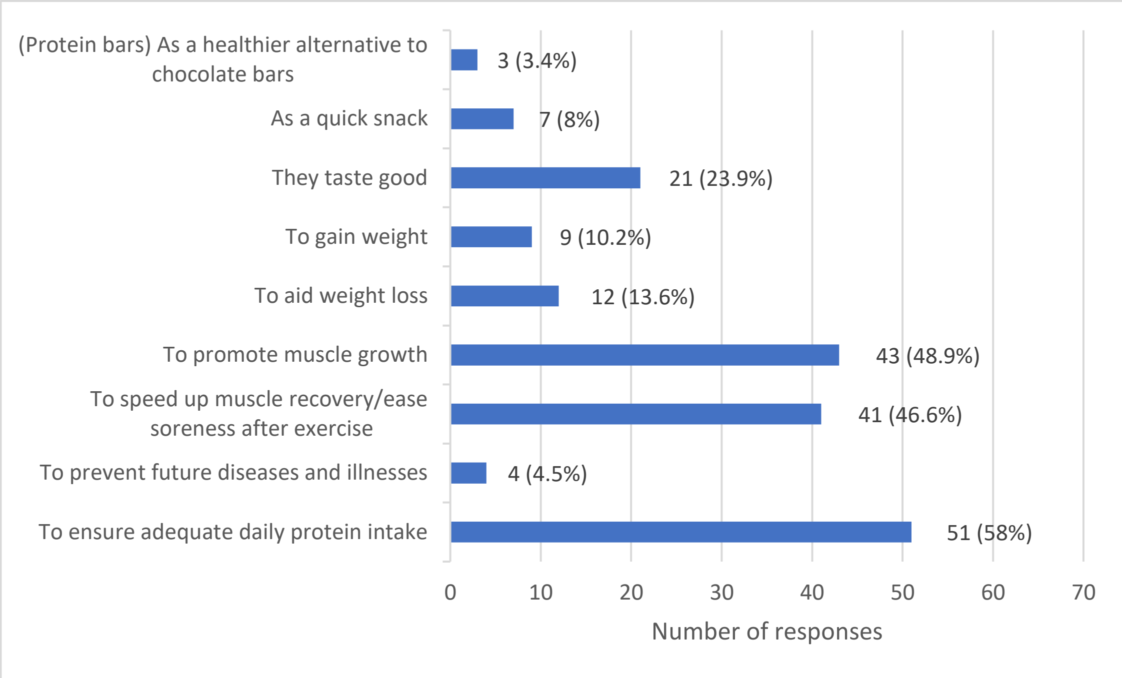

Figure 11. Question 7: Why are you using protein supplements? (n = 88)

As shown above, 58 % of the respondents use protein supplements to ensure adequate daily protein intake. The majority also uses them for promoting muscle growth (48.9 %) and to speed up muscle recovery/ease soreness after exercise (46.6 %), 23.9 % enjoyed them for the good taste, and 13.6 % to aid weight loss, whereas 10.2% to gain weight. Only 4.5 % chose “to prevent future diseases and illnesses”.

Reasons that respondents also mentioned included using them “as a quick snack” (8 %) and 3.4 % also mentioned that they use protein bars as a healthier alternative to chocolate bars.

8- In which circumstances do you use protein supplements? (Choose all that apply)

Number of responses: 88

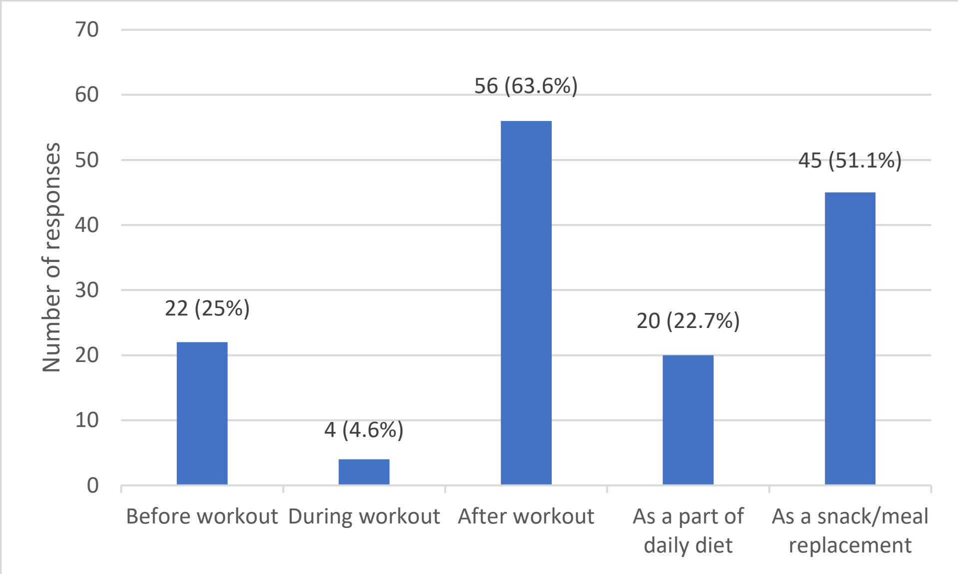

Figure 12. Question 8: In which circumstances do you use protein supplements? (n = 88)

The question eight was about the circumstances in which respondents use protein supplements. The majority (63.6 %) responded using them “after workout”, followed by 51.1 % as a snack or meal replacement, 25 % before a workout, and 22.7 % as a part of a daily diet. Only 4.5 % answered “during workout”, and one respondent mentioned using them while in the army when spending multiple days outdoors.

9- How healthy do you think protein supplements are on a scale from 1 to 5? (1 = not at all healthy, 5 = extremely healthy)

Number of responses: 90

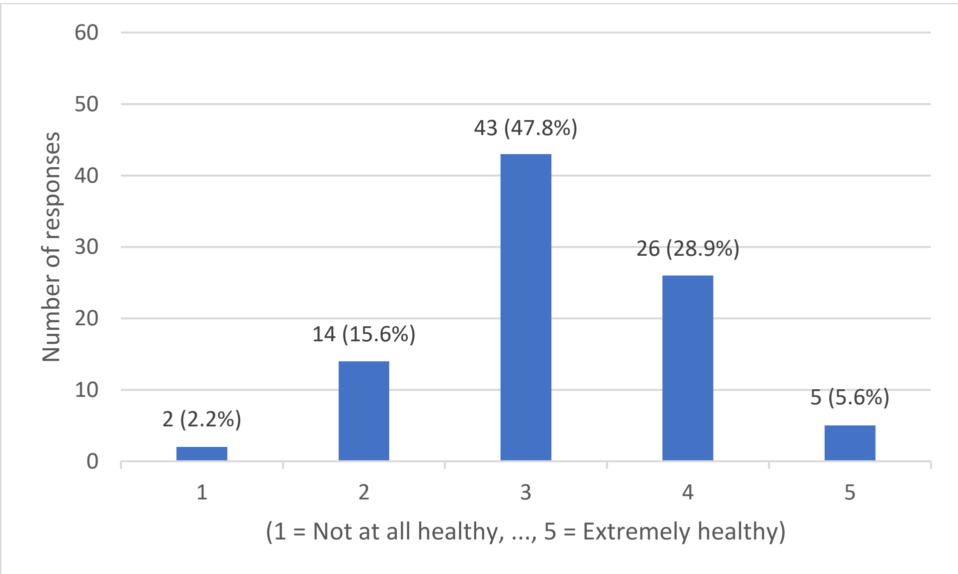

Figure 13. Question 9: How healthy do you think protein supplements are on a scale from 1 to 5? (n = 90)

Almost half of the respondents, 47.8 %, rated the healthiness of protein supplements as 3, “moderate”, 28.9 % rated them as 4 - healthy, and 15.6 % as 2 - not healthy. Only 5.6 % considered them extremely healthy, and 2.2 % as not at all healthy.

10- Which of these brands have you heard of? (Choose all that apply)

Number of responses: 90

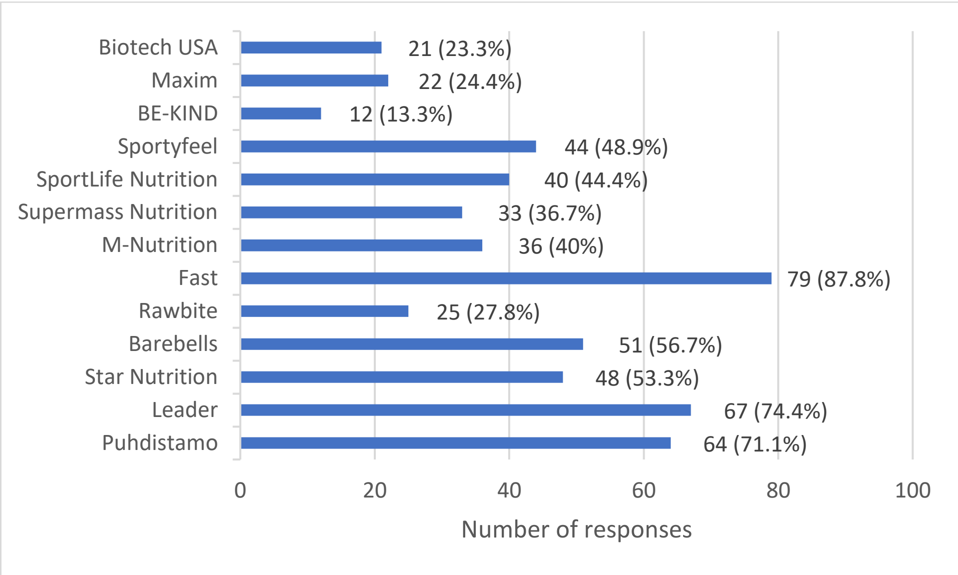

Figure 14. Question 10: Which of these brands have you heard of? (n = 90)

Question 10 was about brand awareness and included the most common protein supplement brands sold in Finland. Fast was the most well-known brand (87.8 %), Leader the second well-known (74.4 %) and Puhdistamo came in third with 71.1 %. Over half of the respondents were also familiar with Barebells (56.7 %) and Star Nutrition (53.3 %).

Other brands mentioned included MyProtein (3.3%), and the following brands that received one vote each; Domyos, Isostar, Apurna, Optimum nutrition, Mutant and Nutri drink.

11- Which of these brands do you use? (Choose all that apply)

Number of responses: 86

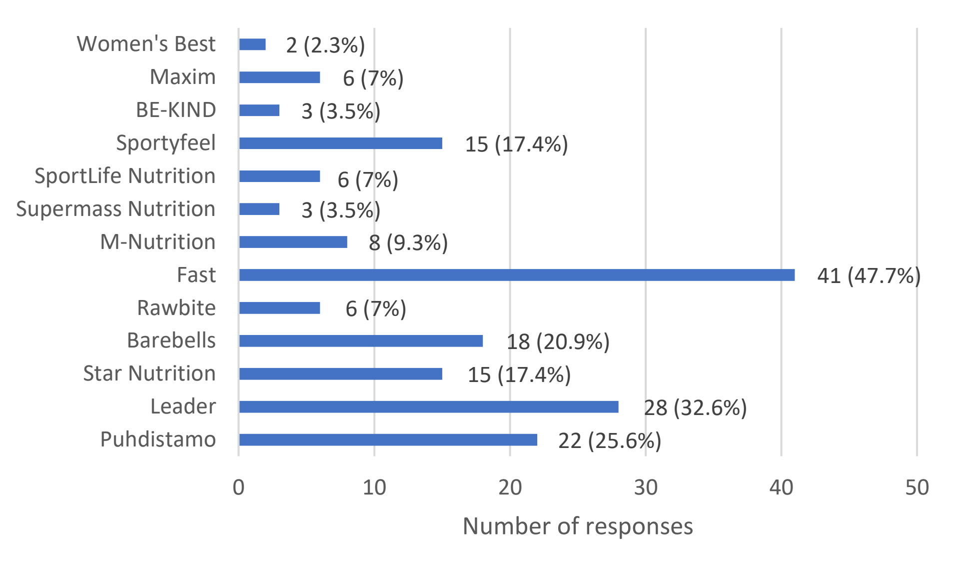

Figure 15. Question 11: Which of these brands do you use? (n = 86)

The 11th question was about which brands the respondents use. The results were similar to the previous question - the brand that was also the most well-known, Fast, scored 47.7 %, with Leader coming as second, 32.6 % and Puhdistamo in third place with 25.6 %. A brand that was also mentioned twice was Women's Best.

ATTITUDES AND PREFERENCES

In this section, the respondent was asked to rate the importance of factors impacting their purchase decisions on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = not at all important, 5 = extremely important). The results are presented in the table below.

Table 2. Importance of factors impacting purchase decision on a scale from 1 to 5.

Factor	**N**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**Average on a scale 1-5** (1 = Not at all important

							5 = Extremely important)
I have seen an advertisement of the brand/product	90	27 (30%)	26 (28.9%)	20 (22.2%)	16 (17.8%)	1 (1.1%)	**2.3**
A family member or friend has recommended the brand/product	90	16 (17.8%)	15 (16.7%)	22 (24.4%)	26 (28.9%)	11 (12.2%)	**3.0**
I have seen influencers/celebrities promoting the brand/product	90	39 (43.3%)	17 (18.9%)	18 (20%)	13 (14.4%)	3 (3.3%)	**2.2**
A salesman recommends it	90	43 (47.8%)	25 (27.8%)	15 (16.7%)	7 (7.8%)	0 (0%)	**1.8**
The brand is well-known	90	18 (20%)	7 (7.8%)	23 (25.6%)	24 (26.7%)	18 (20%)	**3.2**
The brand is domestic	90	19 (21.1%)	11 (12.2%)	33 (36.7%)	19 (21.1%)	8 (8.9%)	**2.8**
I have used the brand/product before	90	1 (1.1%)	3 (3.3%)	18 (20%)	28 (31.1%)	40 (44.4%)	**4.1**
The product is limited edition	90	55 (61.1%)	18 (20%)	14 (15.6%)	2 (2.2%)	1 (1.1%)	**1.6**
The product is easily available (for example, next to the cash register)	90	19 (21.1%)	9 (10%)	20 (22.2%)	29 (32.2%)	13 (14.4%)	**3.1**
The price of the product	90	1 (1.1%)	7 (7.8%)	11 (12.2%)	40 (44.4%)	31 (34.4%)	**4.0**
The attractiveness of the product packaging	90	18 (20%)	15 (16.7%)	23 (25.6%)	27 (30%)	7 (7.8%)	**2.9**
The taste of the product	90	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	12 (13.3%)	25 (27.8%)	53 (58.9%)	**4.5**
The product has high protein content	90	1 (1.1%)	4 (4.4%)	13 (14.4%)	42 (46.7%)	30 (33.3%)	**4.1**
The product is vegan	90	45 (50%)	14 (15.6%)	20 (22.2%)	5 (5.6%)	6 (6.7%)	**2.0**

The product is low-calorie	90	20 (22.2%)	9 (10%)	33 (36.7%)	17 (18.9%)	11 (12.2%)	**2.9**
The product does not contain artificial sweeteners	90	16 (17.8%)	16 (17.8%)	23 (25.6%)	13 (14.4%)	22 (24.4%)	**3.1**
The product is artificially sweetened (sucralose, aspartame, acesulfame, stevia...)	90	25 (27.8%)	24 (26.7%)	28 (31.1%)	8 (8.9%)	5 (5.6%)	**2.4**

6 ANALYSIS AND RESULT

In this chapter, the research findings of the survey will be summarized and analyzed.

6.1 Background of respondents

Gender distribution was fairly even, as 55.1 % of the respondents were women and 44.9 % men. A little over half of the respondents fell to the age group 22-25, 24.4 % to the age group 26-29 and 23.3 % to 18-21.

6.2 Consumption habits

According to figure 7, the most popular protein supplements among young Finns are protein shakes and drinks (64.8 %), with protein bars coming as second (62.5 %), and protein powders as third (59.1 %).

Figure 9 shows that most of the respondents (73.3 %) buy protein supplements from grocery stores, 46.7 % from online stores and 20 % from fitness or wellness stores.

A surprising finding was how rarely the respondents buy protein supplements – the majority only buys them a few times a year yet uses them weekly. This might suggest that many consumers prefer to purchase large containers, saving packs, or huge quantities at once, or their parents purchase products for them on their behalf.

6.3 Reason for consumption

According to figure 11, the main reason why young Finnish consumers buy protein supplements is to ensure their adequate daily protein intake (58 %). The same figure also demonstrates how protein consumption is clearly associated with exercise - 48.9 % of the respondents consume protein for promoting muscle growth and 46.6 % for speeding up muscle recovery and easing soreness after exercise.

When it comes to the circumstances in which protein supplements are consumed, figure 12 shows how most of the respondents (63.6 %) use them after exercise, 25 % before exercise, and 4.6 % during exercise. A little over half of the respondents (51.1 %) also reported using them as a snack or meal replacement, and 22.7 % as a part of the daily diet.

When it comes to the healthiness of protein supplements, the majority rated them as 3 - neutral. Still, some respondents mentioned using protein bars as a healthier alternative to chocolate bars.

6.4 Brand preferences

Most of the respondents did not care whether the brands were foreign or domestic. However, foreign brands seemed to be preferred, with Fast and Leader as most brought and consumed brands. However, Finnish brand Puhdistamo came third. One possible explanation for this might be that most available brands on Finnish markets are foreign and there is a lack of domestic brands in stores, at least according to the author’s experience.

However, it mattered whether the brands were well-known, as its importance's average score was 3.2 on a scale from 1 to 5; 26.7 % of the respondents rated it as important, 25.6 % as neutral, whereas 20 % considered it as not at all important and 20 % as extremely important. This could imply that **the social validation heuristic,** the peer pressure that arises when consumers are pressured to purchase a product because many others have brought it (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p. 136-137), affects consumer behaviour of young Finns. **The consensus-implies-correctness heuristic** - when consumers trust the opinion of the majority (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p. 136) - seems to apply here as well.

It was also important (average 4.1) for the respondents that they were already familiar with the brand. The majority of the respondents (44.4 %) found it extremely important that they have used the brand/product before, which means that repeat purchases are common among young Finnish consumers, at least when it comes to protein supplements. Only one respondent rated it as not at all important. From this, we can assume that repeat purchases are common among young Finns, at least when it comes to protein supplements. This could indicate brand loyalty and respondents' emotional attachment to specific brands, but it could also mean that the respondents had positive memories and past experiences of those brands and therefore, had committed to purchasing them again. If this is the case, **the availability heuristic,** one's habit to make judgements based on past experiences and memories (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p. 133-134), affects purchase decisions. The results also support the research findings by Salesforce (Young, 2021), according to which both Millenials (60 %) and Generation Z (57 %) are emotionally attached to brands, consider them important and are willing to pay for them.

6.5 Factors affecting purchase decision

Whether the respondents had seen an advertisement of the product or brand did not matter at all, as the average importance rate was 2.3 which is low, and most of the respondents (30 %) rated it as not at all important. Very few found that it affected their purchase decision, and only one person rated it as extremely important.

Whether the respondents' family members or friends had recommended them products or brands divided opinions, as the average 3.0 demonstrates: for 28.9 % respondents it was important, for 24.4 % it did not make a difference, and for the rest, it was not important. Only the minority (12.2 %) rated it as extremely important. It seems that **the liking-agreement heuristic**, according to which consumers tend to agree with those they like (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p. 136), applies at least to some of the respondents, as well as **the liking heuristic**, according to which the level of how much the consumer likes another person impacts how they comply with their requests (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p. 137).

Whether an influencer, celebrity or a salesman had promoted products did not influence respondents' purchase decision (average 2.2), which means that **the authority heuristic**, which refers to letting requests from authority figures or people seen as "experts" impact purchase decision (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p. 137), did not apply to the sample group.

6.6 Product attributes

When it comes to the importance of product attributes and the respondents' attitudes towards them, it was clear that the taste of the product was important, as none of the respondents considered it an unimportant feature and its importance was rated as 4.5 on average. Price was also important (average 4.0), whereas the attractiveness of the product packaging was rated as 2.9 on average .

Whether the product was limited edition did not affect their purchase decision (average 1.6), which means that **the scarcity heuristic,** which applies to limited-edition products, the motivation to purchase something because others cannot have it (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p. 136.), did not apply in this case. However, whether the product was easily available divided opinions (average 3.1); for most of the respondents (32.2 %) it was important that the product was easily available. However, many also had a neutral opinion about it or did not find it important at all.

The products' high protein content was clearly rated as important, as the average 4.1 demonstrates - almost half of the respondents (46.7 %) rated it as important or extremely important that the product has high protein content. Only a few respondents considered it non-important.

Whether the product was vegan, did not seem to matter (average 2.0). Half of the respondents rated it as not at all important and 22.2 % as neutral. Only the minority rated it as important. The reason behind these results could simply be that there were not many respondents within the sample group who were vegan.

The importance of whether the products were low-calorie was rated as 2.9 - the majority rated this product attribute as either neutral (36.7 %) or not at all important (22.2 %). The reason behind this might simply be that there were not many respondents who track their calories and/or try to lose weight.

When it comes to respondents' attitudes towards artificial sweeteners, for the majority of young Finnish consumers it does not either matter or they slightly prefer protein products that do not contain artificial sweeteners (average 3.1). There were not many respondents who preferred artificially sweetened products either, as the average 2.4 demonstrates. Still, at least according to the author's observations, most of the protein supplements in Finnish markets do contain acesulfame or other synthetically produced artificial sweeteners, which raises the question of whether there should be more naturally sweetened products (products sweetened with natural - or refined sugars) available on the market.

7 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The consumer decision-making process always starts with a **need recognition,** caused by either an internal (emotional or physiological need) or external (advertisement or other external cue) stimuli. After that comes an **information search stage**, to which both internal (information consumers already have about the product or brand) and external knowledge (information from others) affect. Then, the **evaluation of alternatives,** in which consumers compare and evaluate their alternatives by weighing their objective (product attributes) and subjective (feelings caused by past experiences) characteristics, takes place. After that comes the time for final **purchase decision** and **post-purchase evaluation,** during which consumers evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of the bought product to see whether it was worth the purchase. (Millwood, 2021.)

The consumer decision-making process is affected by multiple factors - with factors that consumers and marketers cannot affect, such as cultural, personal, psychological and social factors (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018, p. 159), to those they unconsciously choose to make purchase decisions, heuristics; prediction -, persuasion -, compliance - and choice heuristics (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p. 132). In addition, consumers are characterized by different buying behavior types (complex -, variety-seeking -, dissonance-reducing - or habitual buying behavior) that determine how involved they are in the buying process and how much differences they see between brands (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, p. 174).

The objective of this research was to find out what are the consumption patterns and attitudes of young Finnish adults towards protein supplements. From the survey results, it can be concluded that most young Finns use protein supplements weekly but do not purchase them as often, and the main reason why they consume them are for supplementing their diet and using them in association with exercise, to enhance muscle growth and to restore after a workout.

When it comes to brand preferences, young Finns clearly prefer foreign, well-known brands that they are already familiar with, meaning that repeat purchases often take place.

When examining which factors or who influence the purchase decision of young Finns, it is mostly the family members and friends whose requests they listen to, not influencers or authority figures.

The product attributes that protein supplement producers should pay attention to when it comes to young Finns as consumers are taste, price, and high protein content of the product. These were the top three most important attributes according to respondents. A good recommendation would also be to bring some protein supplements made with non-synthetically produced sugars on the markets since the young target market prefers them slightly, yet most of the popular protein supplements brands make products that contain artificial sweeteners for optimized taste and low added-sugar content. (Agnroots, n.d.)

According to the survey results, most of the young Finnish consumers seem to fit either the dissonance-reducing or habitual buying behavior category. In dissonance-reducing buying behavior, the consumer is highly involved in the purchase process but does not see a lot of difference between brands - when evaluating the brands, the consumer may choose quite quickly because he/she does not see significant differences in brands and the buying decision will often be based on just certain product feature or convenience (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, p. 174). In this case, the respondents could have purchased a certain brand because of the best price, the one with the highest protein content or the one easiest available, for example, conveniently next to the cash register.

In habitual buying behavior, on the other hand, the consumer purchases familiar products or brands for a habit, not for brand loyalty (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, p. 174). This research does not go into detail on whether the respondents who prefer familiar brands repeat-purchase them out of brand loyalty or out of habit. However, those that stick to familiar brands out of habit would fit the habitual buying behavior category, whereas those who do it out of emotional involvement to specific brands, fit the complex buying behavior. Characterized by high emotional involvement and significant differences between brands, consumers of complex buying behavior are the ones who let their original beliefs and attitudes about a product or brand affect their purchase decision (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, p. 174).

8 FINAL WORDS

For the most part, the research process did go according to the plan. The research started with a brief introduction to the protein supplements market, soon followed by literary review. The secondary data provided good points of reference and supported the research findings. The research method was mainly quantitative method, and the data collection method was an online survey, which was a good choice for this research as it enabled the author to reach potential respondents quickly and efficiently. The author herself uses protein supplements too, and the process gave her more insight on the consumption patterns of her peers. The outcome of the research is as hoped for - the objectives were met, as this research provides a comprehensive analysis of how young, Finnish consumers are as target market, what are their preferences, and how are their consumption patterns and attitudes towards protein supplements.

If I would start the research again, I would probably include a few more questions to the survey, especially some specifying questions that would help clarify the reason behind the responses. For example, I would include a question that would specify whether those respondents that engage in repeat-purchases do that out of brand loyalty or habit.

For further research, it would be beneficial to examine the general consumer behavior of Finnish Millenials and Generation Z more, as the author found that it was difficult to find research on it. This would also provide more information about whether the consumer behavior of young Finns has a clear pattern or whether the behavior depends on the product category in question.

This research might serve as a reference for other research with a focus on young Finns as consumers, as well as provide an analysis of young Finns as a target market for marketers wanting to reach them. It could provide companies and suppliers with a better understanding of the factors and product attributes they should concentrate on in order to make their products attractive to a young audience, and help them develop their products and advertising methods accordingly.

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APPENDIX

The Consumption of Protein Supplements Among Young Adults (Under 30 Years old) in Finland

The purpose of this survey is to find out what are the consumption patterns and attitudes of young Finnish adults towards protein supplements. All the answers are anonymous and are only used for research purposes for a bachelor's thesis.

To qualify as a respondent, you verify that you have at least tried protein supplements before and are a Finnish citizen in the age range from 18 to 29. You also agree that your answers will be included in the thesis research statistics.

The survey consists of two sections, first of which focuses on consumption patterns, and the second one on attitudes and preferences. At the end of some questions, you will find option "other" where you can specify your answer in your own words if none of the other options apply.

1. What is your gender?

Mark only one oval.

- Female
- Male
- Other: ______________________

2. How old are you?

Mark only one oval.

- 18 - 21
- 22 - 25
- 26 – 29

3. Which of these protein supplements do you use? (Choose all that apply)

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Protein bars
- [ ] Protein powders
- [ ] Protein shakes/drinks

Other: [ ] ____________________

4. How often do you buy protein supplements?

Mark only one oval.

- Weekly
- Monthly
- Few times a year
- Once a year or less often

5. Where do you buy protein supplements from? (Choose all that apply)

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Grocery stores
- [ ] Fitness/wellness stores
- [ ] Online stores

Other: [ ] ____________________

6. How often do you use protein supplements?

Mark only one oval.

- [ ] Daily
- [ ] Weekly
- [ ] Monthly
- [ ] Few times a year
- [ ] Once a year or less often

7. Why are you using protein supplements? (Choose all that apply)

Check all that apply.

- [ ] To ensure adequate daily protein intake
- [ ] To prevent future diseases and illnesses
- [ ] To speed up muscle recovery/ease soreness after exercise
- [ ] To promote muscle growth
- [ ] To aid weight loss
- [ ] To gain weight
- [ ] They taste good

Other: [ ] ____________________

8. In which circumstances do you use protein supplements? (Choose all that apply)

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Before workout
- [ ] After workout
- [ ] As part of daily diet
- [ ] As a snack/meal replacement

Other: [ ] ____________________

9. How healthy do you think protein supplements are on a scale from 1 to 5? (1 = not at all healthy, 5 = extremely healthy) *Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all healthy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Extremely healthy

10. Which of these brands have you heard of? (Choose all that apply)

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Puhdistamo
- [ ] Leader
- [ ] Star Nutrition
- [ ] Barebells
- [ ] Rawbite
- [ ] Fast
- [ ] M-Nutrition
- [ ] Supermass Nutrition
- [ ] SportLife Nutrition
- [ ] Sportyfeel
- [ ] BE-KIND
- [ ] Maxim
- [ ] Biotech USA

Other: [ ] ____________________

11. Which of these brands do you use? (Choose all that apply)

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Puhdistamo
- [ ] Leader
- [ ] Star Nutrition
- [ ] Barebells
- [ ] Rawbite
- [ ] Fast
- [ ] M-Nutrition
- [ ] Supermass Nutrition
- [ ] SportLife Nutrition
- [ ] Sportyfeel
- [ ] BE-KIND
- [ ] Maxim
- [ ] Biotech USA

Other: [ ] ____________________

Attitudes and Preferences

In this section, the respondent is asked to rate the importance of factors impacting purchase decision on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = not at all important, 5 = extremely important)

12. I have seen advertisement of the brand/product

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all important	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Extremely important

13. A family member or friend has recommended the brand/product

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all important						Extremely important

14. I have seen influencers/celebrities promoting the brand/product

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all important						Extremely important

15. A salesman recommends it

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all important						Extremely important

16. The brand is well-known

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all important						Extremely important

17. The brand is domestic

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all important						Extremely important

18. I have used the brand/product before

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all important						Extremely important

19. The product is limited edition

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all important						Extremely important

20. The product is easily available (for example, next to the cash register)

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all important						Extremely important

21. The price of the product

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	

Not at all important	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Extremely important

22. The attractiveness of the product packaging

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all important	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Extremely important

23. The taste of the product

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all important	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Extremely important

24. The product has high protein content

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all important	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Extremely important

25. The product is vegan

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all important	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Extremely important

26. The product is low-calorie

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all important	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Extremely important

27. The product does not contain artificial sweeteners

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all important	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Extremely important

28. The product is artifically sweetened (sucralose, aspartame, acesulfame, stevia...)

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all important	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Extremely important