JÖNKÖPING UNIVERSITY
Jönköping International Business School

An Alternative Path to Customer Analysis

A qualitative case study with the aim to investigate the paradigm of segmentation and an alternative path to enhanced customer analysis

BACHELOR THESIS WITHIN: *Business Administration*
NUMBER OF CREDITS: 15
PROGRAM: Marketing Management
AUTHOR: *Li Persson, Sigrid Green Salmonson*
JÖNKÖPING May 2019

Bachelor Thesis in Business Administration

Title: An Alternative Path to Customer Analysis

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Date: 2019-05-20

Key terms: Segmentation, customer analysis, psychographic, values, lifestyles, market communication, brand communication and communication models

Abstract

Problem: The concept of marketing segmentation was introduced over 60 years ago and have been a central element in the process of conducting customer analysis since then. However, it has barely been criticized. Consequently, companies have constructed their communication strategies upon segmentation criteria's with the belief of it being the most effective alternative. As digitalization has changed the way in which information is retrieved and the way people communicate with one another, the customer analysis process should be adapted accordingly.

Purpose: This study aimed to explore how customer analysis is performed by professionals in the marketing field today and identify which factors professionals find essential when communicating with their target audience.

Method: To fulfil the purpose of this research and answer the research questions, a qualitative research approach with a case study was conducted. Semi-structured interviews with eight Swedish professionals in the field of marketing was held in the empirical data collection process.

Conclusion: The analysis of the interviews showed that there is an understanding of new perspectives when conducting customer analysis among professionals today. Furthermore, acknowledgments were made that for marketing communication to be effective, changes in customer demand and individuals life context should be taken into account. Based on these results, we conclude that segmentation criteria's might be less relevant when identifying prospects and communicating with target audiences today. Moreover, companies should become familiar with their customer's preparatory understandings, as this premise could be used as a complement to segmentation when identifying prospects and performing effective marketing communication.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, we wish to express our sincere thanks to our tutor MaxMikael Wilde Björling for guiding and supporting us throughout this process. He raised many valuable points in our discussions and we hope that we have managed to address several of them in this thesis. We would also like to thank the eight interviewees for their time and participation in this study, they provided us with interesting reasoning's and an understanding of the current practice. Furthermore, we would like to give a special thanks to Gustaf Tivelius for leading us into the paradigm which caught our interest.

At last, we would like to take this opportunity to express gratitude to Sigge Birkenfalk, an expert within the field of communication and marketing, who have provided us with valuable insights and new perspectives on the topic of marketing communication. Without your assistance and dedicated involvement in every step throughout the process, this paper would never have been accomplished.

Li Persson

Sigrid Green Salmonson

Jönköping, 2019-05-20

Preface

During fall 2018 we spent a semester abroad as exchange students. Luckily, both of us went to the same university which allowed us to discuss the topic of our bachelor thesis several times. Between Christmas and New Year's one of us met a childhood friend. Little did we know that this spontaneous meeting would lead us to the topic of this thesis. This old friend is also a student with a major in marketing and therefore the conversation naturally evolved into topics regarding what we have learned about this very interesting yet complex subject. We noticed an interesting paradigm, were our perspectives upon a broad subject as customer analysis significantly differed. We concluded that this could possibly be a result of one of us being a University student while the other one is a Polytechnic student, hence we had different pre-understandings of the subject. When discussing this paradigm, we came to consensus that the polytechnic perspective of what a target audience is and how it should be used seemed to be more modernized with regards to changes in society as well as the digital progress. As both of us as well as this childhood friend will enter the labor market in the coming months, the fact that our perspectives of such an important topic significantly differ is both fascinating and a bit intimidating. Therefore, we decided to investigate how professionals in the field perceive customer analysis and what they suggest as essential components in the process of communicating with a target audience. Hence, our thesis will be based on the paradigm discovered during Christmas holiday.

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1. Intro duction

This chapter provides a background to market communication and customer analysis. This is followed by a problem description and lastly, the purpose of the thesis and the research questions are presented.

1.1. Background

A major challenge of establishing a positive brand image is having an effective communication strategy where the message is perceived the way it was intended to. In order to achieve the right interpretation of a message, it is crucial to communicate it to the right target audience (Dwivedi, Johnson and McDonald, 2015). In order to find a target audience, a segmentation process is usually conducted. The concept of segmentation was introduced by Wendell R. Smith (1956) and refers to the process of dividing a market into smaller groups of potential customers. These groups are likely to show similar purchase behavior and possess similar needs and/or characteristics (Weinstein, 2004). A segment is established by dividing a market according to various factors such as geographics, demographics, a variable which includes gender, age, income, educational level etc. and psychographics, a mix of demographic and psychological factors which includes interests, attitudes, values and lifestyles (Gunter and Furnham, 1992). In order for a company to develop a strategic plan of action, where a segmentation process is included, companies usually consider the entire environment in which the business operates. This process is referred to as a context analysis (Ward & Peppard, 2002). A context analysis combines a wide scope of external environmental aspects as well as internal factors which enables a company to identify their own position on the market. The different aspects included in a context analysis reflects upon the company itself, their competitors, consumers, the market, their product offering, opportunities and threats (Vrontis & Thrassou 2005). As a context analysis allows a company to understand their current position in the market, a suitable communication strategy could be developed and implemented (Ward & Peppard, 2002). Hence, by knowing the context in which a business operates, the process of communicating with prospects could be facilitated (Kents, 2014).

An effective communication strategy will boost the position of a brand on the market (Flatt, Stanley & Kowalczyk, 2008). Furthermore, it could assist a company to enhance their brand awareness and recognition which in turn would allow them to gain market share (ibid). A message that is easily interpreted and goes in line with the brand's values is more likely to contribute to a strong brand image, which affects the expectations of the product or service offered and is of high importance to attract customers (Keller, 1998). If a target audience does not sympathize with the brand values, there is an increased risk for the message to be disturbed by market noise (Rabino R, Moskowitz, Paulus & Aarts 2012). This corresponds to the fact that a person with a genuine passion is more likely to recall an advertisement which aligns with that person's interest (Çiçek, Eren-Erdoğmuş & Daştan, 2017). Therefore, it is of highest importance to identify the right target audience in order for a communication strategy to be efficient (Kicova, Kral & Janoskova 2018). Due to digitalization and improved technology, information about prospects could easily be obtained. Hence, it is now possible for communication managers to segment their market and reach out to customers with the same interests and equivalent values (Waterson, 2017).

As customer's nowadays can consume media according to their own preferences, the media landscape is becoming more individualized. Due to the growth of independent media coupled with social media's role as a gatekeeper, media consumption is progressively becoming a buyers' market (Scheiner, 2014). In today's constantly changing environment, geographic as well as demographic borders are being blurred out as a result of the evolving digitalization. In other words, even though a certain segment is homogeneous in terms of geographic and demographic factors, people included in the segment are still likely to interpret a message differently (Vyncke, 2002). Birkenfalk & Edfeldt (2005) argues that individuals should be grouped based on their preparatory understanding of the message being communicated, this would also decrease the risk of the message being disturbed (Rabino et al., 2012). This means that no segmentation criteria should be considered as this is a newly developed method of identifying prospects rather than a complement to segmentation according to Birkenfalk and Edfeldt (2005). In other words, a target audience should be established solely based on the individuals preparatory understanding of a certain phenomenon. This is further elaborated on in a study conducted by Birkenfalk, Birkenfalk & Nylund (2007) about the Red Cross. As Birkenfalk et al. (2007) got assigned a communicative mission to get people to donate money to the Red Cross, they noticed something interesting. Despite an individual's formal belonging in terms of demographic and geographic variables, people have different preparatory understandings towards donating 250 SEK to the Red Cross. These diverse preparatory understandings did not relate to the individual's level of income, age nor gender. However, 6 different reasonings were identified which suggested both positive as well as negative mindsets towards donating 250 SEK to the Red Cross (Appendix 1). According to Birkenfalk et al. (2007), these 6 preparatory understandings of the same phenomena determines what the receiver of a message is able to see and hear. By identifying the underlying reasonings a communication process would be facilitated (ibid). Birkenfalk et al. (2007) further elaborates on this finding and concludes that an individual could interpret the same message in around 5 different ways. It could be 4, or 6 as the example about the Red Cross suggests. However, 5 different preparatory understandings are the average.

1.2. Problem Description

As the world is shifting towards a more globalized environment, physical distance might be less relevant for companies when communicating with their target audience. Due to the expansion of Internet, new interests are also easier to explore, despite an individual's physical presence or demographic belonging (Vyncke, 2002). In universities and academia, we learn that potential customers should be grouped based on criterias such as geographics, demographics and psychographics and that segmentation is an approach which should be adopted. However, segmentation has barely been questioned at all even though the field of marketing has changed tremendously since 1956, the year when segmentation first was introduced. When examining articles published in the most popular marketing and communication journals, only a handful of publications which question segmentation as an approach to reach prospects could be found. This is where a research gap is identified.

The approach presented by Birkenfalk and Edfeldt (2005) challenges the traditional way of performing customer analysis, hence one could argue that there are approaches which could be more relevant and effective today. As discussed by Birkenfalk et al. (2007), a target group with similar preparatory understanding will interpret a message in the same way. This relates to Chris Fill (2005) who argues that an individual's realms of understanding affect the way in which a message is understood. Realms of understanding and an individual's preparatory understanding are comparable concepts which describes the differences in how a message is interpreted. If you are aware of the difference in how various groups interprets a message, you could adapt your communication in order to attract more than one target group (Kicova et al., 2018). Therefore, it is of high importance to communicate with a target audience with the same realms of understanding (Fill, 2005). Unlike realms of understanding, an individual's preparatory understanding could act as a criterion for how a target group is established (Birkenfalk & Edfeldt, 2005). Because even though people in one specific segment are homogeneous in terms of geographic, demographics or psychographics factors, they are still likely to be different when it comes to their understanding of a message being communicated (Birkenfalk & Edfeldt, 2005). An individual's understanding of a message is something which the process of segmentation does not deliberate on. Therefore, we see the value in further exploring the paradigm of the concept segmentation and an alternative path to enhanced customer analysis.

1.3. Purpose

Over 70 years has passed since Smith (1956) introduced the concept of segmentation. Even though the concept has developed over time, it has barely been criticized. In universities and in academia over all, segmentation is still being emphasized as the ultimate way to identify a target audience, hence we assume that many professionals in the field also adopt this theory. We aim to investigate the paradigm of segmentation and an alternative path to customer analysis, to be able to conclude if they could be separated or used as complements to one another. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to challenge the understanding of the current practice as well as exploring essential aspects in the process of communicating with a target audience. The research questions are:

Q1. How is customer analysis performed by professionals in the field today?

Q2. What factors are substantial in the process of communicating with a target audience?

1.4. Limitations

In order to explore the process of customer analysis a qualitative study with eight professionals in the field of marketing will be conducted. As all the interviewees are Swedish it is assumed that they possess comparable realms of understanding as well as similar cultural values, which is important in order for the answers to not vary too much with regards to national differences. This thesis will focus on the Swedish market since Sweden is the most progressive country in the world (IPSOS, 2016). In 2018, the access to internet in Sweden increased from 95% in 2017 to 98%, which implies that digitalization has come far (2018.svenskarnaochinternet.se, n.d). Regarding these aspects, performing the research in Sweden could be of value for other nations in the future as digitalization changes the way companies interact with their customers (Swan, 2014). Another limitation in this study is with regards to the term target audience. One understanding of the term is the targeted group of people. In other words, certain individuals whom a specific message is addressed to. However, the meaning of a target audience in this thesis is the group of people whom is intended to be influenced by a company's market communication.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents the link between theories and the research topic as well as a more detailed presentation of the theoretical framework and concepts used to fulfil the purpose of the thesis.

The most common databases used for this literature review was Google Scholar, JU library (Primo) and Scopus. Through these databases a search process and collection of peer-reviewed articles was carried out. The following keywords were used; *segmentation, customer analysis, psychographic, values, lifestyles, market communication, brand communication and communication models*. Additionally, the collected peer-reviewed articles enabled further identification of interesting references which were useful to gain more insight and knowledge within the field of interest. Regarding the choice of articles, the ones with the highest number of citations were prioritized.

2.1 Market Segmentation

Market segmentation is a concept which has been widely accepted and warmly embraced, both by academia as well as by various industries (Dolnicar & Grün, 2008). Wendell R. Smith introduced the concept in 1956, and since then segmentation has been a core concept for communication campaigns as well as target marketing. It refers to the process of establishing smaller, relatively homogeneous, groups in a market. These groups are referred to as a target audience and they have similar needs, desires, and product or service interests (Vynke, 2002). Furthermore, Goyat (2011) argue that different segments might require separate products or marketing mixes. By recognizing that all heterogeneous markets consist of smaller homogeneous submarkets, companies must realize that they normally cannot serve all customers in that specific market (Vynke, 2002). Many criterias can be used in order to assign a potential customer to a specific homogeneous group. Generally, these variables are grouped into three categories (Gunter and Furnham, 1992). These are:

- Product-specific, behavioral attributes segmentation
- General, physical attributes segmentation
- General, psychological attributes segmentation

Behavioral attribute segmentation refers to a consumer's purchasing behavior and the benefits the consumer is hoping to derive from using the specific product. The physical attributes of a customer are easily observable criteria such as demographics, geographic or socioeconomic variables. The third and final category, psychological attributes, corresponds to profiles of consumers based upon personality, lifestyles, and beliefs. This is often referred to as "psychographic" variables (Gunter and Furnham, 1992). Psychographic is a term which was introduced by Demby (1974). By using the already existing segmentation variable ‘demographics’ and mixing it with ‘psychology’, psychographics became a new variable in the segmentation process (Wolburg and Pokrywczynski, 2001). Demby (1974) wanted to enhance the understanding of consumer behavior since demographic segmentation is considered a general classification of consumers and does not explain the underlying motives behind the buying behavior. This relates to Wedel and Kamakura (2012) who argue that a consequence of adapting a segmentation process could be that companies might not reach out to potential customers who do not belong in the assumed geographic or demographic segment, even though they might have a desire for the specific product. However, Vyncke (2002) argues that the psychographic dimension, and especially lifestyles, is the most valuable targeting criterion for communication managers as it allows a deeper understanding of the target audience and their desires. This corresponds to what Hornik (1989) points out, “the basic premise of psychographics is that the more we know about people’s lifestyle, the more effectively we can communicate with them”. Research performed by Chiagouris (1991) is an extension of the statement by Hornik (1989). It showed that marketing communication is more effective when the sender of the message understands the end-user’s lifestyle (Chiagouris, 1991). Hence, lifestyle research is crucial in order to “visualize” audiences in an effective manner. This corresponds to another concept within segmentation, which is the use of personas when establishing a target group.

2.1.1. Personas

Many companies are creating personas in order to improve their targeting strategies (Birkner, 2013). These profiles are developed by researching buying behavior, purchasing intentions and depicts the way the individual is acting (Doyle, 2016). A persona is essentially a generalization of the type of buyer identified as interested in the specific product and organization (Hazlett, 2012). This targeting tool facilitates the visualization of prospects, customers and users and embody the typical customer which gives marketers an enhanced understanding of who they are trying to reach (Birkner, 2013). Each persona is usually described in detail on 1-2 pages, the information included is everything from name to education, skills, attitudes, marital status and favorite sport. This information helps to bring the character to life and is an effective tool to include in the segmentation process (Banich, 2010). However, Waterson (2017) argues that the generalization employed when creating personas could lead to missed opportunities and wasted resources. With the constantly advancing environment, including digitalization and improved technology, much information about prospects could easily be obtained. Hence, generalization of potential customers and establishing personas should not be done by default (Waterson, 2017). According to Patrutiu-Baltes (2016), correctly identifying the buyer persona and thereafter adapting the marketing and communication content accordingly is crucial in order to ensure an effective marketing strategy.

2.1.2. The AIO Approach & Concepts of Values

Activities, interests and opinions (AIO) is a set of measures used to research lifestyles, and is a common approach to perform market segmentation based on psychographic variables. The process is arranged by a market researcher who analyze consumers according to their responses to statements or questions in a survey (Vyncke, 2002). This in turn leads to useful lifestyle typologies and the costumer's psychographic profile, which thereafter could be examined using cluster analysis (Chen & Rodgers, 2004). The AIO approach has been criticized since an extensive number of statements has to be used in order to reach conclusions regarding lifestyles which could make the concept burdensome (Vyncke, 2002). For example, Wells and Tigert (1971) formulated 300 AIO statements and Cosmas (1982) created a questionnaire consisting of 250 AIO statements. Typical statements to be considered when using the AIO approach could be:

- I listen to popular music (activity)
- I have a strong interest in the latest fashion trends (interest)
- A woman's place is the kitchen (opinion)

2.1.3. Values and Lifestyle Segmentation

Another concept which could be used in order to group customers in a market according to psychological and sociological theories is values and lifestyle segmentation (VALS) (Figure 2). This concept is used to predict customers purchase decisions and behavior (Rousseau & Kruger, 1990).

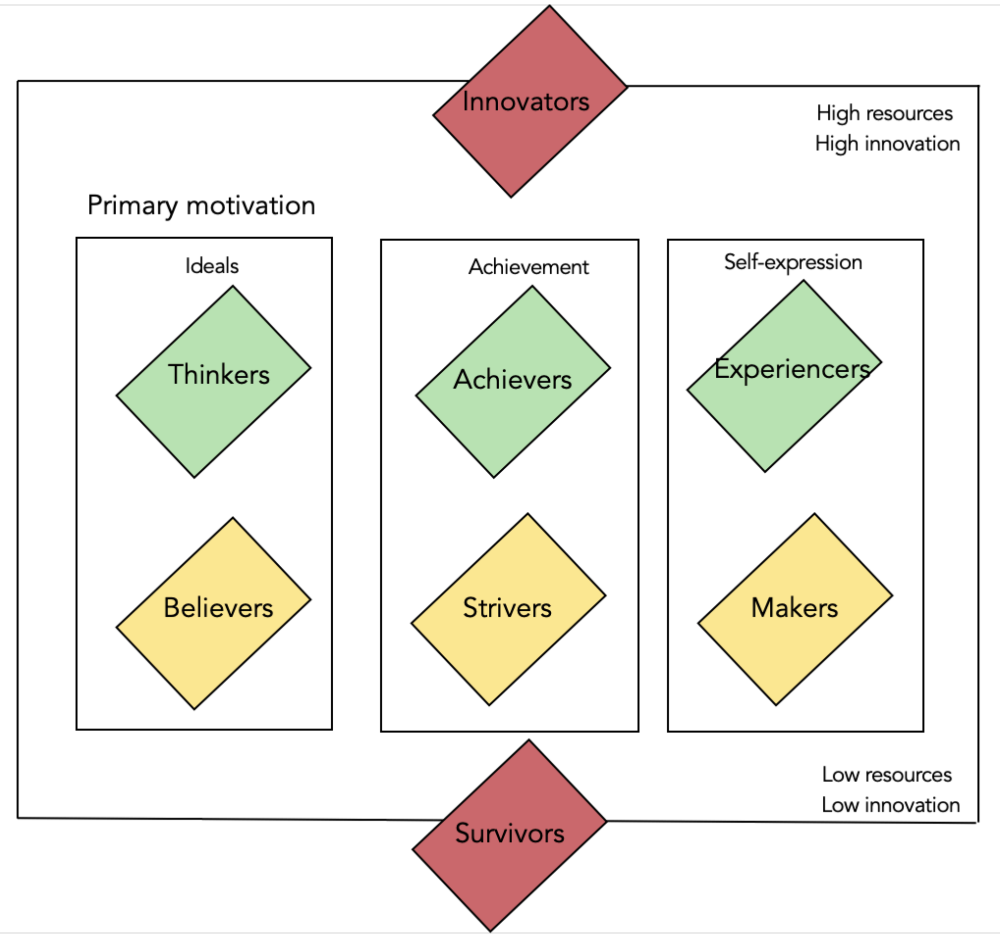


Figure 2: VALS - values and lifestyle segmentation. Source: Adapted from Rousseau & Kruger (1990)

The concept of VALS was introduced in 1978 by Arnold Mitchell and his associates at the Stanford Research Institute. Together they propelled the Values and Lifestyle program (Yankelovich & Meer, 2006). By utilizing an arrangement of mental qualities and key demographics that drive customer behavior, individuals buying behavior could be outlined according to his or her answers to the VALS questionnaire. This program is based on frameworks created by David Riesman, co-author of "The lonely crowd" as well as the well-known theory called Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Rousseau & Kruger, 1990). The two fundamental dimensions of the framework are the vertical and the horizontal dimension. The first dimension represents resources of the respondent, this includes the level of education, income, intelligence, leadership skills, energy, and self-confidence. The second dimension, the horizontal, represents primary motivation and incorporates three distinct types (Yankelovich & Meer, 2006). These types could either be motivated by ideals or achievements. The third type are those motivated by self-expression which means that they have a desire for social risk-taking and physical activity. In addition to these three groups, there are people with such high resources that any of the three motivations could drive them to a purchase. Furthermore, there are also those who live within their means and therefore lack a strong primary motivation (Mitchell, 1983).

VALS is a framework which could facilitate the process of defining target groups and developing advertising and media strategies (Boote, 1981). However, when it was presented in 1978, the first VALS framework was criticized by researchers and scientists for its reliability and validity (Yankelovich & Meer, 2006). According to Wedel & Wagner (2012) this kept some specialists from testing it. The critics still agreed that the VALS typology, given its premise in social qualities, was useful in building up and promoting messages customized to the various motivations of the target audience (Wedel & Wagner, 2012).

2.2. Market communication

Morgan and Welton (1986) defines communication as: “an act of communication is one that aims to produce an effect on another person or persons. If this intention is absent, the act tends to be expressive rather than communicative”. Moreover, communication involves establishing a “commonness” with someone (Schramm, 1954). According to Mihali (2014), market communication is a process which ensures a connection between an organization and the environment it operates in. Furthermore, Mihali (2014) argues that using market communication, organizations have the ability to establish an image of the organization and retain a competitive position on the market (Dwivedi et al., 2015) support this by arguing that market communication is an effective tool for building a positive brand image. Investing in a market communication strategy might also lead to enhanced clarity of a brands position on the market as it would attain increased brand authenticity from the customer’s perspective (Dwivedi et al., 2015) Market communication represents the voice of a brand (Keller, 2009) and are noticeable expressions of an organization's marketing efforts (Stern, 1994). Hence, market communication should be a prime focus in order to achieve a positive brand image and reaching out to prospects and customers (Dwivedi et al., 2015). Today, a typical consumer is exposed to several hundred messages a day. Consequently, the consumer will spend little or no time at all on messages that are perceived as irrelevant. Due to the high number of messages that are constantly being communicated, it is vital to execute a communication strategy that will break through the market noise, and depreciate the level of competitor's messages (Rabino et al., 2012). If the content of the message is not considered sufficient enough to convince the consumer, there is an increased risk that a potential purchase of the product or service will not take place (ibid).

Effective market communication will contribute to establishing beliefs about the primary characteristics of a brand, and plays a vital role in the creation of consumer's attitudes towards the brand (Anisimova & Sultan 2014). Furthermore, Grace and O'Cass (2005) argue that a brands communication is vital in the sense that it forms the expectations of the consumers, hence, the satisfaction and brand attitudes from the consumer's perspective. Furthermore, the chances of formatting a positive attitude towards a brand is based on the effectiveness of the communication of the brand (Rabino, et al., 2012).

2.2.1. Communication models

In 1948 Claude Elwood Shannon and Warren Weaver, one mathematicians and one scientist, got a mission to improve technical communication. However, their model is now more widely applied and acts as a fundamental assumption to most models within the field of communication (Hollnagel & Woods, 2005). Even though Shannon and Weaver did not have any interest in either human communication nor market communication, the "Shannon-Weaver model of communication" is now more referred to as the model of all models (ibid). Hooper-Greenhill (1994) states that in the Shannon-Weaver model distinction is made between the source and the transmitter and between the receiver and the destination. In this model the 'noise' was also introduced, which could be anything interrupting the transfer of information in the communication process. Due to interruptions, the 'noise' in the Shannon-Weaver model could also lead to misinterpretations of the message being sent (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994) (Figure 3). Sperber and Wilson (1986) states that the basic idea of the model developed by Shannon & Weaver is quite outdated, as it was initially suggested as an interpretation or technical communication. Another disadvantage with Shannon-Weavers communication model is that the model suggests that communication consists of a simple transfer of a message from one part to another. However, according to Hooper-Greenhill (1994) communication involves far more than this. McQuail (1985) argue that the understanding of communication has progressed from a simple model to a more complex phenomenon.

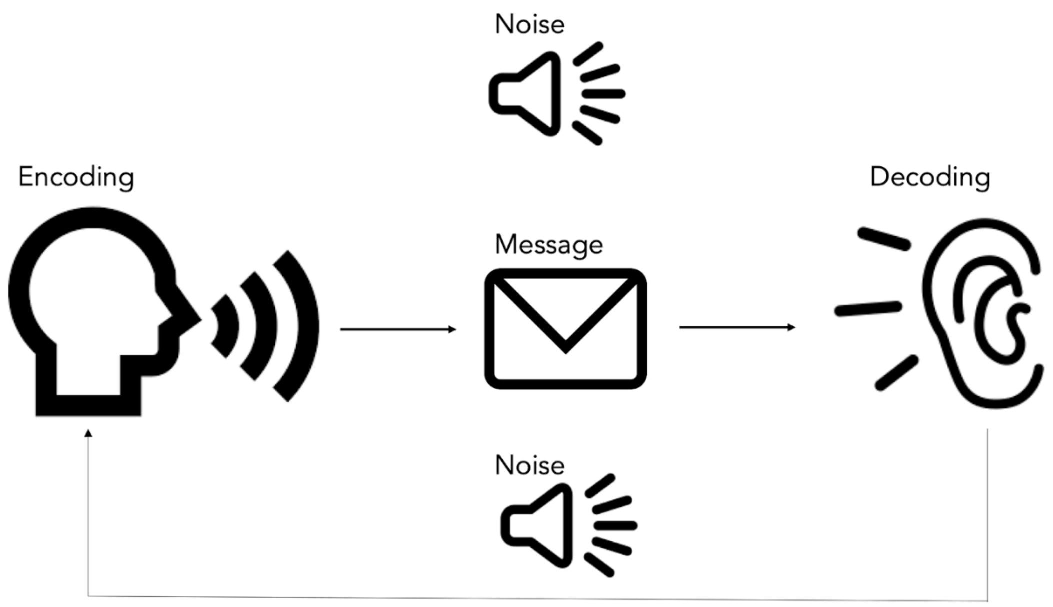


Figure 3: The Shannon-Weaver model of communication. Source: Adapted from Hooper-Greenhill (1994)

In contrast to the Shannon-Weaver model of communication is the interactive model of communication (Figure 4), which was further developed by Schramm (1954). This model is now more accepted as the basic model for mass communication (Grönroos, 2004). This model of communication is based upon three components; source, message, receiver. The source encodes the message, transmits it and the receiver decodes it. Furthermore, if the decoding matches the encoding, there has been established commonness (Buttle, 1995). Unlike the Shannon-Weaver model of communication, Schramms model considers 'feedback', which is a way to control how messages are being interpreted between the sender and receiver in the communication process. Furthermore, Schramms model of communication challenges the Shannon-Weaver model in the sense that it is based on the principle that it might be misleading to think of communication as a one-way process. Schramm (1954) argues that communication does not start nor end somewhere, since we are constantly receiving and decoding signs from the environment, interpreting these signs and encoding them.

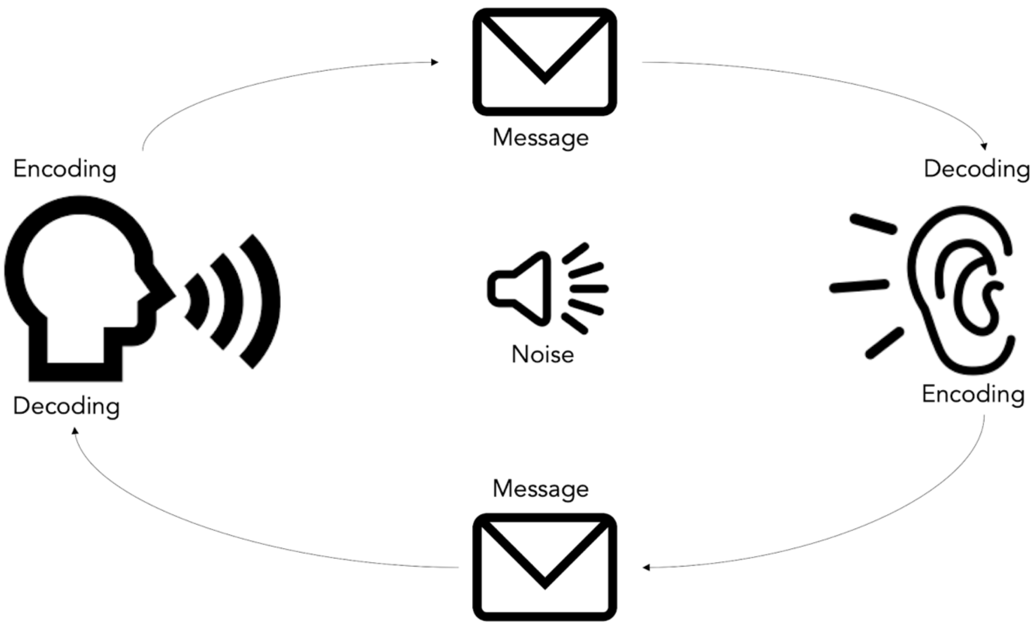


Figure 4: Schramm-model of communication. Source: Adapted from Schramm (1954)

2.2.2. Human interpretation of communication

Ference Marton (1975) developed a concept called" phenomenography". He noted that the perception of the purpose of a text and the context which the text is perceived to be found in, is crucial for *how* the essence of it is perceived. In other words, the concept phenomenography explains that individuals interpret the same phenomenon in several different ways. According to Birkenfalk (2005), a study performed by Marton & Booth (2000) aligns with the concept of preparatory understanding which Birkenfalk (2005) further elaborates on. Marton and Booth (2000) conducted an experiment which was based on the underlying assumption that two students, identical in terms of personal characteristics and level of knowledge, will perceive a situation, and therefore also solve a problem, in the same way (Birkenfalk, 2005). Once the experiment was executed, Marton & Booth (2000) concluded that one cannot assume that both students will succeed to conquer the same problem even though they are identical in terms personal characteristics and level of knowledge. Marton & Booth (2000) argue that two people who manage a specific problem differently, most likely interpreted the problem differently (Birkenfalk, 2005). This corresponds to the concept an individual's preparatory understanding which is an important element in the communication process since it recognizes that successful communication is more likely to be established if the source and the receiver understands each other (Belch & Belch, 2001). In other words, successful communication is more likely to be achieved if there is a common ground between the decoder and the encoder of a message.

Birkenfalk et al. (2007) further elaborates on the phenomenon of an individual's preparatory understanding by outlining a framework of five cognitive interpretations of a message which a brand communicates. This framework suggests that one message could be interpreted in around five different ways which are determined by the receivers preparatory understanding. The understanding is not based upon personal characteristics, interests nor beliefs, it is solely based upon the way one individual perceives a message with regards to his or her current life context. These interpretations correspond to Marton & Booth's (2000) theory that individuals who handle situations differently will most likely solve problems differently as well. Therefore, the fact that the same message will be interpreted in several different ways, even though the individuals receiving the message are perceived to be similar in terms of demographics or psychographics, should be taken into consideration (Birkenfalk et al., 2007).

If individuals do not have the same preparatory understanding, they cannot decode a message in the same way (Birkenfalk, 2005). Looking at Schramm's model of communication (1954) compared to Marton & Booths findings (2000), the message from the encoder will be the same while the decoding will differ depending on the receivers preparatory understanding. Consequently, the message/feedback from the decoder would also vary which in turn would affect the communication process, since Schramm (1954) suggests that the communication process is never ending. In the example about the Red Cross from Birkenfalk et al. (2007), the message about donating 250 SEK is communicated in the same way. However, 6 different preparatory understandings of the same message are identified. In other words, the communication process will be affected since the receiver will decode the message differently and therefore their message/feedback will vary.

2.2.3. Integrated Marketing Communication

Blackwell (1987) characterized a concept named integrated marketing communications (IMC). This concept has become widely accepted both among academicians and practitioners in the field of marketing and communication. According to Anantachart (2005) Blackwell (1987) highlighted the differences between "integrated marketing communication" and "traditionally marketing communications". These differences are that IMC programs are more productive, comprehensive, targeted, unified, and coordinately executed compared to traditional programs (Anantachart, 2005). The idea of IMC is to coordinate marketing communication tools strategically in order to optimize the impact on the target group (Duncan & Caywood, 1996). By integrating all marketing communication efforts, the exertion would be maximized and positively promote the company's goals. For this to happen, marketing and communication functions should strategically work together in synergy (Schultz, Tannenbaum, & Lauterborn, 1993).

Even though IMC has been a popular topic in recent years there is still little consensus about what IMC really is (Nowak & Phelps, 1994). For instance, Sellahvarzi, Mirabi and Parizi (2014) define IMC as a cross-functional process for establishing and nourishing profitable relationships with stakeholders as well as customers. By ensuring that all forms of messages and communication towards the customers and the stakeholders are carefully linked together the impact of all communication is strategically controlled (Sellahvarzi et al. 2014). According to Phelps, Plumley and Johnson (1994), this contradicts the definition of the American Association of Advertising Agencies whom define IMC as a planning activity which adds value to a comprehensive plan that evaluates the strategic roles of different communication channels. Furthermore, it combines them to provide consistency, clarity and maximize the communications impact (Schultz, 1993). Moreover, Belch and Belch (2001) has yet another definition of IMC. They define IMC as the integration and coordination of all marketing and promotional activities performed by a company. This includes; media advertisement, direct marketing, packaging and price. By making use of the synergy among these factors a consistent and unified brand image will be established in the marketplace (Belch and Belch, 2001). Since there are contradictions regarding what IMC really is, researchers have attempted to group the existing conceptualizations.

The IMC concept could be linked to the planning process in marketing (Anantachart, 2005). Market planning helps companies select and organize business activities which will generate profit for the organization in the long run (LaBahn & Biehal, 1991). Furthermore, it serves as a link between a company, its prospects or customers, the stakeholders and other parties. It evaluates a company's potential, guides corporate missions and assess customers' needs (Wind & Robertson, 1983). From a strategic planning perspective, when marketing managers develop plans for their products and services, IMC should be considered simultaneously as an integral part of the marketing plan (Anantachart, 2005). Sellahvarzi et al. (2014) argue that IMC is required in order to establish a competitive edge. This is supported by Anantachart (2005) who claims that IMC gives a company potential to gain a competitive advantage. Chris Fill (2013) introduced an IMC planning process which consists of six stages: context analysis, promotional goals and positioning, promotional strategies, coordinated promotional mix, scheduling, resources, and implementation, control & evaluation (Figure 6).

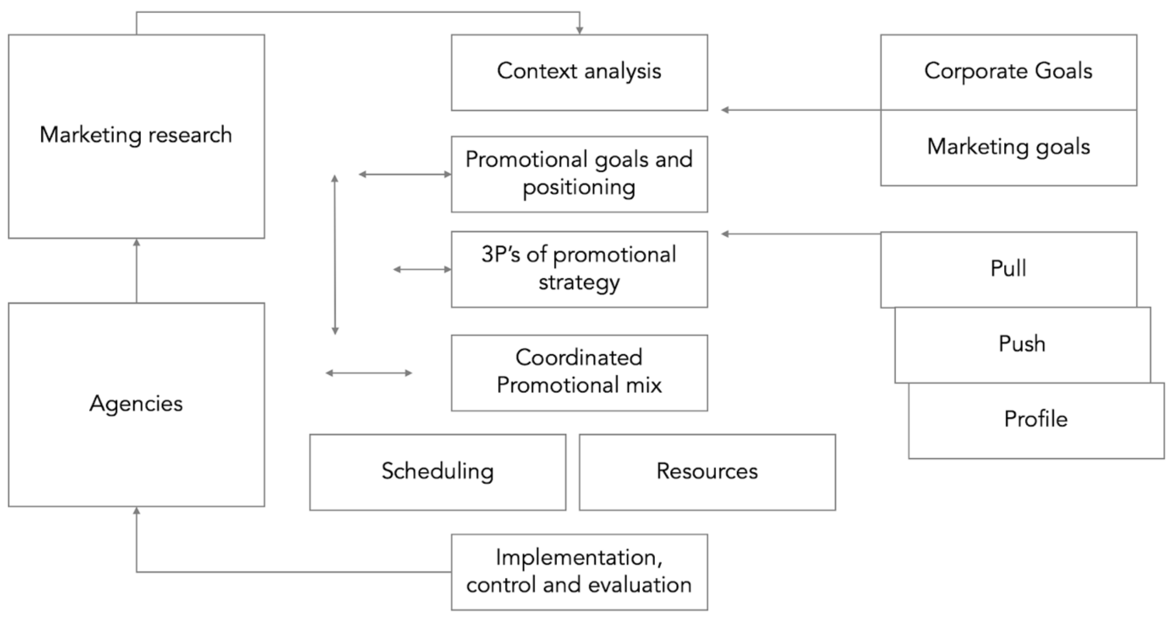


Figure 6: Integrated marketing communication. Source: Adapted from Fill (2013)

Context analysis

Context analysis refers to the process of examining a combination of the external and internal environment which allows a company to identify their position in the market based on known facts (Ward & Peppard, 2002). By analyzing both the internal and the external environment a company gets a solid understanding of their current position in the marketplace (Vrontis & Thrassou 2005). By not having a clearly defined communication strategy it is difficult to succeed with a context analysis since there is an increased risk that the message is not understood by the receiver (Hollnagel & Woods, 2005).

Promotional goals and positioning

Promotional goals and positioning includes marketing and corporate goals and they must be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-specific. The objectives may vary from building awareness, providing information, creating interest, stimulating demand or strengthening brand visibility (Belch & Belch, 2003). Nguyen (2014) argue that marketing objectives focus on the leverage of brand awareness, perception and attitudes towards the brand and lastly product preference. Corporate objectives, on the other hand, reflect the way a company wish to achieve a desired position, as well as their value and mission development in the market (Nguyen, 2014).

Promotional strategies

According to Bax and Woodhouse (2013), there are three main approaches to a marketing communication strategy. These are push, pull and profile strategy. A push strategy is used when the objective is to ‘push’ a product to the end-customer by stimulating distribution networks. The pull strategy involves direct interaction with customers. The purpose is to gain the customers attention and interest and thereby making them intentionally requesting the products or services. Apart from the push and pull strategies, a profile strategy could be used to fulfil the corporate promotional goals. Public relations, charity campaigns, sponsored events or corporate advertising are widely used promotional tools with the aim to establish a positive brand image (Holm, 2006).

Coordinated promotional mix

Coordinated promotional mix is a critical stage in the planning process as it directly affects the result of a marketing campaign. The elements included are advertising, direct marketing, sales promotion, public relations and personal selling (Sagala, Destriani, Putri, & Kumar, 2014). In a fierce competition, a creative and integrated combination of different marketing tools can be decisive weather a product or service stands apart from its peers or not. Adapting to technology advances would also contribute to the delivery of an effective message (Holm, 2006).

Scheduling & resources

An IMC planning process generally consists of numerous promotional tools. These tools should be arranged in a reasonable timeline in order for them to be able to function in synergy and place the best possible impact on the target audience. The scheduling normally depends on certain circumstances such as seasons, public activities, specific events and costs (Nguyen, 2014). According to Pham and Tran (2016), a budget plan clearly shows the resource forecast including revenues and expenditures. Managers will review these forecasts and either approve or modified them.

Implementation, control & evaluation

Lastly, when a subtle integrated communications plan has been developed, it is time for the implementation phase. It is of high importance to launch the plan via selected marketing channels which are in line with the schedule and the strategy (Belch & Belch, 2003). By fulfilling the communication objectives, continuous evaluation, control and feedback is necessary. Different evaluative research methods could be used in order to measure the effectiveness of the applied strategy (Nguyen, 2014).

2.3. Theoretical summary

The theoretical framework in this study is limited to provide sufficient information to be able to examine the link between prior research and how customer analysis is performed by professionals in the field today. How the different concepts and theories are connected and how this study perceive these relationships is displayed in the theoretical synthesis below (Figure 1).

Customer analysis is the essence in this paper and this is linked to both market segmentation as well as market communication. Market segmentation includes personas which is a common practice when establishing a target audience (Birkner, 2013). Furthermore, the AIO approach and VALS are included in this section. Market communication has the sub heading communication models, where the Shannon and Weaver model acts as the fundamental assumption for all the communication models presented (Hollnagel & Woods, 2005). Moreover, interpretation of communication as well as integrated marketing communication,

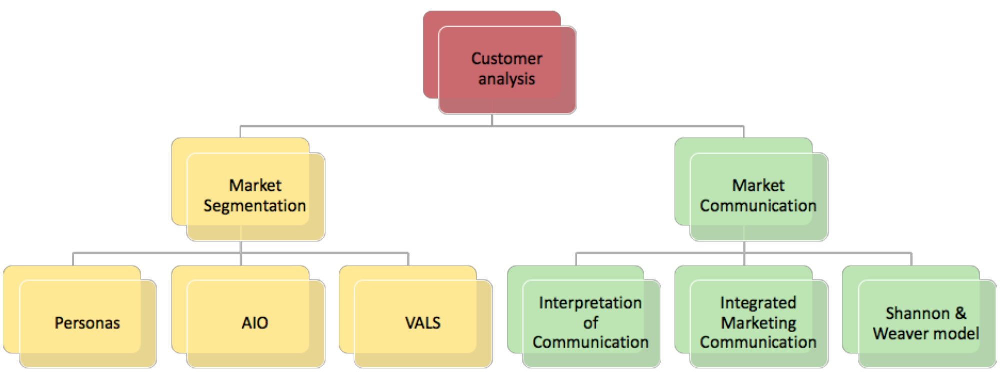


Figure 1: Theoretical overview

3. Methodology and Method

3.1. Methodology

3.1.1. Research philosophy

This thesis aims to follow an interpretivist research philosophy. The research carried out will focus on human perspectives of customer analysis, which relates to an interpretivist philosophy (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The interpretivist paradigm aims to understand the way humans interpret their own world and then acts based on those interpretations (Hammersley, 2013). Furthermore, the interpretivist paradigm should encourage researcher to establish an understanding for "diverse ways of seeing and experiencing the world through different contexts and cultures" (ibid). This research aims to understand the perceptions of customer analysis, hence, it is desired to identify the knowledge behind how humans interpret the same phenomenon. The interpretivist philosophy also follows a structure where a qualitative approach and small samples are the most suitable (Saunders et al., 2012).

3.1.2. Research approach

According to Bryman & Bell (2017) there are three different research approaches which relates to the relation between empirics and theory, these are; Deduction, induction and abduction. Deduction is according to Bryman & Bell (2017) the most common research approach to be used in quantitative research, where the method is based upon a frame of reference, which then leads to the researcher formulating a research question which the study will aim to answer. Consequently, a hypothesis will either be rejected or accepted and thereafter, a revision of theory will take place. Cooper & Schindler (2011) argue that deduction establishes a more intense correlation between theory and conclusion. Induction is an approach where the relation between empirics and theory starts with empirics and thereafter, a frame of reference is establish based on the data collected. Alvesson & Sköldberg (2008) argue that researchers form theory through the compilation of empirical results, which in turns forms theory within the area of interest. Abduction on the other hand, is according to Bryman & Bell (2017) an approach which aims to circumvent the limitations which deduction and induction might shape. Therefore, abduction is a combination of induction and deduction (ibid).

As a starting point in this thesis, a deductive approach has been used to formulate the research question and theory pre the empirics. As the process evolved major elements of induction were added. For instance, this paper aims to explore if segmentation criteria's and alternative paths could be separated or used as complements to one another. The paradigm between segmentation and the new insights which came to our notice, lead to an exploratory approach being established (Bryman & Bell, 2017). Hence, the result of the research conducted might lead to exploring new insights in the topic of customer analysis, which is why an inductive approach is the most suitable (Saunders et al., 2009). This thesis touch an extensive choice of topic where the theory has been revised throughout time. The research which will be executed allows a less structured approach which might reveal explanations and interesting reasonings about the current practice. Therefore, an inductive approach is the most suitable for this paper (Bryman & Bell, 2017). In contrast to a deductive approach, an inductive approach allows an understanding for the way which humans interpret their social world. In this thesis, the interviewees will be asked to reflect upon their perceptions of certain topics within marketing, which strengthens the choice of an inductive approach (Saunders et al., 2009). Therefore, a purely deductive approach would not be possible even though elements of deduction are included.

3.1.3. Research strategy

The research strategy of this thesis follows a qualitative case study approach. The case study strategy is of high relevance since the ambition is to gain a rich understanding of the current practice (Morris and Wood, 1991). As this thesis involve an investigation of an existing phenomenon within a real-life context, it corresponds to the characteristics of a qualitative research approach (Robson, 2002). In order to gain a deep understanding of the topic of choice, semi-structured interviews were held. Saunders et al. (2009) argue that semi-structured interviews enable the researchers to use a list of themes to be covered. The order of the questions will vary depending on the answers of the interviewee. Furthermore, in order to gain the desired in-depth understanding, probing questions were asked depending on the flow of the interview as suggested by Saunders et al. (2009). A case study strategy and semi-structured interviews are a more appropriate approach as it enable to ask open questions such as “why?” and “how?”. The interviewees in the semi-structured interviews are eight professionals in the field of marketing. It is more appropriate to use smaller samples for a qualitative case study approach as it allows in-depth understanding and room for reflection to a wider extent (Saunders et al., 2009).

3.2. Method

3.2.1. Data collection

The data used in this thesis is primary data, which has been collected through a qualitative case study. The primary data will be presented in the empirical findings. The choice of semi-structured interviews as a method of collecting the primary data enabled observation and understanding for the interviewees' action, feelings and thoughts. This is an essential aspect in order for this thesis to reach desired results (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Moreover, as a complement to the semi-structured interviews, a pre-investigation was made with Sigge Birkenfalk, an expert within the field of market communication, before the interviews took place. The purpose of this interview was to gain in-depth understanding of the topic of interest. As the expert interview was held prior to the semi-structured interviews, we felt confident that we had enough knowledge within the topic to be able to draw conclusions of what the participants answered. Moreover, with regards to the nature of the semi-structured interviews which includes discussions due to probing questions, the most suitable method to capture data was through audio-recording (Saunders et al., 2012).

3.2.2. Data Analysis

The approach used to analyze the data collected followed a thematic analysis, which includes six steps (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Step one is examination of transcripts, which enabled familiarization with the data. In our case the transcripts were audio-recordings, hence we listened to all interviews a second time. The next step was the initial coding. In this step, the data from each interview was translated into text in order to get a clear view of what was discussed during each interview. We created a template which included the topics of interest in order to arrange the data in a systematic way, this facilitated to process to identify similarities between the answers from different interviewees. Step three involved examining a subset of the themes where we created a chart, which enabled us to get a clear perspective of what topics were mentioned by each interviewee (Figure 7). The fourth step involved a review of the themes, which allowed some themes to be joined together and other divided separately. This was followed by stage five where all themes to be used were given names and a headline. Here, an introduction to each theme was developed. The name as well as the short introduction of each theme enabled us to capture the essences and deliver a concise message. The last and sixth step of the data analysis involved a final analysis and presentation of the results in a logical, coherent and interesting way. In order to illustrate and establish a sense of reality, quotes from the interviews were included in the results. Furthermore, the results were analyzed in comparison to previous theory and the research presented in the literature review (Braun & Clarke,2006).

	I1	**I2**	**I3**	**I4**	**I5**	**I6**	**I7**	**I8**
Segmentation	X			X			X	
Demographics	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Geographics				X			X	X
Personas		X		X	X	X		
Preparatory understanding	X		X		X			
Customer needs	X		X	X				X
Customer values	X		X		X		X	X
Customer lifestyle			X	X				X
Customer interest	X	X			X	X	X	X
Customer behavior	X	X	X				X	

Figure 7: Topics mentioned by each interviewee

3.2.3. Population and Sampling

One main criteria were set for the participants in this study, the participants should be a professional within the field of marketing. To ensure this, the participants were closely evaluated according to their title, responsibilities and employer. Considering that the participants were in areas of Sweden which the authors visit on regular basis, the interviews could be conducted face to face. The strategy to find relevant participants included examination of professional networks such as LinkedIn, contacting individuals who were well-connected and taking advantage of contacts of friends and family. An attempt of snowball sampling was made (Saunders et al., 2012), which in one scenario resulted in two interviewees from the same organization.

3.2.4. Question Design and Formulation

Saunders et al. (2012) argue that three types of question are suitable for semi-structured interviews, they are divided into open, probing, and specific questions. All types of questions were used in the interviews; however, the biggest emphasis was made on open and probing questions. The specific questions were only used when an answer needed to clarified. The reason for this is because the interviews were semi-structured, hence the interviewees should be able to express their thoughts and perspectives in an in-depth manner and provide answers which were rich and detailed. Furthermore, probing questions were used to disclose further explanations and to encourage the interviewees to speak freely about their experiences and knowledges (Dale, Arber & Procter, 1988).

3.2.5. Participants

All participants were based in Sweden and are working or has been working with marketing. The interviewees titles are presented in figure 8. The interviews were conducted over a two-week period and involved visiting various parts of Sweden according to the participant's location. The participants of this study did not receive any compensation for their participation.

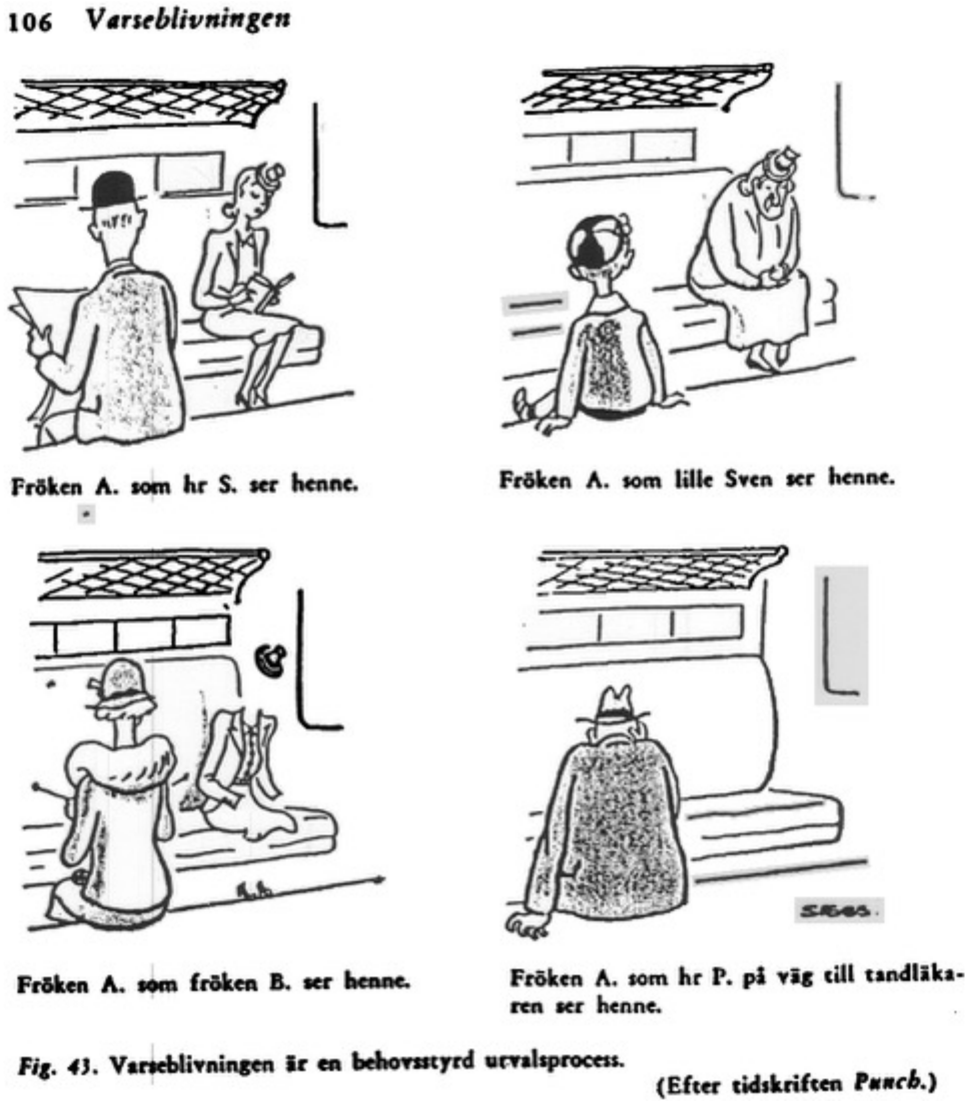
Interview	Interviewee	Position
1	I1	Global Brand Innovation Manager at Essity
2	I2	Senior Digital Strategist at Precis Digital
3	I3	Global Brand Innovation Manager at Essity
4	I4	Consultant within inbound marketing at Structsales
5	I5	PR consultant & project manager at Andreasson Public Relations
6	I6	PR consultant at Agency
7	I7	Intern at Bolt Communication
8	I8	Former consultant within PR and information

Figure 8: Participants in case study

3.2.6. Procedure

The interview had three sections. The first section included introductory questions about the participant's background, current role and responsibilities and basic information about their employer to provide a context and to make them comfortable and relaxed. The second section included open-ended questions concerning target audiences, marketing communication and rationales regarding customer analysis and effective marketing. This section was the largest one, since the main focus of the interviews was to find out the interviewees perspectives on target audiences and the various aspects relating to it. The third section involved showing a picture named "varseblivningen" (figure 9). The participants were asked to express their perceptions and explain how they visualized the picture. The purpose of showing this picture was to challenge their understanding of customer perceptions and to find out if the participants understood the concept realms of understanding. Afterwards, the research purpose was presented to the participants. This opened for discussion and allowed a broader perspective about the interviewees thought and reasoning about customer analysis and an individual's preparatory understanding. The length of the interviews varied between 25-60 minutes, the average length was 40 minutes (figure 10).

(The interview questions are attached in Appendix 2).


106 *Varseblivningen*

Fröken A. som hr S. ser henne.

Fröken A. som lille Sven ser henne.

Fröken A. som fröken B. ser henne.

Fröken A. som hr P. på väg till tandläkaren ser henne.

Fig. 43. Varseblivningen är en behovsstyrd urvalsprocess. (Efter tidskriften *Punch.*)

Figure 9: "Varseblivningen"

Interviewee	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Interview duration (min)	46:00	35:28	24:19	40:03	28:32	38:06	1:02:39	43:00

Figure 10: length of interviews

3.2.7. Data Quality

According to Saunders et al. (2012) the process of conducting interviews aligns with the challenge to avoid certain issues. Some issues to consider are bias, validity, generalizability and ethical issues (Saunders et al., 2012). In addition to this, the authors pre-understanding of the subject was taken into consideration to ensure the data quality as it could affect the results of the research (Wiklund Gustin, 2018). Taking part in an interview regarding one's understanding of professionally related topics could be perceived as intrusive and the interviewees could therefore be sensitive to the unstructured approach of exploring certain themes (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 2002; Healey and Rawlinson, 1994). This was acknowledged and the interviewees comfortability were therefore be emphasized throughout the interviews.

Bias

Bias refers to interviewer bias and interviewee bias. Interviewer bias include comments, tone of voice as well as body and non-verbal language in the interviewer which might influence the interviewee (Saunders et al., 2012). As an interviewer, one might risk bias by radiate individual beliefs through the questions being asked and therefore lack credibility. This could raise doubts regarding the validity and reliability of the interview and the research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). With regards to interviewer bias the interview questions were asked with a natural tone of voice. Another crucial aspect was to show a natural body language to avoid showing any reactions to the interviewees answers, since we did not want to give a notion of the answers being either right or wrong. As a response to interviewer bias is interviewee bias, which refer to bias caused by reactions to the questions or comments made by the interviewee, (Saunders et al., 2012). One must take into consideration that interviews, and especially semi-structured interviews aims to seek explanations and therefore the process may become intrusive. As a result of this, there is a risk that the interviewees choose not to share their perspective of the topic discussed. In order to not infringe on sensitive information, the interviewees were informed that the responses of interest is their individual perceptions of the topic, not organizational strategies. Furthermore, no comments from the interviewers were made, except if some answers were perceived to be unclear (Saunders et al., 2012).

Validity

Saunders et al. (2012) explains validity as a concern whether the findings in a research is what they appear to be about. Moreover, Bryman & Bell (2017) describes that validity regards how conclusions drawn from the research are consistent. Yin (2011) argue that a research is considered to attain a good level of validity if the conclusions reflects the reality that has been studied. To reach validity in this thesis, it was of high importance to ask the right questions to the interviewees, as it relates to trustworthy answers being obtained. The validity in the semi-structured interviews was based upon the fact that the respondents possessed relevant knowledge in the topic of interest. As the interviewees are professionals in the field, we conclude that they do possess relevant knowledge.

Generalizability

Saunders et al. (2012) argue that generalizability is an issue which often is raised within qualitative research and concerns whether the findings in a research are applicable to other settings. In comparison to quantitative studies, where larger samples are included, this issue is raised more often in qualitative studies due to the smaller samples. However, qualitative studies should not be less generalizable than quantitative studies (Saunders et al., 2012). This research includes eight interviewees with the aim to provide results which could possess the qualities to be generalized to a wider extent and applicable to other settings. The result will be presented in a way which increase the chances to provide generalization. This is shown by clearly elaborating on the value of using the results of this thesis for professionals in the field of marketing.

Ethical issues

Adams, Khan, Raeside & White (2007) argue that it is of high importance to be truthful and fair when conducting a research. To fulfil this aim, all interviewees in this research were informed about the topic of choice, and they all gave their consent for us to use their answers in our thesis. To not affect the responses, the interviewees had no information beforehand of the research purpose or the research questions. Furthermore, the names of the interviewees are confidential, since the answers and citations could affect the brand of the company which the interviewees represent (Adams et al., 2007). Lastly, all information has been ethically presented and issues concerning deleted or/and counterfeited information has been taken into account, which according to Adams et al. (2007) is a vital aspect to be perceived as an ethical researcher. Any data or quotes retrieved from the interviews have been communicated to the interviewees and they have accepted the statements which will be used. This was done in order to conclude that the answers were interpreted correctly.

Pre-understanding of the topic

As the authors of this thesis are marketing students a preunderstanding of the subject was procured. The paradigm which this study is based upon was acknowledged by the authors recently, hence the preunderstanding of the new insights within the topic of choice were limited. It is important to identify and acknowledge previous understandings in order to not let it affect the results of the study. By making the pre-understandings visible, the authors are allowed to reflect upon their own pre-understandings. Thereby, the authors remain open to the study topic and previous understanding will not affect the results (Wiklund Gustin 2018).

4. Empirical Findings & Analysis

4.1. Target Audience

In order to sort out the respondent's perceptions of what a target audience is, one question included in each interview was: *How would you define a target audience?* The answers on this question slightly differed. A reason for this could be depending on the time the interviewee have been actively working with marketing. For instance, I1 have gained a lot of experience from working within the same organization for many years. Hence, I1's idea of a target audience was very clear and well defined:

"An alternative term which could be used for the person whom I would like to sell my offer to" - I1

On the contrary, I6's definition of a target audience is that it could be business-related when the aim is to generate conversion. Similarly, I2 believe that a target audience is a group of individual who have abilities to increase an organization's financial results. I6 also believes that a target audience could be communicative, which is more suitable if the ambition is to establish brand awareness. Vynke (2002) defines a target audience as a group of people with similar needs, desires, and interests, this relates to I5's definition of a target audience:

"A target audience is a group of people, in a specific age, in a certain 'category' and with similar interests" - I5

This is supported by I7 and partly also by I8. What these three interviewees have in common is experience in the field of public relations and communication, which might be why they define it similarly.

4.1.1. Interpretation and rationale

To be able to examine the interviewee's perception of a target audience on a deeper level we asked probing questions regarding how they adapt the concept in their daily work and how they perceive the process of establishing a target audience. I3 emphasized the role of a clearly defined target audience, and stated:

"You have to have a complete understanding of your target audience, if you don't... It doesn't really matter what you do next" - I3

The results from the interviews showed that in order to stay competitive on the market, one must clearly position the brand and get to know the target audience and their demands well. This will set the base for developing strategies for future work. For instance, I6 stated that:

"A target audience is a fundamental building block needed in order to keep moving forward and stay competitive on the market. An organization must get to know their target audience and their characteristics to be able to develop strategies and establish visions" -I6

The concept target audience has not only been widely accepted and warmly embraced by academia and various industries (Dolnicar & Grün, 2008), the results from the interviews showed that a majority of the respondents agree upon the vital importance of the concept. For example, I1 argued that understanding your target audience is the key to successful marketing and that companies who succeeds with their advertising are those who have managed to do a well-executed customer analysis. On the other hand, I7 had a diverse perception of the role of a target audience:

"Creating a target audience is not a proper task, it doesn't allow any creativity, it is solely based upon conversation rates and statistics" - I7

We assume that the different understandings could be a result of some interviewees working with B2B marketing, while others work with B2C. However, this does not affect our research more than being an explanation for why some understandings differ.

4.1.2. Approaches towards identifying a target audience

When asking the interviewees to suggest approaches which could be used to identify a target audience the answers varied. I7 believes that age is a crucial aspect when identifying a target audience and that it is the first criteria which should be used when *"segmenting a market"*. This relates to what Gunter and Furnham (1992) suggests as a general, physical attributes segmentation approach. In this segmentation approach, age is a variable included in the demographic factors which should be considered (Gunter and Furnham, 1992). According to I1, the company I1 works for has a different perspective on how to identify a target audience. As they work with diapers they have a clearly defined demographic target audience which is parents with kids with an age of 0-36 months.

"By investigating what type of segments there are within this demographic group of people, we analyze their attitudes through surveys concerning their lifestyles, values, behavior, and needs. Using this data makes it possible to draw conclusions and see patterns between different kinds of people" - I1

What I1 suggests relates to general, psychological attributes segmentation where personality, lifestyle and beliefs acts as the fundamental categorization bias (Gunter and Furnham, 1992). On the contrary, I2 argues that the most effective approach to identify a target audience is by using digital tools which could track behavior-patterns.

"If you identify individuals who search for a certain product more frequently, they are more likely to find an interest in the specific product category" -I2

The approach I2 suggests correspond to product-specific, behavioral attributes segmentation which is the third and final segmentation category as suggested by Gunter and Furnham (1992). Behavioral attributes segmentation refers to a consumer’s purchasing behavior and product interest (ibid). I2 believe that a behavioral approach involves less guessing, compared to if one uses a demographic approach.

I6 believe that the only parameter needed to identify a target audience is to find out the prospects underlying reason for purchasing a certain product e.g. what the customer appeal to. I6 explained an approach called “the empathy map” (Figure 6). This approach consists of four dimensions including what the customer feel/thinks, sees, says and does/hears. It aims to establish an understanding for the customer’s priorities, values, attitudes and visions. The empathy map should provide a distinct overview for companies about what their customers finds appealing, so that their marketing communication could be adopted accordingly. I6 believe that a common challenge for organizations is that they do not know what values and attributes their customers find appealing. I6 exemplifies this by a real case. I6 once had a client who thought that their customers found a product uninteresting because of the price level. However, when the “empathy map” was adapted the results showed that the pricing was not a concern at all. The reason for why the customers were uninterested was because they did not believe that the product was suitable for the Swedish market.

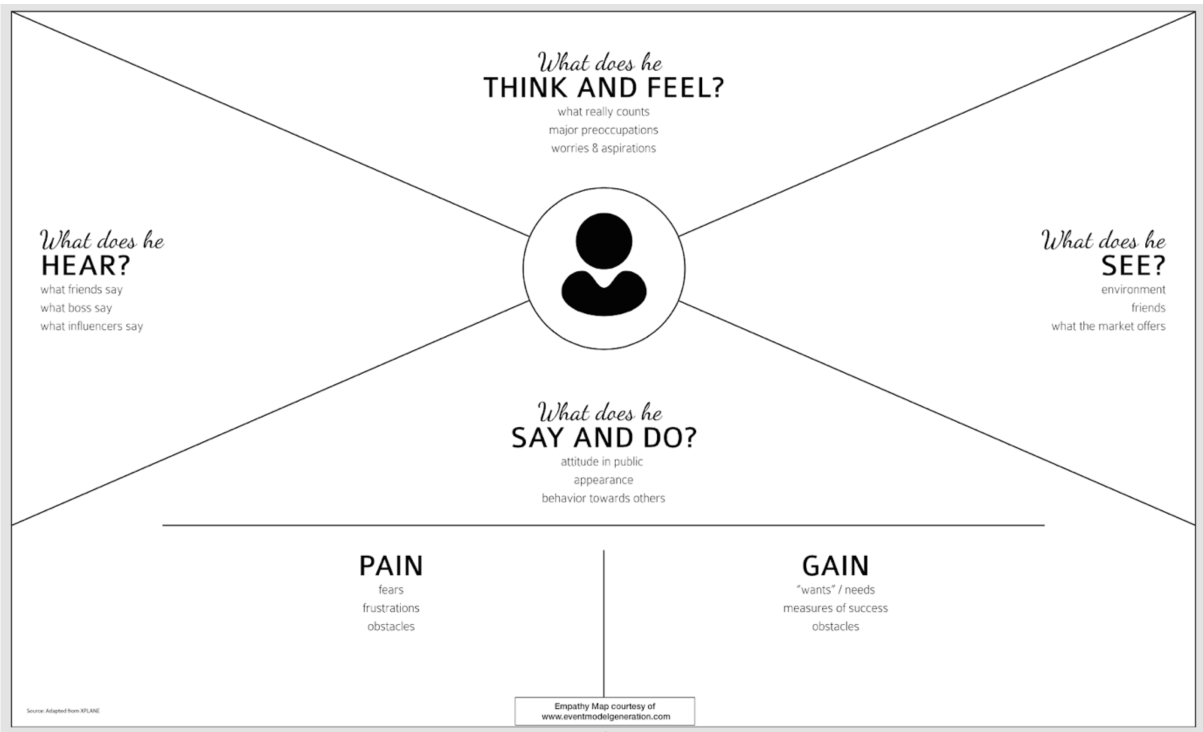


Figure 6: The empathy map. Source: Interview with respondent I6. (2019).

4.2. Segmentation

According to Vynce (2002) segmentation is a concept which should be adopted in order to identify homogeneous customers on the heterogeneous market. However, there are alternatives paths as well (Birkenfalk & Edfeldt, 2005). Therefore, if our interviewees mentioned segmentation or any sub-criteria such as demographics, geographics or psychographics in their description of the method towards identifying a target audience, we see a relation between the segmentation process introduced by Wendell R. Smith in 1956. I3 states that:

"When I was working as a Nordic marketing manager for Libresse, the customers were usually women, or in some cases husbands or boyfriends" - I3

As Libresse is a brand producing female hygiene products the demographic variable is essential with regards to gender. However, the fact that I3 mentioned males as well proves that their understanding of their target audience is wider than the segmentation guidelines suggests. On the contrary, I7 claims that STP (segmentation, targeting, positioning) is the fundamental framework for customer analysis. This relates to I4 who highlights the importance of demographics in a segmentation process. As I4 works with B2B inbound marketing I4 needs to reach decision-makers on a regular basis. I4 believe that one could facilitate this process by generalizing. For instance, I4 claims that one could assume that a marketing manager at a medium to large organization is between 40-45, probably has children and have certain interests.

According to I8 the target audience is easier to identify and is more clearly defined for some specific products, for example foods. For vegetarian food products, the target audience could be 'Young women 20-25 years old, living in larger cities and consuming vegetarian food'. However, I8 still believe that companies need to be aware of the fact that individuals in a target audience could be of a wider spread than what the demographic and geographic frames suggest.

The only interviewees who did not mention segmentation or any sub-criteria were I5 and I6 (Figure 4). Their common denominator is that they both are working as PR consultants (Figure 5). Furthermore, they are both young professionals who have been studying at polytechnic schools in the same region and both graduated only a few years ago. As mentioned in the preface, we got familiar with the alternative path to customer analysis through a childhood friend who currently studies at a polytechnic school in the same region as both I5 and I6. We could not reject the fact that this coincidence is due to that polytechnic schools seems to teach a more modernized way of conducting customer analysis. Hence, segmentation factors are probably not emphasized to the same extent as in universities, according to our own experiences as Swedish university students.

4.2.1. Personas

As a persona is a fictive profile of a target audience which includes both demographic and geographic variables (Hazlett, 2012), we see a relation to segmentation if personas are mentioned by the interviewee. I4 believe that creating a persona which depicts the target audience is the best approach when the aim is to attain a good reach.

“By not using personas the reach will be less effective due to the low percentage of people who will find your message interesting” -I4.

I2 argue that many companies use personas because it makes it easy to understand and imagine a physical customer. This relates to Birkner (2013) who argue that creating personas is a helpful tool which could improve a company’s targeting strategy. The visualization of prospects which embody the customer could for instance be “Patrik, 25 years old who prefer an outdoor lifestyle”. According to I2, “Patrik, 25” should be further developed into a person who express a certain behavior, for instance visits the outdoor-department of a website more than an average person. This corresponds to Doyle (2016) who believe that the profile of a prospect could be identified by taking notice of buying behavior and purchasing intentions.

4.3. Market communication - Reaching out to the Target Audience

After understanding the interviewee's different perspectives of a target audience, the aim was to explore how the professionals interviewed interpret and use market communication. I1 argues that one approach which could be used in order to create market communication is by thinking of the brand as a personality and deciding what traits you would like to communicate to your target audience. This corresponds to Anisimova & Sultan (2014), who argues that communicating the primary characteristics of a brand will contribute to effective market communication. Another communication approach was suggested by I5 who argues that by understanding a market one could adapt the communication to reach a specific target audience. I5 continues:

“In the role as a PR consultant, it is extremely important to know who you are communicating with and why” -I5

This goes in line with I7 who argues that if you do not understand what your target audience finds important, you will not reach them. Furthermore, I3 believes that by getting to know your target audience preferences and demands, you can customize your communication better and form a message which your target audience is susceptible for. Both I7 and I4 agrees that successful marketing communication is when a company manages to communicate a message that is convincing enough for a customer to purchase a product. Many the interviewees agreed that customer values play a distinctive part when forming a message that captures the customer’s attention. In other words, if a company can adopt their marketing communication to what the customer want to hear there is a higher chance that the message will break through the market noise and reach the right person. This relates to what I4 and I8 perceives as a major challenge with marketing communication - to reach those customers who are susceptible for the message.

“Today, customers are becoming more selective of what messages they choose to be susceptible for” -14

"Individuals are overwhelmed with information today. Consumers can't be adoptive to every message; they will select the messages which they find interesting and important" -I8

This corresponds to what Rabino et al. (2012) elaborates on, which is that a typical consumer is exposed to several hundred messages a day. Consequently, the consumer will spend little or no time at all on messages that are perceived as irrelevant.

I1 stress that the same tone of voice should be used in all promotional messages. This relates to the IMC process which suggests that all marketing and promotional activities should be integrated in order to provide consistency, clarity and the best possible communication impact (Schultz, 1993). Furthermore, both I1 and I3 argues that by analyzing competitors' position on the market you could identify what parts of your communication is successful and what aspects could be improved in order to understand your competitive edge. This relates to Anantachart (2005) who claim that IMC gives a company potential to gain a competitive advantage through the communication process.

4.3.1. Communication channels

In order to further elaborate on the interviewee's perception on media preferences with regards to communicating with a target audience we asked what channels they believed were the most efficient ones. We received a variety of suggestions from the respondents. Many argued that digital media is the ultimate approach nowadays. However, I2 argues that a downside with digital marketing is that companies are more likely to reach a younger target audience and that digital marketing's reach decreases as the target audience becomes older. However, I8 believes that a younger target audience does not always prefer digital media and an older target audience does not always prefer printed media. On the contrary, I3 argues that they know that the most effective way to reach their specific target audience is by being visible digitally and not on TV etc. since it is less target specific. This is supported by I1 who states that

"In Sweden, TV commercials aren't very target specific, hence there will be a great loss of potential customers" -I1

In contrast, I5 believe that broadcast media has the highest PR value and that it is the most efficient media with the best scope and reach. Furthermore, I5 argues that when a company introduce a new product on the market the first step is to formulate a press release. The aim is thereafter to get this published in magazines, on radio and on TV in order to reach out to a large scope of people. After this the message, should be shared in the company's owned media channels, such as Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn. *"Consequently, everything is integrated"* according to I5. This corresponds to the IMC process which Belch and Belch (2001) define as an integration and coordination of all marketing and promotional activities.

I2 believe that there is a risk that certain marketing channels are being invested heavily into without knowing if those channels are effective or not. However, I1 states that this could be avoided by conducting a media touch point analysis which could help understand the target audience's media preferences. A media touch point analysis shows what the media consumption for the prospects looks like and it helps you to understand where and when you should communicate with your target audience. By executing an analysis like this one you could maximize your return on marketing investment, according to I1.

4.3.2. Communication models

We recognized a correlation between the theories presented in the theoretical framework and the interviewees reasoning regarding market communication. For example, the fact that a message is encoded and then decoded is mentioned by I1, I2, I4 and I6. I3, I7 and I8 also mentions feedback in terms of clicks or purchasing ratio as an important factor within a communication process. We believe that the modernized shift in media consumption has opened for more opportunities to receive feedback from the target audience. For instance:

"By using digital measurements companies can detect conversions, clicks and visitor numbers on their websites" -I2.

"Today, messages spread in a higher pace than before, and the sender gets feedback in terms of statistics, clicks and other digital measurements" -I8

This could enable companies to understand whether a message has been received and if the communication turned out to be successful depending on what the feedback shows in terms of new registered customers, sales or turnover for example. This corresponds to Schramm's (1954) model of communication which considers feedback and believe that communication is a multi-way process which does not start nor end somewhere. Continuously, I8 argue that digital and social media enable companies to make use of the reach and interactions, which is much harder with printed media.

The linear process in printed media has shifted into an interactive process, and advertisements spread across geographical borders in a high speed. This corresponds to McQuail (1985) who exemplified the shift from the linear Shannon-Weaver model to the interactive model which was developed by Schramm (1954). However, one downside of this shift which has been discussed in some interviews could be that it is harder to distinguish who the receiver of a message is. Therefore, it might be hard for the sender to find out the various ways in which the message was decoded, and how the decoding corresponds to the encoding.

4.4. Context analysis

I2 argues that a brand must be familiar with internal factors as well as external environmental aspects in order to succeed with their marketing communication. This aligns with the first step of the IMC planning process which is context analysis. By understanding the context in which a business operates a company can identify their competitive position on the market. According to I1, both the industry in which a company operates and their current position on the market are crucial factors to take into consideration when communicating with a target audience. This is supported by I3 and goes in line with understanding the external environment as the first step in the IMC planning process suggests (Ward & Peppard, 2002).

I4 believes that one issue which many organizations experience is that they seldomly question where they find their customers and how these could be reached in the most efficient manner. This could be a constraint for the business development in the long run.

"You must understand the context in which you operate in order to avoid blunder for opportunities to reach out to your customers" -I4

Furthermore, I4 believe that organizations need to be aware that their customers are constantly changing because the society and demand is changing. This is supported by I3 who emphasize the importance of being aware of how a target audience might develop over time due to changes in external environment which affects demand. These changes could be identified by conducting a context analysis and therefore an IMC planning process could be a helpful tool when developing a communication strategy. I5 suggests environmental scanning and media monitoring as alternative tools which should be used in order to stay relevant with regards to changing customer demand. If you do become aware of your environment and your customers, I4 believes that you can form your communication according to the customer's preferences, which would lead to an enhanced communication process.

4.4.1. Customer preferences

The idea of IMC is to coordinate marketing communication efforts strategically to be able to optimize the impact on the target group (Duncan & Caywood, 1996). However, in order to attain effective market communication, it is of high importance to understand customer preferences as well. Hence, not only were the external environment an important component to understand according to our interviewees. Customer behavior, lifestyle and values are suggested as essential customer analysis measures as well. I1 stress the importance of these components by arguing that knowing what type of personality the brand should adapt to is vital in order to ensure effective market communication. Furthermore, I1 mentions that they analyze their customers attitudes through questionnaires about their lifestyles, values, behavior, and needs. I1 does not mention the AIO approach, however we identify similarities between the approach suggested by I1 and the AIO approach as both methods suggest questionnaires with a set of measures used to research lifestyles (Vyncke, 2002). Furthermore, I2 argues that by identifying a group of people with similar behaviors one could conclude which customers are likely to be more valuable to a company. What I2 explains corresponds to the VALS framework, as it suggests that the process of defining a target audience could be facilitated by predicting customer behavior (Boote, 1981).

All interviewees agreed that only those individuals who finds a specific product appealing or interesting will be interested in buying it. I3, who works with baby products, further elaborates on this and argues:

"Our products aren't relevant for those who don't have young children" -I3

Hence, people who do not have a lifestyle including babies will most likely not be interested in such products as they do not have a demand for that product category. This relates to I2's arguments that customer demand is an essential aspect to be aware of, due to its importance for successful marketing communication. This is emphasized by I3 who explains that as babies grow older the demand will change for the parents. I1 who has a similar role as I3, states that:

"An interesting aspect with my job is that within 3 years the entire target audience has been replaced" -I1

What I1 means is that new babies are born every day, and every day some children stop using diapers. However, the reason for why demand change over time could be several. I1 states that humans are complex and their behaviors constantly change. Hence, when working with establishing a target audience you can never lean back and think that the work is done. In digital marketing, for instance, individuals search for different products every day and their needs and interests vary on a daily basis, according to I2. I8 stress the importance of identifying the demand and desire a target audience has towards a specific product or service. In other words, I8 believe that companies should invest time to become familiar with their environment and customers in order to stay competitive. By adopting either AIO or VALS as a segmentation approach a company would be able to understand their customer's lifestyle, values and opinions which in turn would allow them to predict customer preferences and demands (Vyncke, 2002; Rousseau & Kruger, 1990). Furthermore, it could also facilitate the process of developing communication and advertising strategies (Boote, 1981).

4.4.2. The importance of a positive brand image

Promotional goals and positioning is the second step in the IMC planning process and includes leverage of brand awareness, establishing perception and attitudes towards the brand etc. (Nguyen, 2014). According to Dwivedi et al., (2015) market communication is an effective tool for building a positive brand image and establishing brand awareness. Therefore, we wanted to explore how our interviewees perceived a brand image in relation to brand awareness and attitudes from the target audiences. I8 believe that in order to create a positive brand image one must be familiar with the importance of the brand values being related to the values of the target audience.

"If one could identify the values of the target audience, one should adapt the brand values accordingly to create recognition and to make the customer feel understood" –I8

I3 has been working as a Nordic marketing manager for a large company offering feminine sanitary products. I3 argues that this product category is often purchased by the mother of a daughter when she first gets her period. The brand chosen by the mother from start is often also the brand which the daughter stays with. I3 believes that this could be because it is perceived as safe and familiar from the daughter's perspective. Thus, some brands follow an individual through life, and of course, that is something which all brands would like to achieve. In order to be the nr 1 choice in a certain product category it is important to have a strong brand with continuity in the market communication so that the brand is recognizable and is perceived as familiar and concise.

"A brand's profile is a very important communication tool and the continuity in the communication could be decisive weather the brand succeeds or not" -I1

"A brand depicts a type of communication where the customers get the opportunity to conceptualize the offering" -I7

I5 believe that it is important to develop a brand image since it could make more people interested of the products which in turn would affects the company's turnover in a positive manner. I3 further elaborates on the importance of positive brand image with regards to financial aspects for a company:

"Having a competitive brand image makes it possible for you to maximize your pricing which would positively affect your financial result" -I3

This relates to Mihali (2014) who argues that by using market communication organizations could establish an image of the organization and retain a competitive position on the market. Furthermore, I3 argues that if you do not have a strong brand image you probably compete on price which is less beneficial in the long run. Since a positive brand image is established when customers feel connection with a brand I8 argues that it is of high importance to invest time and money to get to know your customers. I8 exemplifies this by referring to a case where a vegetarian customer frequently purchased a large amount of vegetable from his local grocery store. The grocery store wanted to show their appreciation to him as a loyal customer and offered discounted prices on certain products. However, the products in question were poultry products. According to I8, this case is a good example of a company which has not invested time into getting to know their customer well enough to understand their demands nor what the customer values. Anisimova & Sultan (2014) argues that market communication plays a vital role in the creation of customer attitudes towards a brand. The case described by I8 is an example of when market communication lead to a negative attitude towards the brand in question (Rabino, et al., 2012), even though the intentions from the brand where good as they wanted to offer discount to a loyal customer.

4.5. Realms of Understanding

To wrap up the interviews a picture named *"Varseblivningen"* was shown to the interviewees (Figure 9). They were asked to think out loud and explain how they visualize the picture. The purpose of this was to find out if the participants understood the concept realms of understanding, which is what the picture depicts. By analyzing the various reasonings we could conclude that realms of understanding were described by several interviewees when visualizing the picture shown. However, only I1, I3 and I5 used the actual term. I2 believes that a group of individuals' realms of understanding will differ depending on everyone's personal characteristics; therefore, everyone will perceive things differently. This corresponds to I4 who believes that one contributing factor to the variation of individual's realms of understanding depends on personal opinions, preferences and previous experiences. This is also what I4 perceives as a great challenge when it comes to marketing. Organizations should strive to look at their offers from the customer's perspective with the aim to understand how their customers differ from each other. I4's perspective of realms of understanding boils down to:

"A situation might be the same but we all interpret it differently, hence a message could be packaged in one way but interpreted in another" -I4

I3 points out that even if two people have the same demographic belonging, they can still have different understandings. This aligns with the study conducted by Marton & Booth (2000) about two university students as well as Birkenfalk et al. (2007) example about the Red Cross. I8 argue that an individual's realms of understanding will vary depending on how one perceives its surroundings and the environment. Furthermore, the life context will also play a crucial role in how different messages are interpreted according to I8. This relates to our reflection of how preparatory understanding affects an individual's perceptions. For instance, a woman who is trying to get pregnant will notice all the baby strollers that passes her. The woman starts to create new individual demands of which includes baby products. Therefore, she will become more susceptible for messages regarding baby care and everything it involves. Simultaneously, she might *not* be susceptible for the messages she used to, due to her new life context which involves baby products. By acknowledging how individual's life context affect their realms of understanding, companies should communicate with them in a way which appeals to the individual's preferences and values.

Birkenfalk et al. (2007) argue that an individual's preparatory understanding is not based upon personal characteristics, interests nor beliefs. It is solely based upon the way one individual perceives a message with regards to his or her current context. In contrast to the rest of the interviewees, I8 and I3 did not mention anything about personal characteristics nor opinions in their reflection of "*Varseblivningen"* (Figure 9). This is why their reasonings are the ones which relates to Birkenfalk et al.'s (2007) perception of an individual's preparatory understanding.

5. Conclusion

In today’s media landscape companies communicate with their customer through an interactive process, enhancing the spread of messages across geographical borders which allows them to receive feedback from all kinds of people. As the digitalization has enabled individuals to explore new passions despite physical presence or demographical belonging, it appears that segmentation variables such as demographics and geographic are less relevant today. Therefore, as shown in the results, companies should strive to understand their customers with regards to their preparatory understandings in order to succeed with their marketing communication. Hence, a preparatory target audience is something which we conclude to be the most appropriate way of identifying customers. This means that companies should target those individuals who are susceptible for their offering according to their current state of mind. Hence, a preparatory target audience will be broader, yet more precise than a target audience based on segmentation criteria. However, demographic, geographic and psychographic are easy measurements for companies to use due to the advanced technology available today. For instance, Facebook ads could be adjusted to reach people in a certain age, with a specific lifestyle and interests. An individual's preparatory understanding is not yet a parameter which could be used in digital marketing. Therefore, for the paradigm identified we conclude that preparatory understandings could not be used as the only targeting criteria due to the current difficulty of implementing it in practice. Hence a preparatory target audience should be used as a complement to the current practice rather than an alternative approach.

Q1 - The current practice:

It appears that the results from the interviews suggests that there is an understanding for new alternative paths of identifying customers, even though it seems like many interviewees are still adopting segmentation variables in the process of identifying prospects. We believe that professionals in the field of marketing still adhere to traditional approaches due to habits, comfort, and lack of knowledge. An example of this is that several respondents presumed that personal characteristics, lifestyles and demographics will be decisive factors when identifying a buyer of a product. No respondent seemed to fully adopt an approach where an individual's preparatory understanding was in focus. However, a few respondents emphasized an individual's life context as an important factor for customer analysis, which we believe relates to preparatory understandings to some extent.

Q2 - The communication process:

A target audience preferences are constantly changing. Things which a target audience finds appealing one day is not necessarily what they find appealing the next day. Some target audiences find themselves in new life contexts while others simply find new passions to pursue. In other words, an individual's demand is not continuous. It is of high importance for companies to understand that as their target audience change, their marketing communication should adapt accordingly. However, it is vital to keep the same tone of voice in the communication and integrate all promotional activities in order to establish brand recognition, clarity and consistency. If a message could be adapted according to what the target audience is susceptible for, there is a higher chance that the message will break through the market noise. By getting to know your target audiences preparatory understanding for a certain phenomenon, the chances for the marketing communication to be successful are improved. Therefore, companies should strive to identify their target audience based on these factors.

6. Discussion

Contribution for practice

Marketing is a complex concept which involves various challenges. One of them is to carry out a precise yet effective customer analysis in order to identify the buyer(s) of a product. How can companies be sure that the target audience they have identified is the right one? Today, consumers are being overwhelmed with exhortations to consume. Consequently, these individuals are becoming more selective of which messages they choose to decode. Due to this, the challenge for companies to find the customers who are most likely to be susceptible for a certain message is apparent. One way to tackle this challenge is for companies to be self-critical regarding how their marketing communication is perceived by their customers. If companies are aware of the fact that the same message could be interpreted in around 5 different ways (Birkenfalk et al., 2007), their marketing could be customized according to these premises.

The research conducted in this thesis further elaborates on the concept of an individual's preparatory understanding as Birkenfalk et al. (2007) brought to light. The concept of individuals preparatory understandings is a modern way of looking at target audiences. Therefore, the concept has not been tested to the same extent as segmentation has. The results of this thesis showed that a preparatory target audience could lead to an enhanced process of performing customer analysis which better suits todays modernized world. However, it could be difficult to execute this in practice which is why we suggest that only fragments of this concept should be included in a company's targeting strategy. This would enable them to identify a more precise, yet broad, target group. In order to include preparatory understandings in the process of customer analysis, time, effort and capital is required. Hence, is only those companies who find customer analysis as a vital building block which will go through this process. Nevertheless, positive financial results and a strong position on the market will make it worth the effort.

We believe that the results of this paper will be of value for people working with marketing as the findings could allow them to widen their perspectives. University students who have been studying marketing, just like ourselves, could also benefit from our study as it acknowledges alternative targeting criteria's in contrast to segmentation. Furthermore, institutions of higher education could also find our study rewarding as it provides an understanding of the current practice as well as segmentation criteria's relevance in today's modernized society. Since this thesis touch a topic which is newly developed by Swedish communicators, we truly believe that we have the ability to contribute with new insights and perspectives.

Future research

As this thesis was limited to explore the current practice, the effectiveness of preparatory understandings has not been tested. Hence, this could be a suggestion for future research. On the other hand, the results from the study conducted shows that preparatory understandings could assist in solving complex challenges within marketing. To mention a few, these could be establishing brand loyalty, understanding customer preferences as well as becoming aware of the fact that individuals with the same demographic and psychographic profile still could interpret messages differently. This corresponds to the fact that AIO and VALS, could be challenged as approaches of finding a target audience. Additionally, we see possibilities to conduct future research about the concept of preparatory understandings where quantitative research could be carried out to test the effectiveness or conversion ratios compared to segmentation, for instance.

Limitations

The process of writing this thesis has put our analytical proficiencies to test considering that we did not possess much knowledge about the topic beforehand. Furthermore, the topic of choice had not yet been brought to our attention, which was a major reason for why we became curious to further explore it. Due to little previous knowledge about the topic, this paper has been revised several times and our knowledge has developed tremendously. This has, of course, led to that the process of writing this paper has taking longer time than expected, but has also contributed to a thesis which is thoroughly written. Even though we, the authors, now more are very familiar with the topic of preparatory understanding, we must acknowledge that the topic could be unfamiliar to a lot of people, including the ones reading this thesis. Therefore, we are aware of the risk that the concept of preparatory understanding could be misinterpreted or misunderstood.

Some methodological limitations in this thesis are the time frame and sample size. Regarding the time frame, we were restricted to complete the study in 5 months. However, we believe that longer time could allow us to make a more in-depth research with several sampling approaches, for instance focus groups and multi-case studies. This leads us to our next limitation, which is the sample size. In order to gain an in-depth understanding for the paradigm between segmentation and preparatory understanding, longer semi-structured interviews were required. Our sample size of eight individuals could be perceived as rather small. However, we perceived it to be the perfect sample size for this study which would allow us to gain in-depth knowledge and insights and not missing out on any details. The participants in this research needed to be professionals in the field of marketing and possess experiences from working with target audiences in different contexts. The participants of choice could have been chosen based on other criteria. For instance, that they operate on a managerial level or in a certain industry. However, according to us, it contributed to diversity and variegation that the interviewees had positions on various levels within an organization as well as operated in different industries.

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Appendix

1. Preparatory understanding

6 different preparatory understandings of donatinting 250 SEK to the red cross:

1. I donate money to projects which provide long-term help for countries in need. For example, building schools and ensuring clean water.
2. I donate money to catastrophe aid. People are suffering right now, and we have to do what we can to help them.
3. You cannot trust organisations like the Red Cross… Once you show interest in donating money you will never get them of you back.
4. How much of the money donated does actually reach the ones in need? Too much money is put into administration and I am not interested in supporting that.
5. I donate money, but to other organizations. You cannot donate to all, you have to prioritize.
6. I already donate by paying taxes which provides aid through the state budget.

2. Interview questions

Section 1:

1. Tell us how have you reached your current state in life?

- What has your path looked like regarding studies and work life experience?
- What is your current role/position?

2. Tell us about the company you work for today

- Vision, mission, and customers

Section 2:

3. How do you interpret marketing communication?

4. In what way, do you believe companies should use marketing communication?

5. Which channels do you believe are the most efficient ones concerning marketing communication?

6. How do you interpret target audiences?

    - Which challenges do you believe company face concerning target audiences?

7. How do you use/have you used target audiences in your work?

8. Do you believe that your perception of target audiences is your individual?

    - Do you believe that your colleagues and people in the same position as you interpret target audiences like you?

Section 3:

9. We will now show you a picture. Please reflect upon this picture and share your reasoning of what you see and how you interpret the picture.