



Linnæus University
Sweden

Bachelor Thesis

The Utilization of Social Media Marketing in a B2B context- *Marketing Decision- makers Point of View*



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Term: VT20
Subject: Bachelor Thesis
Level: Bachelor



Abstract

To date, the rather new phenomena known as Social Media Marketing (SMM) has caught much attention from researchers and several studies have been conducted prior to resolving how this new phenomenon can be utilized by business-to-business (B2B) organizations. However, existing literature covering SMM has been mainly focused on the business-to-consumer (B2C) perspective, therefore, there is a lack of research in the utilization of SMM in a B2B context. Hence, this bachelor thesis aims to contribute to the theoretical and empirical findings of social media in a B2B context, by uncovering marketing decision-makers point of view and how they work with social media, specifically in the international high-technological and service-oriented sector. The purpose of this research paper is to identify and describe the utilization of SMM together with the positive and negative aspects of it in the B2B context, based on empirical data collected from decision-makers working with marketing, operating in service-oriented international IT-organizations located in Sweden. In order to fulfil the purpose, a qualitative research method was chosen where 7 semi-structured interviews were conducted with marketing decision-makers from 6 international service-oriented B2B companies operating in the IT industry. The decision-makers participating in the study contributed with their experiences and perceptions of social media, concluding that they highly value SMM and emphasize its importance as it is perceived as significant for all B2B organizations today and as the society is becoming more and more digitized, it will become of even higher importance in the upcoming years. Further, the thesis also found that the decision-makers working with SM use it for three main objectives; Brand awareness, Lead generation and Employer branding. Lastly, based on the empirical findings of this report, some similarities and controversies were discovered in regard to how theory suggests that SMM is used in the B2B environment as well as how the different participants view the usage of SMM.

Key words

Social Media Marketing (SMM), Social Media, Social Media Perception, Digital Marketing, Industrial Marketing, Business-to-business (B2B), Marketing Communications



Acknowledgments

The authors would like to dedicate this part of the paper to show appreciation and thank all the persons that have been involved in the creation of this bachelor thesis. Primarily, we would like to point our gratitude to the seven decision-makers from six different companies that participated for their time and effort and their participation in the interviews. Without them and their knowledge and valuable insights, it would have been impossible for us to conduct this thesis. We would also like to show our greatest appreciation and gratitude to our supervisor Mr. Peter Caesar for his feedback, expertise and creativity which brought us forward and made it possible for us to write and finalize this thesis. Further, we would like to show our appreciation and gratitude to our examiner, Dr. Tomas Nilsson for his tips and advice during the seminars which has been very helpful and facilitating in the process of writing this bachelor thesis. In addition, we would also like to thank our opponents in our class for taking their time to read our thesis and for providing us with valuable insights and feedback. Finally, we would like to thank all the other persons involved for their love and trust, supporting us during this time and pushing us forward.

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1 Introduction

The digitalization has led to a change in communication in business through new types of platforms and channels, earlier social media was mainly a way of gaining information about companies or brands, whilst nowadays it is also used in marketing strategies (Dwivedi, Ismagilova, Rana & Weerakkody, 2019). It has been used continuously within B2C and has helped improve sales, increasing brand awareness and involved the customers to strengthen relationships among other things, and more recently B2B companies have also opened up their eyes for social media usage and several marketers are currently benefiting from it around the globe (ibid). However, the current research papers are suggesting that the knowledge of B2B social media is still in an embryonic stage and therefore further investigations are quite heavily requested in this area of business research (Salo, 2017; Dwivedi, et al, 2019; Siamagka, Christodoulides, Michaelidou, Valvi, 2015).

1.1 Background

In industrial markets, marketing communications are concerned with presenting and exchanging information with various stakeholders to achieve specific results, which requires elements of persuasion (Hutt & Speh, 2015, p.261) and B2B opportunities from social media are blossoming. Kaplan, A., Haenlein, M., (2010) defines social media as a ‘‘group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation of an exchange of User Generated Content (Kaplan, A., Haenlein, M., 2010). Further, Social Media is seen as ‘‘any tool or service that uses the internet to facilitate conversations’’ (Andersson, Wikström, 2017). In regard to the above stated definitions, we have decided to further refer to social media not only as a customer communication platform but also as a tool for firms to communicate with customers and other stakeholders. Further, Felix, Rauschnabel and Hinsch (2017) suggest that social media (often in combination with other communication channels) are tools of an interdisciplinary and crossfunctional concept named Social Media Marketing (SMM) that is used to achieve organizational goals by creating value for stakeholders. Thus, on a strategic level, social media marketing covers an organization's decisions about social media marketing scope, culture, structure and governance (Felix et al., 2017). Further, it is explained by Dahnil, Marzuki, Laggat & Fabeil (2014) that SMM includes using the social media platforms and its related



technologies and features to help achieve objectives in conjunction with other marketing communication tools (Dahnil et al., 2014).

There has been more studies and examinations of how B2B companies can apply SMM to their marketing communications and what techniques that could be applicable to their context, although the overall understanding of this research area is still very limited (Siamagka et al 2015; Itani, O. S. Agnihotri, R. Dingus, R. 2017; Salo, 2017). Major reasons for the increasing the usage of SMM in the B2C sector is that organizations are able to communicate to customers at a much lower cost than ever before, and have the ability to create online content to develop their brand presence much faster and cheaper through social media platforms (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). It is therefore of high interest to identify whether B2B companies can enjoy the same lower costs and higher speed through SMM as B2C and how it might differ when it comes down to limitations and opportunities (Swani et al, 2017; Iankova et al, 2019). Based on reviewing the literature from studies conducted in this area of research, it is suggested that the usage of SMM in B2B contexts differs from that of B2C, where most current studies has been made, hence alternative theories are required to understand how it can be applicable to B2B organizations (Salo, 2017).

1.2 Problem Discussion

Even though studies suggest that the usage of social media is not only beneficial for marketers, but also for the buyers in several ways (Guesalaga, 2016; Lacka & Chong, 2016), organizations within the B2B context are having difficulties with knowing how to implement the usage of social media successfully for marketing purposes (Swani et al, 2014). Several scholarly articles suggests that the major reasons for B2B organizations not implementing SMM successfully is the lack of knowledge in how to do so and how to benefit from it, which seems to originate in the absence of skills and competences amongst employees (Michaelidou et al, 2011; Siamagka et al, 2015; Järvinen et al, 2012). There is also a common view among B2B marketers that SMM is only beneficial in the B2C context, and that it comes with high risks in B2B, since it may result in losing the control of information published because of the two-way interaction created through social media platforms (Michaelidou et al, 2011; Järvinen et al, 2012; Jussila et al, 2014). Although, it was recognized already in 2015 that those who do not adapt to this “new” way of marketing are at risk of losing competitive



advantage, mainly because other organizations are already using it and prefers to do business with other users, so that they can integrate their digital marketing systems (Siamagka et al, 2015). One can therefore assume that it is of even more relevance today, as the society is more technology driven than ever before. Although Social Media Marketing (SMM) is suggested to be beneficial in the B2B context, it seems to be more complicated than in B2C and based on the previous literature, many B2B marketers seem to struggle with implementing it successfully.

According to a literature review based out of scholarly articles in the area of B2B social media, there are several suggestions for further studies of how B2B social media usage is conducted in practice and how it is viewed upon by top managements in B2B organizations, with the aim of identifying how to use it effectively in relation to outperforming competitors (Salo, 2017). Thus, the findings uncovered in practice could give an insight of what is currently occurring in the industry and thereby evaluate how practice alters from industrial marketing theories (ibid). Another more recent literature reviews based on scholarly articles and conference papers emphasizes that these type of studies are still relevant and requested by researches today, especially through qualitative approaches considering the individuals using SMM, as most previous research has been based on quantitative studies, merely focusing on likes, shares and comments on social media platforms (Dwivedi, et al, 2019). An interesting suggestion of drivers which affect SMM success is the usage-rate and confidence of decision-makers, as B2B marketers are more concerned of the risks involved, they tend to use it less frequently than those in B2C and thereby become less confident in the overall usage (Iankova et al, 2019). In order to gain a deeper understanding of how organizations apply SMM in the B2B context and how it in turn affect their relationship with customers, Iankova et al therefore calls for more qualitative studies focusing on how decision-makers within B2B marketing uses SMM and what they are expecting to achieve from it (Iankova et al, 2019).

Furthermore, some aspects of social media have been more researched than others, as most previous studies have only been considering its positive effects and left out the negative ones (Salo, 2017; Dwivedi, et al, 2019). Also, there are currently no recognized measurements for the effectiveness, in terms such, as lowering speed. and increasing costs, although it is suggested that most users are perceiving SMM as an effective marketing tool without any way of actually measuring it nonetheless (ibid). B2B SMM has



mainly been studied in UK, China, U.S, and India, However it is suggested that it used and perceived differently based on a country's culture and adaptation to social media, meaning that the current findings within this area are mostly based on a few countries, and might be different elsewhere which could result in the current findings being less applicable to other areas than those were the studies were conducted (Dwivedi, et al, 2019).

Based on the research gaps presented above, this research paper will be in line with the request for further research by Ivankova et al, who suggests that qualitative studies based on interviews with decision-makers within B2B marketing is necessary and relevant for developing the current literature of SMM in business research (Iankova et al, 2019). Which is also emphasized by two literature reviews of social media usage in B2B contexts, who advocates the importance of new studies focusing on practice and also specifically in relation to individuals within top managements (Salo, 2017; Dwivedi, et al, 2019). The data collected will then be interpreted with the use of relevant theories of B2B SMM, in order to be able to draw conclusions of how the concept is perceived by B2B marketing decision-makers, which is suggested in literature reviews for future research (ibid). Further descriptions of the specific sample targeted and the reasons for it can be found under 3.3 in the *Methodology*.

1.3 Research Purpose

The purpose of this research paper will be to identify and describe SMM usage together with the positive and negative aspects of it in the B2B context, based on empirical data collected from decision-makers within marketing, operating in service-oriented international IT-organizations located in Sweden.

2 Theoretical Framework

Keywords: Social Media Marketing (SMM), Social Media, Social Media Perception, Digital Marketing, Industrial Marketing, Business-to-business (B2B), Marketing Communications



2.1 Social Media Marketing

The main analytical concept of this study is Social Media Marketing (SMM) which Felix, Rauschnabel, Hinsch (2017) define as an interdisciplinary and cross-functional concept that uses social media to achieve organizational goals by creating value for stakeholders. Accordingly, social media marketing provides firms with an opportunity to use social media to build relationships with customers, employees, communities, and other stakeholders. At the same time, firms may choose to view social media as simply another communications channel through which they can push information to customers (ibid). An important dispute that the authors would like to highlight is the definition of the concept, as some authors use the term “Digital Marketing” instead of SMM (Lipiäinen & Karjaluoto, 2015; Järvinen et al, 2012). Arguing that Digital Marketing is used as an umbrella term, while confessing that the concepts are tightly related and intertwined (Järvinen et al, 2012). However, in this study, the authors have decided that Social Media Marketing (SMM) will be the used definition, as the study is focused on social media, and not all digital communication channels. The purpose of using social media in this context is to increase awareness, keep connected with customers and actively try to influence customers to like its website (Brennan & Croft, 2012). It is argued that Social Media has influence on customers and a wider audience likewise mechanisms found in advertising (Salo, 2017), due to the ability of reaching out to a public and two-way communication. The informative part of B2B social media is described by Holliman and Rowley as “publishing” as they rather focus on helping than selling to their customers by understanding their informative needs and considerations in their purchasing process (Holliman & Rowley, 2014) which Andersson & Wikström (2017) define as “soft marketing”.

2.2 The Usage of Social Media

The use of social media platforms as marketing channels has expanded in the recent years, driven by the ability to reach millions of customers with brand related content to engage them in conversations (Hanna, R., Rohm, A., Crittenden, V.L., 2011). Social Media usage is constantly evolving as organizations and individuals adapt to new and current social media practices and applications. As a result of the evolving phase of the digital world, the use of social media and other social media platforms therefore requires an updated explanation of integrated marketing communications.



Communication through social media is perceived as different from traditional marketing and should therefore be adjusted so that companies can increase their capacity by using it (Andersson, S., Wikström, N., 2017). Hence, one of the biggest advantages deriving from social media sites by B2B marketers is the access to the knowledge it affords. As mentioned before, prior research has shown that Social Networking Sites (SNS) encourage a two-way communication and hence virtual co-creation. Furthermore, this has a positive impact on innovation and product development which results in new and more innovative offerings that in turn will lead to companies gaining competitive advantage through offering new and novel products or services to customers and partners (Jussila, J., Kärkkäinen, H., Leino, M., 2012; Simula, H., Töllinen, A., Karjaluoto, H., 2013).

Swani et al, (2014) implies that B2B marketers commonly believe that the nature of the B2B sector requires face-to-face (F2F) interaction during the process so that both parties are actively involved. They also argue that this approach cannot be satisfied online (Swani, K., Brown, B., 2014). Despite this, researchers have identified that innovative B2B marketers that have established an increased company presence on social media are more likely to invest further in social media usage (Michaelidou et al., 2011; Veldman, C., Van Praet, E., Mechant, P., 2015). Thus, it appears that B2B marketers are starting to realize the value of social media (Brennan, R., Croft, R., 2012).

Siamagka, N., Christodoulides, G., Michaelidou, N., Valvi, A., (2015) did a quantitative study where a survey was sent out to 5000 B2B companies in the UK. The results of this survey is presented in their paper as a table chart that presents the usage rate of the three most commonly used social media platforms used by business-to-business organizations. These platforms were: Twitter with a usage rate of 67% followed by Facebook with a usage rate of 62% and LinkedIn with a usage rate of 52% (Siamagka et al., 2015).

Iankova et a., (2019) mentions that although most SMM channels offer the similar abilities to marketers, such as communication and engaging customers, different social media platforms are perceived favourably for certain forms of communication whereas Facebook is used for providing a rich means for customer relationship management, Twitter is used to communicate brand messages and mining customer responses in real time, Instagram is a means for sharing image-based content and YouTube is



mainly used for videos (Iankova et al., 2019). High technological B2B companies mostly use LinkedIn to connect with customers and to develop professional relationships with a network of people (Järvinen et al, 2012). Even though it is seen that social media is used as a relationship building tool, established digital tools such as e-newsletters and email marketing are suggested to still dominate the digital marketing mix within B2B organizations (Järvinen et al., 2012).

Swani, K., Brown, B., & Milne, G., (2014) has done research where they analyzed tweets from fortune 500 companies in the US. The usage is defined in percent and based on a survey that was sent to these 500 US companies. The result of the survey indicates that Twitter is used by 73% of the companies, as a means for communicating with customers and partners (Swani et al., 2014). In regards to this, one can say that prior research indicates that the usage of social media is becoming more and more common and the B2B marketers are starting to understand the value it brings, however, there are still seems to be many question marks in this regard and a lack of understanding, skills and utilization of SM in a B2B marketing context.

Furthermore, Swani et al (2017) mention that B2B offerings are often perceived to be more technical and utilitarian and B2B buyers tend to use a more formal and generally longer group buying process. In relation, B2B marketers tend to promote their corporate brands more than their individual product brands and communicate to their audience using a rational tone and highlighting functional characteristics of the offering (Swani et al, 2017). SM tools are being considered more as an interesting component of B2B marketing because of the roles of personal relationships and interaction in the B2B environment (Huotari, L., Ulkuniemi, P., Saraniemi, S., Mäläskä, M., 2015). Not only marketing communications and branding have emerged as important criterias of management in B2B marketing, but it also becomes more common for professionals to share content with brand communities (ibid). Social media is said to be beneficial and important in order to overcome resource limitations and to create new business opportunities mainly through collaboration, in particular for SMEs (Huotari et al., 2015). Furthermore, companies use SM with the goals of creating awareness, acquiring new customers, engaging with customers, creating interactions and conversations with actual and potential customers, creating a word-of-mouth (WOM) reputation, enhancing brand image, building leadership roles within



the industry, creating relationships with customers and stakeholders and forming networks (Salo, 2017; Eid, R., Abdelmoety, Z., Agag, G., 2019).

2.3 Benefits of SMM in Industrial Markets

To date, research has shown that social media sites are effectively and efficiently used for numerous B2B marketing activities. Maintaining communication with existing customers, providing support to the selling process, and building general awareness (which is related to branding presented in the section below) are marketing communications goals achieved through SMM identified in the industrial markets by Karjaluoto, Mustonen, and Ulkuniemi (2015). Customers and potential clients are becoming active participants in the communication process (ibid) and B2B marketers have a direct influence on them by adding new content, participating in discussions, and directly or indirectly controlling employee (e.g. salespeople) social media behaviour by training them to create desired content and perform marketing activities that is favorable to the company (Huotari, Ulkuniemi, Saraniemi, Mäläskä, 2015). Quinton and Wilson (2016), who focused their research efforts on LinkedIn, to show how social media networks are created, and if these networks allow for new business relationships. The authors consider social media as an opportunity for sharing and that the reach and spread of SM not only allows quick formation of relationships, but also upheld old relationships when needed (ibid). Further, Felix et al., (2017) explains that the objectives of social media marketing includes stimulating sales, increasing brand awareness, improving brand image, generating traffic to online platforms, reducing marketing costs and creating user interactivity on platforms by stimulating users to post and share content. Apart from this, companies can also utilize social media marketing in a more proactive way, e.g. that they can use SMM to monitor and analyse conversations on social media in order to understand how customers view their firms and its actions (Felix. R., Rauschnabel, P., Hinsch, C., 2017).

2.3.1 Benefits of SMM in B2B Branding

Branding has been of increasing interest in industrial marketing (Salo, 2017) and one of the first studies on industrial companies conducted in 2011 points to that B2B marketers successfully utilizes social media sites in order to identify and attract new business partners and new business opportunities (Michaelidou et al., 2011). Moreover, the authors of the study show that the majority of the companies use Social Media for three main purposes;



attracting new customers, developing relationships, and increasing brand awareness. In addition to that, Brennan & Croft (2012) identified two motives in social media participation in their study. One of the motives is that B2B social media pioneers strive to be seen as “thought leaders” to take a market driving role in their industry. This is enabled through the use of social media sites and applications which enhance a two-way communication between B2B companies and allows marketers to deepen relationships with industrial partners (Lacka, E., Chong, A., 2016). Kaplan and Haenlein, (2010) emphasizes that B2B marketing professionals effectively employ social media sites (SNS) in their branding strategies, which means that social media is not only beneficial for marketing purposes but also for branding since it helps companies to build a unique brand identity and loyalty (Kaplan, A., Haenlein, M., 2010). Buratti et al., 2018 mention in their research paper that SM enables firms to stimulate perceptions, attitudes and behavior through the accumulation of rational, emotional and social contexts. In some cases, they even become a platform where traditional branding practices are replaced by co-creation through the control of the signs and symbols that define the brands role in customers actual use and real life (Buratti et al., 2018). Relatedly, B2B marketers tend to promote their corporate brands more than their individual product brands and communicate to their audience using a rational tone highlighting functional characteristics of the offering (ibid). In business-to-business marketing relationships and interactions between sales representatives and customers play a fundamental role, not only in selling processes but also in post-selling activities. Most certainly, social media tools are becoming more of an interesting component of B2B marketing due to the roles of personal relationships and interactions in these markets (Mäläskä, M., Saraniemi, S., Tähtinen, J., 2011). However, it is not only marketing communications and branding that have emerged as important areas of management in B2B marketing, but it has also become more common for professionals to share content within brand communities (Huotari et al., 2015).

2.3.2 Social Media and Employer Branding

As prior research implies, social media has significant benefits on a firm's brand. Further, it is argued that social media is beneficial internally as well, more specifically it can be used for employer branding. Kaur, P., Sharma, S., Kaur, J., Sharma, S., (2015) mentioned in their research that, the utilization of social media channels such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter have paved a way for successfully reaching out to the potential employees by the firms



(Kaur et al., 2015). Furthermore, employer branding is defined as “a targeted long-term strategy to manage the awareness and perception of employees, potential employees, and related stakeholders with regard to a particular firm” (ibid). Thus, it has been found that the use of social media for a company’s human resources (HR) function facilitates in building the company’s employer brand and is beneficial for attracting the right talent for the firms. A recent study concluded that 18 countries agree that social media is the most effective and preferred channel in promoting and enhancing the employer’s brand (Davison, H., Maraist, C., Bing, N., 2011; Collins, J., Stevens, K., 2002; Kaplan, A., Haenlein, M., 2010; Kaur et al., 2015).

2.3.3 The difference between SMM in B2C and B2B Sales

Swani et al., (2014) mentions that in order to benefit from using SM in B2B it is of high importance to use both emotional and functional appeal in the messages communicated (Swani et al., 2014), together with combining the messages with the corporate brand name and informative content that links to the company’s website (Swani et al., 2017). Swani et al., (2014) further mentions that B2B companies usually prefer a combination of both emotional and functional characteristics associated with their company’s corporate brand rather than the specific product names as it facilitates to strengthen the customers relationship with the firm’s brand (ibid). In contrast, B2C markets should have more informative and directive messages towards the company’s website as the products and relationships with customers are perceived to be more complex (Swani et al., 2017).

Further, Holliman, G., Rowley, J., (2014) describes the informative part of B2B SM brands as “publishing” since their focal point is rather to assist rather than selling to customers by understanding their informative needs and considerations in their purchasing process (Holliman, G., Rowley, J., 2014).

2.3.4 Benefits of SMM in B2B Sales

The sales field has been focusing on social media since its raise (Salo, 2017), and the special interest was on the use of social media. SM has a role in deriving the sale through the sales process and is found to have a positive impact on sales performance (Andzulis, Panagopoulos, Rapp, 2012; Schultz, Schwepker, Good, 2012). Moreover, Agnihotri, Kothandaraman, Kashyap, and Singh (2012) argue that B2B salespeople can benefit from using SM in performing service behaviors like information sharing, customer service, and building trust which results in value creation. An example of how SM is used



in the sales process is provided by Schultz et al. (2012); stating that LinkedIn can be used for asking for references while building relationships. A salesperson's use of social media in a B2B context has an impact on information communication behaviors, which was found by Agnihotri, Dingus, Hu, and Krush (2016) to enhance sales responsiveness and customer satisfaction. Even key account managers use social media to connect with customers (Lacoste, 2016), and when connection was established, social media was used further to build the relationship. The pre-work was to build a reputation on SM before the connection was formed (ibid).

Social media can also be used by B2B companies in order to generate leads. Bodnar, K., Cohen, J., (2012) explains that leads are the lifeblood and success metric for every person working with B2B marketing and it serves as a foremost indicator of sales. Further, a lead is defined as “someone who raises his or her hand; a person who demonstrates interest in something that a business has to offer” (ibid). Further, it is explained that generating leads by using social media starts with three core elements that can be seen as the basics of the online lead generation process: offers, calls to action (CTAs), and landing page (Bodnar, K., Cohen, J., 2012, p.13).

2.4 Challenges of SMM in Industrial Markets

Despite the numerous advantages stated above from the use of social media sites by B2B marketing professionals, the challenges discussed in studied scholarly articles are significant enough to prevent B2B companies adopt SMM and enjoy its benefits. The authors conclude that there are major challenges for B2B companies in using SMM; the lack of resources in terms of skills, time, and expertise, as well as B2B companies perceiving SM irrelevant to the type of industry companies operate in (Siamagka et al, 2015; Michaelidou et al, 2011; Järvinen et al, 2012; Jussila et al, 2014). Employees lacking computing skills are not up-to date with the newest trends and do not know how to utilize SM to achieve business outcomes. As a result, Siamagka et al (2015) emphasize that this issue will lead to cost inefficiency. This is besides that many companies see social networking as irrelevant to the nature of the industries they operate in and cannot see or understand the benefits of using it (Jussila et al, 2014; Järvinen et al, 2012; Michaelidou et al, 2011). B2B organizations already have close relationships with customers and therefore have access to live experience from partners (Iankova et al, 2019), therefore some companies sense that they gain a poor return in investing in SM since it enables a relationship they already have (ibid).



2.4.1 Brand image

Social media can be influenced by a wide range of stakeholders (Andersson & Wikström, 2017), which is a privilege but a risk simultaneously. Instagram has proved to be hard to control in the study of Andersson & Wikström where they state that one company has faced problems controlling its brand where wrong connections have been attached to content, negatively affecting the brand. This risk is discussed furthermore by Siamagka et al (2015) where they argue that companies need to be careful how they use social media to bring out the desired image of the company rather than destroying the image. This is due to the fact that social media is a two-way communication (Michaelidou et al, 2011) so there is a risk of destroying the brand image if not handled carefully and correctly.

2.4.2 Measurements

Measuring the effectiveness of SMM is a major challenge in the B2B sector (Michaelidou et al, 2011; Järvinen et al, 2012; Brennan, Croft, 2012; Jussila et al, 2014, Salo, 2017; Dwivedi et al, 2019). The vast majority of social networking users do not evaluate the effectiveness of SMM resulting in marketing managers not able to provide data that shows the importance of SMM (Michaelidou et al., 2011). Attracting new customers prevailed as the most crucial reason for using social media, however, findings show that the metric comes only fourth among the most popular metrics (ibid). Accordingly, this illustrates the inconsistency between goals of SM use and metrics used to measure whether these goals have been achieved.

2.5 Theoretical Analysis of Findings

The theoretical framework is designed to cover all the aspects of social media that was discussed during the interviews and presented in the findings. The theoretical chapter will be used as a point of analysis whereas Social Media Marketing (SMM) is the main analytical concept of the paper and is used as an umbrella in the analysis chapter. Furthermore, the elaborated theory around the usage of SM, benefits of SM in different contexts, as well as the challenges of the concept will be used to interpret the findings from the conducted interviews. This was done to be able to conclude how decision-makers within marketing are viewing SMM usage in the B2B context, and which positive and negative sides they consider it having in relation to their marketing purposes.



3 Methodology

The purpose of this research paper will be to identify and describe SMM usage together with the positive and negative aspects of it in the B2B context, based on empirical data collected from decision-makers within marketing, operating in service-oriented international organizations located in Sweden. This research paper has taken a deductive approach by using the current literature in this area of research as a starting point, attempting to generate new theory to the literature of B2B SMM through the collection of empirical data from individuals practising it. This purpose is in line with requests from relevant studies of this area to develop the current research theories (Salo, 2017; Dwivedi, et al, 2019; Iankova et al, 2019). A qualitative approach was applied, and the structure and concepts used was based on recommendations presented by Bryman and Bell (2011), in their book *Business Research Methods*.

3.1.1 Design

To avoid having one-sided data, a cross-sectional design was applied, mainly since the usage of SMM might differ between organizations and thereby it could be unfair to draw conclusions merely based on one company. This would more likely give us more accurate data, as we could consider the patterns of what different organizations have in common in relation to the topic. It should also have given us more data to analyses, as most companies are likely to only have a few decision-makers within their marketing departments. Conducting an multiple-case study could also be an option, however as the focus lies on receiving relevant data from specific individuals, it will say decision-makers, the authors considered it to be too time-consuming to gather a large amount of data about each individual and their organization, and rather focusing on gathering more information from different decision-makers. Hence, rather having more perspective of the matter. The cross-sectional method also allows the researchers to identify what is unique and what is more common in each case, which according to Bryman and Bell, also encourage the use of theoretical reflections on the collected data (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The data was collected in a single point in time, based on 5 variables developed to identify patterns and association in the findings related to the purpose of this paper, which emerged from relevant theories related to SMM that is presented in the introduction and theoretical framework, which is in line which the cross-



sectional structure presented by Bryman and Bell (Bryman & Bell, 2011). These variables in turn formed our interview questions and a description can be found in *Table 1*.

Furthermore, Bryman & Bell emphasize the use of qualitative interviewing when conducting a cross-sectional study (Bryman & Bell, 2011), which is the intended method of data collection for this research paper, as it is recommended for further research within this area, based on the problem discussion presented.

3.1.2 Collection of Data

The empirical data was collected through semi-structured interviews, because the data collected was expected to be subjective it was recommended to use an open type of interviewing, as the goal is to capture the opinions of the participants Bryman & Bell recommends that the question should be kept open and rather be considered as guidelines than actual questions (Bryman & Bell, 2011). At the same time the idea was to keep the conversation within the frame of SMM and therefore an unstructured interview could lead us too far away from the subject intended, which other than semi-structured, is recommended for qualitative studies in general (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Furthermore, this type of data collection is considered important according to a relevant literature review, as studies within the topic have mainly been quantitative, and those of qualitative nature have mainly considered large questionnaires, and thereby in-depth interviews have been lacking (Dwivedi et al, 2019). The participants were reached out to through emails explaining the research and its purpose and the interviews were conducted through Zoom, which is a software providing videos conferencing with the ability to record the entire virtual meeting (Zoom.us, 2020). Thus, ensuring a high quality of recording to facilitate the transliteration of the information received, which is also of high importance according to Bryman and Bell. (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The interview questions used to keep the conversation within the frame of our research purpose can be found in *Appendix 1*. The participants were encouraged to speak freely, and the questions were only brought up by the authors if the participants did not touch the areas covered in each question.

3.1.2.1 Guidelines

Some general guidelines were taken into consideration regarding the interviews, based on what is stated by Bryman and Bell and those were as follows:



- Questions related to the topic and research questions was prepared beforehand, they were open and constructed to avoid being leading to an extent of keeping the conversation within the frame of our topic, and they were not placed in any order so that they could be changed based on the flow of each specific interview to avoid taking over the control of the conversations from the participants.
- As it is of importance to use a suitable language for the intended population, the language used was kept formal, as the researchers were targeting participants mainly located in senior management.
- The interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants and all types of disturbances such as background noises were considered and were kept to an as low minimum as possible, to ensure the quality of the conversations.
- Other than the conversation itself, the authors were taking notes of the process, observations and feelings captured during the interviews.

(Bryman et al, 2011).

3.1.3 Sampling

In order to conduct the study as intended the sample targeted needed to be quite specific, as they had to have a leading role within SMM decision-making within their organizations. Therefore, the method of purposive sampling presented by Bryman and Bell was applied, which implies that no random means are involved, and the participants are selected based on certain criteria (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Since this study is based on collecting qualitative data from a certain type of individuals, any type of random sampling would ruin the purpose. The usage of a non-probability sampling is quite common in business research which only has one respondent, likely in senior management, in the form of interviews related to their workplace or organization (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Which is the method used in this paper, with the exception of using two respondents from one of the organizations targeted, as both of them had decision-making roles within SMM in their company. Also, this paper was more focused on the individuals themselves than the organization they work for, although it will be considered as well. This method could lead to the participants giving portraits of the organizational practices that betrays the reality, as it may be one-sided and they might have a different view than other employees (Bryman & Bell, 2011). However, as the focus lied on the individual rather than the organization, this was not seen as a greater risk. Moreover, there is



always a risk of bias when conducting a non-probability sample, as the human judgement is likely to affect the selection process (Bryman & Bell, 2011). However, without taking this risk, this type of study could not be conducted, as the qualifications for participants were very specific.

The population targeted for sampling has been quite specifically targeted; the participants were individuals acting as decision-makers of SMM within marketing departments in B2B service-oriented organizations working with high-technological IT-systems. All the participants have one of the following positions: Head of Marketing & PR, Marketing Manager, Digital & Social Media Marketing Specialist. The organizations were all located in Sweden and are operating internationally and in the B2B sector. The reason for this type of sampling was mainly to make the interviews with the different participants more comparable, as they were working with similar services. Also, by focusing on companies with a high involvement of technology and IT, they are likely to be up to date with the usage of digital means, such as social media. Hence, we expected them to have a higher usage and more experience of SMM, in comparison to e.g. industrial production organizations.

3.1.3.1 Sampling Limitations

In order to strengthen the empirical findings gathered, several interviews are required to be able to draw conclusions. After conducting 7 interviews, the authors considered the empirical finding being similar enough to draw sufficient conclusions based on having reached an empirical saturation, as a majority of the participants had the same or similar answers to the questions asked. Since the main focus of this study was the specifically targeted individuals, within a given position and industry, the authors chose not to set any limit on the size of the organizations chosen for interviews more than being larger than a Micro-enterprise. Thus, excluding start-ups who might not yet have established their SMM, due to the risk of having very few resources. The definitions of the various organizational sizes can be found in *Appendix 2*, and a brief overview of each participant participating in this study, can be found in *Appendix 3*.

An acknowledged limitation is the risk of variation between different participants' situations depending on their organization's size, although we were considering this during the interpretation of data and found very few differences related to the participants' views of SMM and their companies' size.



3.1.4 Analysis of Data Collected

In accordance with Bryman and Bell, the coding of the data was made directly after the interviews had been finished, so that no important factors related to the findings or ideas would be lost that is unrelated to what was being record, such as the feelings and observations during the interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Thus, minimizing the loss of context and flow of the interview when interpreting the collected data (ibid). The information gathered from the participants was transcribed and organized based on which questions they had answered during the interview, as they were speaking quite freely, and was in turn put together in relation to the variables the questions were based upon. Thus, facilitating the process of finding patterns and locating the answers who stood out in the empirical findings. The empirical findings were then analyzed in comparison to each participant and to the concepts and theories presented in the previous literature, in order to gain a perspective of how decision-makers use and view SMM in practice. The similarities found in the empirical findings were then used to develop a general picture of B2B SMM usage which was evaluated based on existing theories to identify how it alters in relation to them, which is suggested to be efficient when connecting theory to practice in areas whom has been under researched (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The unique findings were also analyzed, in an attempt to discover why they stood out from theory and the majority of the empirical data collected.

3.1.5 Quality

Bryman and Bell emphasized that the most comprehensive checklist of criteria that should be of consideration in a qualitative study is the 18 question that are presented by Spencer et al (2003), and therefore the authors of this paper has used these criteria when constructing this research paper in order to ensure its quality (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The criteria's suggested by Spencer et al can be found in the *Appendix 4*. This criteria is evaluating the trustworthiness (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) and authenticity of a research paper, which is considered important aspects by Bryman and Bell, however it is argued that qualitative research should not be using checklists as they are making the investigations to prescriptive by some researchers while other argue that it could be used in that manner (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Therefore, we chose to use these criteria as guidelines rather than as a checklist to an as far extent as possible, as it is debated if it can actually be used that way and Spencer et al also explains that



this criteria was never promoted as a checklist (cited by Bryman & Bell, 2011). The criteria are based on consultation with researchers within the field of business research together, Bryman being one of them, together with already existing schemes (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

3.1.6 Ethics

To ensure that the population was not being harmed in anyway during this research, the authors decided to use following recommendation present by Bryman & Bell, 2011 to maintain the reputation of social research and not jeopardize its trust from our society:

- The participants were asked if they preferred to be kept anonymous or not, and the risk of getting exposed was carefully explained as this particular study has quite few individuals from high positions involved, which means that they could risk being exposed even though they are kept anonymous.
- A third party, in the form of a teacher from Linnaeus university reviewed the research plan and ensured that it is not harmful towards the participants.
- The purpose and aim of the study were carefully explained to the participants and if they chose to, they could change their mind and terminate their participation at any time.
- The participant could choose to not to answer questions they found inappropriate and could at any time ask for any parts of the interview to not be recorded.
- All personal data collected was handled in accordance with the general data protection regulation (GDPR).

(Bryman & Bell, 2011).

The guidelines presented are in line with the four main areas presented by Bryman and Bell when it comes to ethical principles, which prevents harming participants, ensures that we receive an informed consent of participants, avoids invading the participants privacy without their consent, and eliminates possible deceptions. Hence, each criterion is based on suggestions found in their literature, considering all four areas of ethics.

3.1.7 3.7 Operationalization

In order to be able to fulfil the purpose of this research paper in a structured manner, the main concept was divided into variables, which in turn was



translated into operational definitions in the form of interview questions. These questions formed the basis for our interview guide, which was used to gain relevant information from the population contributing to this study. The variables were developed to highlight the main areas of B2B SMM which will be considered in this study and to clarify the meaning of usage, positive sides and negative sides of SMM. The same variables were applied in the construction of the theoretical framework presented earlier, in order to facilitate the process of interpreting the data by applying the theoretical aspects of the variables in relation to the different aspects analyzed from each individual in our sample of population. Thus, ensuring that the interviews and the information gathered is in line with the purpose of the study throughout the process. For the readers convenience, a hierarchy table describing the operationalization and its details can be found in *Table 1* on the following page.

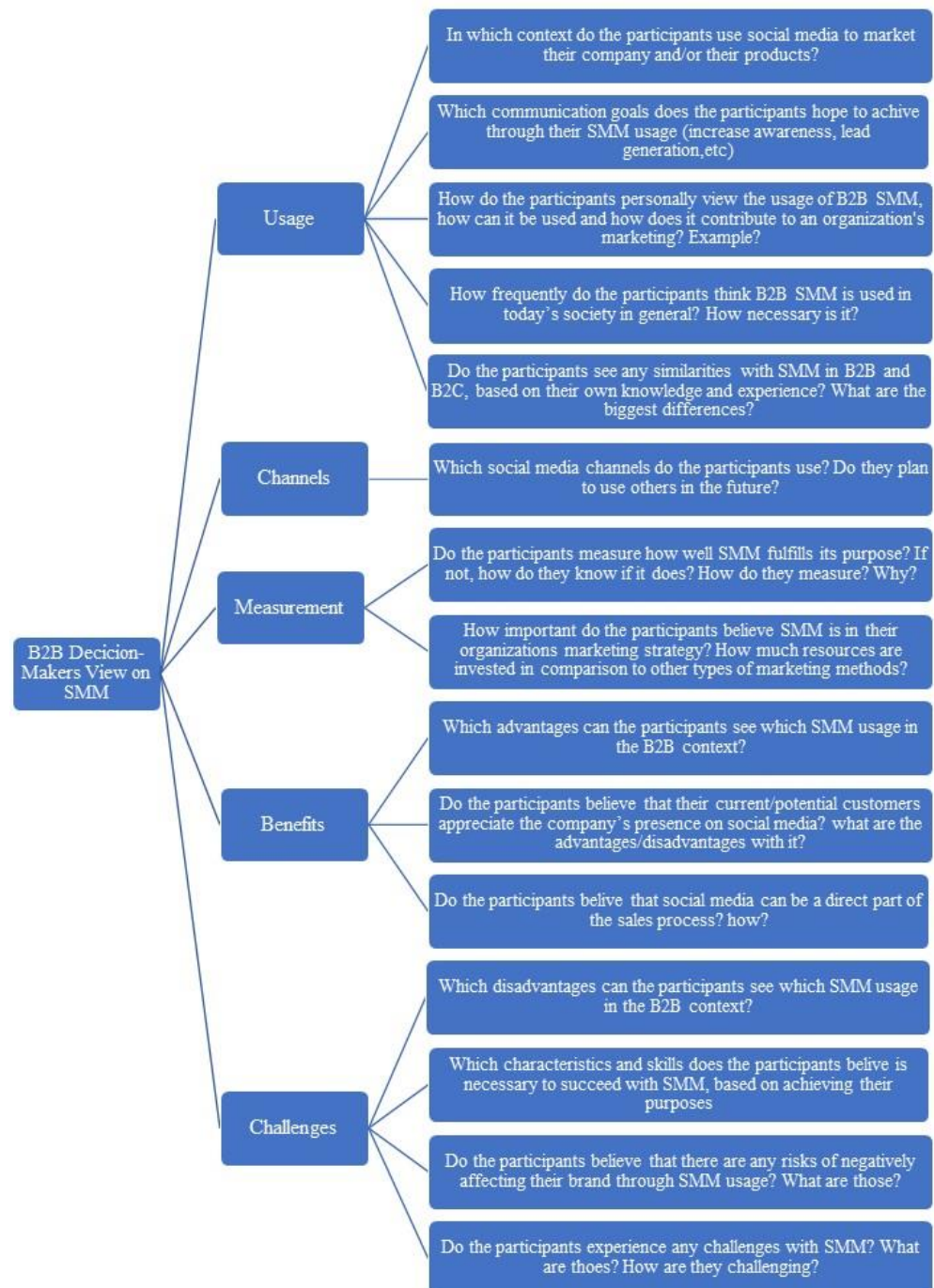


Table 1: Operationalization Chart



3.1.8 3.8 Work Process & Individual Contributions

The process of writing this bachelor-thesis has largely been conducted in the following manner:

1. The authors collected data from various articles related to the topic of this paper, in order to gain insight on the subject and gather theoretical data for the framework and introduction.
2. The authors chose a research method based on the findings related to the topic and requests for future research methods found in recent scientific articles.
3. Based on the method chosen, an interview-guide was conducted and revised by the tutorer before contacting individuals targeted for interviewing.
4. The interviews were then conducted through Zoom and all authors participated. The interviews were recorded, notes were taken, and follow-up questions were asked.
5. The interviews were transcribed in relation to each of the variables connected to the research question in the Operationalization, and the most relevant information connected to this study was put together in the Empirical Findings.
6. The Empirical findings were analyzed in relation to the different participants and the theoretical framework and based on discussions in the analysis, conclusions were drawn.

The authors were assigned different parts of the research paper, which can be seen below. Although, everything was correlated and discussed together before finishing each chapter.

- Introduction - Månsson
- Theoretical Framework - Shahan & Gharanfoli
- Methodology - Månsson
- Empirical Findings - Månsson, Shahan & Gharanfoli
- Analysis - Månsson, Shahan & Gharanfoli
- Conclusion - Månsson, Shahan & Gharanfoli



4 Empirical Findings

This is where the findings of the conducted interviews are presented. The chapter is structured in line with the operationalization of the research to make it easier for the reader to follow the findings. All participants are kept anonymous to prevent any type of harm; however, their different positions can be found in the *APPENDIX 2*.

4.1 Usage

4.1.1 Usage - SMM Purposes

Based on the responses we got from our 7 participants we could clearly understand that Social Media is used by the interviewed individuals mainly to achieve three objectives, these are: Brand Awareness, Lead Generation and Employer Branding. 4 out of 7 participants shares the opinion that SM is used for increasing their brand awareness whilst all respondents except two uses SM primarily for lead generation and finally two of the participants use SM mostly for employer branding purposes.

“We mostly use LinkedIn since we perceive it as being the most reliable platform when it comes to B2B. We perceive it as the social media platform that is most business-oriented and LinkedIn is the only platform where we use paid advertising, whilst we also have presence on Facebook and Instagram as well but we mainly use those two for Employer Branding and Brand Awareness since they have a wider reach and images/videos can be used to share content about our company.” - Participant 1

Participants 2, 4, 5 and 6 share the same opinion as above stated from participant 1, LinkedIn is used more frequently, and they perceive it as being the most business-oriented social media platform.

Participant 1 further mentions: *“Except using LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram we use a social media platform called Xin. Xin is the German equivalent for LinkedIn and we mostly use it to reach out to German businesspeople and companies.”*



As for participant 3, the person mentions: *'LinkedIn is mostly used for employer branding purposes whilst we use Facebook and Instagram for branding purposes, such as increasing our brand awareness. Apart from that we also use a platform called WeChat for the Chinese market, which can be seen as a similar platform as Facebook.'*

Another clear similarity that all the respondents share is that they combine both organic and paid ads, however it differs based on what social media platform they are most active on and how well it fulfils their goals and purposes. Hence, all participants use paid and organic advertisement, but to different extents due to how well it fulfils their marketing objectives.

'Social media has become a very important component for us when it comes to communication. We have become more and more digitized lately, not least due to the current situation in the world with the Coronavirus of which we see an increased presence on our social media channels. Therefore, we try to combine both paid and organic advertising in order to reach and target our customer segments. I would assume that we allocate approximately 25% of our marketing budget for social media marketing.' - Participant 3.

'Social media for us is super important since we only market ourselves through social media at the moment. This due to the fact that it is cheap and cost effective in comparison to other types of marketing. Hence, we allocate 100% of our marketing budget and resources for marketing and advertising through social media.' - Participant 5.

Participant 7 shares its unique opinion by saying: *'We mostly use Facebook and Instagram, this due to that it fits our target group the most. We are also active on YouTube and Twitter where we only post supporting content. At the moment we use LinkedIn, but we have encountered that our usage of this platform is significantly lower than other B2B companies, especially in our line of work. Thus, we have decided to increase our usage and activity on LinkedIn in the future. We have also analyzed that Snapchat and TikTok would be possible to use in the future'*



4.1.2 Usage - Personal view of Participants

As for the participants personal view on to what extent B2B companies utilize SM for marketing activities we can see some differences. Almost all the participants have their own opinion. Participant 1 states that SM is important for B2B companies since it allows them to not be stuck in rational communication which means that companies do not have to specify their information and communication messages to specific targets.

“ A very general issue is that many companies get stuck in rational communication where they do not specify themselves to their target markets specific usage of social media. It is very common that companies communicate the same information everywhere (communicating the same message on all the platforms) which easily hits wrong, therefore we use LinkedIn since we are sure that the target group are there and we can ‘meet’ them more personally. ” - Participant 1

Participant 2 points out that it is of high importance to be seen on SM and also highlights that it is important for companies to develop their own platforms. The person also mentioned that SM works very well to build a company's brand as well as to get fast responses from end users.

“It is very important nowadays to be seen on social media. It is also very crucial to be able to develop your own platforms. Social media works very good in the sense of building your brand and to get a fast response from end-users. However, since the competition is tough, social media requires lots of effort in order to become successful. Primarily, we have seen that companies lack the right resources for SM, and it requires that you have the right tools in order to build your brand, which can be very resource demanding. ” - Participant 2.

As for participant 3's personal view was a bit different from the others. The participant states that the usage of SM is rather based on what the industry the company is operating in than agreeing that all companies are present and/or active on social media in one way or another. An example is also given where the participant means that production and industrial companies are not as dependent on social media as e.g. high-tech or IT companies. However, the person points out that some sort of social media presence is



still important since there is a risk of losing or missing potential customers if the company lacks presence on SM.

4.1.3 Usage - SMM Frequency

As for the participants' understanding of how frequently SM is used in today's B2B environment, they all agreed upon one thing: None of the participants believe that there is a single company that does not have some sort of social media presence even though it might differ to what extent it is used.

Participant 1 highlights the fact that the bigger the company is, the more important SM becomes, and the more resources shall be allocated for SM.

“ I have a hard time believing that there is a single B2B company that does not use social media, and I would say it is almost a ‘must have’ in order to be a strong and serious actor today. The most important part for companies today is to stand out from the crowd. I also believe that the bigger the enterprise is, the more important social media becomes for their operations. ” - Participant 1

As for the second participant, we can interpret the same as above, that they agree upon the fact that SM is highly crucial for companies and also refers to their own company where it directly facilitates sales since some of their sales leads are generated through social media.

“ I absolutely believe that it is necessary to be present and seen on social media as a B2B company today, not least since the opportunities are huge. I would say that it is a very bad risk to not be active on SM today, no matter if you are a B2B or B2C company. It seems like most of the companies are fast with adapting to new trends whilst the companies that aren't frequently using social media are less innovative and do not update their social media as often. For us, SM is very important since it generates both leads and sales, even though we also generate sales through our sales team, of course. ” - Participant 2, that agrees with the above statement from participant 1 in regard to how frequently SM is used in today's B2B society.



Participants 3 and 4 agree that in the upcoming years SM will be of even higher importance and customers usually check out company's social media pages before contacting them for further business, in particular LinkedIn since it is more business oriented. Further, participant 4 mentioned that social media is of such high importance in their company that their team of marketing managers spend at least one hour per week to analyse their shared content since they believe that it is proven that people do research on the internet before deciding to proceed with the purchase.

“ We interpret that the usage of social media has doubled the past 2-3 years amongst B2B companies. Earlier there weren't so many companies that were active on social media, but today, we can see a significant increase which has also led to higher competition. It is highly crucial to deliver relevant information since it encourages customers to purchase, this due to that we believe that it has become more common that people look up companies and/or products before they actually decide to get in contact with them.” - Participant 3.

Participant 4 agrees to the above by saying: *“ Social media is very important; it has a very big purpose and the usage of SM has sky rocked in the past years. We can see that B2B decision makers allocate at least one hour per week to analyses and interpret their companies' content on social media, based on a research that we recently found. It is also proven that people tend to do research on the internet before they purchase something, which is another reason why it is important to be seen, even as a B2B company.”*

Participants 5, 6 and 7 agreed that social media is used very frequently and in particular the participants mentioned LinkedIn and Facebook that is used on a daily basis to advertise products and services. The respondents share the opinion that SM is very important since it creates a wide viral spread and potential customers tend to contact salespeople after finding their advertising on different social media channels. Further, participants 5, 6 and 7 agreed by stating:

“Social media is our main communication channel and we are currently most using it for creating brand awareness. I believe that it is important to



have some sort of digital communication, however, it might depend on what type of industry you are operating in. By not using social media you will most certainly lose out on some of your target groups since almost everyone uses social media today, in one way or the other.'' - Participant 5.

'' Social media is used all the time, every day. LinkedIn is more targeted towards B2B whilst Facebook and Instagram are more frequently used by B2C companies, but of course B2B companies use these platforms as well. Everyone that I know within the industry utilizes social media on a daily basis in order to market themselves. It is very important today since you have to be where the people are in order to reach as many as possible. Therefore, I believe that you lose a lot by not using social media.'' - Participant 6.

''In one way or the other, social media is important, but I would say it is also very dependent on the company itself. It is always important to be seen and heard, whereas social media is the place where you can be seen and heard in today's modern world. Personally, I spend approximately half of my working time on social media and I work with all types of digital marketing.'' - Participant 7.

4.1.4 Usage - B2C vs B2B

The differences in SM usage in B2C and B2B companies differs a lot. Thus, all the participants share the same basic understanding, that B2C companies can create more viral and ''fun'' content on social media whilst B2B companies need to have a stricter and formal tone as well as being more serious in order to be perceived as professional. It is also mentioned that B2C companies communicate more towards the individual consumer and their advertising becomes more emotional rather than rational.

''I would say that the biggest difference is that B2C companies are able to create and share more viral and fun content while B2B companies have to be more professional and formal in order to be perceived as serious. Therefore, it can sometimes be hard to ''be real'' in B2B marketing through social media since it feels a bit contrived.'' Participant 1.



Participant 2 shares the same opinion as participant 1 and mentions: *“The difference is that B2C companies are more capable of talking to the individual and what is around their sphere. Thus, B2B companies ‘talk’ more to the title, which leads to being more formal. I believe that B2C is more emotional and innovative and exists in a higher frequency. However, I personally believe that B2B companies should think more in line with B2C companies and make their social media marketing and advertising much more emotional and individual than it is today.”* - Participant 2

Participant 3 interprets it differently and argues that instead many similarities can be found in B2B and B2C social media marketing. Further, the participant also mentions that the end goal is to communicate to a person that is behind the screen, no matter what sector they are working in. Hence, companies operating in both sectors shall be personal, open and creative in their publications on social media.

“We are able to see more and more similarities lately. Even though you target the B2B sector, there is still a person behind the screen that you shall always strive to reach at the end of the day. Therefore, it is very important to be personal and open for dialogues regarding whatever you publish even within B2B. While B2C companies' purpose of using SM is to sell their products, I would say that B2B companies mostly use social media to create brand awareness and not as much for selling purposes as B2C organizations.” Participant 3

Based on above statements, the participants argue that B2C companies' end result is to generate purchases through their social media marketing whilst B2B companies are more pointed towards increasing brand awareness which results in sales further in the process. All participants except participant 3 agree upon that B2C generally has a more informal and relaxed tone when they communicate on SM and hence differs mainly in their way of communicating.



4.2 Channels

All 7 participants were users of the social media channels LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. Participant 1 also used a German channel called Xin, Participant 3 a Chinese channel called WeChat and Pinterest, and both Participant 3 & 6 used YouTube.

“We are currently using Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook, and we are currently looking into other modern channels such as TikTok and snapchat, although they do not seem to suit our concept at the moment. We would gladly use more platforms in the future. however currently we haven't found anyone else that feels relevant to us”. - Participant 1

“We are currently using LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. I am personally allergic to the usage of too many social media channels just to be seen and rather use few with a clear purpose and an identified target group.” - Participant 2

The participants were all open to using more social media channels in the future, although the importance of having a purpose and finding channels relevant for the organization's services was of high importance.

The majority of the participant stated that LinkedIn was their most used social media channel:

“We mostly use LinkedIn, as it is the most trusted service when it comes to B2B - Participant 4

“First and foremost, we use LinkedIn, but we also use Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, and YouTube, although we are less active there” - Participant 5

“Our largest channel is LinkedIn, that's the one we put most effort into and where we see the biggest increases in followers” - Participant 6

The only participant not having LinkedIn as their main social media channel was participant 7:



“We mostly use Facebook and Instagram but are also active on YouTube where we post some support material. We also use LinkedIn, although not as much, but we do have plans to use it more in the future” - Participant 7 When asked how come they were not using LinkedIn as much as the other channel participant 7 answered:

“Because many of our customers are small-business owners, they can be seen as both entrepreneurs and private persons and we are using Facebook and Instagram to reach out to them as private persons, as those are channels usually used in private. While LinkedIn is used more in business purposes” - Participant 7

4.3 Measurement

When talking about purposes of SMM usage, the participants brought up lead generation and brand awareness as the most important factors, thus they were asked how they measure how well they reached their purposes in those factors.

4.3.1 Lead Generation

The participants of this study all seemed to have similar ways of measuring how well their SMM were performing and how well it fulfilled its purpose when it came to generating leads and none of them expressed any major difficulties of measuring it when asked.

“We are currently measuring our leads by counting how many visitors we have on our social media channels, how many followers we have, how much is shared, and how much traffic there is in general” - Participant 1

All participants were measuring traffic, and different types of engagements on their social media sites, such as followers, clicks, shares, etc., through the social media channels own analytical tools and explained it similarly as participant 1. Participant 2, 3, and 6 each had something unique to add regarding their measurements:



“One way we are measuring in, is by calculating how much a lead is worth and where it comes from, and by doing so we can see if the leads generated from social media channels weights up to the costs of using it” - Participant 2

“We measure how many people visits our website through social media, and then how many of those how then contacts us after visiting our website” - Participant 3

“We are also encouraging our employees to use their own social media to share and spread our content, which we also measure in similar ways - Participant 6

Respondents 4 & 6 were also mentioning the usage of Google Analytics among other paid services, as a way of measuring the traffic on their websites, which they argued being a more detailed tool than the built-in ones on Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram:

“Every channel has functions where we can see statistics of the traffic occurring, but we also use other types of paid services such as Google Analytics to measure the traffic more in depth.” - Participant 4

The importance of customers actually engaging in the social media content was emphasized by all of the participants and respondent 4 & 6 expressed it as:

“Most importantly is to be aware of engagement and click through rate, just because you have lots of views and followers doesn’t mean that they are active and engaging in what you post”. - Participant 4

“We have managers measuring how many people who take part in our different campaigns, on both Instagram and Facebook”. - Participant 6

4.3.2 Brand Awareness

None of the participants were measuring brand awareness, except for participant 1, 4 & 7 (4 being part of the same organization as 1), who had done so by using large surveys to uncover how well-known they were among a targeted group of individuals, although all of them expressed it as a difficult task:



“Brand awareness is very hard to measure and the only way we are aware of is to pay for surveys to examine how many are aware of us and our brand, although it costs a lot of money and we are not currently using it.” -

Participant 1

“Brand awareness can be very challenging to measure, i know that we have been using some surveys before, to measure how many people know about us, although I am not involved in those.” -

Participant 7

Although few measured social media effectiveness on brand awareness, they all claimed that it was having a positive impact.

4.3.3 SMM as a part of the marketing strategy

All 7 participants agreed that SMM is of high importance in their marketing strategies, particularly since everyone is using it in today's digitalized society.

“Today social media is very relevant, as it is modern and new to B2B, and everyone is using it” -

Participant 1

The amount of resources put into social media in relation to other parts of their marketing strategies varied quite a bit. Participant 5 & 6 only used SMM to market themselves, while 1 & 4 used around 1/10, participant 2 around ½ and participant 3 ¼, while Participant 7 was unsure.

“To market yourself through social medias can be quite costly and can therefore be compare to any other marketing tool, because you need paid advertising to reach out” -

Participant 7

Participants 1, 2, 3 & 4 recognized the need for increased SMM due to the rapid development of digitalization and its usage, which will likely lead to social media taking up a greater part of their marketing resources in the future:

“Personally, I believe it is important to keep a balance between different method of marketing, but it goes more and more towards the digital ways, and SMM is likely to increase” -

Participant 4

Furthermore, all of the respondents used and advocated the use of organic SMM to be able to market their brand and products for free, although the



need for paid advertising was suggested to be required in order to reach its full potential:

“Today, the reach is very low if you do not use paid social media advertisements, and that is why you have to use it more or less, if you do not have a very committed target group who willingly follows your activities” - Participant 7

4.4 Benefits of SMM

It was very clear during the interviews that all the 7 participants shared the same opinion about social media being an easy and efficient tool to reach out to their targeted public. Participant 1 said that digitalization of a company in general increases availability and emphasized the importance of being present on social media, whereas the other participants shared more or less the same view. The participants view SM as a tool to increase the company's presence, awareness, and an easy way to address a specific segment. Participants 2-4 described the phenomena as very cost efficient in relation to how many people you reach out to comparing it to other advertising ways as Google ads. A big advantage of SM as described by participant 5 & 6 is that it is easy to track the people engaging with your content and analyse what kind of content they like, making it easier to create posts and content that will draw the targeted public's attention.

“The biggest benefit is that you create a face for the company, which makes it easier to find a connection to the brand. It is psychological that one wants to relate to a brand. It is of importance within B2B that you create a story in order to make the demand more concrete for your customers. It helps in building relationships with your clients which results in increased trust and awareness.” - Participant 4

“Everyone is present on social media nowadays, so you reach out to lots of people. You can even pay to target a specific group, which makes Social Media very accurate.” - Participant 7

We could also understand that current customers see value from the company's presence on SM. 6 out of 7 participants agreed that SM usage creates value for current clients as well. Accordingly, it proves for them that the company is present and has exceptional competence that can solve their



problems. Participant 2 explained that their presence on SM is not that important for their customers. Although many clients read and follow their content, they would not care that much if the company would stop posting. When participant 7 was asked if their current/potential customers appreciate their presence on SM, this was her response:

“Yes, based on that we have a lot of traffic on our web and high viewing on our videos. I believe that our customers mostly appreciate the knowledge and inspiration we share on our platforms.” - Participant 7

4.4.1 Benefits of SMM in Sales

From a sales perspective, all the participants saw that SM can be beneficial in the sales process, but in different ways. Participant 1 said that many of the salespeople use social media, mostly LinkedIn, to communicate with prospects. They even use it as an “ice-breaker” by reading about a certain prospect and based on the visible information, start a conversation. Participant 2, 4, & 5 viewed it as a way of processing a lead. However, participant 5 was very keen on saying that the company does not sell through SM but only cold calling. Meaning that the salesperson can use SM to get a hint and see what the prospect has been looking for and know its interests and demands, that of course is beneficial and facilitating in the sales process. Participant 3 believes that being present on Social Media increases sales although the company has not measured it, but the belief comes from the increased trust that is enabled from SM and the ability to show competence on the social channels. Participant 6 said that the sales team uses LinkedIn on a daily basis to send messages and create contact with new potential customers.

“The sales team uses LinkedIn daily to send messages and get in contact with current and potential customers. It is even through the platform we have found the majority of our customers. We use ad campaigns on LinkedIn constantly, where we measure clicks, bookings, and those who sign up for free trials, which the sales team can see and contact those who seem interested.” - Participant 7

Participant 7 explained that the salespeople sometimes come in contact with customers through social channels, mentioning LinkedIn. She further explained that they sometimes make advertisements where they sell straight



through social media, as their product is for small companies procurable without the need of a salesforce. But that is accordingly not the main purpose, rather building relationships and increasing awareness.

4.5 Challenges of SMM

The participants also experience challenges, disadvantages, and risks with the phenomena that were uncovered during the conducted interviews. We found that being unique, and standing out from the crowd, were significant and common challenges for participants 1, 2, 4, 5 & 7. The participants experience that nowadays there is a lot of competition on SM between B2B companies, which makes it more challenging to be unique, and provide the targeted audience with real, valuable and interesting content.

This was firstly explained: *“Challenges can be to reach out in the noise, to be real, and not focus a lot on selling. Since we have seen that best-practice is to attract new customers through spreading knowledge about our services rather than selling them.”* - Participant 1

“It is even hard to adjust the offer to those who follow you on social media. You get easily lost between the noise since there is a lot of content on social media resulting in it being very hard to stand out as a B2B company from the crowd.” - Participant 2

“There is a consistent noise on SM which makes it very hard for us to stand out from the crowd among all B2B companies, since there are many other companies saying the same thing.” - Participant 5

“The hardest is to reach out from the noise, since there are a lot of companies that do ads on SM. It was easier before, but it gets more and more over time. The reach is pretty low if you do not pay, and therefore you have to use paid ads if you do not have a very engaged target group that follows your activities.” - Participant 7

It was even perceived as a challenge to engage people with what is published: *“My biggest challenge is to engage people with what we publish. It is important to measure and to look at all different posts one chooses to publish to understand why some get better response than others. Then you need to*



uncover the reasons behind and based on that follow-up with the type of content that works best.'' - Participant 6

Being creative, and innovative: *‘It is hard to be creative within B2B campaigns, as you are required to be formal. You need to depend a lot on creating your own content, since you cannot involve customers as in B2C, but depend on your own content. Which requires one to be very creative and innovative.’* - Participant 5

4.5.1 4.5.1 Necessary skills/characteristics for SMM

The authors asked every participant what skills they see are necessary for achieving marketing purposes with SMM. It was firstly explained by participant 1 that it is very hard to keep in pace with technology of SMM trends as they evolve rapidly. When asked about the skills:

‘It is important to be communicative and have a communicative thinking related to how one uses social media. One needs to know the tools themselves and know what possibilities and alternatives that exist and are relevant in different situations. Therefore, it is important with experience in using it.’ - Participant 1

The importance of knowing the brand and understanding it in the right way: *‘It is important that one is good at knowing the brand and understanding it correctly, simultaneously with being innovative and being able to stand out from the crowd.’* - Participant 2

Participant 3 mentioned that it is crucial to have a policy for the usage of social media, so the employees only communicate what the company sees appropriate. Defining employees as ambassadors of the company on social media. Moreover, she explained that the most important thing is that one needs to follow the trends and know what type of content that creates interest.

‘For me it is a bit like behavior science, you should not do a post but rather think that it is human beings that are going to read this.’ - Participant 4



Furthermore, participant 4 mentioned that one needs to be analytical and follow up results to know what works best.

Participant 5 focused mostly on the computing skills, mentioning that one needs to be multiskilled, being able to edit pictures and videos. However, she shared the opinion of participant 3 that one needs to follow the trends.

Participant 6 explained that creativity and innovatively are needed skills to be able to stand out from the crowd, whereas participant 7 said that SMM does not differ that much from other marketing tools. Saying that one needs to be aware of brand building and marketing, just as with other marketing tools.

4.5.2 Disadvantages of SMM

We could even understand during the interviews with participant 1, 3, 5 & 6 that SM presence is very time consuming, and that it requires one to be active constantly. This was said by them when asked about disadvantages with the phenomena. It is according to participant 6, very time consuming since it requires an accurate plan to make it work and achieve its purposes.

“One needs to be active constantly to be aware of what is happening on social media, so you can quickly respond to feedback, negativity, and conflicts that can be associated with your brand. It also requires a lot of time to build up content, which can lead to consumption of a lot of resources.” - Participant 3

“The company gets a lot of errands which are hard to deal with, since it is hard to be available all the time as social media makes it appear.” Participant 1

4.5.3 Risks with SMM

When asked about the risks, we found that 5 out of 7 participants see direct risks of affecting the brand with SMM. Participant 4 did not mention any concrete risks but rather that it is important to not post stuff just because others do it and instead mark what you want to post, referring to it as a challenge. Meaning that SMM is less risky than other marketing channels. Whereas participant 7 just said that the risk is not that significant compared to other marketing tools. Participant 1 talked about the inability to control how the content you publish is distributed as a risk since there can be many negative comments that can negatively affect the brand. Participant 2 touched



the area of being seen unprofessional if the posts published have not been well prepared.

“What can be risky is not only the usage, but also how the company is active on social media. It is very hard to control what happens and how people use one’s social media, as there are many users with access, like customers, competitors, employees, etc. You don’t really know what can be published and must therefore be quick with replies and accurate with over watching your SM.” - Participant 3

Participant 5 explained further that it is of importance to be accurate with what you publish and adjust it to the channel you use and the target group, in order to avoid misunderstandings and association to wrong contexts.

“There is always a risk with social media, as you only can control what you publish but not how it is distributed and reacted on. There is always a risk for dissatisfying comments and requires therefore monitoring and presence all the time.” - Participant 6

5 Analysis

5.1 SMM Usage

The usage of social media by decision-makers in this study is similar to what can be seen in the theory where social media is mainly used as an communication channel where companies can reach out to millions of customers with brand related content to engage them in conversations (Hanna et al., 2011). The world is becoming more and more digital and the use of social media therefore requires an updated explanation of integrated marketing communications (Andersson, S., Wikström, N., 2017). Thus, communication through SM is perceived as different from traditional marketing and shall be adjusted so that companies can increase their capacity by using it (ibid). The above statements correlate with the participants view on social media usage in a B2B context. All the interviewed decision-makers that participated in the study shared the same basic opinion regarding the usage of social media, which is that they would like to achieve mainly three objectives with their utilization of SM, which is increasing brand awareness, lead generation and employer branding. Based on the results of our



interviews, we can see that all participants use social media for branding purposes, in particular for increasing brand awareness. Participants 3 and 4 also mentioned using SM for Employer branding and all participants utilize SM to generate leads.

As mentioned earlier in the empirical chapter, participant 5 also mentions that the usage of SM might differ based on what industry the company is operating in and to what extent it is relevant for them to advertise through SM rather than other digital communication channels.

In particular, participant 3 mentions that *‘‘Social media has become a very important component for us when it comes to communication. We have become more digitized lately, [...], of which we can see an increased presence on our social media channels.’’* This statement by participant 3 matches what can be found in the theory by both Hanna et al., (2011) and Andersson, S., Wikström N., (2017) that points to the fact that social media has become a very important part of company communications with customers, not least due to that the world is evolving fast and becoming more digital day by day (Hanna et al., 2011; Andersson, S., Wikström, N., 2017). Further, Swani et al., (2017) mentions that B2B offerings are often perceived as more technological and utilitarian. Also, B2B marketers tend to promote their corporate brands more than their individual products whilst communicating to their audience using a more rational tone and highlighting functional characteristics of the offering (Swani et al., 2017).

This statement is almost exactly the same as how our participants view the usage of B2B social media marketing vs B2C social media marketing. The majority of our participants agree that B2B companies use social media to communicate more seriously and professionally. Further, the participants agree upon the fact that B2C companies are able to create and share more informal and emotional content which often becomes more viral and fun while B2B companies have to be more formal in their ‘‘tone’’ when communicating through social media, which can sometimes be perceived as contrived. This can further be elaborated on since Swani et al., (2017) mention, as earlier stated that B2B offerings are more often perceived as being more technical and utilitarian and B2B buyers tend to use more formal and generally longer group buying processes. The authors further mention that B2B marketers tend to promote their corporate brands more than their individual product brands. Hence, B2B marketers communicate to their audience by using a more rational tone that rather focuses on the functional characteristics of the offering (Swani et al., 2017)



Also, some of our participants, more specifically participants 1, 2, 5 and 6 mentions that B2B companies talk more to the person's professional title rather than the individual and that B2C companies due to this fact are able to be more emotional and innovative in their communication, which makes it easy for them to be perceived as “real” and genuine in their marketing. They also mention that B2C companies can be more personal and emotional which makes their content funnier and more viral. As for participants 3 and 4, they mention that they believe there shall not be any difference between B2C and B2B since the end-goals are to reach the individual behind the screen and participant 7 passed on the question since the person was not sure about the differences.

Further, as mentioned by Swani et al., (2017), B2B companies tend to use social media more to market their brand and to increase their brand awareness whilst B2C companies focus more on selling their companies' products and services (Swani et al., 2017). This is correlating with participant 3 that said: *“While B2C companies' purpose of using SM is to sell their products, I would say that B2B companies mostly use social media in order to create brand awareness rather than for selling purposes as B2C organizations usually do.”*

The most unique answer that stands out from the rest in regard to the usage of SM is participants 3's view. The person mentions that they are able to see more similarities today between the usage of SM in B2C and B2B sectors. The person argues that no matter what sector the company is operating in, there is still a person behind the screen that receives the message and therefore the company, no matter if it is a B2C or B2B company should be more personal and open in its communication, since it has to stimulate a person at the end of the day. To further elaborate on this, we can see that Swani et al., (2014) emphasizes upon that using SM as a B2B company, it is important to consider both functional and emotional appeal in the messages, but also to link these messages with the corporate brand name and informative content to the company's official website in order to gain credibility (Swani et al., 2014; Swani et al., 2017). B2B companies seem to prefer a combination of both emotional and functional appeal that is associated with the company's brand rather than specific product names since it strengthens the customers relationship with the company and brand (Swani et al., 2014). However, In B2C markets, the focal point of the messages should rather be more informative and directed towards the company's website and its products (Swani et al., 2017).



As we can see, both from the other participants and from what is mentioned in the theory, this point of view is very much different from the others. Whilst both theory and the other participants argue that there are significant differences in the usage of SM in B2C and B2B and that their approach and end goals differ, participant 3 has its own opinion. The participant advocates that B2B communication should also be emotional and further mentions there shall not differ in how companies communicate, no matter if they are operating within B2C or B2B sector since the end goal of the marketing communication is to reach the individual behind the screen. However, the person indicates that there are some differences in B2B and B2C marketing communication through social media and agrees upon that B2B are more talking to the title and is usually more formal in tone.

Participant 2 shares to some extent the same thought as participant 3, but agrees that B2B companies use a more formal, strict and serious tone in their communication. However, her personal point of view is that B2B companies could aim for being more in line with B2C company's communication whereas she refers to that the communication has the possibility to be a little bit more individual and emotional.

Even though authors still calls for more papers and research in regards to social media in the B2B context, researchers have identified that innovative B2B marketers that have established a good company presence on social media are more likely to invest further in social media usage and, it also appears that B2B marketers are starting to realize the value of social media (Michaelidou et al., 2011; Veldman, C., Van Praet, E., Mechant, P., 2015; Brennan, R., Croft, R., 2012). When asking our participants how frequently they believe that SM is used in the B2B sector, we get almost the same answers as the above statements. The difference is that the participants are much more sure that there is not a single company out there that does not have some sort of social media presence today. Some citations from the participants are: *'I have a hard time believing that there is a single B2B company that does not use social media, and I would say it is almost a 'must have' in order to be counted as a strong and serious actor today'*. Which is further explained by participant 2, who agrees that it is very crucial to be active on social media today and also mentions that it would be a huge risk not to use social media in today's modern world. Also, she mentions that it seems like many companies that use SM frequently are fast in adapting to new trends whilst the companies that lack social media presence are not as innovative and modern anymore. This goes hand in hand with the statement from Jussila et al., (2012) and Simula et al., (2013) that mentions that being active on social media has a positive impact on innovation and product



development which results in new and more innovative offerings that in turn will lead to gaining competitive advantage through offering new or novel products or services to company customers and partners (Jussila et al., 2012; Simula et al., 2013).

5.2 SMM Channels

The channels used by the decision-makers in this study is similar to the study presented by Siamagka et al, 2015, whereas Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook still seems to be among the most commonly used channels (Siamaga et al, 2015), together with Instagram, which seems to have grown more popular on recent years (Iankova et al, 2019). It is argued that different social media channels offer different abilities for the marketers (Iankova et al, 2019), which seems to be agreed upon by the decision-makers participating in this study. In general, the decision-makers mainly use LinkedIn for SMM purposes, as they see it more suitable for B2B and perceive other social media channels as more private and more related to B2C. Only one participant, Participant 7, preferred Instagram and Facebook, although this person did so because her organization was targeting small companies, where the owner often acted as a private person and therefore wanted to reach out to them through more private channels. The empirical findings therefore suggest decision-makers perceive LinkedIn as the most suitable channel for SMM when it comes to B2B organizations, whilst other channels are more suitable for reaching individuals on a more private level. Although, the decisionmakers seem to agree with the different benefits of each social media channel presented in the theoretical framework, they are using LinkedIn for the majority of their SMM tasks, even those suggested to be better suited for other channels. Järvinen et al suggests that high technological companies are likely to use LinkedIn to connect and build professional relationships with customers (Järvinen et al 2012), which seems to be an important task among the decision-makers, which might help explaining why they prefer LinkedIn to other SMM channels. Hence its benefits outweigh those of other channels.



5.3 SMM Measurements

Measuring the effectiveness of SMM has been described as a major challenge in the B2B literature, as there is no specifically defined ways of measurement (Michaelidou et al, 2011; Järvinen et al, 2012; Brennan, Croft, 2012; Jussila et al, 2014, Saldo, 2017; Dwivedi et al, 2019). By not having enough SMM users evaluating its effectiveness, it becomes difficult for marketing managers to provide evidence of its effectiveness, which leaves a gap between whether SMM usage achieves its goal or not (Michaelidou et al, 2011). Looking into the empirical finding and the decision-makers view on SMM measurements, it is clear that it is mainly related to two types of measures: *lead generation* and *brand awareness*.

Lead generation seemed to be the most important type of measure related to B2B SMM according to the findings, as all of the participants were using it, and they did so in similar ways. Keeping track of traffic and different types of customer engagements such as follows, clicks, shares, likes, etc., on social media channels was used by all of the participants and they did not seem to have any difficulties with it. Although, all of the participants did mention the importance of not only measuring how many people viewed their post, but rather how many actually engaged with them, in the form of visiting their company website, signing up for trials or actually contacting them. All the participants measured this through analytical tools on social media channels analytical tools, and some of them also mentioned using other forms of paid services, such as google analytics to get a more detailed view, but for the same purposes. Thus, the decision-makers interviewed did not seem to have any significant difficulties measuring SMM effectiveness when it comes to generating leads, as they used digital analytical tools to identify how many customers came from their different social media channels and were able to track their various activities. However, there were some differences found among the participants considering how specific they measured their SMM. For example, Participant 2 mentioned calculating the average worth of a lead and the costs of using different forms of SMM and then comparing the amount of leads each specific form brought in, to evaluate if the cost of using it was worth the amount of leads it generated. While Participant 3 measured how many visited their website through social media channels and in turn how many of those then contacted the Company. Participant 6 also measured the spread of their SMM content on their employees' own social media. Hence, measuring SMM effectiveness in relation to leads, might not be a significant challenge, although there is not a specifically identified way of



measurement as organizations use different methods of measuring it, depending on their purpose.

Brand Awareness seems to be significantly more difficult to measure according to the decision-makers, as they are unaware of any other way of doing so than using large surveys which can be very costly. None of the participants was currently measuring it, and those who had done so in the past expressed it as “*very challenging*” and “*hard*” to measure. As most participants had not measured it and those who had was not much involved in the process, there was not much insight to gain, more than that it was clearly challenging. Although, all of the participants were certain that their SMM was positively contributing to their brand awareness, even though they did not measure it.

5.3.1 SMM as part of the marketing strategy

All decision-makers interviewed emphasizes the importance of having SMM in B2B marketing strategies, as it is of high relevance in today's digitalized society, which is in-line with the literature review presented by Dweidi et al, which shows that SMM becomes more and more important in B2B companies strategies as society becomes more digitized and social media which has previously been more concerned for B2C are growing more important for B2B as well (Dweidi et al, 2019).

The amount of resources put into SMM in comparison to other parts of the marketing strategy vary quite significantly among the participants. Based on the empirical finding it seems like it could be a relation between that and the size of the organizations, as the small enterprises uses SMM in a greater part of their strategy: Participant 5 & 6 only uses SMM, and 2 around 50%, while the large enterprises interviews only uses 10 - 25% of SMM in their strategy. Participants 1, 3, 4, and 7 who are currently not using as much SMM in their strategy, do realize its importance and are seeing an increase in the future. Even though all of the participant are using organic advertisement on their social media channels , it is recognized that there is a need for paid advertisement in order to reach the full potential of SMM and therefore as expressed by Participant 7 “*marketing through social media can be quite costly and therefore it can be compared to any other marketing tool*”. Hence, there is a common view of SMM being cheaper than other types of marketing tools, which is not the case if you want to use its full potential, according to participant 7; “*unless you have a very committed target group who willingly follows your activities*”. Thus, organic SMM seems to be beneficial for B2B organization, but only to an extent, if they do not have very active followers.



Empirical finding thereby suggests that decisionmakers see an increase in paid B2B SMM in their strategy, as it is becoming more and more important.

5.4 Benefits with SMM

Karjaluoto et al conducted a research where they discussed how SMM is used effectively and efficiently for various B2B marketing activities. Maintaining communication with existing customers, providing support to the selling process, and building awareness are communication goals identified in the research (Karjaluoto et al, 2015). Interestingly, the empirical findings of our research show that the participating B2B marketing-decision makers use SMM to primarily achieve these goals, since SMM has some advantages that allows B2B marketers to achieve them. First of all, a consensus of our findings is that the participating decision-makers perceive the channels of the phenomena as an easy and efficient way to reach out to their targeted audience while they emphasized the importance of being present on SM channels as it increases availability. Explained by participant 7: *‘Everyone is present on social media nowadays, so you reach out to lots of people.’*. Secondly, the literature studied suggests that SMM is cost efficient (Salo, 2017; Dwivedi et al, 2019; Felix et al, 2017), and we could understand that SMM is also perceived to be very cost efficient by the participants. Even though not all of the decision-makers interviewed mentioned cost efficiency as a benefit, it could further be interpreted by looking into participants 5 & 6 for instance, who did not mention cost efficiency as a benefit and represented small enterprises, since they only use SMM and do not use any other marketing tools as e.g. Google ads. The reason is that SMM gives better reach in relation to how much it costs as expressed by participant 2. Moreover, we could interpret from the participants that SMM channels allow B2B companies to increase their presence in their specific field, by targeting as participant 7 described: *‘You can even pay to target a specific group, which makes Social Media very accurate’*. This is an advantage of SM, as it allows you to track the people engaging with your content, target, analyses, and create content that is expected to be interesting for your audience. This is believed to be due to the ability of direct communication to stakeholders of the company allowed by SMM channels, described in the theoretical chapter as a two-way communication platform (Brennan & Croft, 2012; Michaelidou et al, 2011). Furthermore, it could be seen that the participants of this research want to be seen as *‘thought leaders’* in their industry as described by Brennan &



Croft (2012) meaning that they want to be perceived as experts within their field to take a market driving role in their industry. Presented in the findings, current customers are also enjoying their supplier's presence on SM channels. It is accordingly beneficial for them as they can see that their suppliers have competence that can solve their problems and help them achieve business outcomes. Participant 7 described it further in the findings saying: *'I believe that our customers mostly appreciate the knowledge and inspiration we share on our platforms.'*

5.4.1 SMM Benefits in Sales

When the participants were asked about SMM benefits in sales, we could see how the participants saw the positive impact SMM could have in the different sales phases. SMM is argued to be beneficial in the B2B sales process (Agnihotri et al, 2012) where SM can be a factor in deriving the sale through the sales process (Andzulis et al, 2012).

For example, it could be interpreted that LinkedIn is used to start a conversation with a potential customer. Participants 1 & 5 explained that salespeople use the channel to acquire information about people and establish a connection with them, which is even suggested in the theoretical framework of this research (Lacoste, 2016). Moreover, SM channels are used by participants 2, 4, & 5 to nurture leads by sharing content, advising stakeholders, and keeping a constant dialogue with them which is a process that is explained by Bodnar et al (2012) where the so called "online lead generation process" contains offers, calls to action (CTAs) and a landing page. Participant 7 mentioned that they are occasionally actually "selling" directly through campaigns on SM, but that is seen to be logical and possible by the authors due to their straightforward product, although they target B2B companies.

Surprisingly, one of the participants said that SM, specially LinkedIn, is where the company has found the majority of its customers. This is interesting as this company is one of those that used only SMM in their marketing strategy. One can assume here that service oriented B2B companies can depend heavily and only on SMM in their marketing strategy in line with their sales team, and achieve desired results, although it is unfair to have such an assumption just because it works for some companies. Thus, the authors believe that companies that only use SMM are missing out



business opportunities as many companies may not be present on the SMM channels, but still relevant for the company's products or services.

5.5 SMM Challenges Based on Decision-Makers Experience

As the literature suggested, there are some challenges that B2B marketers face when using SMM. The major ones were lack of resources in terms of skills, time, and expertise; B2B companies perceiving SM irrelevant for their industry; and measuring effectiveness of SMM (Siamagka et al, 2015; Michaelidou et al, 2011; Järvinen et al, 2012; Jussila et al, 2014; Brennan & Croft, 2012; Salo, 2017; Dwivedi et al, 2019). Based on that, we were keen on trying to uncover what challenges the participants face in using SMM. The first and yet biggest challenge for the decision-makers is to be unique and stand out from the crowd as presented in the findings. In the benefits part, we presented availability as a benefit, meaning that everyone being present on SMM channels is a huge advantage for SMM practitioners due to the high reach. However, that appears to be a significant challenge simultaneously, as the increased competition makes it hard for SMM users to provide content that is rare, and valuable that cannot be found everywhere. As participant 7 said in the benefits: *'Everyone is present on Social Media nowadays, '* and later explaining in the challenges: *'The hardest is to reach out from the noise, since there are a lot of companies that do ads on SM. '* Therefore, it is obvious that what the participants view as a benefit, is a challenge for them simultaneously, as the increased presence makes it hard to stand out. Participant 5 & 6 explained that engaging people with your content is a challenge, as well as being creative & innovative. The authors believe that their view of challenges about being creative and engaging people, is somehow related to standing out from the crowd. Although they perceive it in a different way. For example, if it is a challenge to engage your audience with your content, it is because there is a lot of noise and competitors saying the same thing. Which requires you to be creative and innovative to stand out from the crowd as participant 5 said, she even compared it to B2C as she explained that one is not required to be that formal in B2C campaigns.

Since this study was aimed at B2B marketing decision-makers representing service-oriented IT companies in Sweden, it was rather hard for us to define whether the nature of industry has any effect on the companies' usage of SMM (Järvinen et al, 2012) as all the participants operate in more or less the same type of industry. However, when the discussion came up during the



interviews, some of the participants believed that all companies have some sort of SM presence nowadays. Even though they may operate in different industries.

5.5.1 SMM Perceived as Time Consuming

4 out of the 7 participants mentioned the issue of time while discussing the challenges of SMM as presented in the findings. This is in line with the literature suggesting that lack of time is a challenge for SMM users (Siamagka et al, 2015, Järvinen et al, 2012). It takes accordingly a lot of time to be present all the time on the different channels. Partly because one needs to spend a lot of time on creating content, planning the posts, and following up the results. But also, because one needs to be available all the time to deal with the different reactions on posts that can lead to affecting the brand that is discussed in chapter 5.5.3. As participant 1 said: *‘it is hard to be available all the time as social media makes it appear’*. We could here interpret that the SMM users of B2B companies are expected to be available all the time as normal consumers can be, which the participants experience is a challenge. In addition to that, participant 4 is only working with SMM at one of the B2B companies, which is believed to be since SMM is very time consuming, because of the reasons stated above. Therefore, the study shows that lack of time is a challenge as literature suggests, because of the time it takes to plan, create, and follow-up content. As well as the expectation to be available all the time.

5.5.2 Necessary Skills for Successful SMM Usage

In the theoretical chapter, we concluded that lack of time is not the only challenge, but also lack of skills and characteristics in using SMM (Jussila et al, 2014; Michaelidou et al, 2011; Siamagka et al, 2015), arguing that employees are not up-to date with the newest trends and do not know how to utilize SM channels to achieve business outcomes. Therefore, it was of importance to uncover what skills these B2B marketing-decision makers perceive are necessary in order to be successful with using the phenomena to achieve its goals. All participants perceived SMM challenging in many different ways, which can be interpreted by looking into the diversity in their responses of what skills and characteristics they see are necessary to succeed with SMM. Participants 1, 3, & 5 explained that SMM is changing all the time, with different trends and technologies, and therefore requires the people working with it to be able to keep in pace with these constant changes while one needs to know what type of content that creates interest. Moreover,



hands-on experience was seen to be important by participant 1 whereas participant 5 also mentioned the issue with editing pictures and videos. Participant 4 saw it from a psychological point of view: *“For me it is a bit like behavior science”* meaning that the end human that is going to read the content is considered. In addition to that, being creative was perceived as a preferred skill, with the ability to analyses and follow-up content. Lastly, participants 1, 2 & 7 explained that being communicative, knowing the brand, and having knowledge in brand building & marketing in general is preferred when working with SMM, as it is a marketing strategy at the end of the day. If we look at the different responses from the participants, what they perceive are necessary skills to work with SMM, we could develop a kind of pattern. First of all, the employee needs to be communicative, and know what marketing is together with brand building. Secondly, the employee needs to have a sense of creativity in order to be able to create content by editing videos and pictures that will create interest for the humans, since it is humans interacting with the content at the end of the day, even if it is in a B2B-context. Furthermore, being analytical to follow-up content and know what works best by seeing the different trends and patterns on the different SMM channels. Unfortunately, these are not skills that can be taught in schools, but rather as participant 1 said: *“It is important with experience in using it”*. The authors hereby see that these characteristics/skills perceived to be needed by the participants can be acquired by practicing SMM and working with it, rather than learning it from a theoretical point of view.

5.5.3 SMM Risks - Affecting the Brand Image

Andersson & Wikström (2017) argued that SM can be influenced by a wide range of stakeholders, which we found to be true in our findings. Therefore, it was of importance to uncover if the participants perceive any risks with the SMM channels due to the two-way communication (Michaelidou et al, 2011). The participants see risks that can affect the brand image, by being present on SMM channels. According to our findings, this is firstly due to the inability to control the comments and how people react to the companies' content. Explained in the findings by participant 6: *“There is always a risk with social media, as you only can control what you publish but not how it is distributed and reacted on.”*. Furthermore, participant 5 emphasized the importance of being accurate with what you publish, in order to avoid any kind of misunderstandings, agreed by participants 2 & 4. Siamagka et al (2015) explain that companies need to be careful how they use social media



to bring out the desired image rather than destroying it. Hence, the participants perceive risks with SM, because of it being influenced by many stakeholders, seeing it as an advantage but a risk simultaneously as literature says (Andersson & Wikström, 2017).

6 Conclusion

The purpose of this research paper was to identify and describe SMM usage together with the positive and negative aspects of it in the B2B context, based on empirical data collected from decision-makers within marketing, operating in service-oriented international IT-organizations located in Sweden. Looking into the empirical findings of the interviews conducted in this research paper, it can be seen that decision-makers highly values SMM and emphasizes its importance, as they believe it is necessary for all B2B organizations today, and as the society is becoming more and more digitized, it will be of even higher importance in the future.

6.1 SMM Usage

Three main objectives were found in relation to SMM; *Brand awareness*, *Lead generation*, and *Employer branding*. All participants felt that these objectives were well suited for SMM and that it positively affected each one of them, although the only objective actually measured regularly was *Lead generation* and they had no plans of measuring the others due to difficulties and high costs. Thus, the decision-makers could see the importance of using SMM to increase brand awareness and employer branding, without feeling the need of measuring it, which could explain why there is a gap of measurements within B2B SMM in the literature. The majority of the decision-makers are highlighting the call for formality and functionality in messages communicated through social media channels in B2B, in contrast to the more informal and emotional content in B2C. At the same time, it is recognized both by the participants and previous researchers that SMM focuses more on creating brand awareness in B2B, than for selling purposes as in B2C. However, it is recognized both in previous literature and by the decision-makers that messages in B2B SMM have indeed become more and more emotional, although it still has to live up to a certain degree of formality. It can be seen that both from decision-makers' view and that of previous research that being active on social media encourages the



organizations to be more innovative and keep up with the modern trends, whilst those not using it would risk falling behind, although the decisionmakers were unaware of any organizations not using SMM today.

The majority of the decision-makers emphasized the use of LinkedIn for most of their SMM activities, although they were also using Instagram, Twitter and Facebook for similar purposes. The only controversy was participant 7 who mainly used Facebook and Instagram, however the person recognized LinkedIn as more suitable for B2B but wanted to reach small businesses by targeting private persons and planned to use LinkedIn more frequently in the future. Hence, the decision-makers disagreed with the previous researchers suggesting the use of different channels for different purposes. Reasons for this might be that previous research has mostly been made in different countries, that it's efficient for this specific industry, or that LinkedIn is becoming more popular for B2B marketing in general.

6.2 Positive Aspects

The most emphasized benefit of SMM found among the decision-makers was the ability to reach out to a large targeted audience and at the same time increase availability through social media channels, which was mentioned by all participants. Furthermore, this also gave the decision-makers the opportunity to track the engagements of individuals on their social media channels, which allowed them to analyse the responses on all of their content.

It is also perceived as cost-efficient by the majority of the participants, although there was some controversy found. SMM was also perceived as beneficial in sales by several decision-makers, as it allows for nurturing leads through the acquisition of information on potential customers, which eased the process of establishing connections with the salespeople.

6.3 Negative Aspects

Surprisingly, the most emphasized challenge of SMM seems to be related to the same factors as the ones perceived as most beneficial by the decisionmakers; the reach and availability.

The reason for this is explained as the competitors of the decision-makers organizations all have the same benefits of reach and availability, thereby the



main challenge becomes to reach out of the noise and stand out from other organizations SMM, in order to be seen as unique and capture the attention of potential customers. Thereby, the decision-makers could all see a significant need for innovativeness and creativity when it comes to SMM in general. Furthermore, the availability presented by social media becomes a challenge in the sense that customers expect the decision-makers organizations to be available at all time, which requires a lot of resources put into SMM, in the form of time and effort. Hence, it also becomes very time consuming, which is also described as challenging by the decision-makers. Another risk coming hand-in-hand with an advantage is that the high reach of SMM in the form of virtual spread, could result in damaging the brand if the content becomes misunderstood by the audience or if negative comments are not handled in a professional manner. To successfully cope with the negative aspects of SMM, the following skills are brought up to be of importance according to the decision-makers; having a basic understanding of marketing, being communicative, creative, and innovative, and to be analytical when it comes to identifying trends and patterns of what kind of content is necessary for a certain desired type of response.

6.4 Theoretical & Managerial Implications

As can be seen in the introduction part of this research paper, several articles are requesting more qualitative research in regard to B2B SMM and also specifically to target senior management, which has been done in this paper. The finding gives an overview of how decision-makers view SMM usage and the positive and negative aspects of it, as well as the variables used when conducting the interviews which are based on areas highlighted in previous literature. Hence, Usage, Channels, Measurements, Benefits & Challenges have been evaluated from the decision-makers point of view, thus, could be contributing to the theoretical research of B2B SMM.

For Managerial implications, B2B organizations, especially service-oriented IT-companies, could benefit from our findings. As they are describing how they could use SMM and several considerations when doing so, based on the view of other individuals in the same business. It might be particularly interesting for other decision-makers to see how others in their situation are dealing with SMM, what benefits and challenges it brings and it can support and provide them some valuable insight of how SM could be used in their operations.



6.4.1 Societal Implications

As mentioned throughout this thesis, social media comes with both benefits and challenges. All the decision makers that participated in the interviews conducted for this thesis highlighted that social media brings lots of opportunities, however, it is very demanding and time consuming. When communicating through social media, you have to be very careful and thoughtful when communicating through the company's social media channels. Almost all our participants mentioned that social media provides us to be connected 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, which in turn leads to stress since the persons working with social media have to be online and available in order to answer everything that is written on the company's social media pages. Further, they mention that customers expect companies to always be available and respond quickly to their inquiries, which makes it hard for the companies due to different factors such as time differences, working hours etc. Other factors of SM that could bring stress to both the company brand and its employees is if someone publishes negative content or comments which can be damaging for the entire organization. The ability to tackle these difficulties and the ability of being online on a 24-hour basis might result in people feeling that they are never getting off work and to constantly work which in turn can lead to health problems. Living a "connected" life comes with risks while bringing great benefits for both consumers and businesses. In regards to this, the authors of this work believe that this social media trend, which makes people spending lots of time on the internet, always staying connected and online might counteract in people's health due to feeling stress and anxiety as well as to living up to all the expectations that comes with it.

6.5 Limitations & Suggestions for Future Research

This study's main limitation in regard to SMM in general, is that it is merely based on the personal view of B2B decision-makers operating in a certain industry and thereby the conclusion, might not be applicable to all types of organizations or industries. It is also based upon organizations of different sizes, and although there were some findings suggesting certain differences between small and large enterprises when it comes to SMM, there is a need for more empirical data in order to draw more conclusions. Hence, further studies might look into how SMM is viewed upon by decision-makers in other types of industries and in specific organizational sizes in order to evaluate how they might differ. Furthermore, our findings suggest that decision-makers emphasise LinkedIn more than other social media platforms



or channels when it comes to most achieving their objectives within B2B SMM, which contradicts with several theoretical articles emphasizing different channels for different objectives. This could be investigated further by conducting a quantitative study measuring how many decision-makers use different channels for different purposes, to discover if it is related to a specific industry, country, or if LinkedIn is just becoming more popular among B2B SMM uses for most objectives. Another controversy found in relation to previous research that could be investigated further is the fact that the decision-makers argued for availability and reach being both the most positive and negative aspect of SMM, hence uncovering how applicable this finding is in B2B SMM in general.



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APPENDICES

a. Interview Questions

1. In which contexts do the participants use social media to market their company and/or their products?
2. Which social media channels does the participant use? Do they plan to use others in the future?
3. What communication goals does the participant hope to achieve through social media? (ex. increase awareness, lead generation, etc.)
4. Do the participants measure how well SMM fulfills its purpose? If not, how do they know if it does? How do they measure? Why?
5. How do the participants personally view the usage of SMM in B2B in general? How can it be used and how does it contribute to an organization's marketing? Example?
6. Which advantages can the participants see with SMM usage in the B2B context?
7. Do the participants experience any challenges with SMM? What are those? How are they challenging?
8. How frequently do the participants think B2B SMM is used in today's society in general? How necessary is it?
9. What characteristics and skills do the participants believe is necessary to succeed with SMM based on achieving their purposes?
10. Do the participants see any similarities with SMM in B2B and B2C, based on their own knowledge and experience? What are the biggest differences?
11. How important do the participants believe SMM is in their organizations marketing strategy? How many resources are invested in it in comparison to other types of marketing methods?
12. Do the participants believe that there are any risks of negatively affecting their brand through SMM usage? What are those?
13. Do the participants experience any challenges with SMM? What are those? How are they challenging?



14. Do the participants believe that their current/potential customers appreciate the company's presence on social media? What are the advantages/disadvantages of it?
15. Do the participants believe that social media can be a direct part of the sales process? How?

Appendix 1

b. Company Size

In accordance with the European Commission, companies with the following numbers of employees and either one (or both) of the turnover and balance sheet total defines their size:

Size	Employees	Turnover	Balance Sheet Total
Medium	<250	<50 Million EUR	<43 Million EUR
Small	<50	<10 Million EUR	<10 Million EUR
Micro	<10	<2 Million EUR	<2 Million EUR

Those who exceed medium sized are defined as large enterprises (European Commission, 2003).

Appendix 2



c. Participants

Participants	Positions	Company & Services	Size	Time
Participant 1	Head of Marketing	IT-Company, offering employee benefits	Large Enterprise	5/5, 2019, 10:00 - 10:40
Participant 2	Head of Marketing	IT-Company, offering communication services	Small Enterprise	5/5, 2019, 13:00-13:40
Participant 3	Head of Marketing	IT-Company, offering consulting services	Large Enterprise	12/5, 2019, 10:00 - 10:40
Participant 4	Social Media Specialist	Same company as Participant 1	-	12/5, 2019, 13:30 - 14:10
Participant 5	Head of Marketing	IT-Company, offering marketing & communication services	Small Enterprise	12/5, 2019, 16:00 - 16:40
Participant 6	Marketing Manager	IT-Company, offering document management services	Small Enterprise	13/5, 2019, 10:00 - 10:40
Participant 7	Digital Marketing Specialist	IT-Company, offering economical & accounting solutions	Large Enterprise	15/5, 2019, 9:00 - 9:40

Appendix 3



d. Framework for Quality

Framework presented by spencer et al (2003) to uphold the quality of a qualitative study:

1. How credible are the findings?
 2. Has knowledge/understanding been extended by the research?
 3. How well does the evaluation address its original aims and purposes?
 4. Scope for drawing wider influences—how well is this explained?
 5. How clear is the basis of the evaluative appraisal?
 6. How defensible is the research design?
 7. How well defended is the sample design/target selection of cases/documents?
 8. Sample composition/case inclusion—how well is the eventual coverage described?
 9. How well was the data collection carried out?
 10. How well has the approach to, and formulation of, the analysis been conveyed?
 11. Contexts of data sources—how well are they retained and portrayed?
 12. How well has diversity of perspective and content been explored?
 13. How well has detail, depth and complexity (richness?) of the data been conveyed?
 14. How clear are the links between data, interpretations and conclusions—i.e. how well can the route to any conclusions be seen?
 15. How clear and coherent is the reporting?
 16. How clear are the assumptions/theoretical perspectives/values that have shaped the form and output of the evaluation?
 17. What evidence is there of attention to ethical issues?
 18. How adequately has the research process been documented?
- (Cited by Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Appendix 4