Linnæus University
Sweden

Bachelor Thesis

Challenges SMEs Face when Adopting Social Media Marketing to Increase Brand Awareness

A Multiple-Case Study

Author: Kainat Kainat, Jennifer Patrizi
Supervisor: Peter Caesar
Examiner: Tomas Nilsson
Term: VT20
Subject: Degreee Project on the International Sales and Marketing Program
Level: Bachelor
Course code: 2FE22E

Linnæus University
Sweden

Abstract

As the use of the internet increases, so does the use of social media channels. These channels have become a part of everyday life and are changing the way of communication and information exchange. Today, more and more business-to-business (B2B) companies are adopting social media marketing (SMM) to communicate with their customers. Although small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have also started adopting SMM to increase their brand awareness, the existing literature is very limited on this subject. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to identify and describe challenges SMEs face adopting social media marketing in order to increase their brand awareness. In order to achieve the purpose of this thesis a qualitative research method was selected and four semi-structured interviews with marketing directors and coordinators at three SMEs were conducted. The result of this thesis shows that SMEs face some common challenges like financial and human resources, lack of time and expertise in SMM, customer satisfaction, channel selection, global crisis and bad reviews. Further, this thesis found that SMEs also face some individual challenges like cultural issues, measuring brand awareness, language, influential content, communication issues, promotion costs and outsourcing.

Key words

Social Media Marketing (SMM), Social Media Channels, Brand Awareness, Challenges, Business-to-Business (B2B), Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

Acknowledgments

The authors of this thesis would like to express their gratitude and acknowledge everyone involved in the completion of this paper. Firstly, the authors want to thank the supervisor Peter Caesar, for guiding and encouraging them throughout the process as well providing them with constructive feedback. The authors also want to express their appreciation to the examiner, Tomas Nilsson, for his professional guidance during the seminars. Additionally, the authors would like to thank all of their previous professors, who helped them establish an academic ground/base which made this thesis possible.

The authors also wish to thank their opponents for providing them with feedback and suggestions during the seminars. Lastly, the authors would like to express their profound gratitude to the three companies for their time and contribution. Without the interviewees participation and insights this thesis would not have been successful.

Jennifer Patrizi and Kainat Kainat.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction **1**
1.1 Background *1*
1.2 Problem Discussion *3*
1.3 Purpose *5*

2. Theoretical Framework **6**
2.1 Social Media Marketing (SMM) *6*
2.1.1 Social Media Channels 7
2.2 Brand Awareness in B2B SMEs *8*
2.2.1 SMM for Increasing Brand Awareness 9
2.3 Challenges for Increasing Brand Awareness through SMM *10*

3. Conceptual Framework **12**

4. Methodology **14**
4.1 Research Approach *14*
4.2 Research Method *15*
4.3 Research Design *15*
4.4 Sampling *16*
4.4.1 Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) 18
4.4.2 Cases 18
4.5 Data Collection Method *20*
4.5.1 Zoom Video Communications Interviews 21
4.5.2 Semi-Structured Interviews Process 21
4.6 Data Analysis *22*
4.6.1 Data Condensation 22
4.6.2 Data Display 23
4.6.3 Drawing Conclusions 23
4.7 Ethical Considerations *24*
4.7.1 Harm to Participants 24
4.7.2 Deception 24
4.7.3 Lack of Informed Consent 25
4.7.4 Invasion of Privacy 25
4.8 Quality Criteria *26*
4.8.1 Credibility 26
4.8.2 Transferability 27
4.8.3 Dependability 27
4.8.4 Confirmability 28
4.9 Individual Contributions *28*

5. Empirical Findings **30**
5.1 Social Media Marketing *30*
5.1.1 Social Media Channels 31
5.2 Brand Awareness *33*

5.3 Challenges *35*
5.3.1 Common Challenges 35
5.3.2 Individual Challenges 39

6. Analysis **41**
6.1 Social Media Marketing *41*
6.1.1 Social Media Channels 41
6.2 Brand Awareness *42*
6.3 Challenges SMEs Face when Adopting SMM to Increase Brand Awareness *45*
6.3.1 Financial Resources, Human Resources, Time, Expertise and Outsourcing 45
6.3.2 Customers' Satisfaction 47

7. Conclusion **50**
7.1 Discussion *50*
7.2 Theoretical Implications *53*
7.3 Managerial Implications *54*
7.4 Societal and Sustainable Implications *55*
7.5 Limitations *56*
7.6 Suggestions for Future Research *56*

References **58**
Articles *58*
Bibliography *62*
Interviews *62*
Websites *63*

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Preliminary Interviews Schedule *1*
Appendix 2 - Preliminary Interviews Questions *1*
Appendix 3 - Interviews Schedule *2*
Appendix 4 - Interviews Questions *3*

Table of Figures

Figure 1. Conceptual Model 13
Figure 2. Multiple-Case Study Process (Yin, 2018, p.58) 16
Figure 3. Upgraded Conceptual Model 54

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The use of the Internet has increased and new platforms are continuously being developed (Alalwan, et al., 2017). Digital technologies have changed how people communicate, exchange and obtain information (Alalwan, et al., 2017; Ngai, Tao and Moon, 2015). Today, social media platforms, also known as social media channels, like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn have become a part of the day to day life (Alalwan, et al., 2017). These channels are used to produce, distribute and transfer information virtually. Social media are not only used for private purposes but also businesses (Ngai, Tao and Moon, 2015). Social media can be understood 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, 2010, p.61; cited in Jussila, Kärkkäinen and Leino, 2013, p.7; cited in Ngai, Tao and Moon, 2015, p.33). Web 2.0 is where multiple users can create and modify the content in a collaborative way (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

When used properly social media can improve communication between the companies and their customers (Alalwan, et al., 2017; Cawsey and Rowley, 2016; Wang, Pauleen and Zhang, 2016) as well as increase the company's brand awareness (Alalwan, et al., 2017). Brand awareness is typically considered as "[...] brand node strength in memory and how easily the brand comes to mind." (Theurer, et al., 2016 cited in Anees-Ur-Rehman, et al., 2018, p.307). Through these digital channels, companies can get in contact with multiple groups and increase strong brand awareness within different segments of the market (Keller, 2009). Moreover, social media can help companies spread the electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), when information

about the companies is shared in a digital space through social media channels (Cawsey and Rowley, 2016).

Social media channels facilitate companies to market themselves, promote their products and/or services in a digitalized way, reach customers and communicate their brand (Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi, 2020; Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011). The activities of a company to market itself and advertise its products or services to customers are known as social media marketing (SMM) (Bîja and Balaş, 2014). Hence, SMM is adopted to promote a product, service or a brand, through the use of social media channels and for spreading and increasing a business's brand awareness (Alalwan, et al., 2017; Andersson and Wikström, 2017; Bîja and Balaş, 2014; Cawsey and Rowley, 2016; Langaro, Rita and de Fátima Salgueiro, 2015; Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011; Siamagka, et al., 2015).

Social media marketing is becoming more and more common within the B2B market, bringing both advantages and challenges (Agnihotri, et al., 2016; Andersson and Wikström, 2017; Alalwan, et al., 2017; Brink, 2017; Cawsey and Rowley, 2016; Järvinen, et al., 2012; Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011; Ritz, Wolf and Mcquitty, 2019). Even though SMM is particularly used by larger companies, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have started adopting it too (Andersson and Wikström, 2017; Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015) because of the advantages that it brings to such small companies (Brink, 2017). SMM helps the companies set as well as achieve goals, which are designed based on the needs and wants of their target market (Bîja and Balaş, 2014). It also allows SMEs to start expanding internationally by saving resources and attract potential customers in a digital environment (Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi, 2020).

1.2 Problem Discussion

Social media marketing is slowly developing within B2B SMEs (Brink, 2017; Hassan, Nadzim and Shiratuddin, 2015) and the use of social media within these organizations is researched to a lesser extent than in B2C context (Brink, 2017). Focusing on SMEs is important because they face more challenges than larger organizations, due to the lack of human resources with professional competence and knowledge, lack of financial resources as well as time and expertise (Brink, 2017; Chirumalla, Oghazi and Parida, 2018; Järvinen, et al., 2012; Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011; Ritz, Wolf and Mcquitty, 2019). Due to the limited resources, SMEs cannot afford to outsource SMM professionals, which puts them in a more challenging position (Ritz, Wolf and Mcquitty, 2019).

Brand awareness is that aspect of a company's brand that customers can create memories about, being then able to recall that exact brand when hearing the name of the company (Keller, 2009; Langaro, Rita and de Fátima Salgueiro, 2015). It is also related to the experience the clients have with it. Brand awareness is increased if customers are frequently exposed to the brand elements, which consist of the name, slogan, logotype, or packaging of a company's product (Keller, 2009; Langaro, Rita and de Fátima Salgueiro, 2015; Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi, 2020). Hence, communicating the brand has a direct impact on increasing its brand awareness aspect (Langaro, Rita and de Fátima Salgueiro, 2015; Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi, 2020). Social media have the ability to communicate specific information about the brand elements when customized brand content is generated and exchanged with the company's existing and potential customers (Bîja and Balaş, 2014; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Langaro, Rita and de Fátima Salgueiro, 2015; Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi, 2020). Therefore, businesses adopt social media to communicate with customers making them become aware of and

develop virtual experiences with the brand (Langaro, Rita and de Fátima Salgueiro, 2015; Ngai, Tao and Moon, 2015).

However, it is also argued that since B2B customers are not yet engaged in social media, as a B2C customer might be, the SMM might not provide the company with the expected outcome of increasing brand awareness (Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi, 2015). Furthermore, Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi (2015), as well as Taiminen and Karjaluoto (2015), argue how companies should not spend time on social media and instead focus on the core business of the company to make sure it offers the best possible products or services to its customers.

Moreover, previous research also stated that using social media to increase brand awareness does not particularly influence the customers' decision-making process (De Bruyn and Lilien, 2008 cited in Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi, 2015, p.708). Whereas, other studies stated that the customers memory and knowledge about the brand leads them through the decision-making process (Davis, et al., 2008 cited in Anees-Ur-Rehman, et al., 2018, p.305; Theurer, et al., 2016 cited in Anees-Ur-Rehman, et al., 2018, p.307; Homburg, Klarmann and Schmitt, 2010; Langaro, Rita and de Fátima Salgueiro, 2015).

Together with other aspects, it is previously argued that it is of utmost importance to identify and discuss the problems related to the use of SMM and its social media channels (Pedersen, 2014; Knoll, 2016; Pegoraro, 2014; Rowe, 2014 all cited in Alalwan, et al., 2017, p.1178). Particular attention is given to the relationship between branding and social media, which according to Alalwan, et al. (2017) has been examined by about 35 scientific articles, which has been considered to be relatively a little amount of studies. Furthermore, it is also pointed out that the general topic on B2B branding in SMEs lacks research (Mäläskä, Saraniemi and Tähtinen, 2011; Neuvonen,

2016 cited in Odoom, et al., 2017, p.473). Also, according to Wamba and Carter (2014 cited in Wang, Pauleen and Zhang, 2016, p.4), less attention has been given to the use of social media in B2B SMEs. There is a need for more studies within SMM from a theoretical perspective since social media are continuously evolving (Stockdale, Ahmed and Scheepers, 2012 cited in Wang, Pauleen and Zhang, 2016, p.5). It is then possible to identify the gap in the literature, according to which only a few studies, presented by Alalwan, et al. (2017) address the challenges related to the use of social media when increasing brand awareness.

Hence, further research on this topic in this specific context can provide SMEs with guidelines. It has been studied that if an SMM activities are efficiently conducted would increase brand awareness. Therefore, this research, in turn, could help them to become aware of and prepare themselves for the challenges they might face. This is because SMEs' managers might look at previous theoretical and empirical research and try to put into practice the research suggestions (Brink, 2017). Thus, due to the lack of in-depth research on the challenges that B2B SMEs can face when adopting SMM to increase their brand awareness, it has been decided to research this important topic. The study plans to contribute to existing social media marketing related literature.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to identify and describe challenges small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) face adopting social media marketing in order to increase their brand awareness.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Social Media Marketing (SMM)

The Internet has opened new gates of communication between companies and their customers, especially through social media channels (Alalwan, et al., 2017; Cawsey and Rowley, 2016; Hänninen and Karjaluoto, 2017; Järvinen, et al., 2012). Social media consists of applications based on the Internet and on the foundations of Web 2.0, which also makes it possible to develop and transmit User Generated Content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Agnihotri, et al. (2016, p.173), describe the use of social media as "any social interaction enhancing technology that can be deployed by sales professionals to generate content (e.g., blogs, microblogs, wikis) and develop networks (e.g., social networks, online communities).". Digital tools like social media allow companies to market themselves in order to reach customers and obtain attention through their digital devices at any place and time and communicate their brand (Keller, 2009; Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi, 2020; Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011).

Social media marketing is known as SMM and it is considered being a set of techniques that target both social networks and their users to increase brand awareness and publicize a particular product (Bîja and Balaş, 2014). SMM is mainly adopted to achieve a company's goals more effectively and efficiently (Bîja and Balaş, 2014) and at a lower cost (Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015) and investment (Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011). However, even if social media is helpful for businesses, it does not ensure the company's success (Bîja and Balaş, 2014). According to Hänninen and Karjaluoto (2017), social media marketing is not effective on its own, it must be used to support personal selling through salespeople.

2.1.1 Social Media Channels

Some of the main social media channels have millions of users worldwide, Facebook alone has circa 2 billion members (Company Info | About Facebook, 2020), Twitter has around 330 million monthly users (Twitter, Inc. - Financial information - Quarterly results, 2019), Instagram has over 1 billion users (Instagram | About Us | Official Site, 2020) and LinkedIn has over 600 million users (About LinkedIn, 2020). Customers can connect with companies by liking their Facebook page, following the company's Twitter account and connecting through LinkedIn. Additionally, channels like Google+, Youtube and blogs are also used by some organizations (Siamagka, et al., 2015). Hence, these social media channels allow the customers to gain more knowledge about both the company's brand and the products or services (Agnihotri, et al., 2016). Furthermore, social media channels help create better relationships between the seller and buyer (Agnihotri, et al., 2016; Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi, 2020). They also allow marketing employees to connect with the current and potential customers as well as interact with different target groups (Agnihotri, et al., 2016; Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi, 2020), increasing brand awareness (Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi, 2020).

B2B companies use various social media channels for different purposes (Agnihotri, et al., 2016). When it comes to SMEs operating within B2B markets, some channels are considered more beneficial and valuable than others and those are Facebook, LinkedIn (Jones, Borgman and Ulusoy, 2015; Buratti, Parola and Satta, 2018), Twitter (Siamagka, et al., 2015; Buratti, Parola and Satta, 2018) and Instagram (Andersson and Wikström, 2017). However, Instagram has been considered to be challenging for B2B companies (Andersson and Wikström, 2017). According to Agnihotri, et al. (2016), as well as Buratti, Parola and Satta (2018), LinkedIn is used to create brand awareness, collect information about areas companies operate in

through LinkedIn groups and gain references. Moreover, LinkedIn is used to target potential customers, suppliers as well as employees, build professional networks within the market (Andersson and Wikström, 2017; Buratti, Parola and Satta, 2018) and recruit new customers (Andersson and Wikström, 2017). Facebook is used to lead existing or potential customers to the company's sales channels and to share the company's achievements in order to demonstrate the value propositions (Agnihotri, et al., 2016; Buratti, Parola and Satta, 2018). Facebook can also be used to recruit customers as well as employees like LinkedIn (Andersson and Wikström, 2017), provide information about the company but in an informal manner and it is often used to connect with local stakeholders (Andersson and Wikström, 2017; Buratti, Parola and Satta, 2018). According to Buratti, Parola and Satta (2018), Twitter is used by B2B firms to share information, solve problems, improve public relations, enter new markets and promote the company's brand instead of products. However, Andersson and Wikström (2017), argue that B2B companies struggle using Twitter as well as Instagram to its full potential and often fail to reach their goals.

2.2 Brand Awareness in B2B SMEs

When businesses operate in a B2B market, brand awareness is typically considered as "[...] the ability of the decision-makers in organizational buying centers to recognize or recall a brand." (Homburg, Klarmann and Schmitt, 2010, p.202; Keller, 2009; Langaro, Rita and de Fátima Salgueiro, 2015). It has also been attributed another definition, such as "[...] brand node strength in memory and how easily the brand comes to mind." (Theurer, et al., 2016 cited in Anees-Ur-Rehman, et al., 2018, p.307). B2B buyers are affected by previous experience, memories, the brand knowledge and its related benefits which are key factors in buyers' decision making processes (Davis, et al., 2008 cited in Anees-Ur-Rehman, et al., 2018, p.305; Keller, 2009; Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi, 2020) especially in a B2B SME

context. Therefore, for all these previous reasons explaining the importance of brand awareness, B2B marketers must always keep this concept in mind when working with SMM (Bîja and Balaş, 2014).

Furthermore, SMEs' brand awareness needs to be spread remarkably since it affects the brand credibility aspect (Anees-Ur-Rehman, et al., 2018; Homburg, Klarmann and Schmitt, 2010). High levels of brand awareness have a positive influence on the B2B organization's performance and it also reduces the costs and risks of a buyer (Homburg, Klarmann and Schmitt, 2010). Furthermore, brand awareness relies on promotional activities and it is due to a company's popularity in the market that it appears to be more attractive from a buyer's perspective (Anees-Ur-Rehman, et al., 2018; Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi, 2020).

For communicating a brand, B2B companies have started using social media, which enables them to increase their brand awareness as well (Cawsey and Rowley, 2016). However, the use of social media in SMEs, through which brand awareness is spread, could also have long-term consequences on a business brand image and values (Mäläskä, Saraniemi and Tähtinen, 2011). The outcome might be either improving the brand image or damaging it (Mäläskä, Saraniemi and Tähtinen, 2011).

2.2.1 SMM for Increasing Brand Awareness

Adopting SMM, B2B companies can benefit from it in different ways (Andersson and Wikström, 2017; Järvinen, et al., 2012; Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011; Siamagka, et al., 2015). One of the significant benefits that SMM and its channels bring to a company is to increase brand awareness (Alalwan, et al., 2017; Andersson and Wikström, 2017; Bîja and Balaş, 2014; Cawsey and Rowley, 2016; Felix, Rauschnabel and Hinsch, 2017; Langaro, Rita and de Fátima Salgueiro, 2015; Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi, 2020; Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides,

2011; Siamagka, et al., 2015). Furthermore, companies do not need to use a large investment when using social media for increasing brand and products awareness (Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011). Hence, social media channels are considered being a 'must' when companies strive to increase their brand awareness (Bîja and Balaş, 2014).

2.3 Challenges for Increasing Brand Awareness through SMM

B2B companies have started adopting SMM for communicating their brands and spreading their brand awareness (Cawsey and Rowley, 2016). However, together with benefits, SMEs need to deal with several challenges that they face when adopting SMM and its channels for increasing their brand awareness (Alalwan, et al., 2017; Brink, 2017; Jones, Borgman and Ulusoy, 2015).

SMEs can face challenges conducting SMM due to the lack of human resources with competence, such as specialized IT employees with professional knowledge to adopt social media channels (Brink, 2017; Chirumalla, Oghazi and Parida, 2018; Järvinen, et al., 2012; Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011; Ritz, Wolf and Mcquitty, 2019) as well as lack of financial resources, time and expertise (Chirumalla, Oghazi and Parida, 2018; Järvinen, et al., 2012; Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011). Due to these limited resources, SMEs cannot afford outsourcing and often use a 'learn as you go' method when working with social media channels, which does not always guarantee positive results (Ritz, Wolf and Mcquitty, 2019). Further, SMEs personnel should always be transparent when communicating with customers through social media channels, which, however, is seen as a challenge for the managers (Ritz, Wolf and Mcquitty, 2019).

Furthermore, equally important is the challenges related to satisfying the customers' needs and wants, since they are the key factor in increasing a company's brand awareness (Bîja and Balaş, 2014). It consists of creating valuable content that will be spread through social media channels (Bîja and Balaş, 2014). Choosing social media channels that are best suitable for a company is also difficult for marketers, which affects brand awareness (Bîja and Balaş, 2014). If these channels are not used correctly, they can negatively affect the reputation of the brand (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Chirumalla, Oghazi and Parida, 2018). Agnihotri, et al. (2016), Berthon, et al. (2012 cited in Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi, 2020, p.5) and Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi (2015) discuss how SMM changes the power dynamic between the seller and the buyer since social media channels are particularly controlled by the users. Users became active participants on social media by choosing what they want to receive from a company (Lamberton and Stephen, 2016 cited in Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi, 2020, p.5), leading to customers trusting their reviews more than information provided directly by the company (Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi, 2015).

The high levels of possible interactions increase the customers' expectations for contact and if a firm is unable to provide that, then they risk losing up to 82% of the customers due to negative experiences (Agnihotri, et al., 2016). It is because customers directly impact a company's brand awareness (Langaro, Rita and de Fátima Salgueiro, 2015). Further, an SME operating international faces more challenges related to the differences between cultures (Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi, 2020).

3. Conceptual Framework

Social media marketing is perceived as being the foundation for this thesis and the other main concepts related to the research topic, based on Chapter '2. Theoretical Framework' and the purpose of this thesis, which is to identify and describe challenges small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) face adopting social media marketing in order to increase their brand awareness. Alalwan, et al. (2017), Cawsey and Rowley (2016) and Järvinen, et al. (2012) argue that social media marketing is performed through the use of social media channels. Therefore, social media are generally known as a group of applications based on the Internet and the foundations of Web 2.0 (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). They are also considered as commercial online communities where people and businesses communicate and exchange information about their brands, products or services (Agnihotri, et al., 2016; Alalwan, et al., 2017; Cawsey and Rowley, 2016). The most beneficial social media channels adopted by B2B SMEs are Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram (Andersson and Wikström, 2017; Buratti, Parola and Satta, 2018; Jones, Borgman and Ulusoy, 2015; Siamagka, et al., 2015). SMEs started adopting SMM to increase their brand awareness and therefore market themselves (Agnihotri, et al., 2016; Alalwan, et al., 2017; Andersson and Wikström, 2017; Bîja and Balaş, 2014; Cawsey and Rowley, 2016; Langaro, Rita and de Fátima Salgueiro, 2015; Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011; Siamagka, et al., 2015). However, when increasing brand awareness through SMM, SMEs can also face several challenges (Alalwan, et al., 2017; Brink, 2017; Bîja and Balaş, 2014; Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Chirumalla, Oghazi and Parida, 2018; Jones, Borgman and Ulusoy, 2015; Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi, 2015; Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi, 2020).

Based on the theoretical framework, it was possible to find a connection between all the concepts presented and used to gain deeper knowledge to fulfill the purpose of the thesis (Figure 1).

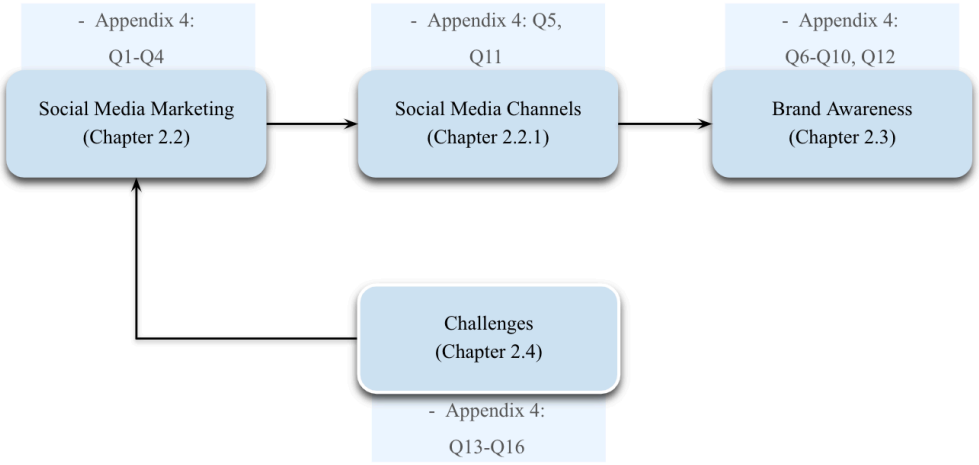

Figure 1. Conceptual Model

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Approach

When conducting business research, some critical aspects that need to be taken into consideration and one is the research approach. The research approach presents the relationship between the empirical findings and theory (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). This thesis has used an abductive approach, this involves collecting data in order to identify patterns and themes, which in turn can lead to the generation of new or modified theories (Dubois and Gadde, 2002; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016).

As this thesis is aimed at identifying and describing challenges faced by SMEs when adopting social media marketing in order to increase their brand awareness, the abductive approach is deemed beneficial since it enabled the authors to gain a greater understanding. When following this approach, the authors have switched between data collection and theory. The authors began by investigating and analyzing the existing research and data on the topic, which provided an overview of the subject and the main themes. After gathering the empirical data, the theoretical framework was modified based on the findings to explain the discoveries better. This process left the authors with the most important theoretical concepts that best explained the information gathered through the semi-structured interviews. The empirical data were then analyzed as well as compared with the existing concepts and themes to reduce the research gaps. This approach enabled the authors to fulfill the purpose of this study by analyzing and identifying patterns from the empirical data and comparing them to the theoretical concepts.

4.2 Research Method

There are two main research methods to collect data, qualitative and quantitative (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). Qualitative research method focuses on non-numerical data when collecting and analyzing the information, where the theory is generated from observations and the data is collected through in-depth interviews and observations (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). Therefore, the qualitative research method has been considered to be more suitable for this thesis than quantitative, as it provides in-depth information and knowledge of social phenomena (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). The qualitative method was selected since it can provide thoughts and opinions of the people working with SMM, social media channels and brand awareness. Moreover, this method enabled the interpretation and understanding of collected data about challenges SMEs are facing when increasing their brand awareness through SMM hence supporting the purpose of this study.

4.3 Research Design

Research design has been defined as the logical order which links the empirical data to the research's purpose and then to its conclusions (Yin, 2018). Hence, the structure of the purpose is used as a sort of guideline to identify the appropriate type of research design (Yin, 2018). For this thesis, a case study research design has been chosen. However, it was considered appropriate to study three different cases, which is therefore defined as a multiple-case study research design (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). It has been considered a suitable way to carry out this research because the study focused on analyzing and understanding a contemporary phenomenon in a specific real-life organizational context in depth (Yin, 2018).

A multiple-case study design provides a detailed analysis of each singular case (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019), which is then used to generate a single set of 'cross-case' conclusions (Yin, 2018) to properly fulfill the purpose of the thesis in depth. Furthermore, it is considered to deliver more substantial findings producing stronger effects and trustworthiness (Yin, 2018). Figure 2 provides an overview of a multiple-case study process, according to Yin (2018).

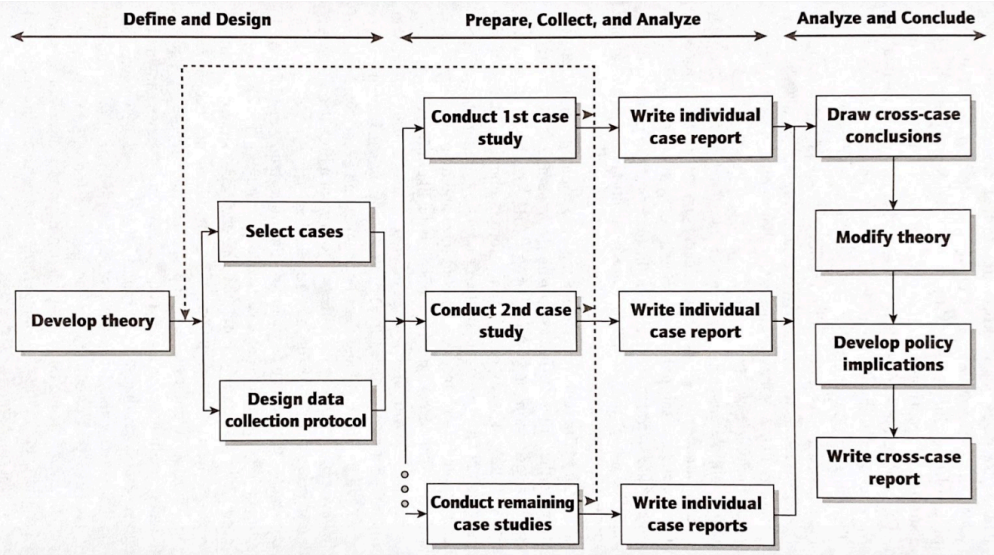

Figure 2. Multiple-Case Study Process (Yin, 2018, p.58)

4.4 Sampling

For this thesis, a non-probability sampling technique has been selected, according to which the selection process is not randomized (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). Specifically, a purposive sampling, a type of non-probability sampling, has been adopted. It consists of sampling units relevant to the research question, or purpose, over others, in order to gain significant and specific data (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). This selection method ensures the participants' suitability in relation to the purpose of the research

(Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). By following this sampling approach, the companies were selected based on the following criteria:

1. The company must be operating in the international and B2B market;
2. The company should be an SME, i.e., have less than 250 employees (Burns, 2016; Merrilees, Rundle-Thiele and Lye, 2011) and the annual turnover of less than €50 million (European Commission, 2003);
3. The company must be actively adopting social media marketing.

For this multiple-case study based on three international B2B SMEs located in Sweden, a small sample, which consists of a segment of the individuals selected for investigation (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019), has been identified and considered as participants for this analysis. Even if the thesis is a multiple-case study, the level of the analysis can also be a single unit of analysis (Yin, 2018), which in this case was the social media marketing unit. The focus group for this thesis consisted of the marketing directors and coordinators who were making the decisions related to and directly working with SMM. All three of the cases mentioned in '4.4.2 Cases' have worked with SMM since 2018 and have two years of experience. These companies also have a similar organizational structure, where only 1-2 people are directly working with SMM. This sample has been considered appropriate to be examined for gaining deeper knowledge and understanding of what challenges SMM brings up to the SMEs.

This research was delimited to only international SMEs operating in Sweden and did not include larger organizations. The reason behind this was that SMEs are more likely to face different challenges due to their limited resources (Jones, Borgman and Ulusoy, 2015; Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015). Further, it was delimited only to include organizations actively

adopting social media marketing to increase their brand awareness in order to collect real and contemporary information.

4.4.1 Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs)

"Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) represent 99% of all businesses in the EU." (ec.europa.eu, n.d.). A business is considered an SME if it meets certain requirements. These requirements are determined by specific factors. Hence, the factors that establish whether a business is an SME are the number of employees, the company's turnover or balance sheet (European Commission, 2003). Furthermore, SMEs consist of three different categories, micro-enterprises, small enterprises and medium-sized enterprises (European Commission, 2003; Merrilees, Rundle-Thiele and Lye, 2011).

- Micro enterprises have less than 10 employees; their turnover or balance sheet total is less or equal to €2 million.
- Small enterprises have less than 50 employees; their turnover or balance sheet total is less or equal to €10 million.
- Medium enterprises have less than 250 employees; their turnover is less or equal to €50 million or the balance sheet total is less or equal to €43 million.

Therefore, whenever a company has less than 250 employees (Burns, 2016; Merrilees, Rundle-Thiele and Lye, 2011), the annual turnover does not exceed €50 million and/or the balance sheet total is less than €43 million is an SME (European Commission, 2003).

4.4.2 Cases

In order to ensure that the three companies under study fulfilled the criteria mentioned earlier in '4.4 Sampling', a preliminary interview (Appendix 1 and 2) was conducted through Zoom Video Communications. These

interviews made it possible to gain general information about each company as well as explain the purpose of this study in detail to the participants. Company X was presented by P1, Company Y by P2, while Company Z by P3 and P4.

4.4.2.1 Company X

Company X is an SME of 40 employees, based in Gothenburg, Sweden, established in 1975. Their customer base includes Scandinavia, together with other countries in Europe, the USA, Australia and the Middle East. They operate within the construction machinery industry, hence manufacture and distribute machines for concrete. They provide different product groups for floor and surface treatment like floor grinding, surface finishing and polishing equipment, dust extractors as well as mills. Their goal is to produce cost-effective solutions possible for their customers in the form of machines, tools and equipment. (Company X's website; P1)

4.4.2.2 Company Y

Company Y is an SME based in Växjö, Sweden. It was established in 2018 by two people and today it has five active employees. Their customer base consists mainly of Scandinavia, some countries in Europe as well as Middle Eastern countries. They work within the e-sport and their customers are organizations as well as influencers working within the industry. They provide digital services to their customers, which include creating webshops, designing and selling merchandise for their customers. (Company Y's website; P2)

4.4.2.3 Company Z

Company Z is an SME based in Ljungby, Sweden, created in 2017 with three employees. They work with digital communications and marketing solutions. Their main customers are Swedish companies, but they also have few

customers in the UAE and Italy. They help companies with individual projects, designing and creating content based on their customers' needs and wants. The type of content they provide is images, videos, audio as well as graphics. Company Z takes the responsibility for the entire process, from planning and production to editing content for all the different types of channels. (Company Z's website; P3; P4)

4.5 Data Collection Method

In order to gather significant data, as well as understand the participants' thoughts and different points of view from the company's perspective on the thesis' topic, a qualitative interview approach has been selected. Specifically, a semi-structured in-depth and focused interview approach has been preferred and adopted. An interview is considered a two-way communication, where the interviewer asks the participants questions related to the research topic within a formal context (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). The participants of the study have been interviewed individually and on a voluntary-based interview approach. All the interviews were carried out via the Zoom Video Communications and were recorded with each participant's permission. The interviews were recorded because it makes it easier to concentrate on the interviews rather than on taking notes (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). Furthermore, it also allowed the transcription of the information which has been analyzed.

Before starting the interviews, an interview guide was formulated in order to plan the interviews in advance as a sort of schedule and list of the questions that needed to be asked. The interview guide helps reduce the risk of missing data since interviewers are less likely to forget questions (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). It included both probing and direct questions in order to collect correct and deeper information. However, leading questions were avoided since the participants should answer freely without feeling obligated

to answer in a certain way. In addition, English was selected as a common language when conducting interviews in order to avoid as many misunderstandings as possible (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019), since all three organizations were international. Further information was collected from the companies websites as well as their social media channels.

4.5.1 Zoom Video Communications Interviews

In order to carry out the semi-structured interviews, Zoom Video Communications has been preferred for certain reasons. Zoom is considered an advantageous platform for collecting qualitative data due to its facility of use, cost-effectiveness, data administration aspects, as well as safety options (Archibald, et al., 2019; Zoom Video Communications Inc., 2016). It makes it possible to reach distant companies virtually because as an online technological tool there is no travel needed, saving both time and money (Archibald, et al., 2019; Zoom Video Communications Inc., 2016). Further, it is possible to securely record and store the meetings without adopting a third-party software, reducing safety issues (Archibald, et al., 2019; Zoom Video Communications Inc., 2016). Zoom also replicates the face-to-face interviews, as it is still possible to keep a face-to-face rapport with the interviewee (Archibald, et al., 2019). Lastly, it allows the researchers to adjust to the work schedule of the participants. Despite this, Zoom also has challenges related to the difficulties of establishing a call connection, as well as audio or video quality (Archibald, et al., 2019). However, these issues did not come up when conducting interviews for collecting this thesis' data.

4.5.2 Semi-Structured Interviews Process

Before starting the interviews, an interview guide was formed based on the guidelines provided by Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019). The interview guide was divided into five parts in order to create a flow in the interviews and avoid going back and forth between different topics. These parts covered the

following topics: SMM, social media channels, brand awareness, SMM in relation to brand awareness and lastly, the challenges. When needed, follow-up questions were formulated and asked based on the participant's replies. The list of questions, except for the follow-up questions related to each part, are presented in Appendix 4. After formulating the interview guide, four semi-structured interviews for collecting the data were conducted via Zoom Video Communications between the 20th of April 2020 to the 29th of April 2020. The marketing directors and coordinators from the three companies presented in Chapter '4.4.2 Cases' were interviewed for a duration between 30 and 40 minutes (see Appendix 3).

At the start of every interview, the participants were informed about the topic and aim of the thesis in order to avoid misunderstandings. The participants were also asked for their consent to record the interview, informed how the recordings were going to be used, such as for transcribing the data only and that no one else would get access to them. After finishing the interview, the participants were informed that a copy of the interview transcription and the final thesis would be sent to them via email to ensure nothing during the interviews and data analysis was misinterpreted.

4.6 Data Analysis

There are several approaches to analyze and interpret qualitative data collected through interviews (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). This thesis has followed a data display and analysis approach. This approach consists of the following three steps: data condensation, data display and drawing conclusions (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016).

4.6.1 Data Condensation

In-depth interviews provide a huge amount of data, which needs to be summarized and simplified in order to find the most relevant information

(Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). For this thesis, all of the recorded interviews were transcribed in order to review them easily. After reviewing the transcription, it was possible to remove the irrelevant information and find the most meaningful data. Moreover, condensed data from the interviews made it easier to analyze and discuss them, gaining deeper knowledge and understanding about this real-life phenomenon.

4.6.2 Data Display

Data display is about compiling and organizing the collected data, displaying it in graphs or charts. The use of data display can help identify patterns and themes in the collected data (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2020; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). For this thesis, no visual representation of data was created; instead, the gathered data were transcribed and analyzed in order to find patterns in the form of challenges companies faced when adopting SMM to increase their brand awareness. This process made it easier to analyze the collected data and be more coherent for the reader since qualitative data tends to be extremely long and boring; it makes it difficult for the reader to process it (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2020).

4.6.3 Drawing Conclusions

Drawing conclusions is where the results of the study are explained after analyzing the empirical findings as well as presenting how the results contribute to the research area (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). The empirical findings collected from three international SMEs regarding SMM and brand awareness have been analyzed and later, the conclusion, as well as an upgraded conceptual model, have been presented in ‘7. Conclusion’.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

The research design and purpose of this thesis required in-depth interviews with the marketing directors and coordinators in order to gather their thoughts and personal views on the topic. The information regarding the challenges when increasing brand awareness through SMM can be perceived as sensitive by the companies. Due to this, it was vital to consider the four ethical principles presented by Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019) when collecting data. These principles are discussed in detail below.

4.7.1 Harm to Participants

According to Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019), harm to participants can be in different forms. It can either be psychological, physical or harm to the participants' future employment and career. In order to avoid any harm, all of the participants were informed about the nature of the study and that it would be published online. Moreover, all of the participants' information except their job duties were kept anonymous in this study as well as the name of the companies. The reason behind keeping them anonymous was for the participants to express their opinions as well as thoughts without feeling pressured to answer in the 'right' way. To avoid physical harm, all of the interviews were conducted through the Zoom Video Communications due to the current health issues. Lastly, the interviews were designed and scheduled in a way that would cause no stress or emotional harm to the participants.

4.7.2 Deception

Deception takes place when the participants of the research are misinformed by the researchers and the research is presented as something different than what it is (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). In order to not deceive the participants of this thesis, the topic, aim, data collection method, and timeline of the research were written in the initial email sent to them. These points

were explained again at the beginning of each interview and any questions by the participants were answered to make sure everyone was on the same page. Lastly, the interviews were conducted in English to avoid misunderstandings and translation errors.

4.7.3 Lack of Informed Consent

Lack of informed consent refers to whether the participants of the study have been provided with correct information about the topic and interview techniques before the interview (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). The information should be clear, allowing the participants to make a deliberate decision to participate in the study. The participants were informed of the topic and were asked for their consent to record the interviews. Moreover, it was made clear that the recordings were only going to be used for transcribing the empirical findings and, later, analyzed. The personal data of all the participants were collected with their full consent and were handled according to the GDPR rules.

4.7.4 Invasion of Privacy

When conducting a study, it is vital not to invade the privacy of the participants involved (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). Therefore, the interview guide was created carefully and no personal questions were included. The questions were mainly based on how the company works with SMM, brand awareness as well as the challenges they face when working with them. The participants were informed that they could end the interview at any time or not answer questions if they did not feel comfortable. Furthermore, all of the participants were anonymous so that no one can invade their privacy. These steps reduced the possibility of participants feeling that their privacy was or will be invaded.

4.8 Quality Criteria

The quality of qualitative research can be evaluated by assessing four important alternative criteria (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). These are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, which are based on how the research study's findings have been established (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019).

4.8.1 Credibility

Qualitative research's credibility refers to how credible the data and the findings of the study are (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). In order to ensure the credibility aspect of this thesis, a respondent validation approach was adopted. This activity was carried out in order to see if there was any lack of correspondence and that everything was correctly understood and transcribed.

4.8.1.2 Respondents Validation

This type of approach has been considered suitable because the thesis results should correspond to the participants' points of view and experiences. During the interviews, participants were asked if it was possible to send them a draft of the data transcript and the final thesis, which they agreed on. It was also explained the reasons behind asking them to confirm the transcriptions (presented in '4.8.1 Credibility') since this process helps to enhance the credibility of the thesis' findings (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). Hence, the draft of each transcript was sent to its respective participant via email. All of the participants provided positive feedback confirming that the data was properly transcribed. Therefore, this thesis did not face the concern of a lack of correspondence. However, it was not possible to send the final thesis.

4.8.2 Transferability

The transferability criterion is used to examine if the research findings can be applicable to other contexts. Therefore, in order to understand if the thesis findings could satisfy this criterion, a thick description technique has been suggested by Bell, Bryman and Harley (2019) and chosen for this multiple-case study. It consists of describing in detail the social setting in which the research takes place, events and individuals and providing enough data (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). Hence, this technique would allow the readers to understand and deduce if this multiple-case study's findings could be applied to other circumstances and contexts or not. For this reason, the data of this thesis have been gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews to collect detailed information. Further, the study has been carried out within three different SMEs operating in different industries and for this reason, the findings might not be possible to be applied within other industries. Since the thesis focused on SMM at this time, the findings might not be considered transferable to other contexts from different times, for instance, in five years, since SMM is continuously evolving.

4.8.3 Dependability

The dependability factor demonstrates if the study can be replicable (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). In order to show this aspect, the auditing approach was chosen. It identifies if the processes have accurately been followed and to what extent (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). Hence, it would demonstrate if other researchers can replicate the study and if the findings they would get would be similar to this thesis' results (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). For this reason, two external people as auditors, such as a supervisor and the examiner, continuously reviewed this thesis. They examined the research processes and data analysis to confirm that the findings were consistent and, therefore, replicable. Further, by following the

auditors' guidelines, the dependability of the thesis has been strengthened. However, due to the time factor in which this research has been conducted, it might be difficult for other researchers who would replicate this study in another period to experience this thesis' same findings.

4.8.4 Confirmability

The last criterion is confirmability, which refers to how neutral and objective the research's findings are (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019). Therefore, in the '4.6 Data Analysis' Chapter, all the steps were described in detail, from the interviews' transcription to the data display process and generation of the findings, as well as drawing conclusions. By presenting the steps and processes according to which the study has been conducted, as well as the final results in a transparent way, it is possible to note that no personal attitudes have been included, leading to completely objective findings (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019).

4.9 Individual Contributions

The authors of this thesis are Jennifer Patrizi and Kainat Kainat. In order to find the thesis' topic, the authors have read various scientific articles to gain a general understanding of the research area and find research gaps. Further, the authors exchanged information gathered from different articles and then discussed the thesis' final topic and purpose. In order to efficiently conduct and complete the thesis, the authors were assigned different tasks. Chapters like introduction, empirical findings, analysis and conclusion were written by both the authors in order to identify themes and create connections between the different concepts, themes and theories. The conceptual framework was also discussed together to draw a connection between the different concepts of the thesis. However, the theoretical framework and methodology chapters were discussed between the authors and equally divided when writing them.

During the data collection, Jennifer and Kainat equally participated in the interviews. Jennifer transcribed all of the interviews and Kainat revised all of them. The task of drawing tables and graphs was assigned to Jennifer; however, they were all discussed with Kainat. Further, both the authors had the responsibility for proofreading, correcting the text of the thesis and adding information to each other's parts when needed to avoid missing important data. Finally, the authors used Google Docs to write the thesis so that they could continuously see the work progress. They also actively participated in all tutoring sessions and seminars.

5. Empirical Findings

The interviewed SMEs' marketing directors and coordinators knew about social media marketing, brand awareness and their related challenges coming together with these two aspects. All four of the participants had two years of experience within the social media marketing sector of their respective companies, which they represented throughout the interviews. This characteristic made it possible to gain deep knowledge about their current social context and the phenomenon of facing challenges, from each company's perspective. Moreover, the participants had both previous personal and business experiences with social media. Hence, they were familiar with the usage of such tools for communicating and increasing a company's brand awareness. Company X was presented by P1, Company Y by P2, while Company Z by P3 and P4. From Company Z, two participants have been interviewed since they are the ones taking the decisions for SMM activities. Questions asked during the interviews can be found in Appendix 4. In order to strengthen the empirical data, further information was collected from companies social media channels.

5.1 Social Media Marketing

All of the participants were asked, "*What was the reason your company started adopting social media marketing?*". P1, P3 and P4 answers were very similar. They elaborated that social media is a growing platform, more and more people are using them, which means that their target groups, as well as customers, are going digital too. Therefore, it is important for them to be present on these platforms in order to communicate with their potential as well as existing customers and have a digital presence (P1; P3; P4). On the other hand, P2 saw it as a customer's requirement to show that the company is real. Moreover, P2 elaborated that social media channels are also a way of providing potential investors a look into their brand and business.

> "*It might be investors looking into our brand and our business that think that we are not really active on social media and I would say these people don't know much about social media so they cannot evaluate other then it should be a regular post here every now and then.*" (P2)

The participants were also asked about the main goals for adopting SMM. P1 explained that their main goal is to increase sales and to grow the number of visitors on their digital channels. All of the participants stated that one of their goals is to inform the customers about their brand and values. Moreover, all of the participants described that they want to communicate with their existing customers and connect with potential customers by conveying the company's offerings, hence generating more leads.

From the interviews, it also emerged that only two companies outsource professionals for different reasons. P1 explained that they outsource trained people in SMM only for creating videos to upload on their social media. However, it depends on what the company wants to show and the period of the product's lasting. They outsource when they want to publish videos about products that will be available for an extended period. While for other kinds of offerings, they use internal resources by uploading in-house videos as well as customers' videos. Hence, a mix of both professional and non-professional videos enables Company X to show their products in both a professional environment and in a real-life experience (Company X's social media channels; P1). P2, instead, stated that they outsource because of the lack of professional knowledge about the technical side of social media posting and handling.

5.1.1 Social Media Channels

When asked about which social media channels the companies used and why, the answers varied from company to company. P1 argued that:

> "*The content we put up there and the timing and how frequently it is done is more important than the sort of social media channels*." (P1)

P1 further explained that their company uses different channels because it allows them to communicate with different types of customers in different ways and change the content based on the target groups of each channel. Company X, experienced LinkedIn as a more professional platform where they can connect with bigger organizations and use it as a corporate platform for recruiting by publishing job postings (P1). Company Y, on the other hand, does not actively use LinkedIn (Company Y's LinkedIn; P2) because they believe it is not beneficial for them since their target groups are not present on this platform (P2). Lastly, Company Z is similar to Company X and uses LinkedIn as a professional platform to reach its target groups.

Moreover, P1 shared that Facebook is good for communicating with their customers and helps the company get in contact with smaller businesses as well as use Facebook groups to share customized information with each group. Facebook is also used to share tips and usage guides regarding their products (Company X's Facebook; P1). However, this platform is not as time-efficient as Instagram since it takes more effort to navigate the pages (P1). Whereas, Company Y and Z do not put much effort or time into their Facebook pages and use it to publish the same content as their other channels (P2; P3; P4). It was also possible to notice it by looking through Company Y and Z's social media accounts. P3 and P4 have noticed that Facebook has helped them gain new customers as well as employees.

When it comes to Instagram, P1 believes that it is the most beneficial for their local customers and allows the company to communicate with them through direct messages. P1 also stated that they use Instagram to directly sell their product on the platform (Company X's Instagram). Both Company

X and Y put a lot of effort into this channel by creating customized content because they find many of their customers on Instagram doing the same (Company X's Instagram; Company Y's Instagram; P1; P2). Company Y also uses Instagram to interact with customers by having giveaways, which attract new customers as well (Company Y's Instagram; P2). Company Z, similar to its other channels, does not create customized content for this platform (Company Z's Instagram). Lastly, only Company Y uses Twitter because their company generates the most amount of leads from this channel compared to others (P2). Moreover, Company X is the only one creating content for Youtube in the form of product videos (Company X's Youtube).

All of the companies explained how social media channels allow their customers to leave reviews or comments. P1, P3 and P4 believe that if customers write bad reviews, it can negatively affect the company's brand awareness and reputation. P2, on the other hand, argued that it could positively affect the company and increase its brand awareness since other people can read positive reviews. P2 continued:

> "*There is a risk in it, but I think the reward is greater because, I mean, on the other hand, if you handle social media on customer support really well, that will generate its own marketing without even having to do anything.*" (P2)

5.2 Brand Awareness

To each participant, it was asked to answer the question, "*What do you think when you hear the term 'brand awareness'?*". All of the participants' replies were very similar to each other.

> "*How many people know what our brand is and what it stands for.*" (P1)

> "*[...] having a good brand awareness is having a lot of clients and potential clients, knowing who we are and what we stand for.*" (P2)

> "*It means that you are well informed about the company, what they can do and offer. It's about creating a feeling for the brand and trust for the people working at the company.*" (P3)

> "*It's absolutely not just knowing the logo. It's about knowing what's behind the logo, what you have. It's related to customers' feelings and the association to the brand.*" (P4)

From the data, it emerged that only Company X measures brand awareness in terms of an increase in sales and market share growth (P1). On the contrary, Company Y and Z do not measure it because it requires time investment and financial resources since it is considered a big task (P2; P3; P4). However, P2 discussed that they see an increase of visitors and new followers on their social media accounts, especially on Instagram. Further, all the three companies stated that increasing brand awareness is challenging for the reasons presented in Chapter '5.3 Challenges'. Moreover, P1, P3 and P4 believe that if on social media there is more customers' engagement implies an increase in brand awareness because more customers become aware of the brand and the company's products or services.

> "*Interactions on social media increase brand awareness. It is the key to success on social media platforms.*" (P3)

According to P2, having more clients visiting a company's social media accounts does not indicate that they are interested in the brand, but they "*can be only people wanting to participate in giveaways.*".

All of the participants stated that they adopt social media marketing in order to increase their brand awareness. P3 and P4 argued that they see an increase due to the number of customers that contact them. Moreover, P4 stated:

> "*We have noticed that some customers that get in touch with us say that they have found our company on Facebook or LinkedIn, for example.*" (P4)

Hence, P3 and P4 believe they are successfully spreading and increasing their brand awareness. According to P1, it is possible to become aware of the outcome SMM has on brand awareness by communicating with the company's salespeople, as well as keeping track of the likes and followers on their social media. In this way, marketers understand whether "*[...] brand awareness exists in the market and that the customers get the intended message.*" (P1) or not. Therefore, P1 believes that its brand awareness is successfully increasing.

5.3 Challenges

All of the participants were asked if their companies face challenges when they adopt social media marketing in order to increase their brand awareness. They agreed on finding themselves to deal with challenges; however, they face both similar and individual points of view on the difficulty each company faces.

5.3.1 Common Challenges

P1 and P2 believe that the financial resources and the company size, intended in the number of employees, are the most critical factors. P1 argued that having a restricted budget does not allow the company to hire new personnel operating within social media marketing. Hence, company size negatively affects SMM activities, which in turn influence the increase of its brand

awareness. It is because the limited number of workers are not able to keep track of the activities on digital platforms (P1). P2 explained how time is also a difficulty when planning as well as conducting social media marketing activities. Lastly, P3 and P4 find the monetary capability and lack of time as the main challenges. Due to the limited budget, the company cannot frequently publish enough content on their platforms to market themselves (P3). Moreover, P2, P3 and P4 stated that they do not measure their brand awareness due to the higher costs and time it requires.

The participants were also asked if they have any specific education or training within social media marketing. P2, P3 and P4 stated that within their companies, they do not have any education in SMM. Further, arguing how challenging it is not to have professional competence within this field, as well as its importance within a company in distinct ways.

Within Company X, only P1 has a specialization in SMM (P1). P1 has trained and provided basic knowledge about SMM to the company's sales staff in order for them to interact with customers on social media platforms (P1). Additionally, both P1 and P2 believe that proper knowledge about the company and products is vital, otherwise the content published on the channels would not reflect and communicate the company's brand, value and message, which in turn would lead to negative brand awareness.

> "*So it is really important, especially for the marketing department, to be aware of the product, the product life and how things work in real life.*" (P1)

P2 further explained how knowledge about the company is most important because it focuses on the ability to create and publish content on social media channels to reach more clients. Employees working at Company Z do not have any degree or specialization in SMM (P3; P4). Both P3 and P4 stated that they have learned about it by looking at Google. Moreover, according to

P3, professional knowledge acquired through studies is not very significant. They believe that people can become aware of specific information by directly experiencing it, trying to learn (P3; P4). On the contrary, P2 explained that they chose to outsource a professional working with social media marketing due to their lack of knowledge.

Further, all three companies agreed on the importance of satisfying the customers' needs and wants to succeed in increasing their brand awareness. Despite this, all participants believe that delivering the right information, content, as well as customer service, is also difficult. For P1, satisfying the customers is part of their goal. P1 explained that their employees manage communications through social media conversations, especially on Facebook as well as Instagram. However, due to the lack of personnel and time, Company X finds itself in a complicated situation when trying to get a good response time when interacting with customers on these platforms (P1).

According to P2, it is difficult to communicate with customers appropriately. P2 believes that if a conversation with clients is inadequately handled can reach other customers, affecting then the company's brand awareness and reputation. Hence, the information should be clear and the company should carefully deal with its digital audience (P2). Additionally, publishing content on social media channels without meeting customers' needs is risky. Clients can share posts; however, if the information is misunderstood, the posts' content might not reflect the company's brand, influencing then potential clients' opinions (P2). P2 also added that if the information posted is transparent and customer support handled adequately, it is then a more effortless and free way of doing word-of-mouth marketing. It is believed so, because customers communicate, increasing the company's brand awareness (P2).

Both P3 and P4 agreed that satisfying customers' needs and wants is a challenging task, but for different reasons. P3 stated that in some situations, it is complicated to find great ideas for new content because it needs to reflect the company's brand and services when simultaneously creating the right content that customers want to see and get attracted to (P3). However, for P4, the main reasons why it is complicated to achieve this essential task consist of the lack of personnel as well as time invested in social media. These challenges do not allow Company Z to reach a short time response rate on social media conversations (P3).

Finally, all of the participants agreed that these challenges could affect the company's brand awareness reputation. During the interview conducted with P1, it emerged that the current health situation is the most severe ongoing difficulty the company faces. P1 discussed that they need to consider the change in customers' behaviors since they became more sensitive. Hence, when they publish a video or pictures on social media, they need to take into consideration different aspects, like social distancing between people retracted in the image or video.

> "*We need to be sure that the post would not offend anyone in such a special situation. [...]. So, it will definitely affect us.*" (P1)

On the contrary to what P1 stated about the current health situation affecting their brand awareness and reputation, P2, P3 and P4 feel less affected by it. P2 stated that their industry was gaining more attention during this crisis and temporarily boosted their brand awareness; however, they have also noticed a huge sales drop. Moreover, P2, P3 and P4 stated that now they have to prioritize some activities within their companies over others. They all three also recognized that by not also focusing on SMM, it affects them. According to P1, the current health situation affects brand awareness and

reputation the most. While P2 stated that the challenges they face have a bigger effect on customer wise. If clients do not see continuous company's engagement in social media, they might think it might be risky to purchase some of their products (P2).

5.3.2 Individual Challenges

As mentioned in Chapter '5. Empirical Findings', only two companies (Company X and Y) outsource professionals for different reasons. However, only P2 sees it as a difficulty, stating that outsourcing can be challenging because it is a risk for the company. P2 claimed it to be risky because an outsourced person does not work within the company and is not aligned with the company's brand, values and message. Which can lead to the content published on social media channels being non-aligned to what the company stands for (P2).

Since Company X operates globally, they face the issue of the different cultures and, therefore, different messages as well (P1). According to P1, a company should create different content according to the different countries' customers' characteristics. However, it is difficult for them to decide how to deliver the message so their audience can understand it correctly (P1). Moreover, they have products that are only targeted to a specific country, which makes it more difficult for them to operate their social media channels (P1).

Nevertheless, P1 stated that the company follows "*[...] a straight line [...]*" approach. It means that the marketing department creates the same content for all their social media despite the cultural differences of their clients (P1). Moreover, it was explained that for overcoming this challenge, it is necessary to have different social media accounts for each different country (P1). However, for Company X, this activity requires time, commitment and more personnel, which they lack (P1). P2, instead, stated that for Company Y, it is

complicated to increase their brand awareness and communicate values as well as the company's mission, even if these aspects are conveyed directly by the in-house personnel.

On the other hand, for Company Z, standing out in the digital market, where all the other competitors are, is challenging (P3; P4). P3 explained that there always is the necessity of publishing great content on social media to influence and attract potential customers. Moreover, it became difficult to promote their services through social media because these platforms have increased the costs of promoting videos and images (P3). Hence, it affects the company's views and the growth of its clients. The last difficulty presented regarded the language aspect when publishing on social media internationally (P3). It is considered as a barrier for reaching potential customers in different countries since they might have different languages and lack of English skills (P3). Hence, this leads to a misunderstanding of the company's brand (P3).

6. Analysis

6.1 Social Media Marketing

All of the participants describe how they adopt SMM to connect with current as well as potential customers. These findings are supported by the literature that explains how social media marketing allows organizations to communicate with their customers through social media channels (Alalwan, et al., 2017; Cawsey and Rowley, 2016; Hänninen and Karjaluoto, 2017; Järvinen, et al., 2012). Agnihotri, et al. (2016) explain how SMM can be used to create digital networks and communities, which is in line with the findings of this research. Both Company X and Z expressed SMM enables them to have a digital presence.

6.1.1 Social Media Channels

In the theoretical framework, it was presented how B2B companies use various social media channels for different objectives (Agnihotri, et al., 2016) and target groups (Agnihotri, et al., 2016; Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi, 2020). In line with this, P1 also described that different channels allow them to reach various target groups and are used in different ways. P1, P3 and P4 agreed on using LinkedIn as a professional platform, used to reach their target groups. P1 further explained that LinkedIn is used to connect with larger organizations. The existing research verifies this by explaining how LinkedIn is helpful for building professional networks (Andersson and Wikström, 2017; Buratti, Parola and Satta, 2018). Company X also adopts LinkedIn as a channel for recruiting potential employees by publishing job advertisements (Company X's LinkedIn; P1). This is in line with Andersson and Wikström (2017), describing how companies can utilize LinkedIn to recruit new employees. On the other hand, Company Y does not even use LinkedIn explaining it is not beneficial for them because their target groups

are not active on this channel. Buratti, Parlo and Satta (2018) express that Twitter allows B2B organizations to publish information about the company, improve relations, reach new markets, enhance their PR and increase brand awareness. However, only one of the three companies, Company Y used Twitter.

When it comes to Facebook, Company X uses it to communicate with smaller and local businesses, which is also discussed by Andersson and Wikström (2017) as well as Buratti, Parlo and Satta (2018). However, Company X and Y do not use Facebook in the same manner, they publish the same content as their other social media channel. Agnihotri, et al. (2016), Buratti, Parola and Satta (2018), P1, P3 and P4 argued that Facebook can be used to lead customers to the company's sales channels like website or sales personnel. The sales personnel at Company X are communicating with customers on Facebook by answering their questions regarding the products. P3 and P4 explained how new customers have contacted them because of their Facebook page. Andersson and Wikström (2017) as well as Company Z describe that Facebook can also be used to attract and recruit new employees.

Lastly, Andersson and Wikström (2017) discuss that Instagram is challenging for B2B companies, which was not the case for Company X and Y. P1 found Instagram to be time-efficient and easy to navigate, explaining how Instagram allows them to communicate with their customers through direct messages as well as sell their products. Company Y is creating customized content for this channel and using it to communicate with the customers (Company Y's Instagram; P2).

6.2 Brand Awareness

According to previous research, a company's brand awareness is the ability of the customer to recognize and recall a specific brand based on the memories and experiences connected with a company's brand (Homburg,

Klarmann and Schmitt, 2010, p.202; Keller, 2009; Langaro, Rita and de Fátima Salgueiro, 2015; Theurer, et al., 2016 cited in Anees-Ur-Rehman, et al., 2018, p.307). Brand awareness also affects a customer's decision making processes. Hence, having positive experiences, memories and deep knowledge about a brand can positively influence a customer to buy a product (Davis, et al., 2008 cited in Anees-Ur-Rehman, et al., 2018, p.305; Keller, 2009; Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi, 2020). In line with this, all of the participants stated that a company has a strong brand awareness when it has many customers or potential customers, who have adequate and deep information about a brand as well as know what the company stands for. A company's brand awareness is also related to the trust and the feelings a customer has about a brand and the company itself (P3). Further, brand awareness can rely on the association a customer has about the brand logo (P4); therefore, brand awareness is also increased when customers are constantly exposed to the brand elements (Keller, 2009; Langaro, Rita and de Fátima Salgueiro, 2015; Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi, 2020).

According to the study conducted by Cawsey and Rowley (2016), in order for a company to spread and increase brand awareness, it needs to adopt social media marketing that is already adopted by all four of the participants within their respective companies. Further, Homburg, Klarmann and Schmitt (2010) also studied that if a brand's awareness is strong, it can positively enhance a company's performance and reduce customers' costs and risks when buying a product, a theory that has been discussed by P2. P2 believes that the high levels of awareness within the market can enhance word-of-mouth marketing (Cawsey and Rowley, 2016), which in turn increases brand awareness and reduces costs for the company carrying out SMM activities. Furthermore, Anees-Ur-Rehman, et al. (2018), Homburg, Klarmann and Schmitt (2010) and P2, discussed how brand awareness is communicated through SMM could affect the brand credibility. Further, if information or

content that reflects a brand and its products is not frequently published on a company's social media, customers might not make purchases since it could look risky and not trustworthy (P2).

According to P1, P3 and P4, having many visitors navigating as well as more followers on a company's social media channels reflects the increase in brand awareness. They believe that SMM activities conducted to promote their products or services can attract and facilitate customers to gain deeper knowledge about them. An aspect that corresponds to what has been studied by Anees-Ur-Rehman, et al. (2018) and Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi (2020), who discussed that promotional activities and popularity within a market has a direct impact on the increase of brand awareness. However, if a company notices growth in customers' engagement on its social media channels, it does not imply they are interested in the real brand experience and create memories (P2).

Adopting SMM and its social media channels for increasing brand awareness can have repercussions on a company's brand image and value, which could be either positive or negative (Mäläskä, Saraniemi and Tähtinen, 2011). Therefore, if a company does not invest in SMM activities it negatively affects the company's brand awareness and reputation (P1; P2; P3; P4).

As it has been studied in various research (Alalwan, et al., 2017; Andersson and Wikström, 2017; Bîja and Balaş, 2014; Cawsey and Rowley, 2016; Felix, Rauschnabel and Hinsch, 2017; Langaro, Rita and de Fátima Salgueiro, 2015; Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi, 2020; Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011; Siamagka, et al., 2015) as well as discussed by all four of the participants, SMM provides companies with the opportunity to increase their brand awareness. Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides (2011) also researched that adopting SMM does not require a large investment. However, if firms want to promote their content on social

media channels, it requires financial resources since these platforms require fees and are raising the costs for promoting (P3). Lack of these promotional activities might negatively affect the influence on customers and the increase in brand awareness within the market, since they would not be frequently exposed to contents and information about the brand (P3).

6.3 Challenges SMEs Face when Adopting SMM to Increase Brand Awareness

6.3.1 Financial Resources, Human Resources, Time, Expertise and Outsourcing

As mentioned in the theoretical framework that when SMEs adopt social media marketing, they face challenges, such as the lack of human resources in terms of the number of employees actively working at the company (Brink, 2017; Chirumalla, Oghazi and Parida, 2018; Järvinen, et al., 2012; Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011; Ritz, Wolf and Mcquitty, 2019). Additionally, according to Chirumalla, Oghazi and Parida (2018), Järvinen, et al. (2012) and Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides (2011), companies can find themselves in a difficult situation concerning their financial resources and time investment. Agreeing with this previously mentioned research, all of the participants currently face the same challenges. P1 believes there is a correlation between the limited financial resources and the number of employees since, due to the lack of money, the company cannot afford to hire other workers working with SMM. Hence, the lack of personnel has a negative influence on the SMM tasks, which in turn affects the company's brand awareness because few employees are directly managing SMM and cannot always focus on monitoring the visitors' traffic on their social media channels (P1). The lack of time makes it difficult for Company Y and Z to plan and carry out SMM activities that are crucial for

their companies' brand awareness within the market (P2; P3; P4). The monetary capability also affects SMM tasks (P3; P4). Due to the limited budget, the company is not able to create content that spreads knowledge about their products and/or services as well as promote the content posted on the channels, which can help them increase brand awareness (P3; P4).

It has been studied that professional expertise, such as specialized IT employees in adopting social media channels can be challenging for SMEs (Brink, 2017; Chirumalla, Oghazi and Parida, 2018; Järvinen, et al., 2012; Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011; Ritz, Wolf and Mcquitty, 2019). Not having professional technical knowledge about how to conduct SMM activities is challenging also because the content they might publish may not reflect the company's brand (P2). Even if a marketer working directly with social media has a specialization, the other workers within the company, especially salespeople, should receive formal education and training (P1). On the contrary to what has been previously researched and other participants' beliefs, it is believed that direct experience is the best way to learn about SMM (P3; P4), following a more 'learn as you go' approach studied by Ritz, Wolf and Mcquitty (2019). This approach is adopted when a company cannot afford to outsource (Ritz, Wolf and Mcquitty, 2019) but this was not the reason for Company Z.

P1 stated that they outsource skilled people only for creating videos to publish on their social media. P2, instead, explained that due to the lack of expertise within the company, they needed to outsource professionals to conduct their SMM tasks to reach and attract customers. However, P2 also believes that outsourcing for them is challenging. It is risky to work with someone outside the company, since the person may not fully understand the company's brand, values and messages that need to be communicated (P2). Therefore, the person might not be able to communicate in a transparent way with customers (Ritz, Wolf and Mcquitty, 2019).

6.3.2 Customers' Satisfaction

As studied by Bîja and Balaş (2014), satisfying customers' requirements is challenging. Companies need to listen, analyze and interpret what the audience wants to get (Bîja and Balaş, 2014). As previously mentioned, all of the participants stated that meeting customers' needs and wants needs to be part of the company's main goals since they directly impact the increase in brand awareness, also explained by Langaro, Rita and de Fátima Salgueiro (2015).

It is also previously discussed that customers decide what information has to be published and delivered through social media since they are the ones who decide if they receive enough knowledge to create a memory about the brand (Agnihotri, et al., 2016; Berthon, et al., 2012 cited in Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi, 2020, p.5; Bîja and Balaş, 2014; Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi, 2015; Lamberton and Stephen, 2016 cited in Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi, 2020, p.5). Hence, customers are the main participants when it comes to increasing a company's brand awareness through social media (Lamberton and Stephen, 2016 cited in Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi, 2020, p.5). Acting as active stakeholders, they control the company's activity of SMM on their social media channels which put them in a difficult position (Agnihotri, et al., 2016; Berthon, et al., 2012 cited in Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi, 2020, p.5; Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi, 2015). It means that there is the necessity of creating valuable content to be delivered through social media channels (Bîja and Balaş, 2014). All four of the participants shared the same challenge as the literature, stating that conveying correct knowledge about a brand and designing customized content based on what customers require is difficult. Further, P2 believed it is also a risky activity, since customers may share published posts with other customers. If the company's shared content does not clearly communicate the message, the audience might misunderstand it, which can negatively affect potential

clients' impressions on the brand (P2). A challenge supported by Ritz, Wolf and Mcquitty (2019) is that it is difficult to be constantly transparent through social media. P3 added that it is also hard to create new original ideas every time to design the content reflecting customers' demands as well as the company's brand and services at the same time.

P2 further shared that if customers are successfully satisfied, they can positively influence other potential customers by communicating with each other, increasing electronic word of mouth, which in turn increases brand awareness. As discussed by Karjaluoto, Mustonen and Ulkuniemi (2015) as well, happy customers generate positive reviews that other stakeholders trust. Moreover, it is researched that if SMM activities are not correctly conducted and social media are not properly adopted, they can negatively affect the company's brand reputation. (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Chirumalla, Oghazi and Parida, 2018). This theory is in line with the empirical findings.

Agnihotri, et al. (2016) also explained that direct interactions with customers are crucial; however, they have high expectations that need to be fulfilled. If clients do not feel being provided with the right conversations, companies might lose up to 82% of the customers (Agnihotri, et al., 2016). Similarly, P1 emphasized that they try to manage communications with customers directly through social media channels. P2 also added that the exchanged information with clients needs to be understandable. Communicating with customers on social media is challenging because of the lack of personnel and time (P1; P2; P3; P4). All of the participants also discussed that for these reasons, SMEs struggle to get a good and short response time.

It was also studied that the cultural differences SMEs deal with when operating in an international environment are considered as a challenge for the companies (Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi, 2020). This aspect has been

shared by P1 as well, stating that operating globally, they have to manage different characteristics concerning each culture. However, this is a difficult task for the company since they would have to create different and customized content and spread different messages (P1). Despite being acknowledged of the importance of having customized information, they generate and spread the same content for every kind of customer in the same way (P1). It is added that this would require different social media accounts for each of the countries they operate in, an activity that the company cannot afford because of lack of employees and time commitment (P1). If the company is unable to communicate with their customers due to cultural differences then it will not be able to increase its brand awareness within the country. For P2, instead, it is challenging to deliver the same messages and values, in order to increase the company brand awareness. Moreover, as shared by Makrides, Vrontis and Christofi (2020), P3 emphasized that emerging in the market is difficult due to the need to design and publish more customized content on the company's social media channels, which can have a greater impact on customers than competitors.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Discussion

This research aimed to identify and describe challenges small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) face adopting social media marketing in order to increase their brand awareness. This was studied by analyzing three Swedish SMEs actively working with social media marketing. The thesis looked into what social media channels they were using and the challenges they were facing to increase their brand awareness through SMM. The authors believe that through the analyses, they were able to find the various challenges. Based on previous literature, SMEs operating in a B2B market can face similar challenges when they adopt social media marketing to increase their brand awareness, regardless of the industry they operate in. These challenges involve the limited financial and human resources, lack of time, the expertise of the employees as well as the ones related to the customers' satisfaction.

A new challenge that was identified and experienced by all three SMEs but not previously studied is related to the current global crises caused by the pandemic. This situation has been affecting all of the companies but in different ways. As emphasized by Company X, it is the most severe ongoing challenge the company faces since customers have become more sensitive to what content and information companies publish on their social media. Therefore, companies should take into consideration this customers' aspect and pay attention to not go against the current restrictions related to the virus. For Company Z, the pandemic put them in a position of prioritizing other activities rather than focusing on SMM tasks. On the other hand, company Y experienced that their industry was gaining more attention during this pandemic and temporarily boosted its brand awareness. However, at the same time, they have also noticed a huge sales drop.

Another common challenge that SMEs face is bad reviews on social media channels. Reviews can help companies increase brand awareness and electronic word of mouth, however, bad reviews can also have a negative effect on the company. SMEs struggle to overcome this problem. Due to the limited resources, it can be difficult for them to always satisfy their customers, for example, by replying to them via social media channels. Lastly, when adopting SMM, each company faces the same challenge of selecting the right social media channels to achieve its goals. Some channels like Instagram were considered challenging by theory, whereas some companies found it to be easier to operate.

Despite these common challenges, as discovered by conducting this research, SMEs can also experience other challenges that can be referred to as individual challenges. As explored, they depend on a company's particular situation, which can differ. It was found that outsourcing can be considered an individual challenge since it is a firm's own decision whether to outsource skilled people to conduct SMM activities or not. Outsourcing could be seen as an advantage; however, it also puts the company in a risky situation. Since the outsourced person does not work physically within the company, the person may not be wholly aligned with the company's brand, values and messages. This may lead to an exchange of different content that does not clearly reflect the firm's brand and in turn, customers might misunderstand the message and not become aware of what the company stands for.

As it is identified, companies can also deal with challenges connected to different cultures, depending on the countries a company operates in. It is considered a challenge because different cultures require different content that delivers clear values, information and messages in various ways based on the specific culture in order to spread awareness. Companies should influence customers but, at the same time, not offend people coming from other cultures, which for an SME that might lack financial or human

resources and time is challenging. Moreover, concerning operating internationally, it was emphasized that another challenge regards the language companies should adopt when publishing content on their social media channels to allow the customers to understand the right messages clearly. However, SMEs may lack foreign language skills, so they might not be able to communicate clearly, leading to a misunderstanding of the company's brand. It might also be a problem of customers living in specific countries that might not speak or read and understand a different language from their native language.

Further, it emerged that when SMEs lack expertise, they do not know how to correctly and transparently communicate the values and company's mission; hence, sometimes they need to outsource in order to increase brand awareness better and then influence and attract customers. Moreover, when SMEs utilizes only one social media account for all of the markets or countries they operate in, it can affect their brand awareness, especially when the company has different products for different markets or countries. It was also discovered that developing effective and original content is challenging; marketers do not always have original ideas. Through original and unique content, companies can attract new customers as well as increase their brand awareness.

Additionally, the costs for advertising and promotions on social media channels have increased, making it difficult for companies to promote their product and/or services. Since SMEs struggle to analyze which channel has the highest reach compared to the costs, it can be challenging to select a channel as well as afford the costs. Hence, it can affect companies' ability to promote their product and/or services and increase their brand awareness in the market. It also emerged that even if only one of the three companies measures its increase in brand awareness, the other two do not because it is a big task to carry out, requiring both financial resources and time. Moreover,

if a company cannot afford to measure its brand awareness with specific tools they cannot know if it is increasing (P2; P3; P4). However, to the authors' knowledge, these previously-described individual challenges have not been studied yet.

In conclusion, this thesis could contribute to the existing literature of SMM's related challenges and help SMEs' marketers become aware of some challenges they might face when adopting SMM to increase their brand awareness. Further, it makes them understand how important it is to become aware of, be prepared to face different types of challenges and learn how to prevent, overcome, or deal with them in advance.

7.2 Theoretical Implications

As mentioned in Sub-chapter '1.2 Problem Discussion', more theoretical research is required within the topic of social media marketing (SMM) since social media is continually evolving (Stockdale, Ahmed and Scheepers, 2012 cited in Wang, Pauleen and Zhang, 2016, p.5). The existing research on the relationship between social media and branding is also insufficient, with only 35 articles (Alalwan, et al., 2017). Out of these 35 articles, only a few address the challenges related to SMM when increasing brand awareness. Moreover, research on branding (Mäläskä, Saraniemi and Tähtinen, 2011; Neuvonen, 2016 cited in Odoom, et al., 2017, p.473) and the use of social media (Wamba and Carter, 2014 cited in Wang, Pauleen and Zhang, 2016, p.4) in B2B SMEs is even more limited. This thesis plans to fill these research gaps and provide insights into the challenges B2B SMEs can face when working with SMM to increase brand awareness.

Furthermore, it was possible to identify the challenges that previous scientific articles did not study. Hence, the thesis contributed by presenting and describing them in detail and they have been displayed in an upgraded conceptual model (Figure 3). The challenges have also been divided into two

categories based on the authors' interpretations of the empirical findings. This conceptual model presents the challenges that have been previously studied in green, while the newly identified challenges are displayed in blue. The last-mentioned challenges are considered the new findings that emerged from the thesis. Therefore, according to the authors, they are contributing to the current literature.

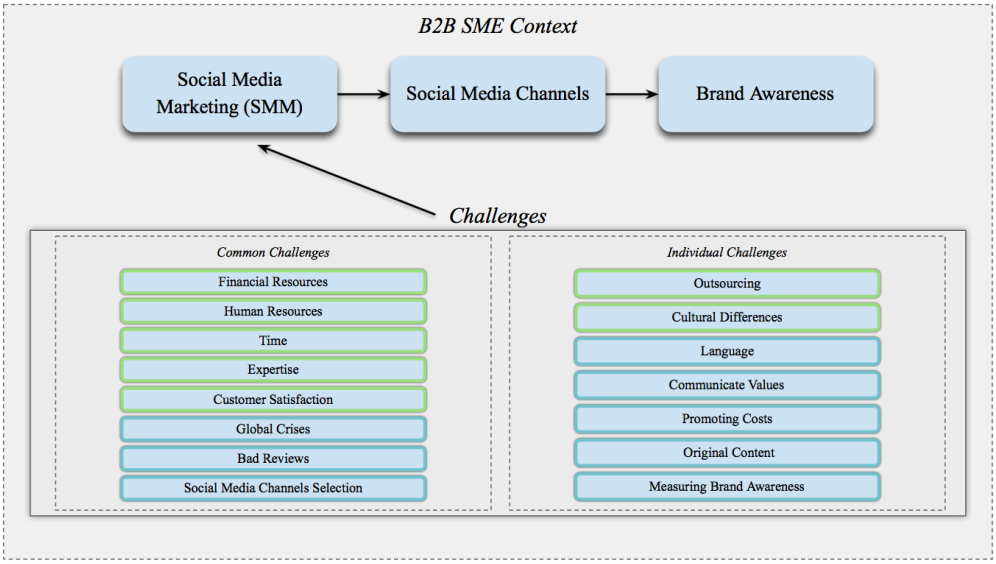

Figure 3. Upgraded Conceptual Model

7.3 Managerial Implications

This thesis provides SMEs and their marketers with insights into possible challenges they might face when they want to adopt social media marketing to increase their brand awareness within a B2B market. From this research, companies should understand that they need to become aware of the possibility that they could face different challenges and that might depend on their type of industry they operate in, business and current individual situations. Further, by knowing possible challenges, firms can plan actions to take in order to overcome these challenges when they occur. Becoming aware of these challenges, marketers can first consider how beneficial it

could be for an SME to begin adopting SMM or the negatively affect other aspects of the company.

Finally, this thesis could help companies to understand how important it is to be always prepared for challenges and possible global crises. Hence, SMEs should start adopting SMM since it is always useful and helpful to faster spread brand awareness, especially in case something, like the current pandemic, happens, where no physical contact nor physical marketing is allowed. Moreover, in order to be able to conduct SMM activities and help companies to increase their brand awareness within the market, marketers should select social media channels that are more beneficial for them and not adopt all of them. By focusing on a few channels SMEs can use their limited resources in the most beneficial and profitable way. To identify the most valuable channels, a company might look at which social media channels their customers are operating in.

7.4 Societal and Sustainable Implications

This thesis is based on SMEs that operate internationally within a B2B context. Therefore, they are the main target group of this thesis. However, this study is useful for every type of organization that adopts social media marketing for communicating with customers, which helps companies increase their brand awareness on an international scale. According to the thesis' authors, SMM is considered to have a positive and negative impact on the business society. Businesses can communicate and be always aware of B2B customer offerings with help of social media channels where companies publish information. However, as previously discussed in the empirical findings, the current global crisis due to the pandemic is making people as well as companies more sensitive about the content they consume through social media channels. When creating content marketers should keep in mind

the social aspects and the regulations in the countries they operate in otherwise it can affect the brand.

By adopting SMM instead of traditional marketing like advertisements through posters and mails, companies can save both economic and environmental resources while reaching more customers. Moreover, companies can connect with potential and existing customers without traveling, which saves the company crucial time for other activities, financial resources and reduces pollution.

7.5 Limitations

When conducting this study, there were some limitations that affected the results. One of the main limitations of this thesis was that the findings were only based on three marketing directors and one marketing coordinator from three SMEs operating in different industries based in Sweden. Even though the authors were able to gain in-depth information about these companies, the number of cases is still small to present generalized findings. Furthermore, time was also a factor that limited this thesis. Additional time could have also allowed the authors to gain the participants' validation, as mentioned in '4.8.1.2 Respondents Validation', in order to increase the credibility of the thesis. Lastly, the pandemic also affected the results of the thesis and limited the number of companies. Due to the global crisis, many companies refused to participate because of internal issues. The thesis' results were affected since some of the challenges that were based on the pandemic might not appear in normal circumstances. Moreover, due to the health regulations, the authors were not able to conduct interviews in person.

7.6 Suggestions for Future Research

Since this thesis was based on three international B2B SMEs operating within three different industries, it could be of interest for researchers to

study challenges related to SMM to increase brand awareness in each of the industries that were analyzed in this thesis. Therefore, it could be interesting to analyze if the identified and described challenges in this thesis are similar and often occur within different B2B SMEs, regardless of the type of industry.

As described, the current global situation is negatively affecting SMEs to increase their brand awareness and challenging them in adopting SMM. Since this is a new phenomenon affecting SMM, it could be of interest for researchers to conduct studies on the challenges companies can face and how to handle them in situations similar to this. Moreover, it was possible to recognize that the three industries, the investigated companies operate in, are all affected by the pandemic; however, in different ways. Hence, it would be valuable to analyze how a global phenomenon can affect different industries. It would also be helpful for marketers to become aware of activities to conduct to prevent, overcome or learn how to deal with the SMM challenges. For these reasons, it urges further studies in identifying effective strategies that SMEs should look at and adopt as a sort of guideline.

Lastly, by presenting and identifying all these challenges, it is possible to argue that they can have a direct or indirect impact on increasing a company's brand awareness since it was noticeable that all of them are connected and affect each other. For instance, as identified in this study, if an SME has limited financial resources to conduct SMM activities. SMEs cannot create new content or promote the published content on social media channels due to the high costs of promoting, thus affecting the increase in brand awareness within the market. Hence, the limited monetary capability indirectly affects a company's brand awareness. Therefore, it could be a significant contribution to current literature to analyze how each of the challenges presented in this study can impact an SME's brand awareness.

References

Articles

Agnihotri, R., Dingus, R., Hu, M. and Krush, M., 2016. Social media: Influencing customer satisfaction in B2B sales. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 53, pp.172–180.

Alalwan, A.A., Rana, N.P., Dwivedi, Y.K. and Algharabat, R., 2017. Social media in marketing: A review and analysis of the existing literature. *Telematics and Informatics*, 34(7), pp.1177–1190.

Andersson, S. and Wikström, N., 2017. Why and how are social media used in a B2B context, and which stakeholders are involved? *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 32(8), pp.1098–1108.

Anees-Ur-Rehman, M., Wong, H.Y., Sultan, P. and Merrilees, B., 2018. How brand-oriented strategy affects the financial performance of B2B SMEs. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 33(3), pp.303–315.

Archibald, M.M., Ambagtsheer, R.C., Casey, M.G. and Lawless, M., 2019. Using Zoom Videoconferencing for Qualitative Data Collection: Perceptions and Experiences of Researchers and Participants. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18, pp.1-8.

Brink, T., 2017. B2B SME management of antecedents to the application of social media. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 64, pp.57-65.

Buratti, N., Parola, F. and Satta, G., 2018. Insights on the adoption of social media marketing in B2B services. *The TQM Journal*, 30(5), pp.490–529.

Bîja, M. and Balaş, R., 2014. Social Media Marketing to Increase Brand Awareness. *Journal of Economics and Business Research*, 20(2), pp.155-164.

Cawsey, T. and Rowley, J., 2016. Social media brand building strategies in B2B companies. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 34(6), pp.754–776.

Chirumalla, K., Oghazi, P. and Parida, V., 2018. Social media engagement strategy: Investigation of marketing and R&D interfaces in manufacturing industry. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 74, pp.138–149.

Dubois, A. and Gadde, L.-E., 2002. Systematic combining: an abductive approach to case research. *Journal of Business Research*, 55(7), pp.553–560.

European Commission, 2003. DEFINITION OF MICRO, SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES ADOPTED BY THE COMMISSION. *Official Journal of the European Union*, p.41, Article 2.

Felix, R., Rauschnabel, P. and Hinsch, C., 2017. Elements of strategic social media marketing: A holistic framework. *Journal of Business Research,* 70*,* pp.118-126.

Hassan, S., Nadzim, S. and Shiratuddin, N., 2015. Strategic Use of Social Media for Small Business Based on the AIDA Model. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 172(C), pp.262-269.

Homburg, C., Klarmann, M. and Schmitt, J., 2010. Brand awareness in business markets: When is it related to firm performance? *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 27(3), pp.201–212.

Hänninen, N. and Karjaluoto, H., 2017. The effect of marketing communication on business relationship loyalty. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 35(4), pp.458–472.

Jones, N., Borgman, R. and Ulusoy, E., 2015. Impact of social media on small businesses. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 22(4), pp.611–632.

Jussila, J., Kärkkäinen, H. and Leino, M., 2013. Innovation-related benefits of social media in Business-to-Business customer relationships. *International Journal of Advanced Media and Communication*, 5(1), pp.4-18.

Järvinen, J., Tollinen, A., Karjaluoto, H. and Jayawardhena, C., 2012. Digital and social media marketing usage in B2B industrial section. *Marketing Management Journal*, 22(2), pp.102-117.

Kaplan, A. and Haenlein, M., 2010. Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), pp.59-68.

Keller, K.L., 2009. Building strong brands in a modern marketing communications environment. *Journal of Marketing Communications: Integrated Marketing Communications*, 15(2-3), pp.139–155.

Karjaluoto, H., Mustonen, N. and Ulkuniemi, P., 2015. The role of digital channels in industrial marketing communications. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 30(6), pp.703-710.

Langaro, D., Rita, P. and de Fátima Salgueiro, M., 2015. Do social networking sites contribute for building brands? Evaluating the impact of users' participation on brand awareness and brand attitude. *Journal of Marketing Communications,* 24(2), pp.146-168.

Makrides, A., Vrontis, D. and Christofi, M., 2020. The Gold Rush of Digital Marketing: Assessing Prospects of Building Brand Awareness Overseas. *Business Perspectives and Research*, 8(1), pp.4–20.

Merrilees, B., Rundle-Thiele, S. and Lye, A., 2011. Marketing capabilities: Antecedents and implications for B2B SME performance. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 40(3), pp.368–375.

Michaelidou, N., Siamagka, N. and Christodoulides, G., 2011. Usage, barriers and measurement of social media marketing: an exploratory investigation of small and medium brands. *Industrial Marketing Management,* 40(P), pp.1153-1159.

Mäläskä, M., Saraniemi, S. and Tähtinen, J., 2011. Network actors' participation in B2B SME branding. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 40(7), pp.1144–1152.

Ngai, E., Tao, S. and Moon, K., 2015. Social media research: Theories, constructs, and conceptual frameworks. *International Journal of Information Management*, 35(1), pp.33-44.

Odoom, R., Agbemabiese, G.C., Anning-Dorson, T. and Mensah, P., 2017. Branding capabilities and SME performance in an emerging market. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 35(4), pp.473–487.

Ritz, W., Wolf, M. and Mcquitty, S., 2019. Digital marketing adoption and success for small businesses. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing,* 13(2), pp.179–203.

Siamagka, N., Christodoulides, G., Michaelidou, N. and Valvi, A., 2015. Determinants of social media adoption by B2B organizations. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 51, pp.89-99.

Taiminen, H.M. and Karjaluoto, H., 2015. The usage of digital marketing channels in SMEs. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 22(4), pp.633–651.

Wang, W., Pauleen, D. and Zhang, T., 2016. How social media applications affect B2B communication and improve business performance in SMEs. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 54, pp.4-14.

Bibliography

Bell, E., Bryman, A. and Harley, B., 2019. *Business research methods*. 5th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Burns, P., 2016. *Entrepreneurship and small business*. 4th ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Chaffey, D. and Ellis-Chadwick, F., 2019. *Digital Marketing - Strategy, Implementation, and Practice*. 7th ed. Harlow, England: Pearson.

Miles, M.B., Huberman, A.M. & Saldaña, J., 2020. *Qualitative data analysis : a methods sourcebook*. 4th ed. Los Angeles: Sage.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A., 2016. *Research methods for business students*. 7th ed. Harlow: Pearson Education.

Yin, R.K., 2018. *Case study research and applications*. 6th ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Interviews

Participant 1, 2020. *Meeting with the marketing director in charge at company X*. Interviewed by Jennifer Patrizi and Kainat Kainat. [Zoom Video Communications] 1st and 20th of April 2020.

Participant 2, 2020. *Meeting with the CEO/marketing director in charge at company Y.* Interviewed by Jennifer Patrizi and Kainat Kainat. [Zoom Video Communications] 9th and 22nd of April 2020.

Participant 3, 2020. *Meeting with the marketing director in charge at company Z.* Interviewed by Jennifer Patrizi and Kainat Kainat. [Zoom Video Communications] 15th and 29th of April 2020.

Participant 4, 2020. *Meeting with the managing director/marketing coordinator in charge at company Z.* Interviewed by Jennifer Patrizi and Kainat Kainat. [Zoom Video Communications] 15th and 29th of April 2020.

Websites

About Facebook. 2020. *Company Info | About Facebook*. [online] Available at: <https://about.fb.com/company-info/> [Accessed 3 April 2020].

About Instagram. 2020. *Instagram | About Us | Official Site*. [online] Available at: <https://about.instagram.com/about-us> [Accessed 3 April 2020].

About LinkedIn. 2020. *About Linkedin*. [online] Available at: <https://about.linkedin.com> [Accessed 3 April 2020].

Ec.europa.eu., n.d. *What Is An SME? - Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship And Smes - European Commission*. [online] Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/business-friendly-environment/sme-definition_en> [Accessed 02 April 2020].

Investor.twitterinc.com. 2019. *Twitter, Inc. - Financial Information - Quarterly Results*. [online] Available at: <https://investor.twitterinc.com/financial-information/quarterly-results/default.aspx> [Accessed 3 April 2020].

Zoom Video Communications Inc., 2016. *Security guide. Zoom Video Communications Inc.* [online] Available at: <https://d24cgw3uvb9a9h.cloudfront.net/static/81625/doc/Zoom-Security-White-Paper.pdf> [Accessed 9 April 2020].

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Preliminary Interviews Schedule

Company	**Participant nr.**	**Type of Interview**	**Date/Time (CET) of the Interview**	**Duration of the Interview (CET)**
Company X	Participant 1	Zoom Video Communications	01/04/2020 16.00	16.00 – 16.30 c.30 minutes
Company Y	Participant 2	Zoom Video Communications	09/04/2020 10.00	10.00 – 10.22 c.22 minutes
Company Z	Participant 3 & Participant 4	Zoom Video Communications	15/04/2020 10.00	10.00 – 10.30 c.30 minutes

Appendix 2 - Preliminary Interviews Questions

1. Is it a B2B company?
2. Is the company international?

3. How long has the company been established?
4. How many employees are there in the company?
5. What industry does the company operate in?
6. What countries does the company operate in?
7. What is the company's target market?
8. What is the company specialized in?
9. How do you market yourselves?
10. When did the company start adopting SMM?
11. What social media channels does the company use?

Appendix 3 - Interviews Schedule

Company	**Participant nr.**	**Participant's Job Position**	**Type of Interview**	**Date/Time (CET) of the Interview**	**Duration of the Interview (CET)**
Company X	Participant 1 (P1)	Marketing Director	Zoom Video Communications	20/04/2020 10.45	10.45 – 11.45 c.30 minutes
Company Y	Participant 2 (P2)	CEO/Marketing Director	Zoom Video Communications	22/04/2020 10.00	10.00 – 10.40 c.40 minutes

Company Z	Participant 3 (P3)	Marketing Director	Zoom Video Communications	29/04/2020 14.45	14.45 – 15.15 c.30 minutes
Company Z	Participant 4 (P4)	Managing Director/Marketing Coordinator	Zoom Video Communications	29/04/2020 15.30	15.30 – 16.00 c.30 minutes

Appendix 4 - Interviews Questions

Part 1: Social media marketing (SMM)

1. When did the company start adopting SMM?
2. What was the reason your company started adopting SMM?
3. What are the main goals for adopting SMM?
4. Do you do SMM by outsourcing? Or internal resources?

Part 2: Social media channels

5. Which social media channels do you use and why?
6. Are you creating customized content for all of your social media channels?

Part 3: Brand awareness

7. What do you think when you hear the term ‘brand awareness’?
8. How do you measure brand awareness?
9. Is it challenging for your company to increase its brand awareness?
10. Do you think more customers’ engagement equals an increase in brand awareness?

Part 4: Social media marketing and brand awareness

11. Does the company adopt SMM to increase its brand awareness? Why?
12. Do you think your company has been successful in increasing brand awareness through SMM?

Part 5: Challenges when adopting social media marketing to increase brand awareness

13. Does the company face challenges when adopting SMM to increase brand awareness?
14. What challenges do you think the company currently faces regarding the use of SMM for increasing brand awareness?
15. Do you find it challenging to satisfy customers' needs and wants?
16. Do you have any education or training within SMM?