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Bachelor's Thesis

Social media marketing in B2B:

*Can customer engagement help increase brand
awareness? A Mixed Methods Study*



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Abstract

As social media platforms are increasingly becoming more popular and a part of everyday life, Business-to-Business (B2B) marketers from different industries are realizing social media's potential for achieving marketing purposes. However, scientific literature regarding social media usage in B2B contexts is still filled with gaps in knowledge; especially when compared to literature about social media usage in Business-to-Customer (B2C) contexts. One of these research gaps is the lack of niched information about each effect of using social media. This paper aims at contributing to filling this research gap by presenting an extensive literature review about social media marketing in B2B; followed by an analysis of empirical data gathered from 11 different cases of B2B companies engaged in social media marketing. Moreover, this is to answer the research questions; how are B2B companies using social media to increase brand awareness? Which types of content inspire the most customer engagement? And how can B2B companies amplify their chances of succeeding in increasing brand awareness through social media? This paper will further contribute to this research topic, by identifying further research gaps and present suggestions for future research.

Keywords

Brand Awareness; Business Communication; Business-to-Business (B2B); Customer Engagement; Social Media; Social Media Marketing.



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1 Introduction

This chapter offers a short introduction to the topic of social media marketing in B2B contexts, followed by a problem discussion which argues for the importance for this research thesis, and explains why it is needed.

1.1 Background

The world is going deeper into the digital age and is becoming more and more dependent on using the internet on a daily basis (Sin, 2015). The internet helps carryout many functions; ranging from simple tasks such as, communicating with friends and families (Lomborg, 2016), to doing more complex tasks such as business functions (Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011), and governmental work (Gil-Gracia, Dawes and Pardo, 2017). Some of the most frequently used sites on the internet are social media sites (Lomborg, 2016). Social media is defined as ‘a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan and Haenlein cited in Buratti, Parola and Satta, 2018, p. 490; Habibi et al., 2015, p. 642; Jussila, Kärkkäinen and Leino, 2013, p. 7; Kärkkäinen, Jussila and Väisänen, 2010, p. 229). As stated, social media sites build on the attributes of Web 2.0 which is “a term that was first used in 2004 to describe a new way in which software developers and end-users started to utilize the world wide web; that is, as a platform whereby content and applications are no longer created and published by individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, pp. 60-61). In its inception, the purpose of social media was to facilitate an innovative way in which people can communicate, keep in touch, and share content with each other (Lomborg, 2016). However, as the years went by, social media sites have become a worldwide phenomenon due to their popularity (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016). Facebook, alone, has approximately 2.4 billion monthly users (Newsroom.fb.com, 2019). At first, B2B marketing professionals believed that social media sites were not that serious and would not play a significant role in marketing functions (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016). However, as social media sites users continued to rapidly increase (Ibid.) marketers started to realize social media’s potential as a tool to achieve numerous marketing goals (Habibi et al., 2015; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Some of these marketing goals include increasing brand awareness, communicating and delivering information more efficiently, customer prospecting, and many others (Buratti, Parola and Satta, 2018; Järvinen et al., 2012; Keinänen and Kuivalainen, 2015) which will be looked further into in section (2.2). Although, scientific literature regarding social media has not given attention to B2B contexts, when compared to B2C contexts; which resulted in multiple gaps in research (Aral et al. and Kane et al., cited in Wang et al., 2017; Guesalaga, 2016; Järvinen et al., 2012).



1.2 Problem Discussion

There is no doubt that social media is increasingly becoming more popular among B2B companies; especially since the emergence of business-specific social media platforms, such as LinkedIn (Järvinen et al., 2012). However, B2B companies have been slow in realizing the potential of social media sites and adopting their usage to achieve marketing goals (Guesalaga, 2016; Habibi et al., 2015; Järvinen et al., 2012; Kärkkäinen, Jussila and Väisänen, 2010; Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011; Wang et al., 2017). In addition, even though most B2B companies have shown interest in using technology-based marketing tools such as social media marketing, many of them are still depending on traditional marketing tactics that offer little to no opportunity for customers to give feedback (Järvinen et al., 2012). Moreover, B2B companies have faced, and are still facing numerous obstacles and challenges to being successful in achieving their objectives for using social media marketing (Ibid.). It is even argued, that even in the cases where B2B companies have invested and used social media marketing, these companies have not been able to utilize social media to its full potential (Michaelidou et al. and Karjaluoto et al., cited in Wang et al., 2017). One factor contributing to this slow progress for B2B companies in utilizing social media, is the fact that scientific literature has been giving more attention to B2C companies and providing them with more empirical studies and theoretical guidelines for success (Aral et al. and Kane et al., cited in Wang et al., 2017; Guesalaga, 2016; Järvinen et al., 2012; Tafesse and Wien, 2018). This lack of research regarding B2B contexts is what motivated this paper; as research intended for B2C contexts simply cannot be used by B2B marketers due to its irrelevance. Järvinen et al. (2012) supported this by stating that social media marketing's benefits can differ between B2C and B2B companies. As stated, scientific literature has brushed upon the potential benefits of social media as a whole and superficially (Buratti, Parola and Satta, 2018). This paper aims at contributing to filling this lack of depth in literature by focusing on one of the most important potential benefits of social media in B2B contexts: brand awareness. Brand Awareness is defined as the ability of the customer to recall a brand in their mind, when considering suppliers before making a purchase decision. (Langaro, Rita and de Fátima Salgueiro, 2015). The reasoning behind choosing brand awareness for this study is due to its importance. As brand awareness is a prerequisite for brands to be considered as a potential supplier when buyers are in the "considering options" stage of the buying process (Langaro, Rita and de Fátima Salgueiro, 2015). Using Social media marketing can help B2B companies increase the awareness of their brands (Andersson and Wikström, 2017; Buratti, Parola and Satta, 2018; Järvinen et al., 2012; Keinänen and Kuivalainen, 2015; Langaro, Rita and de Fátima Salgueiro, 2015; Rodriguez, Peterson and Krishnan, 2012). However, as stated by Bija and Balaş (2014), social media is not a golden ticket that ensures success on its own; it is rather a tool that helps marketers reach their goals more efficiently if done properly. Moreover, no matter how much content companies post on social media platforms, the content has no value unless it receives engagement from the customers in the form of likes, comments, shares, and so on. Customer engagement is an outcome of a company's activities; customer engagement can either be direct or indirect (Pansari



and Kumar, 2017). Direct customer engagement entails purchases; while indirect customer engagement entails other types of value that customers can contribute to the company's marketing efforts; such as, unpaid recommendations by the customers to others, social media activity related to the brand, and customer input to the company in the form of suggestions and feedback (Gupta, Pansari and Kumar, 2018). Since this paper is concerned with social media, only indirect customer engagement on social media will be of relevance to this study. Further, Harmeling et al. (2016) mention a few of the engaging activities that customers could do; such as, customer acquisition and retention. This raises the question of whether customer engagement could also raise brand awareness or not. This is an important question nowadays as competition between B2B companies is becoming fiercer; especially due to globalization (Matthyssens, Kirca and Pace, 2008). Globalization has forced B2B companies to seek new communication channels that enable them to reach global customers. Furthermore, reaching international customers using traditional B2B marketing tactics, such as, personal contact is too expensive and inefficient. Thus, creating a need for a cheap tool to reach customers all around the world. Social media's growing popularity has made it a suitable candidate for being such a tool (Harmeling et al., 2016; Kozinets et al., 2010).

1.3 Purpose

The aim of this thesis is to study how some B2B companies use social media to increase brand awareness. Further, this thesis will explore the relationship between customer engagement and brand awareness. This is done through a qualitative research on 11 Swedish and International B2B companies which are active on social media. The study will provide implications for theory and practice to improve knowledge of social media marketing in B2B contexts.

1.4 Delimitations

To ensure the substantiality of the findings, the authors delimited the size of the companies studied in this thesis to medium and large. The authors have also seen it befitting to interview only high-ranking marketing professionals to ensure that the interviewees have the required knowledge to answer the interview questions. Finally, the companies studied in this thesis are delimited to being either Swedish or International B2B companies.

1.5 Outline of the Thesis

This thesis will consist of 7 major chapters. Introduction; literature review; research operationalisation; methodology; empirical data; data analysis; and conclusions. The thesis will start by generally discussing social media marketing in B2B contexts and briefly discussing its possible benefits and challenges, with a focus on brand awareness



through the literature review chapter. Then, through the data collection and analysis chapters, the paper will display and discuss empirical data gathered from 11 semi-structured telephone interviews regarding increasing brand awareness through social media marketing and the possibility of increasing brand awareness more effectively by increasing customer engagement through interesting and engaging content. Finally, the conclusions chapter will summarize the findings and results, pinpoint the contributions of this paper, and suggest potential areas of inquiry for future research.

2 Literature Review

This chapter displays and discusses different a theoretical framework of the concepts that are relevant to the purpose of this thesis. After reading this chapter, the reader will be equipped with basic knowledge which will help them understand the findings and results of this thesis in a more comprehensive manner. The chapter consists of five major sections; Business Communication, Social Media Marketing, Opportunities and Benefits of Social Media Marketing, Brand Awareness, and Customer Engagement (Marketing). Figure 1 presents a summary of the different concepts and their interrelations.

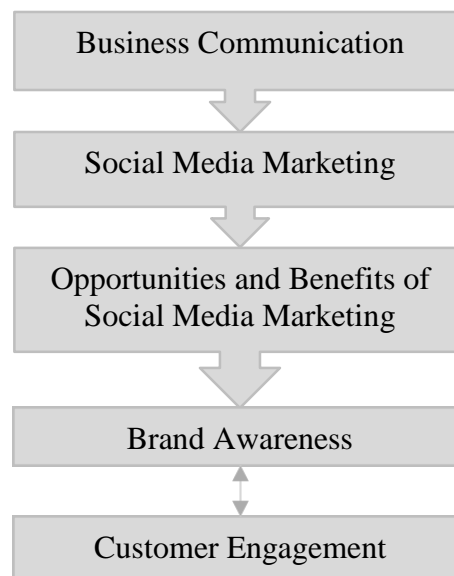


Figure 1: Relevant Concepts and their Interrelations

2.1 Business Communication

Most B2B industries rely on strong relationships between suppliers and buyers to maintain business; which means that relationship building is of critical importance in B2B contexts. The most important factor for building and maintaining relationships is communication (Mora Cortez and Johnston, 2017; Murphy and Sashi, 2018). Constant communication with buyers gives the supplier a strong competitive edge over competitors (Murphy and Sashi, 2018; van Niekerk, 2007). This is especially important nowadays due to how globalization and new technologies such as the internet and social media have increased the competitiveness of B2B companies (Harmeling et al., 2016; Kozinets et al., 2010; Murphy and Sashi, 2018). Moreover, communication needs to be back and forth between suppliers and buyers; because no matter how frequent communication is, it will not be enough to build a strong



relationship if it is one-way from the supplier to the buyer only (Murphy and Sashi, 2018). Communication in B2B has various modes which are categorised based on 5 characteristics that define how the communication mode facilitates the mutual agreement of the parties; and how that communication mode provides the ability to process information (Murphy and Sashi, 2018). The 5 characteristics are the following: (1) speed of communication, which refers to the ability of a mode to facilitate fast two-way communication, (2) symbol variety, which refers to the ability of a mode to convey signs such as facial expressions and so on, (3) parallelism, which refers to the ability of a mode to transmit different two-way messages at the same time, (4) rehearsability, which refers to the ability of a user to edit a message before sending it to the receiver, and (5) reprocessability, which refers to the ability of a mode to support recording of the interaction (Murphy and Sashi, 2018). To ensure a high level of effectivity and satisfaction, one needs to choose which communication mode to use carefully. For example, if the action required is a simple rebuy, then using a simple internet-based communication model could be the most suitable one. However, if the task at hand is negotiating a new sale, then personal formal Face-to-Face communication is required to achieve the highest level of understanding through signs that cannot be picked up on, in other types of communication, as formal Face-to-Face communication makes it possible for both parties to pick up on emotions such as satisfaction, anger, confusion, tiredness and others by observing facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice (Murphy and Sashi, 2018). When the action required is increasing brand awareness, the supplier needs to reach and communicate with large numbers of receivers at the same time (Andersson and Wikström, 2017; Buratti, Parola and Satta, 2018; Järvinen et al., 2012; Keinänen and Kuivalainen, 2015; Langaro, Rita and de Fátima Salgueiro, 2015; Murphy and Sashi, 2018; Rodriguez, Peterson and Krishnan, 2012); arguably, social media pose as a suitable communication mode for companies to undertake this task.

2.2 Why Social Media Marketing?

Prior to the introduction of Web 2.0 principles and consequently social media sites, B2B companies depended on traditional marketing practices that kept most of the power in the hands of suppliers (Mora Cortez and Johnston, 2017). However, after moving further into the digital age and social media sites becoming popular, B2B companies have shifted towards using technology-based applications that give some of the power to the buyers and allow them to give feedback and communicate with each other on a global scale. This new power in the hands of buyers can either be a curse or a blessing to B2B companies, depending on how well they handle it. At the core of all this new technology-based communication models is the concept of social media marketing; which is defined as “an interdisciplinary and cross-functional concept that uses social media (often in combination with other communications channels) to achieve organizational goals by creating value for stakeholders” (Felix, Rauschnabel and Hinsch, 2017). If B2B companies pay attention to this new stream of information generated by the buyers, they can use it to improve their services and address unsatisfied customers. However, if B2B companies are skeptical to this new reality and do not capitalize on it, it can harm the companies’ reputation and image



and cost the companies all the possible opportunities that social media has to offer (Habibi et al., 2015; Hoffman and Novak cited in Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011; Huotari et al., 2015; Wang, Pauleen and Zhang, 2016). Social media sites are becoming a part of everyday life for most people nowadays; including business professionals. Further, Keinänen and Kuivalainen (2015) state that executives, marketers, and other professionals that use social media for private purposes, are more likely to use social media for business purposes as well. This arguably creates an unavoidable need for B2B companies to have a presence on social media to not miss any opportunities that it has to offer. As social media sites are growing, they are becoming more complex and harder to define; Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) identified and categorised six different types of social media sites: Social Networking Sites (SNS), collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, virtual social worlds, and virtual game worlds. Social Networking Sites (SNS) are the most commonly used type of social media; so, when social media is mentioned in this paper, it will only be referring to SNS. Examples of SNS include Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram and others. Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides (2011) conducted a survey which was aimed at finding out the efficiency of SNS in achieving marketing goals when used by B2B companies. 61% of the respondents to the survey conducted by (Ibid.) stated that their respective B2B companies are considering using SNS to achieve marketing and organizational goals; which could be interpreted as an increase in the number of B2B companies that are starting to realise the potential of SNS (Habibi et al., 2015; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Further, the respondents to Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides' (2011) survey who stated that their companies are not using social media marketing, mentioned that the reason behind their respective companies not using social media, is the lack of knowledge about social media's potential and how to use it (Järvinen et al., 2012; Lacka and Chong, 2016). Which further justifies the need for additional research regarding the benefits of social media marketing in B2B contexts. Also, a different study cited in Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides (2011), found that 93% of users active on social media believe that companies need to have an online presence on social media sites; and as mentioned earlier, "users" encompass a wide range of people which includes all types of professionals (Keinänen and Kuivalainen, 2015). Other surveys conducted by different researchers further prove social media's relevance to B2B companies; such as the survey conducted by Kärkkäinen, Jussila and Väisänen (2010) which found that 48.9% of B2B companies believe that social media increases customer orientation. Buratti, Parola and Satta (2018), Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides (2011), and Schultz, Schwepker and Good (2012) all state that B2B companies are increasingly adopting social media into their marketing strategies and many are evaluating increasing their budget for investing in social media marketing; in addition, none of the companies are planning to reduce their existing budget for social media marketing. Social media marketing can have positive effects on other concepts as well. For example, Mora Cortez and Johnston (2017) state that B2B companies mostly depend on the same customers who provide the most revenue; therefore, relationship marketing is very important to B2B companies to help them



cultivate and maintain relationships with their existing customers. Further, Social media and internet-based technologies have been identified for having potential for building and maintaining relationships; as B2B companies can deploy trained professionals to manage and steer the communication with customers over social media, and answer their questions and inquiries, which helps create a more personal touch, and creates extra value for the customers (Agnihotri et al., 2016; Bauer et al., Sharma, cited in Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011; Mora Cortez and Johnston, 2017). In conclusion, there are many reasons for B2B companies to invest in social media marketing, as it brings many opportunities that B2B companies cannot afford to lose (Bîja and Balaş, 2014). Some of these opportunities will be mentioned in the upcoming chapter.

2.3 Opportunities and Benefits of Social Media Marketing in B2B

Social media marketing has many opportunities and benefits to offer to companies that utilize it. Such opportunities include providing access and ability to gather a significantly increased amount of customer data that B2B companies could use to find out to which extent their marketing activities have been effective; then, companies could use this data to make alternations and adjustments to their marketing strategies and practices in order to improve their marketing performance (Habibi et al., 2015; Järvinen et al., 2012; Mora Cortez and Johnston, 2017). Habibi et al. (2015) and Jussila, Kärkkäinen and Aramo-Immonen (2014) speak of another potential benefit of social media marketing, which is increased communication; thus, improving two-way communication between suppliers and buyers, which helps simplify and bolster cooperation (Habibi et al., 2015; Huotari et al., 2015; Wang, Pauleen and Zhang, 2016). In addition, reinforced cooperation would not only be between suppliers and buyers (external), it would rather be between employees and departments of the same organization (internal) (Jussila, Kärkkäinen and Aramo-Immonen, 2014; Wang, Pauleen and Zhang, 2016). Although, it is worth noting that some authors seem to be in controversy regarding whether social media is used more for internal communication or for external communication. Wang, Pauleen and Zhang (2016) and Jussila, Kärkkäinen and Aramo-Immonen (2014) state that social media is used more internal communication; while Kärkkäinen, Jussila and Väsänen (2010) claim that social media is used more for external communication. Moreover, other authors claim that external communication through social media is not only specific to supplier- buyer interactions; it is rather also, between a company and its partners, unions, parties and other cooperators (Andersson and Wikström, 2017; Habibi et al., 2015; Jussila, Kärkkäinen and Aramo-Immonen, 2014). Depending on the B2B industry in which the company operates in, social media sites could serve as additional sales channels that could help bring in more profits to the company (Buratti, Parola and Satta, 2018; Järvinen et al., 2012; Keinänen and Kuivalainen, 2015). Social media marketing has been also identified for saving time, when compared to traditional marketing practices (Jussila, Kärkkäinen and Aramo-Immonen, 2014). All the mentioned above benefits, in addition to many others, are reasons for B2B companies to consider adopting social



media marketing. Although, one especially interesting potential of social media, is increasing brand awareness (Andersson and Wikström, 2017; Rodriguez, Peterson and Krishnan, 2012). In fact, the authors of this paper believe that brand awareness serves as a requirement before many of the other benefits could be attained. For example, attracting new customers is dependent on increasing brand awareness as a first step. Considering this fact, in addition to the fact that brand awareness is the focal point of this paper, the upcoming section will be dedicated solely to discussing increasing brand awareness through social media in B2B contexts.

2.4 Brand Awareness

Brand awareness is at the top of every marketer's agenda (Bîja and Balaş, 2014) as it "captures the potential availability of a brand in the mind of the consumer. It is understood as a precondition for brands to be considered within the repertoire of purchase options, justifying its crucial role in brand knowledge" (Langaro, Rita and de F áima Salgueiro, 2015). This definition goes in line with what the authors of this paper proposed in the previous section about brand awareness being a requirement for some of the other potential benefits of social media marketing. When awareness is activated, it lays the foundation for customers' memory and associations. Brand awareness also contributes to brand familiarity through repeated exposure to the brand message which helps solidify the brand image in the customers' memory. This familiarity with the brand creates a sense of warmth and association with the brand in the minds of the customers, which plays a positive role when these customers are evaluating different alternatives for their purchase need (Langaro, Rita and de F áima Salgueiro, 2015). In early literature, some B2B marketers argue that external communication and brand awareness is not important due to that B2B companies mostly depend on personal relationships and therefore do not need to put effort into increasing brand awareness. However, recent studies suggest that putting effort into increasing brand awareness is just as important and beneficial as maintaining existing relationships and internal communication (Anees-ur-Rehman et al., 2018).

2.4.1 Increasing Brand Awareness through Social Media

Bîja and Balaş (2014) state that social media now is a "must" for companies looking to increase their brand awareness because Marketers perceive social media marketing as more targeted communication with specific groups of audiences which makes it highly effective in creating and improving brand awareness. However, companies cannot engage and succeed in raising brand awareness through social media without clear goals and a plan. Such goals and plans can be, number of posts daily/weekly the company will be posting; which social media platforms will be used; number of reached profiles by the posts; and the level of interactivity with customers the company is aiming for (Bîja and Balaş, 2014). Furthermore, if the company wishes to be successful in using social media and creating brand awareness; the company would need to successfully engage the customers and encourage interaction with its posts.



Contrary to some belief that engagement is determined by the number of “followers” or the platform which the company uses; the key for inspiring engagement with posts, is the actual content the company is putting out. Intriguing and engaging content is important for the brand reach. If the posts have new, original and educative information, there are higher chances for it to be shared by more people, thus reaching more audience and increasing brand awareness (Bîja and Balaş, 2014; Syrdal and Briggs, 2018). Also, companies should not only focus on sharing their news and introduce their products; they should rather post regularly about topics that interest their audience and create a sense of involvement to a community that shares similar interests. This will create a strong connection with the brand and inspire brand loyalty (Syrdal and Briggs, 2018). Creating a sense of involvement and relating to customers is done in order to evoke customer engagement (Anees-ur-Rehman et al., 2018).

2.5 Customer Engagement (Marketing)

Since B2B companies do not have as large of a customer base as B2C companies, and marketing effectiveness measures have become more customer-centric, B2B companies have shifted their focus from a customer-transactions ideology to relationship-building and engaging customers in all possible ways (Youssef et al., 2018). One of these ways of engagement are through social media (Pansari and Kumar, 2017; Youssef et al., 2018). Furthermore, since social media sites became a large part of all business relationships, customers/buyers nowadays have an increasingly involved role in various marketing functions, such as marketing communication, product improvement and innovation, and customer retention and acquisition (Harmeling et al., 2016). When customers/buyers get involved in marketing functions, they often have a greater influence and credibility than marketing practitioners doing the same functions, not to mention having a higher reach and lower costs (Kozinets et al., 2010). This level of customer involvement can either pose as a great potential or a great threat to companies. Therefore, companies nowadays need to adapt to this change in marketing practices to be able to control it to their best ability; and to help guide companies in this new endeavour, a new concept of specific knowledge has emerged under the name of *Customer Engagement Marketing*. Customer Engagement Marketing is defined as “a firm’s deliberate effort to motivate, empower, and measure customer contributions to marketing functions” (Harmeling et al., 2016). Guesalaga (2016) suggests that social media strategies in B2B companies need to be integrated in order to increase customer engagement as the main purpose. In an attempt to steer customer engagement and get a positive outcome from it, companies are increasingly investing in customer engagement and having a higher level of interaction with customers (Verhoef, Reinartz and Krafft, 2010). Customer engagement is defined and understood differently in each company as their measurements and goals differ. However, a generally accepted definition of customer engagement is that it is a “[...] psychological process that models the underlying mechanisms by which customer loyalty forms for new customers of a service as well as mechanisms by which loyalty may be maintained for repeat purchase customers of a service brand” (Youssef et al.,



2018). Having a high level of customer engagement and interaction can have various benefits to companies. One worth mentioning is that engaged customers can serve as extended brand ambassadors who help companies improve their services, which in turn, helps increase customer satisfaction of both the engaged customers and disengaged ones (Youssef et al., 2018).



3 Research Questions/Hypotheses and Operationalisation

This chapter will present the developed research questions and hypotheses which will be answered in this thesis. This chapter will also present how the authors conceptualised and operationalised the different concepts discussed in the previous chapter.

3.1 Research Questions/Hypotheses

Having conducted the literature review and identifying the research gaps in the stream of literature regarding social media marketing in B2B contexts. The authors developed the following research questions, and aim at answering them through this thesis:

- RQ1: How are medium and large B2B companies using social media to increase brand awareness?
- RQ2: Which types of content that medium and large B2B companies post on social media inspire the most customer engagement?
- RQ3: Can medium and large B2B companies amplify the chances of increasing brand awareness by increasing customer engagement?

In addition, based on what was found in the literature review and the substantial amount of empirical data collected, the authors identified an opportunity to developed two research hypotheses that could be tested; which in turn, add on to the contribution of this thesis to literature. First, the authors propose that B2B companies using social media marketing experience higher brand awareness. Second, the authors propose that if companies actively try to increase customer engagement with the content they post on social media, it could result in even higher brand awareness. The research hypotheses stand as follows:

- RH1: B2B companies that are actively present on social media experience higher brand awareness.
- RH2: More customer engagement on companies' social media content can lead to higher brand awareness.

In order to test these hypotheses, the authors will conduct correlation analyses on the primary data collected for this thesis in the data analysis chapter (Chapter 6), and either prove or disprove each hypothesis.

3.2 Conceptualisation and Operationalisation

3.2.1 Conceptualisation

In some cases, authors of different articles define the same concepts in different ways. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify which definition will be adopted in a thesis by having a conceptualisation section (Foschi, 2014). Neuman (2011) defines conceptualisation as a process of specifying what authors mean by a concept. In



addition, Neuman (2011) adds that conceptualisation is the process of transforming a concept into a common meaning, a conceptual or theoretical definition. A concept in this case is also referred to as a “construct” which is considered as the result of conceptualisation. A conceptual definition is a clear verbal statement of the concept in specific words, which are linked to other concepts, so that readers would be able to understand what the conceptual definition means (Neuman, 2011). Conceptualisation is a requirement to operationalise an abstract concept into specific measurable variables that can be used in data analyses.

3.2.1.1 Conceptualisation of Brand Awareness

Authors conceptualise the concept of brand awareness as an overall assessment of how attractive it is for job seekers to work in a company, how much power a company’s social platform has to tempt a customer to deal with the company, or whether the company is present in its potential buyers’ minds when they are considering potential suppliers for the products and services which the company offers (Langaro, Rita and de F áima Salgueiro, 2015).

3.2.1.2 Conceptualisation of Customer Engagement

Authors conceptualise the concept of customer engagement as an overall assessment of the acts that social media users do on a company’s social media account, or the posts that a company shares on its social media platforms regardless of whether they are related to their industry or not. This involvement indicates to what extent the company or the content they share on social media is relevant and interesting to their audience (Youssef et al., 2018).

3.2.1.3 Conceptualisation of Company’s Level of Activity on Social Media

The level of activity of a company on social media platforms can be characterised in different ways. The authors of this thesis conceptualise it as the extent of which the company uses social media; based on the number of social media platforms the company is present on; the scale of targeted audience and the company’s predetermined marketing goals for using social media; the types of content the company shares; and the frequency in which the company posts on its social media accounts.

3.2.2 Operationalisation

Neuman (2011) defines operationalisation as a process of transferring the conceptualised definitions of concepts into operational definition using a set of measurement techniques which convert abstract concepts into measurable variables. Moreover, operationalisation is a process of creating definition(s) for a



concept, which can be observed and measured (Foschi, 2014). In accordance with Neuman (2011), operational definitions could be developed through different ways; such as, a survey questionnaire; field observation; content analysis; or through interview questions. For this thesis, qualitative semi-structured interviews were chosen as a data collection method, since there is a need for a deep understanding of the concepts that no other data collection method could provide. The authors of this paper designed the interview questions in order to uncover the operational meanings of the concepts discussed in this thesis. Further, to develop operational definitions, indicators have been selected. *Table 1* displays the process of operationalisation carried out for this thesis:

Table 1: Operationalisation Table.

Concept/Variable	Scales	Conceptual definition	Operational definition
Brand Awareness	BA	An overall assessment of how attractive it is for job seekers to work in a company, how much power a company's social platform has to tempt a customer to be willing to deal with the company, or whether the company is present in its potential buyers' minds when they are considering potential suppliers for the products and services the company offers (Langaro, Rita and de Fátima Salgueiro, 2015).	Brand awareness is assessed by: (1) The number of active social media users in the same industry who randomly introduced to the company's brand. (2) The number of job applications which the company have received in a specific time period. (3) The number of customers who have been attracted to the company through the company's social media platforms.
Customer Engagement	CE	An overall assessment of the acts that social media networks users do on a company's network, or the posts that a company shares on its social media platforms regardless of whether they are related to their business clients or not. This involvement indicates to what extent the company or the content they share on social media is important for their customers (Youssef et al., 2018).	Customer engagement is assessed by: (1) The number of followers on social media platforms. (2) The number of 'likes'. (3) The number of 'comments' (only the ones including suggestions and constructive criticisms, or questions that lead to feedback).



			(4) The number of views of videos. (5) The number of downloads. (6) The number of 'shares'.
Actively Usage of Social Media	AUSM	The extent to which the company uses social media based on the number of social media platforms that they are present on, the scale of targeted audience and their predetermined goals for using the platforms, the types of content and the number of posts on these platforms.	Actively usage of social media is assessed by: (1) The number of social media platforms that the company is present on. (2) The scale of the targeted audience. (3) The number of weekly shared posts on social media platforms.



4 Methodology

This chapter will discuss and justify the chosen methods of research for this thesis in detail. In addition, this chapter will pinpoint the contributions of each author.

4.1 Research purpose

The purpose of this study is to better understand how to increase brand awareness by using social media in a B2B context. More specifically, this paper is trying to investigate what inspires more customer engagement with posts on social media platforms; which in turn, helps achieve higher brand awareness. In accordance with the stated goals of this paper, the authors have decided on taking an inductive approach to research. As aforementioned, research regarding social media marketing in B2B has been scarce and has so far taken a general and shallow approach. This resulted in a lack of theory and guidelines for practitioners to follow. Consequently, this paper aims at contributing to filling this gap in research and taking an in-depth look into one of the possible effects of social media usage in a B2B context, increasing brand awareness. This topic has not been extensively researched before; resulting in a lack of theories regarding it. Therefore, the authors have found it suitable and necessary to generate new theory from empirical data to supplement research regarding this topic; as well as, offer guidelines for practitioners to follow in order to ensure a more successful experience and outcome of increasing brand awareness by using social media. Moreover, the purpose of this study will be an exploratory one. Meaning that the authors are trying to develop a new theory and create a qualitative basis which can act as a foundation for further quantitative research that can prove this theory. This comes in accordance with what Harrison and Reilly (2011) stated about exploratory research designs often serving as an initial inquiry that identifies variables, concepts, theories, and relations between them that can later be looked further into using quantitative methods. According to Bell and Bryman (2019), a qualitative research is a research strategy that reveals the connection between the research and theory and underlines how theories were produced. Since the data gained through the quantitative analysis contradicted the data analysed through the qualitative research, the authors of this paper decided to use a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, a mixed methods study, and integrate them to reach the most accurate result possible for this research paper. This method is also proposed by Bell and Bryman (Ibid.). Therefore, this paper is a mixed methods study conducting mixed research methods.

4.2 Research approach

After first having conducted the literature review about social media in B2B, it was clear to the authors that there is an urgent need for more empirical data to generate more theories about specific aspects of social media. Moreover, in the recent past, the authors have conducted a quantitative research regarding social media marketing in B2B and have constantly found themselves wondering about the reasoning behind many of the answers that were provided through a survey. It was also unclear why some companies were more successful in their experience with social media than others. More specifically, one of the questions in the survey was regarding the goals



that B2B companies have for using social media marketing; and the majority of the respondents stated increasing brand awareness as one of their main goals for using social media, and some of them were significantly more successful in achieving this goal than others. In an attempt to understand the reasons behind this success and get a better understanding of B2B companies experience with social media, the authors chose the topic of increasing brand awareness through social media in a B2B context for this thesis. In order to collect the required in-depth data, the authors saw it befitting to use a qualitative research approach in addition to using a quantitative research approach which provides the opportunity to understand the justifications behind actions (Shenton, 2004). The reason behind this decision is to a better and deeper understanding of the phenomenon and open up the possibility to have in-depth semi-structured interviews with high-ranking professionals that can provide meaningful and significant insights about the chosen topic of this paper (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019, p.211).

4.3 Data collection method

According to Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019), there are two ways in which researchers can gather data for their research; primary and secondary. Primary data is data which was gathered by the researchers themselves for a specific purpose; primary data can be obtained through interviews, questionnaires, or observations (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). On the other hand, secondary data is data which was gathered by others for a purpose different than the one of the researchers; however, even though for a different purpose, the secondary data could still be relevant for the researchers which allows them to use it and analyse it to answer their own research questions (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). Considering the purpose of this thesis and the lack of empirical data in research regarding the subject at hand, the authors have decided on collecting and using primary data specifically for the purpose of this thesis. As aforementioned, Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019) mention 3 ways in which researchers can collect primary data; interviews, questionnaires and observations. As was mentioned earlier in this thesis, there is a need for deep understanding about the topic of social media marketing in B2B contexts. Hence, a mixture of semi-structured interview questions and structured interview questions are the best candidate for collecting the needed understanding. Semi-structured interviews cover a large variety of instances. Semi-structured interviews entail the interviewer having a number of questions that form the general direction and schedule of the interview, but with the ability of changing the sequence of questions. Furthermore, the questions have a somewhat general nature which aims at giving the interviewee the freedom to answer in their own words and not be limited to a predetermined set of possible answers. Moreover, in semi-structured interviews, the interviewer has the liberty to ask follow-up questions when he/she feel is necessary or insightful. In addition, semi-structured interviews do not only include open questions, but can also include closed questions that may be useful to find out some specific variable such as age, gender, and position; closed questions can also be quantified and used to prove or disprove hypotheses (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019, p. 211). These characteristics of semi-structured interviews pose as suitable candidate for the data collection method of this paper. As mentioned in section (4.2), the purpose of this paper is to get a deeper understanding of how could B2B companies succeed in increasing brand awareness through social media. More specifically, this paper is trying to understand the ideas that facilitate success (justification) and not only the behaviours that lead to success



(actions). In the light of the foregoing, and in accordance with what was stated in the previous section (4.2) about the chosen research purpose and approach being exploratory and qualitative, the authors decided on using a mixture of qualitative semi-structured interview questions and structured interview questions as the data collection method.

4.3.1 Telephone interviews

Having decided on semi-structured interviews as the data collection method of this paper, the authors have decided on conducting these interviews over the phone for the following reasons; they are much cheaper than in-person interviews since no travel is needed, thus, saving time and money. Moreover, telephone interviews are easier to supervise. In addition, an important advantage of telephone interviewing is that the interviewees can focus on answering the questions truthfully and not be affected by the interviewer's characteristics; since it was found that in many cases, interviewees tend to give answers that may be desirable to the interviewer based on his or her age, ethnicity, status, appearance, or even mere presence (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019, pp. 212-213). However, telephone interviews come with a set of drawbacks as well. The first of which, is that telephone interviews cannot be sustained for more than 20-25 minutes, whereas personal interviews can last much longer than this. Telephone interviews are also limited in the sense that the interviewer cannot observe any signs of puzzlement, unease or confusion from the interviewees and act on them. It could also arise that not the right person is speaking on the phone and it is very difficult to determine this (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019, p. 213). Other issues such as data quality and engagement, response rate, unsuitability for sensitive topics and difficulty in reaching certain individuals are mentioned in literature (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019, pp. 213-214) but there is no full agreement or evidence to support these claims, nor do the authors feel that they have experienced these drawbacks.

4.3.2 Interviewing process

Having decided on telephone interviews as the tool for data collection, the authors designed the questions and divided them under 2 categories (see Appendix 1). Under the first category, the interviewees were asked to answer the questions from their respective company strategy perspective. While under the second category, the interviewees were asked to give answers to the questions based on their own opinions and views. The idea behind having these two categories was to first identify what the different companies are doing and how successful they perceive themselves to be with what they do, and then to identify what the interviewees would like to see from companies posting on social media and what type of content they would most likely engage with. Asking the interviewees questions from both seller and buyer perspectives contributes to maximizing on the data range gathered from each interview. The interview questions were designed to uncover the operational meanings of the concepts discussed in the conceptualisation table in chapter 3. Further, as the interviews were of a semi-structured nature, some follow-up questions were asked



during the interviews to expand on some of the answers and uncover the reasonings behind them. Then, the authors would analyse the answers with each other from both categories from all interviewees and connect the different opinions to identify a guideline for the type of content that inspires the most engagement from target audiences and consequently increase brand awareness through additional engagement which results in higher reach of content.

In accordance with what Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019, p. 213) suggested about the length of telephone interviews not exceeding 20-25 minutes, the interviews used for collecting the data for this paper ranged between 12 and 20 minutes each. In order to book each interview, the authors contacted large B2B companies that are active on social media and asked to talk to the head of the marketing or communication departments; once the head of the department was reached, the authors introduced themselves and explained the topic of research and asked if it was possible to have a phone interview at a time convenient to the interviewee. The authors also assured full anonymity to the interviewees and explained how their answers would be used. After having decided on a time, the authors would call the interviewees and conduct the interview in English and record it with the consent of the interviewees. After the interviews, the authors expressed gratitude and wished the interviewees a good day. Every interview was conducted in the same way, same order of questions, and all the questions were asked in the same way to eliminate any chance of interviewees understanding the questions in a different way. Hence, any variation in the answers would be the result of real variation in reality and not due to variations in the questions themselves (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019, p. 208).

4.4 Sample selection

The purpose of this paper is an inductive one which aims at contributing to the knowledge about how B2B companies can succeed in increasing brand awareness through social media. Further, since this is an inductive research, the contributions of this thesis will be based on the empirical data gathered from the interviewees; this means that it is crucial to design inclusion criteria that ensure that the interviewees possess relevant information that can provide the substantial findings this thesis needs. For sampling participants for this thesis, the authors put forth the following inclusion criteria: (1) the company must be operating in a B2B industry, (2) the company's size must be medium or large, (3) the company must be Swedish or International, (4) the company must be active on at least one social media platform, (5) the interviewee must be a high-ranking marketing practitioner within the B2B company. Considering these criteria, it was clear to the authors that there is no need for a purposive sampling method. In fact, using a purposive sampling method in this case would harm the generalizability of the thesis. Therefore, the authors saw it befitting to use the simple random sampling method for choosing participants to be interviewed; provided that they fulfil the aforementioned criteria. The simple random sampling method is a



sampling technique where every item in the population has an even chance and likelihood of being selected in the sample (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019, p. 391). Data was collected continuously until the authors felt it is enough to form a basis for theory (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019, p. 393). In accordance with this, the authors contacted 14 high-ranking marketing professionals from different medium and large B2B companies, 11 of whom have agreed to be interviewed. The authors did not seek to interview more professionals due to time constraints and lack of new data provided by the 11 interviewees; as their answers were somewhat similar. Further, the chosen topic is rather new and narrow, which eliminates the need for a large number of respondents as it requires a high level of depth in answers instead (quality over quantity). The chosen interviewees all have high positions within their respective companies and oversee social media marketing which ensures a high level of relevance and reliability of their answers. No criteria were put forth regarding gender and age, as the focus was rather on the relevance of professional knowledge and position. Further, no specific industry was chosen to be studied in this thesis. However, it is noteworthy to mention that the 11 B2B companies interviewed in this paper operate within the following 10 industries: Furnishing, Water Solutions, IT solutions, Air Handling units manufacturing, Pipeline development (*2), Trading, Cast iron manufacturing, Heating & Ventilation systems manufacturing, Battery manufacturing, and High-Tech Machinery Manufacturing.

4.5 Data analysis

Grounded theory will be used to analyse the findings of this thesis and provide results. Grounded theory is “theory that was derived from data, systematically gathered and analysed through the research process. In this method, data collection, analysis, and eventual theory stand in close relationship to one another” (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019, p. 521). According to this definition and what was stated in the above sections, grounded theory fits perfectly with the inductive purpose of this paper.

4.6 Quality criteria

Since this is a qualitative research, the authors have chosen the *Alternative criteria for evaluating qualitative research* proposed by Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019, pp. 363-365). These alternative criteria include 4 aspects; credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

4.6.1 Credibility

Credibility to qualitative research is what internal validity is to quantitative research. This criterion is met since the authors of this paper decided on the topic and designed the research process together. In addition, throughout the research process, the authors held constant meetings to discuss the latest findings and progress of the research and



to make sure the authors are working in harmony and compatibility. All authors have the same views and ideas about the subject matter and no disagreements arose, which ensure the smoothness of the research process of this paper (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019, p. 365).

4.6.2 Transferability

When sampling prospects for interviewing, the authors did not set any criteria on the industry in which the prospects operate in, other than it being in a B2B context fully or partially. The chosen prospects were targeted based on their position being in charge of social media marketing of their respective companies. After conducting the interviews, it was observed that the interviewees' ideas did not vary, and everyone had similar opinions. That with the fact that the interviewees operate in different B2B industries, suggests a high level of transferability within different industries in a B2B context (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019, p. 365).

4.6.3 Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research parallels what reliability is to quantitative research (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019, p. 365). Dependability can be achieved in qualitative research through "auditing" which entails the recording of all steps and process of the thesis (2019, p. 356). This criterion is somewhat met as the progress of this paper was over watched by a supervisor whom reviewed and approved the research decisions taken by the authors. When it comes to the dependability of the interviews' data, the interviews were conducted in English to avoid any misunderstandings or mistranslations.

4.6.4 Confirmability

It is hard to prove that this criterion is met, but it could be said that the authors kept an objective point of view and made sure to ask open questions without pressing any answers on the interviewees. The authors used logical reasoning by starting this research process from a wide scope and looking at the relevance and all possible effects of using social media in a B2B context. Then, slowly digging deeper and identifying how the different effects are connected e.g. new customers are the product of increased brand awareness. And then finally based on what was reported by the interviewees, generated theory about what inspires more customer engagement and consequently increases brand awareness in a positive manner (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019, p. 365).



4.7 Ethical Considerations

Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019, p. 114) speak of 4 major ethical points which need to be considered when conducting business research; whether there is *harm to participants*; whether there is *lack of informed consent*; whether there is an *invasion of privacy*; and whether *deception* is involved.

4.7.1 Harm to Participants

Harm to participants can mean different things; such as, physical harm, emotional harm, and harm to the participants' careers or image (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019, p. 114). The participants in the research process of this thesis were not harmed in any way, as their identities have been classified. Moreover, even the names of the companies in which the participants work have been classified and hidden to avoid any possibility of identifying these individuals. Further, no emotional or physical harm was done to the participants, since the interviews were designed for their comfort and convenience; and everything was done with their consent.

4.7.2 Lack of Informed Consent

Informed consent refers to the notion that the participants have been given as much information as possible for them to make a conscious decision to partake in the research process (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019, p. 118). The authors made sure to give the required information to all participants prior to conducting the interviews and were given freedom to choose a time fit to their convenience to conduct the interview. Further, all the participants were asked for permission to record their statements while ensuring them that their recordings will only be used for transcribing the interviews, to make it easier for the authors to process the data.

4.7.3 Invasion of Privacy

Every individual has the right to privacy, and it is not acceptable in any way to invade that privacy for any purpose (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019, p. 123). As aforementioned, all data regarding the identity of the participants has been hidden, and there is no way to track these individuals and invade their privacy.

4.7.4 Deception

Deception in research occurs when the authors lie or hide the nature of their research from the participants. The authors avoided this by being as transparent as possible with the participants and explaining to them exactly what the research is about and how their statements will be used and were told that they were being recorded and asked for consent.



4.8 Individual Contributions

This Thesis was carried out by group A4 from the class of 2016 of the International Sales and Marketing (ISM) program at Linnæus University. Group A4 includes the following members: Asem Al Daghtani, Husam Mousa, and Mohammad Rastegari. All chapters of the thesis have been written and executed in cooperation between all group members. However, due to the limited time frame, some tasks were divided and carried out by each group member alone. Nonetheless, having finished each individual task, all group members reviewed each task together and approved it in concurrence.

4.8.1 Asem Al Daghtani

Asem's main contributions are highlighted in chapters 2, 3, and 7 as he collaborated with Mohammad to write an extensive literature review of the different concepts discussed in this thesis; as well as, helped form and develop the research questions and hypotheses; and finally, helped pinpoint the contributions of this thesis through the conclusions chapter. Asem's most significant contribution is carrying out most of the methodology chapter as he studied and proposed the research design for the thesis; then, having discussed it with the remaining group members, wrote most of the chapter with some help from the other group members.

4.8.2 Husam Mousa

Husam's main contributions are highlighted in the background and problem discussion sections, as he took charge of presenting the topic while the remaining group members were working on the substance for the literature review. Further, Husam was responsible for identifying and contacting prospected companies for interviewing. Husam later was the main interviewer and was responsible for collecting most of the empirical data; and later played a crucial role in writing the findings in the empirical data chapter.

4.8.3 Mohammad Rastegari

Mohammad's main contributions are highlighted in chapters 2, 3, and 6 as he helped write the literature review alongside Asem and helped form the research questions and hypotheses. Moreover, Mohammad's most crucial contribution to the thesis is his leading role in carrying out the data analysis chapter; both by writing and computing the analyses.

In summary, this thesis was a group effort as all decisions were taken after planning and designing the different parts together. Moreover, even though there were some tasks which were carried out on an individual level, all group members went through



each of these tasks and gave feedback on them until they were approved by all the members and later were added to the manuscript.



5 Empirical data

This chapter will demonstrate all data gathered from the 11 semi-structured interviews conducted for this thesis and compare it and find patterns of behaviour between the different companies. Then, in the upcoming chapter, only the most relevant data to the purpose of this thesis will be analysed and connect it to existing literature. This chapter will be divided into two major sub-chapters; “Companies Perspectives” and “Individuals Perspectives” in accordance to what was stated earlier in the methodology chapter about the interview questions being divided into two categories. Also, each sub-chapter will have different sections to discuss the different themes of the data.

5.1 Companies Perspectives

This sub-chapter will present the data connected to the questions asked under the “company perspective” category.

5.1.1 Social Media Platforms and Targeted Audience

To ensure confidentiality, exact names of the companies or the names of the interviewees will not be mentioned. However, the industries in which the interviewed companies operate in will be stated for relevance purposes. A summary of the data is shown in Table 1. Under this theme the authors asked the interviewees about which social media sites their respective companies use to share posts; and whom are their targeted audience of these posts. The questions were formed as follows: “Which social media platforms are you present on? Why?” and “Who are your target audience?”. The open nature of the questions provided the possibility for interviewees to answer freely without being constrained by a set of pre-set options. In the first question, the interviewees were asked to state which social media sites their companies are using and why they have chosen these specific platforms over others. In the second question, the interviewees were asked to state who the targeted audience of their companies’ social media posts are. To make it easier to follow henceforth in the text, each interviewee will be given a code (e.g. Interviewee 2 = I-2). Some of the companies that were interviewed had justifications for their choice of social media sites and why they target some segments over others, while some other companies did not have a reason for either choices; and in some cases, companies did not even have any targeted audience and simply wanted to put their information somewhere just in case someone is interested. The exact data regarding chosen social media platforms and the targeted audience from the interviews is as follows:

(I-1): This company is part of a global franchise which own many stores around Sweden. Stores within Sweden have a unified Facebook page that represents all stores. However, each store (including the one interviewed) has their own Instagram account. The interviewee believes that Instagram is the easiest social media platform to post on, hence, their respective company has decided to use this platform for external communications. Regarding targeted audience, the interviewee stated that they do not



have specific goals regarding who views their posts. However, they do generally aim at reaching *individuals* that work for companies that may be potential buyers.

(I-2): This company is part of global franchise that owns multiple stores in Sweden. The specific store which was interviewed uses LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram. However, the interviewee mentioned that Instagram is not that commonly used. The reason behind choosing these platforms is because these are the platforms that the company's customers use the most. The targeted audience for the company's social media posts are *individuals* that work in companies operating in any related industry.

(I-3): This company uses LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. No specific reasons were given to justify the choice of social media platforms. However, they use every platform based on its niched purpose and strengths (e.g. they use YouTube to post educational videos about their new services). The targeted audience for their social media posts are *individuals* that may be decision makers in companies that may be potential buyers; as well as, individuals that might want to work for the company.

(I-4): This company uses Facebook for all external communications and uses LinkedIn for internal communication and for communication with existing customers. No specific reason was given for choosing Facebook. Posts on Facebook are aimed for *individuals* that work for potential buyers; as well as, for individuals that may be interested in working for the company.

(I-5): This company uses LinkedIn and Telegram for their communications. The interviewee stated that the reason for choosing these platforms, is due to their professional orientation and because this is what their customers are using. The Interviewee did not state specifically if the company is aiming for professional individuals or for company profiles. However, the interviewee stated that the company aims at attracting new buyers, potential co-operators, potential suppliers, and for updating existing buyers.

(I-6): This company uses LinkedIn only, due to its business orientation. The company has no target audience; but rather only generally aims at attracting new buyers from related industries.

(I-7): This company uses LinkedIn only. They chose this due to LinkedIn's business-oriented nature; in addition to their will to focus on only one platform and giving it their full focus, instead of "spreading too wide" and needing to hire employees just for the purpose of managing their social media profiles. The company has no specific targeted audience. However, they simply aim at attracting new customers and strengthening their image by increasing brand awareness.

(I-8): This company uses LinkedIn, Telegram, and Twitter. The company chose to use these platforms because they are "more business oriented". The company targets both *individuals* working within companies and *companies'* profiles that could be potential buyers and suppliers.



(I-9): This company uses Facebook and LinkedIn due to their perceived “business orientation”. The targeted audience of the company’s posts are both *companies’* profiles and *individuals* that are working for potential buyers.

(I-10): This company uses LinkedIn, Twitter, and Google+. No reason was given for choosing these specific social media platforms. The company has no target audience for their posts; but rather only posts for “whoever is interested”.

(I-11): This company uses LinkedIn and Twitter because they are “more business oriented”. The company’s targeted audience for their social media posts are *companies’* profiles from a specific industry to which the company sells products.

In summary, when it comes to social media platforms used by the B2B companies that took part in providing data for this thesis, 9 out of the 11 companies use LinkedIn, 5 use Facebook, 3 use Instagram, 3 use Twitter, 2 use Telegram, 1 uses YouTube, and 1 uses Google+. According to the answers provided by the interviewees, these apparent choices are most likely related to the perceived “business orientation” of each platform; with LinkedIn being the most commonly used one. Another apparent reason for choosing some platforms over the others is related to the companies simply following what their customers are doing. The authors of this paper will provide insights regarding why simply choosing platforms based on what the company’s existing customers are using is bad planning, later in the discussions chapter (Chapter 7). When it comes to the target audience, the interviewed companies’ answers differed based on their stated goals for using social media. However, to summarise, 5 out of the 11 interviewed stated that they were targeting both professional individuals working within companies and the companies’ official profiles. Whereas, 4 companies stated that they are targeting professional individuals exclusively. One company stated that they target company profiles exclusively. One company stated that they do not have any target audience, and simply wants to put the information out there with no goal (see Table 2). The main finding here is that 9 out of the 11 companies target professional individuals; whether exclusively or together with other targeted audiences. This will be discussed further in the discussions chapter (Chapter 7).

Table 2: Used Social Media Sites and targeted audience.

B2B Industry	Interviewees’ Positions	Social Platforms	Media	Targeted Audience
(I-1) Furnishing	Head of Marketing	Instagram Facebook	and	Mostly individuals working within companies
(I-2) Water Solutions	Head of Communications Department	Facebook, LinkedIn Instagram.	and	Individuals working within companies



(I-3) Information Technology	Head of Communications Department	LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.	Individuals working within companies
(I-4) Air Handling Units	Head of Marketing Department + Head of Communications Department	Facebook	Individuals working within companies
(I-5) Pipeline Development (1)	Sales Manager	LinkedIn and Telegram	Company profiles
(I-6) Pipeline Development (2)	Marketing Manager	LinkedIn	Company profiles
(I-7) Trading	Senior Marketing Manager	LinkedIn	Individuals working within companies
(I-8) Cast Iron Manufacturing	Sales Manager	Twitter, Telegram and LinkedIn	Both company profiles and individuals working within companies
(I-9) Heating & Ventilation	Head of Communications Department	Facebook and LinkedIn	Individuals working within companies
(I-10) High-Tech Machinery	Sales Manager	LinkedIn, Twitter and Google+	No specific target
(I-11) Battery Manufacturing	Head of Communications Department	Twitter and LinkedIn	Company profiles

5.1.2 Nature and frequency of content posted

The companies that were interviewed share different types of content on their social media profiles. It was found that some of the companies were not using their content to achieve specific goals and were simply posting what's new in their companies. On the other hand, some companies had conducted research regarding the effects of posting specific types of content. For example, in the case of (I-1), the company had conducted research about how some specific types of content encourage more customer engagement than others. They were also sharing posts that are not directly related to any of the products but are still of interest to their targeted audience. Also, the company made sure to post regularly to stay connected with their audience. Below are the specifics about the types of content shared by the companies; as well as, the frequency in which the companies are posting on social media platforms.



(I-1): The company posts a variety of types of content, including what they have done recently, events, new subscription offers, and their newest products. Also, what is particularly interesting about this company, is that they share inspirational posts and content they believe is interesting for their target audience. The goal from this is to create higher traffic which, in turn, creates a larger audience for the company's content. The larger the audience the higher brand awareness becomes. The company also works towards remaining relevant and present in the minds of its target audience, thus, the company posts content at least once a day.

(I-2): The company currently posts about product news, events, and invitations. Although, the interviewee believes that the company should be posting more interesting things to connect with their target audience more. The company posts 3-4 times a week. However, the interviewee also stated that they think the company should be posting at least once a day.

(I-3): The company is currently posting about their own news and case references; in addition to, relevant facts and news from the industry in general. The company posts at least 3 times a week.

(I-4): The company posts content regarding their latest news; as in, new contracts, new products, information about what they are doing, training courses that they offer, and other things related to the company. In addition, the company posts content related to the industry; such as, general knowledge and things that happen to the industry that may affect people's perceptions about the products, thus, creating changes in the industry. The company currently posts approximately two times a week on each platform.

(I-5): The company posts content only related to their own news; such as, new products and how these products can benefit potential buyers. However, the interviewee stated that their marketing department is working on new strategies to use social media to increase brand awareness and introduce more people to the brand. The company posts daily on Telegram due to their customers' activity there. However, the company is posting only 3-4 times a month on LinkedIn.

(I-6): The company posts content solely regarding their own news; new projects and the progress of these projects. The company posts depending on if there are news regarding their projects; but the company aims at posting once a week.

(I-7): The company operates in the trading industry. Therefore, the company posts content about new products they imported or planning to import, news regarding new trading regulations and feedback from their customers to increase potential buyers' trust in the company. The company posts approximately 5 times a week.

(I-8): The company posts regarding their latest activities and products, exhibitions, and relevant news about their industry. The company posts general news daily, however, they post 1-2 times a week regarding their own news.



(I-9): The company posts content regarding their own events and products. The company posts roughly 2-3 times a week.

(I-10): The company posts regarding their latest innovations and products on their different platforms; while LinkedIn is used mostly for job applications. The company posts 3-4 times a week.

(I-11): The company posts news regarding their latest achievements and products; as well as, news regarding upcoming exhibitions and seminars. The company posts at least once a week.

In summary, as all companies interviewed post about their own news, more than half of these companies seem to be only concerned with sharing their own news and the content that they want to share, instead of sharing what the target audience wants to see (6 out of 11 companies). On the other hand, the remaining companies (5 out of 11 companies) are sharing content that is relevant not only to their own (potential) customers; such as, news from the industry. Finally, in one case (I-1) the company posts inspirational posts that are related to the interests of their targeted audience. When it comes to the frequency in which the companies post on their social media accounts, most companies (9 out of 11 companies) post less than once a day. see Table 3 for a clearer understanding.

Table 3: Nature and Frequency of Content

B2B Industry	Nature of Content	Frequency of Posting
(I-1) Furnishing	Company News & Inspirational Posts	1+ Time a Day
(I-2) Water Solutions	Company News	3-4 Times a Week
(I-3) Information Technology	Company News & Industry News	3+ Times a Week
(I-4) Air Handling Units	Company News & Industry News	2+ Times a Week
(I-5) Pipeline Development (1)	Company News	3-4 Times a Week
(I-6) Pipeline Development (2)	Company News	1+ Time a Week
(I-7) Trading	Company News & Industry News	5± Times a Week
(I-8) Cast Iron Manufacturing	Company News & Industry News	1 Time a Day
(I-9) Heating & Ventilation	Company News	2-3 Times a Week



(I-10) Machinery	High-Tech	Company News	3-4 Times a Week
(I-11) Manufacturing	Battery	Company News	1+ Time a Week

5.1.3 Brand Awareness and Customer Engagement

Under this theme, the interviewees were asked how they define and measure brand awareness and customer engagement. Then, the interviewees were asked two yes/no questions to investigate how the interviewees correlate these two concepts. Further, the interviewees were asked to state which types of content inspires the highest level of engagement from customers. This allowed the authors to operationalise the concepts of brand awareness and customer engagement and analyse the correlation between them; as well as, helped uncover which types of content generally attract more customer engagement. The details from each interview are as follows:

(I-1): The company measures brand awareness as being present in the minds of potential buyers when they think of furnisher suppliers. The company's goal is to be at the top and the first company that comes to mind when potential buyers are looking for a furnishing supplier. Increasing brand awareness is at the top of the company's goals for using social media. When it comes to customer engagement, the company is not quite sure about what they count as customer engagement because, as the interviewee described, people could still be engaged with a post without leaving any "likes" or "comments". So, it is hard to be sure if measuring these things is an accurate reflection of reality. However, when it comes to "likes" and "comments", the interviewee stated that posts announcing events with "free snacks" get the most engagement. This could be interpreted as a reciprocal relationship, where the company offers people attending free food in exchange for engagement and attendance. The interviewee also stated that they believe that more customer engagement equals more brand awareness. Also, the interviewee believes that more brand awareness equals more potential business deals.

(I-2): The company measures brand awareness simply as knowledge about the company. Brand awareness is the top goal for using social media by the company. On the other hand, the company defines customer engagement by the amount of "clicks" each post receives. The company also uses a software that measure all types of engagement with each post; including downloads, likes, comments, and shares. When asked about which types of content inspire the highest levels of customer engagement, the interviewee stated that posts that offer valuable knowledge get the highest level of engagement. Valuable content, as stated by the interviewee, could be stories about projects which the company has undertaken, historical information, and new technology related to the industry. The interviewee further stated that they believe more customer engagement equals more brand awareness; and that, in turn, more brand awareness equals more potential business. However, the interviewee noted that it is difficult to determine if a new buyer was introduced to the company through social



media or through other channels. So, theoretically, brand awareness through social media has the potential for attracting new customers, but it may be difficult to measure with accuracy.

(I-3): The company measures brand awareness as being in the mind of potential buyers when they are considering potential suppliers for the products/services that the company offers. Customer engagement, according to the interviewee, is defined in terms of reach, likes, comments, and shares on posts. Also, since the company has a YouTube channel, the company also counts views as customer engagement. When asked about which types of content inspires the most engagement, the interviewee interestingly stated that the highest level of engagement is on posts that are created by “consultants” working for the company. The consultants often post about their work after they have finished an assignment for a customer. Also, videos which the company creates, and shares inspire a high level of engagement. The contents of the videos are not as important as the quality of the video. Therefore, the interviewee stressed on the importance of putting effort into each video or post, in order to inspire more engagement from customers. Finally, the interviewee believes that higher customer engagement equals more brand awareness; and that higher brand awareness equals more potential business deals.

(I-4): The company measures brand awareness as the amount of job applications and new customers they receive through social media. The company measures customer engagement in terms of “visits” to their website through social media channels and “views” of the posts on their social media profiles, in addition to, comments and sharing of posts. Further, the interviewee stated that “personal content” gets the highest level of engagement in terms of “likes” and “comments”. By “personal content”, the interviewee means pictures and videos where members of the staff are shown in different settings and events. Finally, the interviewee expressed their belief that more customer engagement equals more brand awareness; and that more brand awareness equals more potential business.

(I-5): The company does not have a measurement for brand awareness other than being recognized and known by relevant professionals. Customer engagement for the company constitutes of the number of likes, comments, and shares that people leave on their social media posts. Further, the interviewee stated that posts regarding the features of new products and posts about national holidays and official occasions receive the highest amount of engagement. Finally, the interviewee stated their belief that more customer engagement with social media posts equals more brand awareness; and that more brand awareness equals more potential business deals.

(I-6): The company measures brand awareness as the ability of people in related industries to recall the name of the company when considering a product that the company offers. Customer engagement for the company constitutes sharing and Electronic Word-Of-Mouth, where customers recommend the company to their contacts. For the company, social media posts regarding the progress of the company’s projects are the most popular posts and inspire the highest level of engagement from



the customers. Finally, the interviewee believes that more customer engagement equals more brand awareness; and believes that increased brand awareness could bring more potential business.

(I-7): The company measures brand awareness through social media only by measuring when customers state that they found the company on social media. The interviewee stated that the company used to measure likes, comments, and shares when they first started their social media profiles. However, nowadays, the company does not give any value for these measures because they believe that these numbers are circumstantial and do not mean what marketing professionals believe they mean. Nonetheless, posts regarding the latest technological innovations in the industry receive the highest number of likes, comments, and shares. The interviewee believes that more customer engagement brings more brand awareness; and more brand awareness eventually brings more potential business.

(I-8): The company measures brand awareness using a generic definition of the ability of people to recall the name of the company when its industry is considered. Customer engagement is also measured and defined using a generic definition of counting likes, comments, and shares. Posts regarding events and news about products receive the highest numbers of likes, comments, and shares. Finally, the interviewee agrees that more customer engagement equals more brand awareness, and that more brand awareness equals more potential business deals.

(I-9): The company measures brand awareness as the ability of people to identify what does the company do when they hear its name. Customer engagement, for the company, counts as liking, commenting, sharing, or simply viewing and reading the company's social media posts. When it comes to which types of content inspire the highest engagement from customers, the interviewee only stated that "positive" news receives highest numbers of engagement. Finally, the interviewee believes that more customer engagement equals more brand awareness; and more brand awareness equals more potential business deals.

(I-10): The company measures brand awareness as the ability to recall the name of the company and what it does. When it comes to customer engagement, the company does not count likes, comments, and shares as valuable measures because they do not always mean what marketers think they mean. However, if one is to state which types of content get the most engagement, job announcements have the highest level of engagement. Finally, the interviewee does not think that more customer engagement equals more brand awareness. However, the interviewee believes that more brand awareness does not equal more potential business deals.

(I-11): The company measures brand awareness as the ability of potential customers to recall the company name in their mind. When it comes to customer engagement, the company counts engagement as the number of comments and questions they receive about new products. When asked about which types of content inspires the highest engagement, the interviewee stated that all types of content the company posts receive the same amount of engagement from customers. Finally, the interviewee believe that



more customer engagement equals more brand awareness; and that more brand awareness equals more potential business deals.

In summary, when it comes to the measurement of brand awareness and customer engagement, the companies have somewhat different understandings of them. However, when it comes to types of content that inspire the highest engagement from customers, some patterns can be identified between the different answers. Also, most of the interviewees had the same views about the correlation between customer engagement, brand awareness, and potential business deals (see Table 4). For a better understanding of the “Most engaging content” column in Table 4, “events” stand for content regarding exhibitions, events, posts about the achievements of staff, pictures of staff in different settings, and posts about holidays. While “informative content” stands for news about new technological innovations, new products, product features, and progress of ongoing projects. Also, it is noteworthy to notice the last column to the right in Table 4, which states the perceived level of success the interviewed companies have of increasing brand awareness.

Table 4: Content, Customer Engagement, and success in increasing Brand Awareness.

B2B industry	Most engaging content	More engagement equals more brand awareness	More brand awareness equals more potential business	Degree of success in raising brand awareness
(I-1) Furnishing	Events	Agree	Agree	Low
(I-2) Water Solutions	Informative content	Agree	Agree	Medium
(I-3) Information Technology	Personal content	Agree	Agree	Medium
(I-4) Air Handling Units	Personal content	Agree	Agree	High
(I-5) Pipeline Development (1)	Informative content + events	Agree	Agree	High
(I-6) Pipeline Development (2)	Informative content	Agree	Agree	High
(I-7) Trading	Informative content	Agree	Agree	High



(I-8) Cast Iron Manufacturing	Informative content + events	Agree	Agree	High
(I-9) Heating & Ventilation	Content with positive nature	Agree	Agree	Medium
(I-10) High-Tech Machinery	Job announcements	Agree	Disagree	Medium
(I-11) Battery Manufacturing	All content has same engagement level	Agree	Agree	Medium

All the interviewees believe that increasing customer engagement with content on social media leads to an increase in brand awareness. Also, 10 out of the 11 companies believe that raising brand awareness could lead to potential business deals, due to the new potential buyers who have been newly introduced to the company and may be interested in buying or cooperating in some form with the company. Two apparent patterns can be identified through the data collected; and these are that posts regarding “events” and “informative content” are commonly the most popular types of content that customers are willing to engage with. Further, the reason behind this willingness to engage with the posts is due to the level of relevance the targeted audience feels with these specific types of content, depending on the audience’s interests and goals. The last three companies had different experiences with engaging content; with (I-9)’s audience being most engaged with content of “positive nature”, (I-10)’s audience seems to engage most with posts regarding job opportunities, while (I-11)’s audience seems to not have any preference and engages with all types of content on a similar intensity. When it comes to the perceived level of success in achieving higher brand awareness, the authors could not authenticate the stated level of success, since no official numbers were provided; so, the credibility of these statements is compromised.

5.2. Personal Perspectives of the Interviewees

This sub-chapter will present the data connected to the questions asked under the “company perspective” category

5.2.1. The interviewees as the audience of other B2B companies

This section will present what the interviewees stated about which types of content they are most interested in and would most likely engage with as the audience for other B2B companies’ social media posts. As well as, what do the interviewees constitute as engagement. Finally, it will be mentioned if the interviewees have ever been introduced to a new brand due to that brand’s activity on social media platforms. A detailed explanation of each interviewee’s answers is as follows:



(I-1): The interviewee stated that they would most likely engage with content that relates to their personal interests. Which are, technology, environment, and design. The interviewee further stated that in order for a post to inspire engagement, it must have narrow and personalised content which the audience can relate to. For example, the post could have the idea that the company wants to present, but it should be presented in a way that it contains a personal aspect to it, such as presenting a new product while focusing on its effects on environment. This would, according to the interviewee, be more inviting to the portion of the audience that are interested in the environment and its future. In the case that the interviewee sees an interesting post, they stated that they would engage with it by reading, and/or commenting, and/or sharing the post. When asked if they have been introduced to any new brands through social media activity, the interviewee said no. The interviewee further justified this by stating that they are loyal to the brands they usually buy from and do not wish to change their buying behaviours.

(I-2): The interviewee stated that they are most likely to engage with content that relates to an interest that the interviewee has. For the interviewee, they would engage with an interesting post by sharing and/or commenting on it. When asked whether they have been introduced to new brands through social media activity, the interviewee said yes, they have.

(I-3): The interviewee stated that they would most likely engage with content that has a personal side related to the audience's interests. Especially visually pleasing content such as pictures and videos. The interviewee stated that they would engage with content by viewing, and/or liking, and/or commenting on the post. When asked about if they have been introduced to new brands through social media activity, the interviewee said yes.

(I-4): The interviewee stated that they would be most interested in news about specific products that the interviewee has an interest in. However, even in that case, the interviewee stated that they would still not engage with the posts. When asked about if they have been introduced to new brands through social media activity, the interviewee said yes.

(I-5): The interviewee stated that they would be most interested in new products in their own industry. The interviewee would engage by following, and/or liking, and/or commenting, and/or sharing. Finally, when asked about if they have been introduced to new brands through social media activity, the interviewee said yes.

(I-6): The interviewee stated that they would be most interested in content regarding new products and technology in the industry. The way in which the interviewee would engage with such posts is by "clicking" a link, and/or liking, and/or commenting. When asked about if they have been introduced to new brands through social media activity, the interviewee said yes.



(I-7): The interviewee stated that they would only be interested in company posts that relate to their personal interests. In this case, the personal interest is automobiles. The interviewee stated that they do not believe that leaving a like or comment is important and would rather engage by buying a product. When asked about if they have been introduced to new brands through social media activity, the interviewee said yes.

(I-8): The interviewee stated that they are most interested in new products and innovations in their own industry; especially those of competitors'. The interviewee stated that they would engage with the content by liking, and/or commenting, and/or sharing the post. When asked about if they have been introduced to new brands through social media activity, the interviewee said yes.

(I-9): The interviewee stated that they would most be interested in viewing posts about companies and how they are doing. The interviewee would engage with an interesting post by liking and/or sharing. When asked about if they have been introduced to new brands through social media activity, the interviewee said yes.

(I-10): The interviewee stated that they are most likely to engage with general news articles. The interviewee has a similar view as some of the other interviewees about online engagement (liking, sharing, ...) is not important and only sees engagement as a contract signed. When asked about if they have been introduced to new brands through social media activity, the interviewee said yes.

(I-11): The interviewee stated that they are most interested in business-oriented posts. more specifically, videos that convey a business-related message with a sense of humour. The interviewee would engage with the content by following, and/or liking, and/or commenting, and/or sharing the post. When asked about if they have been introduced to new brands through social media activity, the interviewee said yes.

In summary, as expected, the interviewees have different opinions and views about what constitutes as “engaging content” and “engaging with content”. However, the data is not without some patterns of similarity. Table 5 provides a better and simplified view of the data.

Table 5: Engaging Content and Engaging with Content.

B2B industry	Type of engaging content	Type of engagement	Introduced to new brands?
(I-1) Furnishing	Personalized content	Viewing, commenting, sharing	No
(I-2) Water Solutions	Personalized content	Commenting, sharing	Yes



(I-3) Information Technology	Personalized content	Viewing, liking, commenting	Yes
(I-4) Air Handling Units	Interesting products	Would not engage	Yes
(I-5) Pipeline Development (1)	New products in the industry	Following, liking, commenting, sharing	Yes
(I-6) Pipeline Development (2)	New products and innovations in the industry	Viewing, liking, commenting	Yes
(I-7) Trading	Personalized content	Buying (no online engagement)	Yes
(I-8) Cast Iron Manufacturing	New products and innovations in the industry	Liking, commenting, sharing	Yes
(I-9) Heating & Ventilation	Company news and what they are doing	Liking sharing	Yes
(I-10) High-Tech Machinery	News articles	Buying (no online engagement)	Yes
(I-11) Battery Manufacturing	Business-related videos (with humour)	Following, liking, commenting, sharing	Yes

As can be learned from Table 5, there are some similarities regarding what the interviewees would engage with and how they would engage with it. For example, 4 of the interviewees (I-1, I-2, I-3, I-7) stated that they are most likely to engage with content that is “personalized”; meaning that the content is connected to a personal interest of the interviewee. Further, 3 of the interviewees (I-5, I-6, I-8) stated that they are most likely to engage with content about “new products and innovations in the industry”; meaning that the content is still somewhat personalized, as it concerns the specific industry of the interviewee. Each of the remaining 4 interviewees (I-4, I-9, I-10, I-11) had different opinions regarding which types of content they would engage with. However, (I-4) stated that they are most likely to engage with posts about products which they are personally interested in; they could be interpreted as a sort of *personalized* content. In conclusion, 8 of the 11 interviewees stated that they are most likely to engage with content that is related to a *personal* interest of theirs or an aspect related to them, such as, their industry. This realization will be further discussed in the discussion chapter (Chapter 7). Also, it can be observed in Table 5 that 10 out of the 11 interviewees stated that they have been introduced to new B2B brands through social media. This supports the argument for the feasibility of social media marketing in a B2B context; and that it can increase brand awareness. In fact, in accordance with what was stated earlier in Table 4, regarding if the interviewees believe that increased brand awareness equals more potential business, 4 of the interviewees (I-5, I-6, I-7, I-



8) have stated names of companies which they have been introduced to by social media channels, and have actually conducted business with them later. In addition, the rest of the interviewees have stated that they would consider a brand which they have been introduced to on social media for future business. Further analysis of the data will be conducted and presented later in the data analysis chapter (Chapter 6).



6 Data Analysis

This chapter presents the analysis of the empirical data. The analysis will contain both qualitative interpretation of the data; as well as, correlation analyses to answer the research hypotheses stated in chapter 3.

6.1 Social Media Activity Goals

The findings data from the interviews parallel what Bija and Balaş (2014) suggest regarding what companies should set as goals for using social media. The empirical data suggests that all companies have goals regarding how many times a week they want to post on their social media accounts; and what types of content they want to share (see Table 3). Also, most of the companies (10 out of 11) have set goals regarding who are their targeted audience for their posts (see Table 2). The interesting finding from Table 2 is that 9 out of 11 companies are targeting professional individuals, whether exclusively or as a part of the targeted audience (This will be discussed in the final chapter of this thesis). Bija and Balaş (2014) go on to mention that “content is king”; suggesting that B2B companies need to put more focus on the types of content they share, while keeping in mind the aim of increasing customer engagement. In turn, the increased customer engagement leads to a higher reach of the content (Youssef et al., 2018) which could increase brand awareness as a result.

6.2 Brand Awareness

Researchers and practitioners usually understand concepts in a different way. For example, when it comes to brand awareness, Langaro, Rita and de Fátima Salgueiro (2015) define it as “the potential availability of a brand in the mind of the consumer. It is understood as a precondition for brands to be considered within the repertoire of purchase options, justifying its crucial role in brand knowledge”. Contemporary research state that acquiring social media and using it for achieving marketing goals (social media marketing) can bring many benefits to B2B companies (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Habibi et al., 2015); such as, increasing brand awareness (Andersson and Wikström, 2017; Buratti, Parola and Satta, 2018; Järvinen et al., 2012; Keinänen and Kuivalainen, 2015; Langaro, Rita and de Fátima Salgueiro, 2015; Rodriguez, Peterson and Krishnan, 2012). In parallel, when asked about this, the interviewees reported a higher brand awareness. More specifically, interviewees I-4, I-5, I-6, I-7, and I-8 reported that they noticed a significant spike in levels of brand awareness after using social media marketing. While interviewees I-2, I-3, I-9, I-10, and I-11 reported a mild spike in levels of brand awareness after using social media marketing; however, it is noteworthy to state that these interviewees mentioned that their mere usage of social media marketing may not be the reason for this increase in brand awareness. Further, in the case of I-1, the interviewee did not report a higher brand awareness; although, the interviewee reported a significant increase in brand loyalty; which comes in concurrence with what Bija and Balaş (2014) stated about social media marketing



bringing different types of benefits, depending on the use and content that the company posts. Finally, in regard to question 11 of the interview guide, which asks if the interviewees agree that increased brand awareness can lead to increased potential business deals, 10 out of the 11 interviewees answered with “YES”. In addition, 4 of the interviewees gave names of companies which they have been introduced to over social media, and later conducted business with. Thus, it could be argued that using social media marketing could eventually lead to business deals; and this is an opportunity B2B companies cannot afford to lose.

Since not all the interviewed companies were sure if using social media marketing is the reason they experienced higher brand awareness, it is appropriate to revisit the research hypotheses stated in chapter 3. More specifically, research hypothesis 1 (RH1) proposes the following:

- RH1: B2B companies that are actively present on social media experience higher brand awareness

In order to test this research hypothesis, the authors conducted a correlation analysis based on the responses of the interviewees to determine whether there is a positive relationship between actively using social media marketing (AUSM) and experiencing higher brand awareness (BA). The correlation analysis is displayed as what follows:

Table 6: Correlation Analysis for RH1-Part 1

Interviewee	To what extent do you actively use SM? (Very active= 4, somewhat Active=3, Neutral= 2, Non active=1)	To what extent do you think SM has helped you achieve higher brand awareness? (High= 4, Medium= 3, Low=2, Not at all= 1)
1	3	2
2	3	3
3	4	3
4	3	4
5	4	4
6	3	4
7	4	4
8	4	4
9	3	3
10	3	3
11	4	3



Table 7: Correlation Analysis for RH1-Part 2

	<i>To what extent do you actively use SM? (Very active= 4, somewhat Active=3, Neutral= 2, Non active=1)</i>	<i>To what extent do you think SM has helped you achieve higher brand awareness? (High= 4, Medium= 3, Low=2, Not at all= 1)</i>
<i>To what extent do you actively use SM? (Very active= 4, somewhat Active=3, Neutral= 2, Non active=1)</i>	1	
<i>To what extent do you think SM has helped you higher brand awareness? (High= 4, Medium= 3, Low=2, Not at all= 1)</i>	0,33565855667131	1

There are two important values here; there is a 1 in terms in the box for level of actively usage of social media column and Level of brand awareness row that means they are perfectly correlated which makes sense.

In the column for level of actively usage of social media and the row for the influence of social media on brand awareness that we will notice there is a decimal value. In this case the 0,33565855667131 is the Person's **r** (correlation coefficient). So, this is the statistic we would report in our findings and in this case, there is a correlation between the actively usage of social media and the higher brand awareness.

when we go to write this up here's we would say for those who responded to this survey, more actively usage of social media scores was correlated with higher brand awareness scores, $r = 0.33$, which can be considered a large effect.

Effect size: If $r = +/-0.4$ it is large, $+/-0.2$ it is medium, and $+/-0.1$ It is small

Therefore, the high level of usage of social media can be interpreted as a reason for high brand awareness and has a large effect on increasing brand awareness for a company. Thus, research hypothesis 1 (RH1) is proven and accepted.

Table 8 and Figure 2 provide the full analysis statistics for RH1. However, the reader only needs to know about Person's **r** (correlation coefficient).

Table 8: Descriptive Statistics for RH1

To what extent you actively use SM? (Very active= 4, somewhat		To what extent do you think SM has helped you higher brand awareness?	
--	--	---	--



Active=3, Neutral= 2, Non active=1)		(High= 4, Medium= 3, Low=2, Not at all= 1)	
Mean	3,454545	Mean	3,363636
Median	3	Median	3
Standard Deviation	0,522233	Standard Deviation	0,6742
Minimum	3	Minimum	2
Maximum	4	Maximum	4
Sum	38	Sum	37
Count	11	Count	11

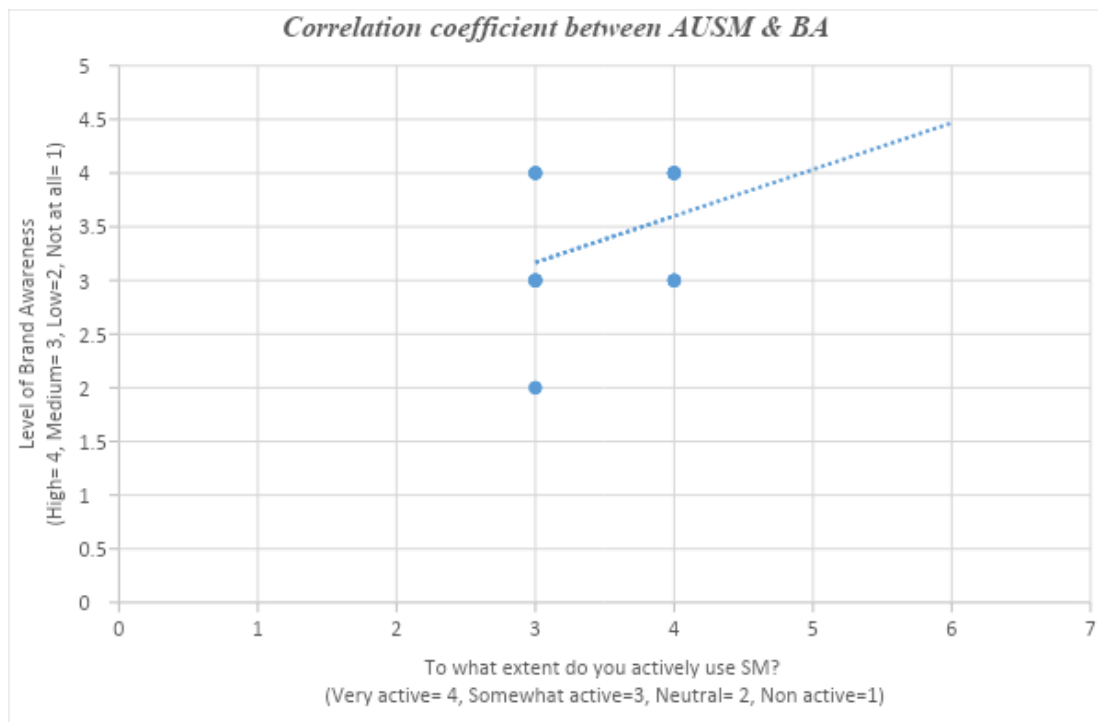


Figure 2: Correlation Coefficient Between AUSM & BA

6.3 Customer Engagement

Youssef et al. (2018) state that B2B companies are increasingly leaning towards more customer-centric marketing strategies and are focusing on relationship building in all possible ways. Relationship building is based on customer engagement which facilitates two-way communication (Pansari and Kumar, 2017). One of the most important channels to increase customer engagement and sense of involvement is through social media platforms. Engaging customers through social media channels is especially important nowadays since social media usage is continuously growing in all business and marketing functions (Harmeling et al., 2016; Pansari and Kumar, 2017; Youssef et al., 2018). Similar to the concept of brand awareness, researchers and practitioners differ in their understanding of the concept of customer engagement. As researchers define customer engagement as a “[...] psychological process that models



the underlying mechanisms by which customer loyalty forms for new customers of a service as well as mechanisms by which loyalty may be maintained for repeat purchase customers of a service brand” (Youssef et al., 2018). On the other hand, however, practitioners in each company define and measure customer engagement in a different way, which was supported by the responses collected from the interviews (see section 5.1.3). Notwithstanding that each company has their own understanding and measurements of customer engagement, it was still possible to identify a general pattern of what companies measure and count as customer engagement; such as, the number of ‘likes’, ‘comments’, and ‘shares’ that a post receives. Moreover, these engagement measures, according to the interviewees, depend on the type of content that was posted. Also, all of the interviewees had the same views regarding the correlations between customer engagement, brand awareness, and potential business deals resulting from the increased brand awareness. To be more specific, all the interviewees believe that more customer engagement with social media posts leads to higher brand awareness; and most of the interviewees (10 out of 11) believe that higher brand awareness leads to a spike in potential business deals. However, even though it seems as if more customer engagement is sure to bring higher brand awareness, according to the correlation analysis conducted in this thesis, that is not the case. Before, presenting the correlation analysis, it is important to know that the interviewees did not present any hard numbers to be analysed; instead, the analysis was conducted based on what the interviewees reported about customer engagement (which was different for each interviewee), so, the credibility of the findings may be compromised. Having said that, it is now appropriate to revisit chapter 3 and test research hypothesis 2, which proposes the following:

- RH2: More customer engagement on companies’ social media content can lead to higher brand awareness.

In order to test this research hypothesis, the authors conducted a correlation analysis based on the responses of the interviewees to determine whether there is a positive relationship between active customer engagement (CE) and higher brand awareness (BA). The correlation analysis is displayed as what follows:

Table 9: Correlation Analysis for RH2-Part 1

Interviewee	To what extent do you rate your customers’ engagement on your social media platforms? (High= 4, Medium= 3, Low=2, Not at all= 1)	To what extent do you think SM has helped you achieve higher brand awareness? (High= 4, Medium= 3, Low=2, Not at all= 1)
1	2	2
2	3	3
3	3	3



4	3	4
5	2	4
6	3	4
7	1	4
8	3	4
9	3	3
10	1	3
11	2	3

Table 10: Correlation Analysis for RH2-Part 2

	To what extent do you rate your customers' engagement on your social media platforms? (High= 4, Medium= 3, Low=2, Not at all= 1)	To what extent do you think SM has helped you achieve higher brand awareness? (High= 4, Medium= 3, Low=2, Not at all= 1)
To what extent do you rate your customers' engagement on your social media platforms? (High= 4, Medium= 3, Low=2, Not at all= 1)	1	
To what extent do you think SM has helped you achieve higher brand awareness? (High= 4, Medium= 3, Low=2, Not at all= 1)	0,1	1

There are two important values shown in Table 10: there is a '1' showing the rate of customer engagement on companies' social media platforms column, and higher brand awareness row that means they are perfectly correlated, which means it is a true value (it makes sense). In Table 10, in the column for the rate of 'customer engagement' and the row for 'the influence of SM on higher brand awareness', there is a decimal value. In this case, the '0,1' is Person's r (correlation coefficient). So, this is the statistic reported in the findings, and in this case, there is a correlation between the rate of the customer engagement on SM and the higher brand awareness.

By analysing the responses to the interviews' questions, we can see that more customer engagement on social media platforms scores are correlated with higher brand awareness by a value of ' $r = 0,1$ ', which can be considered as a small effect.

Effect size: If $r = +/-0.4$ it is large, $+/-0.2$ it is medium, and $+/-0.1$ It is small

Therefore, the high level of the customer engagement on companies' social media platforms is not essentially considered as a cause for higher brand awareness, and it does not have high effect on increasing brand awareness for a company. Thus, research hypothesis 2 (RH2) is disproven and unaccepted.

Table 11 and Figure 3 provide the full analysis statistics for RH2. However, the reader only needs to know about Person's r (correlation coefficient).



Table 11: Descriptive Statistics for RH2

To what extent do you rate your customers' engagement on your social media platforms? (High= 4, Medium= 3, Low=2, Not at all= 1)		To what extent do you think SM has helped you achieve higher brand awareness? (High= 4, Medium= 3, Low=2, Not at all= 1)	
Mean	2,363636	Mean	3,363636
Median	3	Median	3
Standard Deviation	0,80904	Standard Deviation	0,6742
Minimum	1	Minimum	2
Maximum	3	Maximum	4
Sum	26	Sum	37
Count	11	Count	11

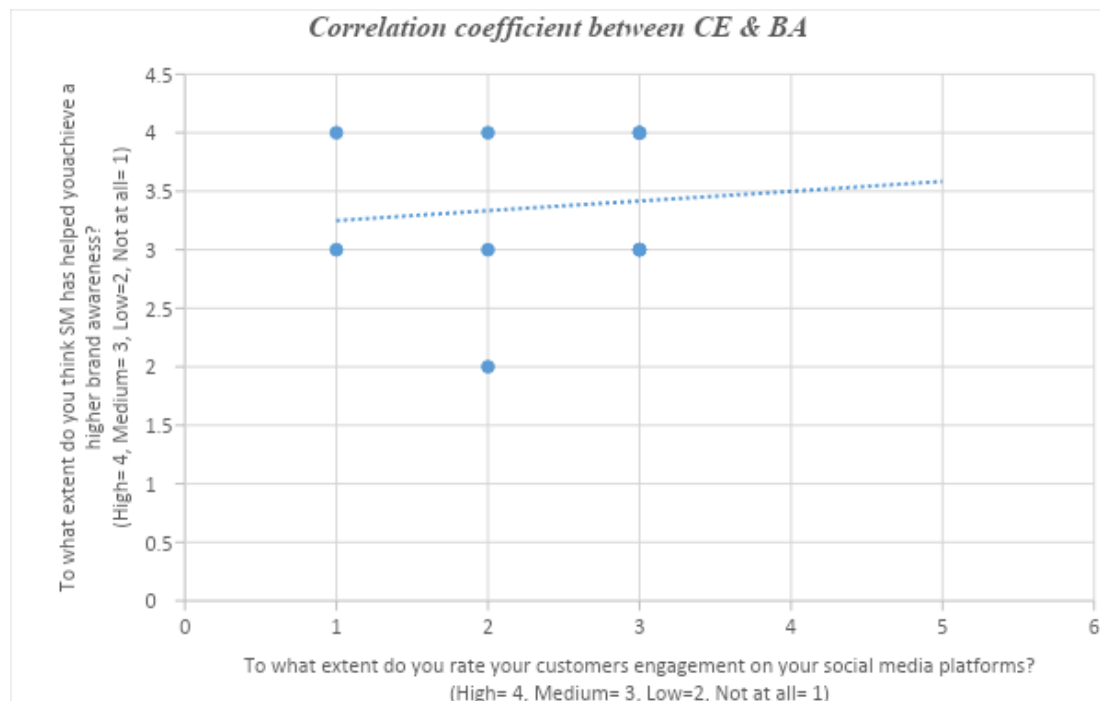


Figure 3: Correlation Coefficient Between CE & BA

Finally, Table 12 summarises the results of testing research hypotheses 1 & 2:

Table 12: Hypotheses Results

Research hypothesis	Approval
<i>RH1: B2B companies that are actively present on social media experience higher brand awareness</i>	Proven
<i>RH2: More customer engagement on companies' social media content can lead to higher brand awareness.</i>	Disproven



7 Conclusions and implications

This chapter will discuss the findings of the thesis, as well as, pinpoint how the thesis contributes to literature regarding social media marketing in B2B. In addition to, presenting the implications of this thesis to practitioners. Finally, the limitations of this thesis, and suggestions for future research will be discussed.

7.1 Discussions

As one can see in chapter 3, this thesis aims at answering the following research questions:

- RQ1: How are medium and large B2B companies using social media to increase brand awareness?
- RQ2: Which types of content that medium and large B2B companies post on social media inspire the most customer engagement?
- RQ3: Can medium and large B2B companies amplify the chances of increasing brand awareness by increasing customer engagement?

The authors believe that they have been successful in answering these research questions. The first two research questions have been answered in chapters 5 and 6 in details. While research question 3 presented a slight controversy between the qualitative interpretation of the authors of the empirical data and the correlation analysis conducted in regard to research hypothesis 2. However, as already mentioned, the correlation analysis was not based on actual numbers, so, the interpretation of the authors is a more credible source for answering the RQ3. The full interpretation and answer for research question 3 and the entire findings can be found below.

The findings of this thesis support contemporary research on the notion that B2B companies which use social media marketing experience a higher level of brand awareness. This is represented in both the correlation analysis related to research hypothesis 1, as well as, the qualitative analysis regarding brand awareness (section 6.2). Moreover, the findings support the argument for the cruciality of social media's role in increasing brand awareness, as 10 out of the 11 interviewees stated that they have been introduced to new brands over social media. Also, in relation to question 11 of the interviews guide (see Appendix 1), 10 out of the 11 interviewees expressed their belief that increased brand awareness can lead to more potential business deals. In addition, 4 of the interviewees have even stated names of companies which they have been introduced to through social media and have later conducted business with them. However, to get to the point where a company comes across another company on social media and considers it for potential business deal, both companies would need to work on increasing their brand awareness. Achieving higher brand awareness over social media could be tricky; but the findings of this thesis can help bring companies closer to success. The main point to take from this thesis comes in accordance with what B ̇a and Balaş (2014) suggest, and that is that “content is king”. Unlike in B2C contexts,



B2B companies usually base their marketing tactics on their own products and ideas, rather than on what the customers want; in concurrence with Youssef et al. (2018), this thesis suggests that they should take a more customer-centric approach in order to increase their brand awareness and ultimately increase their potential business opportunities. Being more “customer-centric” means that companies need to not only post about their own news but should rather aim at posting other types of content that may be of interest to their target audience. Posting content that is related to the targeted audience’s interests will inspire a higher level of customer engagement. In turn, having a higher level of engagement on a post will naturally increase the number of people reached by this post, and will consequently increase brand awareness, as engagement could mean people ‘sharing’ the post to their list of contact, thus, creating a snowball effect.

Reaching this level of engagement from the target audience can only be achieved by giving them something they find interesting. Through the empirical data, the authors were able to identify a general outline of what could be considered as “engaging content”. The process of identifying what could be considered as engaging content, the authors analysed and compared the data from tables 4 and 5; where Table 4 summarised which types of content the companies receive the highest levels of engagement on (supplier perspective); and Table 5 summarised what the interviewees themselves would most likely engage with (buyer perspective). The data from both tables is somewhat similar, and a pattern could be recognised; that pattern is that content that has some level of *personalisation* is more likely to receive customer engagement. Even though “personalised” content differs from one person to another, some patterns could still be identified from the data. The most common types of content to receive engagement are posts about *events and exhibitions*; *news about the industry*, such as new innovations and regulations; and *informative content*, such as, news articles. There are other types of content that are less likely to inspire engagement but are still noteworthy, such as, news regarding the environment and other issues of global concern. The thing that these content types have in common is that they give value to the audience which encourages them to reciprocate this value by engaging with the posts. The idea that pushes the audience to engage with the content, is that they feel a sense of involvement and relatability. This is supported by Syrdal and Briggs (2018) and Anees-ur-Rehman et al. (2018), who suggested that companies need to post content that is of “relevance to the audience” in order to create higher engagement and, consequently, higher brand awareness. These findings are of significant relevance to most B2B companies as 9 out of the 11 interviewees stated that their respective companies are targeting professional individuals working in specific industries of interest, instead of targeting entire companies. The authors see this as a crucial fact because it could be used to argue that social media marketing tactics are not so different between B2C and B2B contexts. The idea behind this claim is that some B2B companies are using their social media channels as an advertisement tool where they simply post their new products; whereas they should be using it as a



communication tool which builds on the ideas of reciprocation between the company and its (potential)customers. Further, when the audience are considering different suppliers, they are more likely to choose a supplier that connects with them and cares about issues that they care about as well, rather than choosing a supplier that simply shows their products on social media. If a company posts only about their own news, their audience will most likely be people who already know about the company (aware of its brand) and connect to it; but if the company takes more of a general stance in the industry, it has a better chance to connect with more people (who may not be aware of its brand). Having said that, simply posting about things the audience cares about will not necessarily lead to purchases. Therefore, the authors suggest that companies should use a combination of content regarding their own news and products, and content of more of a general nature which will attract more engagement. The general content will inspire higher levels of engagement and raise brand awareness, thus, creating more traffic of people who will see the posts regarding products, and raise the probability of receiving more orders. This is important because no matter how good the products and the message are, they are useless without an audience to see them and react to them. In addition, according to the empirical data, raising brand awareness is not only connected to attracting more potential customers; it is also connected to attracting more potential employees who can add value to the company and benefit it. Finally, according to the empirical data, some B2B companies are present on specific social media platforms, because these are the platforms that their customers are using. While this is good for strengthening the relationship with these customers, it is unwise to do so since some potential customers may be present on other platforms; hence, making the decision to exclude some platforms from being used could be a lost opportunity.

7.2 Theoretical and managerial implications

This thesis contributes to literature by substantiating the importance of social media marketing in B2B contexts and reinforcing the argument against that social media marketing may not be suitable for some B2B industries (Habibi et al., 2015; Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011) by gathering data from 10 different B2B industries. In addition, there are a large number of articles such as, Andersson and Wikström (2017), Habibi et al. (2015), Jussila, Kärkkäinen and Aramo-Immonen (2014), that discuss the potential benefits of using social media marketing and state the goals which B2B companies have for using it. However, according to the empirical data, there is an addition benefit of using social media marketing that was not discussed before; which is attracting new employees. Previous literature focused on how social media can raise brand awareness, and consequently raising the number of potential business deals; which is one form of value which using social media can provide. However, even though attracting new employees may not provide immediate financial benefits to the companies, it still provides a form of long-term value creation for B2B companies. This potential benefit, and arguably most other benefits, depend on increasing brand awareness as a prerequisite for them to be possible. A company cannot attract new customers or employees without increasing the number of people



who are aware of its existence and offerings. This additional confirmation of social media marketing's importance brings life into the argument for not only its use, but for its seriousness; as the empirical data suggests that most B2B companies, even though are using social media, do not take it too seriously or give it enough attention. This comes in line with what previous literature stated regarding B2B companies being slower than B2C companies in realising the potential of social media marketing (Guesalaga, 2016; Habibi et al., 2015; Järvinen et al., 2012; Kärkkäinen, Jussila and Väisänen, 2010; Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011; Wang et al., 2017). The findings of this thesis are not only critical to the stream of literature regarding social media marketing in B2B, but is rather critical to practitioners as well, as they can benefit from the data presented in this thesis and can follow the general advice provided by the authors regarding which content to share in order to create more traffic into their social media channels, thus, creating a bigger audience for posts regarding their offerings. Which consequently increases the number of potential buyers.

7.2.1 Societal Implications

As this thesis is for B2B contexts, regional and local governmental organisations do not have much to learn from it. However the general message of this thesis is still relevant to all users of social media who wish to increase engagement with their content and reach more people; and that is to personalise your content and connect to your target audience, so that you have a bigger audience and level of engagement for the content that you want to share. Social media is about communication and reciprocal value creation.

7.3 Limitations

This thesis is limited in the number of interviews conducted; thus, limiting the ability to reach theoretical saturation, as well as, limiting the ability to generalise the findings. However, the authors made sure to maximise on the available number of interviews by not limiting the chosen sample to a specific industry. In addition, each interviewee was asked from both a supplier and buyer perspectives to maximise on the amount of data which could be collected.

7.4 Suggestions for future research

Having conducted the interviews and analysed the data, it was clear to the authors that it is not credible to take the supplier's point of view about what constitutes as engagement with content; since the supplier might consider a 'like' as engagement, while the person who put that like may not have meant it as engagement or actually read the post. Therefore, the authors suggest that future research should focus more on the audience's point of view about what they would like to see from B2B companies



and what they define as engagement. Then, if the data is substantial, future research could provide a clearer guideline for B2B companies to help them be more successful in using social media; and consequently, achieve their goals more effectively.



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The list of the interviewed companies

Number	Company's name	Job position of the interviewed person	Place of the interview	Date/ time of the interview (2019)	Duration of the interview (minutes)
I - 1	IKEA	Head of marketing department	Phone call	26 Apr/ 10:00	19
I - 2	XYLEM	Head of communication department	Phone call	1 May/ 11:30	11
I - 3	Softhouse Consulting	Head of communication department	Phone call	3 May/ 13:00	13
I - 4	IV Produkt	Head of marketing department	Phone call	3 May/ 15:30	17
I - 5	Hamoon Pipeline Development Co.	IT Manager	Phone call	6 May/ 10:00	22
I - 6	Hamoon Nyzeh Co.	Sales Manager	Phone call	6 May/ 13:00	25
I - 7	Arsam Trading Group Co.	Senior Manager	Phone call	7 May/ 08:00	18
I - 8	LMI Co.	Sales Manager	Phone call	7 May/ 11:00	16
I - 9	NIBE	Head of marketing department	Phone call	9 May/ 08:00	23
I - 10	ABB	Sales Manager	Phone call	9 May/ 10:30	14
I - 11	Northstar Sitetel AB.	Director of global site and solution engineering	Phone call	10 May/ 14:00	20



Appendix 1

- Interviews Guideline

i. Company Perspective

1. Which social media platforms are you present on? Why?
2. Who are your target audience? Companies or the individuals working in companies?
3. What kind of content do you share on these platforms?
4. How often do you post?
5. What are your goals for using social media platforms? Which one is the most important one?
6. To what extent do you think you have been successful in achieving higher brand awareness through social media usage?
(HIGH, MEDIUM, LOW, NOT AT ALL)
7. How do you define brand awareness? What do you measure?
8. What do you count as customer engagement?
9. What kind of content inspires the most engagement from customers?
10. Do you agree that more engagement equals more brand awareness?
(YES, NO)
11. Do you agree that more brand awareness equals more potential business?
(YES, NO)

ii. Personal Perspective

12. In your personal opinion, what constitutes as customer engagement online?
13. Which kind of content are you most interested in and would most likely engage with?
14. Have you been introduced to new brands due to exposure through social media platforms?
15. Would you consider one of the brands you've been exposed to on social media platforms for future business deals?
16. Do you think company pages on social media should post only about their own news and products, or do you think they should post about other things and interests that may relate to their target customers? What would you personally like to see from company pages on social media for you engage with more?