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Content creation activities related to content marketing through social media.

- a qualitative study in a B2B context -



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Abstract

Background: Companies have lately been engaging their business activities onto social media and its platforms. They are taking advantage of the opportunities provided by social media and they are starting to realize the importance of content marketing.

Problem Discussion: Content marketing has been researched previously research. However, the research regarding B2B content marketing and the differences between B2B and B2C content is still rather limited. The question lingers whether the same principles apply to firms working with B2B as well. Moreover, a clear framework or guide regarding the way that content should be created does not yet exist – a guide including the aspects may be taken into account when creating content and implementing content marketing.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to understand and describe how companies deal with the content creation process, within content marketing through social media.

Research Question: How do companies handle content creation for content marketing through social media?

Methodology: This thesis has taken a qualitative and abductive approach on the study. It has been based on a multiple-case study, where semi-structured interviews took place with seven firms working with content marketing and content creation - in a B2B context.

Conclusion: All seven firms have a uniform understanding of content marketing, aligned with previous research. The study concludes that there are similarities between the ways that companies handle content marketing. Furthermore, the study concludes that there are general traits that needs to always be taken into consideration when creating content s.a. long term planning, providing value to the customer, well thought out message and choosing the right channels for content distribution.

Keywords: Content marketing, Content Creation, Social Media, Social media platforms, Content Creation Process.

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1. Introduction

This chapter offers an insight into the topic that this research study is based on. It also provides the purpose that will be followed throughout the research, the research question and provides a problems discussion.

1.1 Background

Social media has revolutionized the way that companies communicate, inform and keep in touch with their stakeholders (Neti, 2011; Brennan & Croft, 2012). Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, etc. allow a wide wider reach than ever before (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Facebook itself has over 2 billion active users and has an average of 480 million active users (Smartinsights, 2017).

Over the years, companies have started spending more and more on social media marketing. In the United States alone, companies have spent 4.3 billion USD in 2011 alone on social media marketing (Leeflang et al., 2014) and since the annual amount spent has more than doubled (Smartinsights, 2017).

The digital activity and the importance of social media in our day to day life is increasing on a regular basis (Järvinen, 2012). As well, the role of the audience is changing as now the audience is no longer a passive receiver of information (Heinonen, 2011). Through the evolution of social media technologies, the communication has shifted towards a two-way model – in which both the transmitter and the receiver can interact and share content (ibid). Through this change, now the consumers can now share their thoughts about the content received by posting a reply (ibid). Furthermore, through these changes, social media marketing is presenting new challenges for companies. Now the content needs not only to incorporate the message that the company wants to transmit, but as well package it in a way that the receiver will be interested in (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Gupta, 2014). This is causing firms to put a great focus on understanding the change in behavior and dedicate more time and resources to the creation of content so they can achieve their marketing goals (Mangolds & Faulds, 2009; Heinonen, 2011; Hautz, Dennhardt & Füller, 2013).

Social media users are spending more and more time on the social media platforms and more and more people join social media every day (Hautz et al., 2013). Therefore, these platforms are becoming essential communication methods that businesses should be taking advantage of (ibid).

Firms are seeing the opportunities offered by social media, which are bringing unprecedented numbers of stakeholders in one place (Huotari et al., 2015; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Therefore, decision makers and consultants are always searching for new ways to make a proper use of the main social media platforms s.a. Facebook, Youtube, Twitter (Kaplan & Hainlein, 2010).

As the ways of communication have changed and evolved, it is more important than ever to communicate through the right content or as Kaplan & Hainlein (2010) argue it it: create fresh content that will grasp the attention of the social media users.

As companies are starting to see the “understanding the right way of communicating through social media” as being essential, the focus and resources dedicated for content marketing are increasing (Baltes, 2015). B2B marketers have always known and kept in mind the fact that

relationships with customers are the most valuable assets that a company can have (Brennan & Croft, 2012). Therefore, it is only natural that they are constantly trying to adapt to the latest ways of communication and focusing more on content marketing through social media (ibid). As Baltes (2015) states in his research: Any firm that has the focus to be seen and to have a competitive advantage must adapt and develop their content marketing according to the targeted audience.

1.2 Problem Discussion

Communication through social media represents an optimal way to maintain and create relationships with customers and stakeholders (Kietzmann et al., 2011). In order for companies to be able to clearly communicate their message through social media, content must be distributed (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016). Utilizing content that has been created in a deliberate and planned way, with the purpose of being shared through social media or other channels and used for marketing purposes is often referred to as: content marketing (Siamagka et al., 2015; Järvinen et al., 2012; Gupta, 2014).

It is considered that content marketing and social media platforms have become a continuously growing and improving networking communication process; offering benefits for both companies and their potential clients (Siamagka, et al., 2015; Agnihotri et al., 2015; Mehmet & Clarke, 2016). Through Content Marketing, companies have been able to significantly increase their brand awareness, customer engagement and create business leads (Järvinen et al., 2012; Järvinen & Karjaluo, 2015; Agnihotri et al., 2015).

Therefore, the importance of content is increasingly acknowledged. This is because of its benefits – which are starting to be recognized. This has led to content marketing to become a topic of high interest for the business industry (Azad et al., 2016; Gupta, 2014). Furthermore, the availability of online channels for distribution of content is: enabling prospects within B2B to inform themselves about companies and the product offerings (Gagnon, 2014) as well as allowing companies to easily share content and transmit information to any existing and potential shareholders (ibid.).

Gupta (2014) argues that creating content for social media or any other platform is discussed by previous research to help companies to uniquely position their company on the market and to provide a competitive advantage. Siamagka et al. (2015) that the

Although the reaction of the stakeholders receiving the transmitted content cannot be controlled (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), companies do have control over the content creation process, where the possible outcomes can and should be foreseen (ibid.). When creating content, companies need to take into account the long and short term effects that the content will have on their reputation (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Ryan and Jones, 2009).

Until now, research has not approached social media content creation from a B2B marketing perspective (Chen et al., 2013). Previous research has been concerned with the Business To Consumer – B2C – perspective of content marketing (Chen et al., 2013; Williams et al., 2010; Schultz and Peltier, 2013, Siamgka et al. 2015). Therefore, research regarding the possible differences in approach that, if not implemented, could prove to be harmful for businesses operating in a Business to Business (B2B) environment has been ignored (ibid). Furthermore, it is argued that by understanding if there are indeed differences between B2C and B2B content marketing, could prove beneficial to companies operating within B2B (ibid.). The possible differences could help B2B companies avoid any negative short or long-term effects on their reputations, as well as providing a clear image of the way that the content should be created for desirable results to be achieved (ibid).

Furthermore, Huotari et al. (2015), Michaelidou et al. (2011), Guesalga (2016), Lacka and Chong, (2016), Siagmagka et al., 2015, all argue in favor of further research to be carried out in the field of B2B social media and content marketing as through their research they have determined that: the current existing research does not offer information on neither the existence or inexistence of differences between B2C and B2B content marketing. Furthermore, these authors call for future research regarding content creation in a B2B context in order to be able to determine if indeed there are differences between the way content is created in B2B and B2C marketing or if the process is completely identical.

At the current moment, only general and vague indications regarding content creation and distribution, for B2B content marketing purposes, exist in literature (Baltes, 2015; Gangdon, 2014). The existing indications suggest companies to focus on quality of the content rather than the quantity as well as focusing on transmitting the right message through their content (ibid.). Furthermore, the studies suggesting these indications call for future research into the topic of content creation for B2B in order to further the pool of knowledge (ibid).

In order for companies to be able to clearly pass across their messages in a way that could attract and interest both already existing and potential stakeholders, they need to understand the way that content needs to be created and shared (Järvinen et al., 2012; Järvinen and Karjaluoto, 2015). Therefore, by investigating content creation in a B2B context, the authors of this research study aim to aid the understanding of the creation process. The study is carried out with an empirical

focus, by collecting primary data from companies and people creating content for B2B marketing purposes. This is done in order to gain a better understanding regarding the way that companies handle content creation for social media marketing. Furthermore, the study is as, as well, aiming to identify steps that are being used in the content creation process.

As previously stated, at the current moment there is sufficient research backing up the benefits and importance of content marketing, but not enough research focusing on the way content for B2B marketing campaigns is being created. Therefore, through this research study, the authors aim to gain and provide further insight and understanding into the process of B2B content creation. For this study, the content creation processes of seven companies operating in a B2B context. Through studying multiple companies, possible similarities and patterns in their content creation process could be identified and emphasized. Through this study, B2B companies interested in implementing content marketing into their business practice should will be able to find information regarding the way that other companies go about the creation of content.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to understand and describe how companies deal with the content creation process, within content marketing through social media.

1.4 Research Question

How do companies handle content creation for content marketing through social media?

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter showcases the main theoretical concepts which have been identified and are utilized in this research study. The framework presented is based on current research regarding the field of content marketing and content creation.

2.1 Content marketing

2.1.1 Definition of content marketing

There are many definitions of content marketing which are formed by different authors. Mcpheat (2011) explains it as publishing content to the audience which will attract them to engage and connect. Another definition explains content marketing as distributing interesting content via e.g.

social media, more specifically business-related content to consumers and other stakeholders (Brennan & Croft, 2012).

Gupta (2014) states that the concept of content marketing refers to creating and delivering content of relevance and value, this in order to attract and obtain new customers. Baltes (2015) further argues in his research that shared and targeted content aims to widely inform customers and answer their basic question and needs. Furthermore, according to Pulizzi (2014), the change in marketing is due to that content nowadays should pursue to express what one can offer the consumers instead of pushing on what they can buy from the companies. Abel (2012) describes it as an art to be mastered where companies should aim to communicate value with their content rather than aim to sell.

Incorporating and mastering content marketing can be thought of as delivering a strong and well-thought-out message at the right time to the people (Gupta 2014). The content can be and is delivered in various formats and platforms, e.g. news, videos, different social media channels, e-books, photos etc. (Gupta 2014). YouTube, Twitter and Facebook are getting more attention by businesses as they are seeing the importance of these social media channels and tending to engage and distribute their content on the platforms (Kaplan & Hainlein, 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Brennan & Croft (2012) reason the importance of sharing useful content via e.g. blog posts or online video as it will be targeted towards the key audience; which in B2B may be buyers, decision makers and potential prospects. They also discuss that this is a factor for success within social media but it may pose challenges for the companies to create the content as it must be genuine and interesting enough for the business customers (Ibid).

Gangdon (2014) discusses three parts that content marketing does for the company and their objectives with the created content; firstly, it helps to bring forward the information about a firm such as their processes, skills and the products or services. Second it targets the audience and delivers to their needs and more specifically, how the firm can become a solution and satisfy needs. The content also enables a competitive advantage and can help to position the firm as the most desirable one in relation to other companies. In addition, it is debated that when one has accomplished to interest the audience by a learning experience, there is a great possibility that when they aim to buy and make a purchase decision, they will reach out to you (Gupta, 2014).

In the research paper “Content Marketing: Say Something; Say It Well; Say It Often” it is discussed that no matter what content has been created and distributed, it should offer a sense of relevance and intrigue the customers. Any firm that ensures to properly educate with its information has the possibility to “earn trust and credibility” (Gupta, 2014) among customers, suppliers, prospects etc.

2.1.2 Objectives of Content Marketing

The purposes are in fact many behind implementing and taking the time to invest in content marketing (Baltes, 2015). They might seem similar to the general purpose of traditional marketing but one must remind himself that content exists within every message, the difference however lies in the knowledge, effort and strategies one puts when creating the actual content (Alagöz & Ekici, 2016). As previously mentioned, content marketing is not about selling to the

audience as it is more tailored to inform and educate the buyers (Pulizzi, 2014). Baltes (2015) brings forward some basic objectives which usually are;

- a) Increase in brand recognition as the company distributes its content to enhance awareness,
- b) Promoting and building trustworthy relationships with the audience; may be everything from buyers, suppliers and recruits etc.
- c) Generate new leads; specifically, important for B2Bs,
- c) Offer solutions to problems of the customers,
- d) Create a need and desire among the audience via the shared information in the content,
- e) Obtain customer loyalty by promoting trust and credibility.

The relevance, value and trust placed and portrayed within the content is highly important in order to reach the objectives of content marketing and the firm's own strategies (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). Holliman & Rowley (2014) mention in their research four critical parts of content marketing strategies formed by Peppers & Rogers (2012) which can help to enhance trust. These elements are; shared values, interdependence, quality communication and non-opportunistic behavior.

By incorporating this into the message of the content it can help to shed light on trust and value, which furthermore is important in B2B due to the more complicated buying process and relationships (Holliman & Rowley, 2014).

Because of the complexity, B2B firms may have bigger goals to achieve with their content (Gagnon, 2014); first may be to influence the potential prospect by guiding them towards responding directly or indirectly and hence hopefully generate leads. Other goal may be to convert these potential leads into sales, but this requires patience and to position the firm well in the prospects mind in order to become the first decision and solution to their problems or satisfaction to their needs (Ibid). The objectives of content marketing should be based on detailed content strategies (Holliman & Rowley, 2014), strategies which Bloomstein (2012) explains as processes of planning the content itself and the distribution of it to the audience.

2.1.3 Content Creation Process

Understanding the way that content marketing is to be used and integrated with the overall marketing strategy of a company is highly important; this is because quality content marketing is of crucial importance when it comes to customer attraction and improving the relationships that companies and their stakeholders have (Azad et al., 2016).

The essence of creating content to promote one's company and its product or services is to as Gagnon (2014) states "Show what you know". Firms should incorporate into their strategy to produce content which will inform the audience about what the company "knows". By "know" Gagnon (2014) refers it to enhancing the organizational knowledge which in comparison to competitors should be useful, informing and exciting content. It should enable the content to place itself in the audience's mind so that they end up coming back to the company to satisfy their needs (Ibid).

Audiences i.e. customers or potential prospects, have little patience nowadays for boring ads and they are not interested in reading technical content, instead they are seeking entertainment and simplicity where the main message is delivered and will catch their attention (Alagöz & Ekici,

2016). Alagöz & Ekici (2016) also advice in their research “The new phenomenon of the marketing world in the digital era: Content Marketing” that content should put importance on the title and include visuals such as photographs or videos; as these are resulting in attracting attention and comment and likes on e.g. social media (Newman, 2012).

Baltes (2015) argues some important aspects which should be important for content marketing strategies; the marketing and creation should emphasize on quality rather than quantity and regards topics which will be of interest to the people. The quality should include Search Engine Optimization, meaning it should be partly based on including keywords which matter to the company and their desired reach. It is furthermore important to choose the right channels where the content will be distributed on and to consider the variety of media on these channels, as one can create content in sense of pictures, videos, blog posts, audio content etc (Ibid).

Social media allows the audience to interact with the delivered content as they have the ability and accessibility to like, comment, share and thus create digital word-of-mouth and form discussions. It is therefore important for companies to be active and to engage with their audience and respond to their comments and shares, whether they are positive or negative (Baltes, 2015; Kaplan & Hainlein, 2010).

Further aspects are discussed by Alagöz & Ekici (2016) which can help companies build efficient and sustainable strategies. The researchers state that content strategies should not only aim to attract new customers or prospects, but also entertain and inform existing ones in order to create brand affinity which can further help the firm. Firms should also develop their content marketing strategies on thinking one step further, meaning they should not focus on quick results of response but rather understand that engagement and awareness takes time (Ibid).

Throughout this process, companies must remember to be honest and stay true to their brand and to invest in resources which have the ability to meet the objectives, whatever they might be (Alagöz & Ekici, 2016).

2.2 Social Media

2.2.1 Definition of Social Media

Social media can be described and defined as a content delivery channel (Järvinen & Taminen (2016). Therefore, social media can be considered a digital channel through which content can be created, shared, distributed and reviewed by the receiver (Ibid).

Social media can help companies in various methods, such as: creating and improving brand awareness, promoting business offering and better relationships with customers through the increased level of communication (Järvinen and Taminen, 2016). Social media is being used in companies to help create competencies and higher performance and there is a constantly increasing number of companies that are starting to explore the benefits of social media and implement it in the everyday marketing efforts (Siagmagka et al., 2015; Guesalga, 2016).

Implementing social media in b2b is a complicated and ambiguous process (Lacka and Chong, 2016; Cawsey and Rowley, 2015). Some firms do not understand and therefore cannot perceive the benefits of introducing social media in their marketing efforts (Siamagka et al., 2015). In

larger b2b enterprises, a slightly higher perception of the benefits exists, but there is as well a higher resistance from management on the matter of implementing social media in their marketing strategies (Siamagka et al, 2015; Guesalaga, 2016).

It has been shown in literature that Social Media can and does influence the decision-making criteria within companies and they can help improve the long time relationships with customers (Guesalga, 2016; Siamagka et al., 2015). There are even arguments as of how Social Media is helping companies to increase their sales, improve their reputation and hence create opportunities for attracting new business (Ibid).

Overall social media offers a tremendous amount of power to its users. They offer vast audiences that are often captivated by high quality and/or high interest content (Erdoğan & Cicek, 2012). Therefore, companies should pay a lot of attention to the ways that they could be using social media to their advantage (Ibid). Companies have the opportunity of engaging with customers and potential customers at unprecedented levels that will only continue to rise in the near future. (Smith et al 2012).

2.2.2 Platforms on Social Media

Most used social media platforms within the business world are Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube (Keating et al, 2015; Guesalga, 2016). All these social media platforms offer different type of services, having essentially different layouts, functions and purposes (Jarvinen, 2012; Keating et al, 2015; Guesalga, 2016).

It is important for companies to understand and use each and every one of these platforms in a different manner, specific to the purpose that the platform has been created and designed for (Keating et al, 2015). All this in order to ensure that through their use, businesses can benefit of an exchange of valuable information, efficient two-way communication with their clients and potential clients and an increased chance of forming and maintaining long term relationships (Guesalga, 2016).

Facebook is a social media platform that helps its users share all type of content, from pictures to videos, events and texts. Facebook is considered to be one of the main social media platforms that can and is benefiting businesses at the current moment (Rodriguez et al, 2012; Järvinen et al, 2012; Fischer & Reuber, 2010). Twitter represents a simplified blogging platform where the text is limited to 140 characters that could be added next to a photo or video or just individually shared (Järvinen et al, 2012). It is one of the most vastly used method of spreading news in online existence at the current moment (ibid).

Twitter has repeatedly proved its power of spreading news and therefore affecting the livelihoods of companies as companies depend on the content that is shared here (Järvinen et al, 2012; Fischer & Reuber, 2010).

Instagram represents a photo blogging platform. It is currently the second most popular social media platform and its popularity is continuously increasing (Järvinen et al, 2012).

2.2.3 Research Model

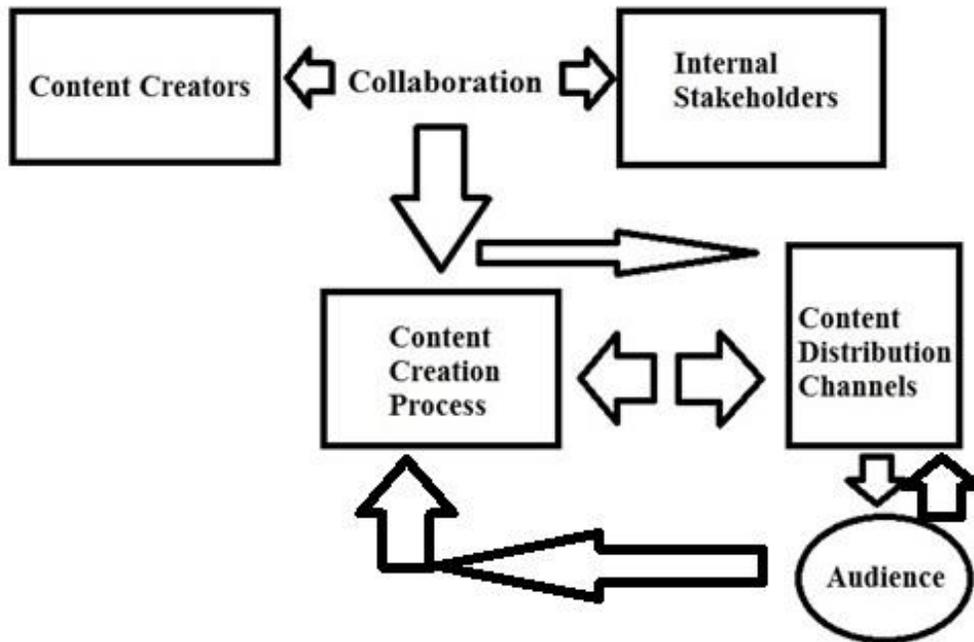


Figure 1 – Research Model

Figure 1 represents the research model that regards and presents the relationship between the main concepts that are discussed in Chapter 2. The model shows how the concepts are connected and related to each-other. For this research study is based around the relationship between content creation and the way that companies within B2B are handling the Content Creation Process.

At the top, we have the Content Creators and the Internal Stakeholders. The latter represent the Decision-Making Units within the companies such as managers, marketing departments and any other internal party that might provide information that should be taken into consideration in the Content Creation Process. The Content Creators represent the people or companies that create the actual content that is to be used. Both of them influence the Content Creation Process and the choice of Content Distribution Channels.

Through collaboration, the Content Creators and the Internal Stakeholders have the role of deciding upon the final form of the content that shall be created, the way that the content creation will take place and the channels through which the content will be distributed.

Furthermore, the Content Creation Process and the Content Distribution Channels are interconnected as the content that is being created, needs to be specifically adapted to the

distribution channel that it will be used on. Vice versa, the Content Creation Process can influence the decision regarding the Content Distribution Channels – as some channels are better suited for different types of content.

At the bottom, we find the audience which not only will be receiving the content, but as well influence the entire process. Depending on the Audience that is targeted:

- The Content Creation Process needs to be adapted in order to ensure that the final content will contain all the attributes desired by the Audience
- Some Content Distribution Channels being more efficient in reaching certain Audiences.

The research model will act as a framework that is to be used for the empirical and theoretical analysis in order to attempt to achieve the aim of this paper and to answer the research questions.

3. Methodology

This chapter presents the choice of methodology used and thus the way this study has been conducted. As well, descriptions of the different choices of methods that could have been used will be presented in detail in this chapter, followed by a discussion and motivation of the chosen methodology and approach.

3.1 Research Approach

According to Bryman and Bell (2015), the author's choice of how the studied problem will be treated and approached, is what the research approach is. The research approach represents the theory of science that the author of a study chooses to utilize. The research approach could be deductive, inductive or abductive and the study can be a quantitative or qualitative study (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

It is important that authors understand what research approach is the most suitable for conducting their study. Additionally, it is important for the authors to take into account the right epistemological and ontological considerations as these provide a clear structure on how the authors will be conducting the study they are carrying out (Bryman and Bell, 2015). While the epistemological considerations are concerned with what is studied being considered true knowledge, the ontological considerations are concerned with the social world being influenced by the one actor's actions and perceptions, as the actor's external reality reflects an objective point of view towards the social world (ibid).

3.2 Qualitative Research

According to Bryman and Bell (2015), the research approach can be quantitative or qualitative. The main difference between a quantitative and a qualitative approach is the type of data that the research is based on. When it comes to quantitative research, this is based on collected data

that is meant to test the hypothesis and that is quantifiable. On the other hand, when it comes to qualitative research, the collected data aims to form a more in depth understanding of the studied subject (Saunders et al., 2009) and consists of word-based information that is analyzed through the author's own interpretation (Bryman and Bell, 2015). When it comes to qualitative research, the data is collected through interviews, document inspection and the observation of behaviors (Creswell, 2014). The data for quantitative research is most often collected through surveys of which answers are converted into quantifiable values (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

The purpose of this study is to collect data through interviews to understand the way that companies deal with the content creation process when it comes to their social media marketing campaigns and what are the steps that companies follow when it comes to the creation of this content. Due to this purpose, the authors have decided that a qualitative study would be the most suitable approach for this study.

A qualitative research aims to study things in their natural form and setting in an attempt to interpret events in terms of the meaning that people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994:2). Furthermore, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) adds that qualitative research aims to “understand how people interpret their experiences” and “the way that people construct their words”.

These statements have reinforced the authors' decision of using a qualitative approach, as the purpose of this study is understanding and gaining knowledge about the process of content creation and how companies deal with this, without trying to determine any future implications or causes. (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Furthermore, to gain this knowledge, in-depth interviews with the professionals creating the content is the most suitable option. The data collected through the interviews will represent an accurate depiction of their perception, thoughts and interpretations of the studied subject – which represents the fitting outcome of a qualitative study, according to Bryman and Bell (2015)

3.3 Abductive Approach

According to Bryman and Bell (2015), the inductive approach is used mostly when carrying out a qualitative research as this type of research is generally based on observations and data collection – which will later be analyzed through the prism of theory in order to generate new data. Therefore, in the case of the inductive approach, the study is started from the collected data and will lead to the generation of new data and theory (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

When it comes to the deductive approach, the research starts from the already existing theory from which a working hypothesis, that will later be tested through the collected data, is formed (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The deductive approach is most common when carrying out quantitative research in which quantifiable measures are needed in order to be able to conclusively prove or disprove the formed hypothesis (Patel & Davidson, 2011).

The abductive approach combines the use of both the deductive and inductive approaches (Patel & Davidson, 2011). As this particular study is not following neither of these approaches and the study as a whole represents a continuous process of collecting and combining both data and theory, the abductive approach is the most appropriate for carrying it out (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

According to Alvesson & Sköldbberg (2009), an abductive approach allows a study to start from the empirical data which will after be interpreted and analyzed through the prism of the previously existing theory.

Bryman and Bell (2015) describe the abductive approach as an approach where the theory and the empirical data is gathered through a process of puzzling. The same process was used for this particular study. As new communication with the interviewed companies have been carried out, more information has been gathered, which when combined, linked and interpreted with the help of the theory, has led to the find of patterns and the understanding of the concepts. This, according to Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) is the way that the abductive approach should work, being a continuous process of adapting and adjusting both the empirical and theoretical data in order to shape the research study.

The interconnected, constantly evolving and developing use of both empirical and theoretical data throughout this study - which represents what Bryman and Bell (2015) describe as being the process of puzzling which defines the abductive approach - represents the reason why the authors of this study argue that an abductive approach is the most suitable.

3.2 Research Design

Research design is most commonly classified in the following three types: exploratory, descriptive and explanatory (Saunders et al. 2012). This study is based on a descriptive strategy. Saunders et al (2012) argues that the aim of a descriptive strategy is to provide an accurate and clear view of a person, event or situation as well as providing extensive information about the studied subject, without altering the information (ibid.). As the aim of this study is to gain a clear view of how the subject of this research is treated in several companies, without altering the collected information, the most appropriate strategy to be used for this study is a descriptive one. Furthermore, according to Sontakki (2010) and Gahauri and Grønhaug (2005), a descriptive strategy, through its flexibility, allows the authors to adapt and change their study depending on the information that is being collected during the primary data collection phase. This has proved to be an advantage for the authors of this particular research study as it has allowed them to adapt the direction of this study according to the data collected in order to ensure optimal results.

The research design that is chosen for a study is, as well, concerned with the method which the authors find most appropriate for the collection of data - providing authors with a framework for collecting data and analyzing it (Bryman and Bell, 2011). According to Bryman

and Bell (2011) there are five types of research design: experimental design, cross-sectional or social survey design, longitudinal design, case study design, comparative design.

For this study, a multiple case study design will be used due to the fact that this design type is the most suitable for the aim of the research – a research for which companies have been interviewed in order to gain an accurate depiction of the studied subject. Furthermore, Yin (2009) argues that case study research contributes to a more in-depth understanding of the chosen topic and as this research study intends to achieve exactly that, a better understanding of the studied subject, the author's design choice is reinforced.

3.2.1 Case Study

As Saunders, et al. (2012) and Yin (2009) argue that a case study design is the most appropriate when the aim of the research is to gain an in-depth understanding of the researched topic and the involved processes. Therefore, a case study design will be used as the aim is to gain an in-depth understanding and analysis of the way that content for social media marketing is created by multiple companies. Furthermore, this research study will be utilizing a multiple-case study design which will be allowing the authors the possibility to find and compare the differences and similarities between the multiple cases (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

The case studies for this research will be from seven different companies that work within the studied field of research and they will focus on the way that these companies, together with their clients handle the content creation process for their social media campaigns. Due to the fact that these companies might share proprietary information about their process and about their clients, the interviewed personnel and the companies will remain anonymous – this being done both to ensure professional safety and in order to fulfill privacy requirements which have been stated when approached regarding this study.

3.3 Research Procedure

3.3.1 Data Sources

When it comes to data sources, there are two different types of data that can be used for research, according to Saunders et al. (2012) and Bryman and Bell (2015). The two types of data are used in order to provide the necessary data for the authors to be able to answer the study's research question/s (Saunders et al. 2009). It is essential to understand what data needs to be collected in order to be able to answer the research question and to fulfill the purpose of a study (Österberg, 2003).

Secondary data refers to data that has not been collected for the specific study that it is currently being carried out (Saunders et al., 2009). Secondary data can be represented by previously published articles, data collected for different research purposes (ibid).

Primary data refers to new data that has been directly collected by the researchers with the purpose of being used for a research study (Saunders et al. 2009; Alvehus, 2013). According to Bryman and Bell (2015), there are several risks related to primary data, which include: the

inability of collecting the right data due to problems in communication with the participants as well as the risk of the researchers subjectively interpretation of the data, which could result in a non-valid and irrelevant conclusion. Despite this, there are advantages to the use and collection of primary data for a study, which are represented by the specific/tailored nature of the collected data and the assurance of the data being up to date (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

This study is focused on primary data only. The choice of focusing on the use of primary data has allowed the authors to customize the data collection so that the collected data is tailored specifically for gaining a deeper understanding of the studied subject. The primary data will be collected through interviews, as interviews represent the most appropriate data collection method for gaining in-depth information regarding the studied subject, from the participants.

3.3.2 Data collection method

According to Yin (2013), depending on the research method that is to be used for a certain study, some data collection methods are more suitable than others. The most used collection methods are represented by interviews, focus groups, surveys and content analysis (Bryman and Bell, 2015). For this research study, the selected data collection method was: interviews. There are three types of interviews that can be used when it comes data collection for qualitative studies: unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews and structured interviews (ibid.)

For this research study, the authors have opted for the use of semi-structured interviews. Before the interviews, an interview guide has been created in order to ensure that all the relevant questions and topics of conversation were to be covered (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

Through choosing semi-structured interviews as the data collection method, the authors wanted not only to ensure that all the relevant questions and topics are covered, but as well that additional questions that could arise during the interviews could be directly addressed (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The interviews have been carried out, when possible, face to face as this is considered to be preferable as it provides more personal, accurate and spontaneous answers (ibid) or through video calls. Another benefit of having live interviews instead of carrying them out through email or any other type of written communication is that it allows both the interviewees and the interviewer to be fully committed to the interview – therefore providing more accurate and possibly less filtered information (ibid). The questions that have been formulated and listed in the interview guide (located in appendix) are open questions that allow the interviewees to both interpret them and answer freely, from their own point of view and experience. For each company, there has been one initial interview and further information has been collected through the use of email and other forms of digital communication.

3.3.3 Pre-Interview

Upon deciding the field of research in which this study was to be carried out, a first interview has been carried out by the authors in order to gain a better understanding of the topic, the task that they will be aiming to accomplish and the process of doing so. At the time of the interview the topic has not been completely decided upon and this first interview has helped form a research path and a better understanding of possible research subjects and directions. According to the Bryman and Bell's (2015) definition of a pre-study – a pre-study being a way of realizing if the questions, information and research direction are relevant – this first interview could and does classify as a pre-study for this researchers study. The interview/study has been carried out with one of the seven companies interviewed for this study.

3.3.4 Sample selection

It is not always possible to study all the relevant groups or population and therefore it is important that the researchers choose the right population sample for the study that they are attempting to carry out (Bryman and Bell, 2015). According to Saunders et al., (2012), sampling plays a very important role in any research as the objectives and results are dependent on it.

According to Bryman & Bell (2011) there are two types of sampling that can and shall be used when carrying out qualitative research: probability and non-probability sampling. Non-probability sampling is a sampling method in which the sample population is not chosen on purpose. This type of sampling eliminates as much as possible the factor of probability and uncertainty as some groups/individuals within the population have a higher chance of being selected (Bryman and Bell, 2011). On the other hand, probability sampling represents a sampling method in which the sampling are chosen at random (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

The sampling method that has been used for this research study is non-probability sampling as the samples have been chosen in a strategic and well thought-out way. The authors wanted to ensure that significant information will be collected – information that is relevant and adequate to the topic and aim of the research study.

The authors aimed to find and interview companies that work within the field of content creation and content marketing. The goal was to choose samples with a strong and relevant connection to the studied subject and therefore interview people that have an extensive knowledge in this field (Alvehus, 2013). By choosing and interviewing the right companies and people within the companies, the data collection process will provide the necessary data for the research study to be carried out (Bryman and Bell, 2011). However, by using this sampling selection method it is meant that the data collected cannot be generalized outside the field of content creation as the data cannot be generalized outside this particular field (ibid).

The choice of non-probability sampling is as well influenced by the fact that the authors of this study are working in the field of media content creation and content marketing and therefore have experience and knowledge regarding this particular field.

Seven companies have been chosen for this research study. All the companies operate within the field of content marketing and content creation – creating content both for them in order to advertise their services and B2B to other companies, and, creating media content for their corporate clients. Within the seven companies, a total of ten people have been chosen based on their function and responsibilities to be interviewed.

3.3.5 Procedure

In order to carry out the interviews, the authors have made initial contact with the seven interviewed companies, making sure to specify the purpose of the study and present a preview of what information they are aiming to collect. The initial contact has been made through the use of social media and direct phone calls to the companies. Upon this initial contact, the dates and time for the interviews have been set.

The interviews took place either face to face in some cases, as well as through Video Calls in the case of companies located in countries other than Sweden. In all cases, the interviews have been carried out in a live format in which both the interviewers and the interviewees interacted in real time and therefore ensuring a fair and natural flow of conversation.

For all interviews, both of the authors of this study were present, which is highly beneficial as this has allowed for follow up questions to be asked (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Furthermore, by both being present, the authors have ensured that they are up to date with all of the collected information and that it is all well understood and accurate (ibid).

The duration of the interviews varied, depending on the length of the answers provided and the schedule of the interviewees, with the average time per interview being of 25 minutes. In total, ten people from the seven different companies have been interviewed.

As the companies have opted towards keeping their anonymity, the anonymity of the ten interviewed people will be respected as well in order to ensure that no sensitive information is leaked and no direct link to the interviewed companies could be made.

3.3.6 Respondent Validation

Respondent validation represents an important process in which the authors of a research study aim to provide the readers with information regarding the interviewed parties that have provided the primary data use for the study they are carrying out (Bryman and Bell, 2015). This process is often used when it comes to qualitative research as the authors intend to show the compliance between the authors' findings and the respondent's provided knowledge and expressed perspectives (ibid.).

All the interviewed parties are well established within the fields of content creation, content distribution and content marketing. All of them are providing their professional services in the mentioned fields towards other companies; by this it is to be understood that all the respondent companies use content marketing in order to attract their own corporate clients and then further they create content and implement content marketing campaigns on social media for their corporate clients.

In total, there have been seven companies interviewed for this research and ten people. For three of the interviewed companies, two people from the respective companies were present at once – during the interview. In total, seven interviews have been carried out - one for each company.

The respondents of these interviews are referred to as Respondent 1,2,3,4,5,6,7. Although there were 10 people, as for the three companies that provided 2 people per interview, as they have provided the information together, they will be referred to as one entity. This is done as a result of the information provided by the two people that were present, was the same and it did not differ from one person to the other in any way. As well, the choice is based on the fact that both of them represent the same company.

Respondent 1: Works as a consultant and content creator at a company in Sweden. This company offers services such as creating micro-content, long form content etc. for different clients. Generally, Respondent 1 works with small firms and companies, helping them create content that has as aim attracting new business partnerships and corporate clients, as well as keeping the already existing pool of customers and partners up to date with their activities.

Respondent 2: Works closely with social media management and is also a content creator, being specialized on the hospitality industry; working closely with hotels, destinations, resorts, etc. in order to attract corporate clients.

Respondent 3: The interviewee is an entrepreneur and owns an advertisement company; social media plays an important part for this firm as many of the advertisement and content creation is done explicitly for various platforms. Working within the advertisement industry, Respondent 3 only works with corporate clients. Furthermore, the company represented by Respondent 3 specializes in B2B advertisement, creating advertising material that is aimed to showcase the activities and abilities of companies towards other companies.

Respondent 4: Is a social media manager for a business organization that helps student who have either started a business or are aiming to do so in the near future. The firm helps the student with tutoring, financing and to get in contact with investors. The main activity of the company represented by Respondent 4 being helping startups, they exclusively work within the B2B industry and their aim is attracting new business partners as well as attracting entrepreneurs and startups in order to connect them and help the latter develop.

Respondent 5: Entrepreneurs that work with content creation on a daily basis; everything from creating content for their blog, social media channels and especially creating content for clients

that approach them to market their brand. This company specializes in traveling and works with different touristic destinations, hotels and restaurants.

Respondent 6: Entrepreneurs that specialize in content creation in the form of writing and photography; they also travel around the world partially to write about food experiences. The company represented by Respondent 6 works mostly with restaurants, as previously mentioned, aiming to create content that showcases the ability of these restaurants and culinary destination for hosting high-end corporate events. Therefore, the content that is created by them is aimed towards the B2B segment of the market and not towards the general consumers

Respondent 7: The firm is specialized in luxury traveling and work with writing reviews on destinations and hotels. This is also an area in which they offer consulting services. They are specialized in collaborating with and creating content for destinations and hotels aimed towards the corporate world; aiming to attract high-end corporate retreats, conferences, etc. towards the destinations that they collaborate with.

3.3.7 Empirical overview

The empirical data for this study that has been gathered through the semi-structured interviews that have been carried out with the seven above mentioned companies.

The data has been collected in the form of notes and recordings – created during the interviews. The collected material is represented by approximately two and a half to three hours of audio recordings and additional notes, collected in a digital format. Under spoken agreement with the interviewed parties, the recordings and original notes of the interviews are not to be published or publicly showcase in order to ensure the anonymity of the respondents – this is done as throughout the interviews, the respondents have shared real life examples of their work and processes that, if published, could affect them and their corporate clients.

3.3.8 Data analysis method

As previously mentioned, the data collected during qualitative research is not quantifiable and consists of words – therefore it is not as clear as the data collected during quantitative research and harder to interpret and analyze (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

Although the data that has been collected is rich and useful, it does present a struggle to analyze and cherry pick the most valuable of it (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Furthermore, Saunders et al. (2012) points out the importance of paying increase attention when using a qualitative analysis method. Therefore, mapping out and following a clear pathway of how the data has been collected should be transcribed, coded, interpreted and presented, is essential.

The recordings of the interviews, which have helped preserve the collected information as well as facilitate the process of reanalyzing it, have been converted to written content -all the data collected during the interviews now being transcribed. After being transcribed, the material

has been simplified to make sure that all the unnecessary information has been eliminated and only the relevant one is kept. Next, the process of coding has been carried out in order to find commonly and occurring keywords and themes e.g. content creation, social media, content marketing. Through the process of coding, the authors have been able to identify the relevant concepts which have further helped to form the empirical collection. Furthermore, by transcribing and then coding the collected data, the authors have been able to interpret the empirical material and link it to the theoretical framework and vice versa and through doing so, both similarities and slight differences have been identified. When the Interpretation phase has been completed, the presentation of the empirical findings, followed.

3.4 Quality Criteria

The quality criteria chapter of a research study allows the authors to showcase the trustworthiness of it. According to Bryman and Bell (2011) this is one of the main considerations that shall be taken into consideration when considering reviewing academic research material.

According to Bryman and Bell (2011), case study research is often hard to generalize as the cases, most often, do not widely apply – being based on specific examples. Despite this, by using a multiple case study, based on several companies, a certain level of trustworthiness and reliability has been ensured – as this study focuses on the similar practices of the studied companies.

3.4.1 Validity

Validity represents the most important criterion of research (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Validity is concerned with the conclusions and results that are generated from a research paper (Bryman and Bell, 2011) and refers to the correctness of the research (Ritchie et al. 2014).

In order to ensure the validity of this particular study, the authors have ensured to work closely with all the parties that are involved in the completion of this research study. Reason being to ensure that the focus of the research was not lost during the period that the study was being carried out; thus ensuring internal validity through the pledged responsibility to complete the proposed study. As well, to verify the external validity of the study, after the completion of the study, the authors are to be distributing the final work to the companies that have been interviewed for the data collection to analyze and ensure that the study is applicable in other instances, as it has been initially planned and designed.

3.4.2 Confirmability

Confirmability is concerned with whether the researcher(s) has allowed his or her values to intrude to a high degree in the research study (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The researchers of this study have made sure to keep one another in check and make sure that none of their values intruded, to any significant degree in the way that the research study has been carried out. Additionally, throughout the period in which the study has been carried out, the role of “devil’s

advocate" has been assigned to one of the researchers; this was done to ensure that throughout the whole study, there is always someone to objectively question the course of action that is being taken and the way that the study is being carried out. This position has shifted between the authors to have a sense of variety and for both to be able to be objective and give constructive criticism along the way.

3.4.3 Credibility

Credibility is concerned with the way the researchers carry out the research and if it has been carried out according to the canons of good practice, as well as being submitting the findings of the research to the members of the social world who were studied in order for confirmation that the researcher has clearly understood the subject studied. The latter often being referred to as respondent validation (Bryman and Bell, 2011). In order to ensure credibility for this particular study, the team of authors has ensured to follow all the theoretical instructions to the letter so that no mishaps would take place, as well as agreeing in advance of all the interviews that have been carried that after the research is to be completed, the final research study is to be submitted to all the parties that were involved in the study. By doing so, the authors have ensured to fulfill both the inner credibility criterion as well as the respondent validation one.

3.4.4 Reliability

Reliability is generally concerned with whether the research can be replicated in the exact same manner, while generating the exact same outcome (Saunders et al., (2009). Internal reliability is concerned with the number of researchers present for the data collection phase of the research study and it is as well concerned if the team present agrees about what they see and hear (Bryman and Bell, 2011). When it comes to this particular research study, both of the authors were present during all stages of data collection and they agree upon the what they have heard and saw during the interviews that have been carried out in order to collect the primary data used.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

There are several ethical considerations discussed by Patel & Davidsson (2015) as well as by Bryman and Bell (2015). The authors of a research study must strive to consider these considerations in order to ensure that no problems with the participants will occur as well as to ensure that the participant businesses do not suffer any harm (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

Deception is concerned with the researchers providing all the relevant information about the research they are carrying out, to the participants (Bryman and Bell, 2015). In order to ensure that the participants are fully informed, the authors of this study have ensured to provide to the participant companies all the relevant information regarding the research from the beginning, in the initial contact process.

Confidentiality represents the ethical consideration concerned with preserving the anonymity of the participants (Bryman and Bell, 2015) – both the companies and the interviewed personnel. This is an ethic consideration which is respected throughout this research as all

companies are left anonymous and only brief and descriptive information is given regarding each company – other than this, no additional or sensitive information about the companies has been shared.

Invasion of Privacy is concerned with the researchers need to respect the privacy of the participants (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Throughout the entire process of carrying out this research study, the authors have ensured to be as objective, careful and professional as possible. Proper communication channels have been established, clear interview schedules have been fixed and the personal and professional values and beliefs of the participants have been considered.

Furthermore, to ensure an ethical conduct of this research study, the participants have been asked to agree upon the respondent validation section of this research study. As well, the participants have been promised to be presented with the full research upon its completion to ensure them that no deception has taken place and that the authors have presented their research in full.

4. Empirical Findings

This chapter presents the empirical findings that have been collected from seven semi-structured interviews. The interviews have been carried out with companies working in the field of content creation, content marketing and social media. The chapter is divided into various sections, regarding the topics of interest chosen to be the most appropriate for this study

4.1 Content Marketing

4.1.1 Purpose of content marketing

“With content marketing, you actively put yourself out there.” – Respondent 1

Respondent 1 argues content marketing as a way of providing useful information which will be relevant to the audience which you are targeting. As an expert within the field of content creation, the respondent further emphasizes the fact that one must plan what will work best for the audience. Content marketing relies much on the fact that consistency is crucial when both creating and distributing content. According to the respondents it is important to have a constant presence on social media platforms.

“By constantly posting and always trying to not only maintain the quality of our content, but always improve it, we keep our audience constantly engaged and ever growing” - Respondent 5

By posting and sharing content on e.g. social media it helps the brand to be present and show themselves to the audience (Respondent 5). Pushing content on a regular basis can raise the

brand awareness (Respondent 1; Respondent 2; Respondent 6). It is important to be aware and prepared of the possibility that there will be no instant responds to the content campaigns; however, that it will appear eventually. At some point along the line, the audience will stumble upon the certain content again and there is a chance that they will recognize it already and desire to act upon it and be a part of what the company must offer (Respondent 1; Respondent 7).

The content needs to be interesting and engaging for the audience to both take it into consideration in the first place and to want to know more about it.” – Respondent 3

When content is not consistent it can create a disadvantage. In this case, it most likely means that the audience has not been taken into account in the process of content creation (Respondent 2; Respondent 6). By utilizing content marketing in this way, the content does not generate any value and thus the content loses its purpose (Respondent 6). Respondent 1 shared that in some cases companies create content with the mindset to push content to simply achieve something, but that is not how it is supposed to be done (Respondent 1; Respondent 4).

“Sometimes the only way through which companies understand the benefits of content marketing is seeing other companies benefit from it. We make sure to present a detailed presentation and make sure to give an idea of what we response we can be expecting from the content we will be creating” – Respondent 5

Respondent 3 perceives and argues content marketing as distribution of content such as written posts, photos or videos; according to him and several other respondents, the content is meant to be well thought-out, planned and designed to a purpose which is decided prior to its creation. Furthermore, respondents 5, 6 and 7; all of them emphasizing the importance of defining the clear goals of the content that is to be produced.

When it comes to content marketing there is a variety of content which you can create and share with the audience (Respondent 7). It can be everything from fun material, relevant news, useful content which is meant to inform the audience, basically anything that helps to put the company out on the market according to Respondent 1.

Respondent 2 argued that content shared should contain a variety of attributes. It should be a mix of informative, educating, entertaining and engaging materials. Further the respondent explained that content must be based on creativity and facts. Furthermore, the respondent adds that although selling something is the ultimate goal, content needs to be created first to raise interest and then after to fulfill its marketing purposes.

Respondent 2 discussed that the goal is to attract new customers and keep the existing ones, however to achieve this, there are smaller goals that need to be attained. These smaller goals can refer to entertaining the crowd and having a constant and updated feed, etc. (Respondent 5). Thus, for companies to achieve these smaller goals they must attract their audience by their content marketing (Ibid). The content must be of interest to the people, whether it be a picture of e.g. their dream destination or hotel. It must generate some sense of value to the audience (Respondent 2; Respondent 6).

Companies can tell their stories via content marketing; meaning they can show people how their journey looks like and which persons stand behind the passion and activities (Respondent 1; Respondent 4; Respondent 7). Furthermore, they can project onto the audience what the value of the company is and why it is revolutionary (Respondent 1; Respondent 5). This represents a great benefit especially for small companies as usually they do not have the resources themselves to do this, but they however have the opportunity to hire professionals to handle the content creation and distribution tasks

Respondent 1 and Respondent 6 concluded the perception of content marketing by stating that the consistent presence of content on social media can help firms in many ways. The content marketing can yield advantages and achieve company goals such as; building brand image, building trust and relationships with the audience (Respondent 6; Respondent 2). Respondent 1 views it as a strategy of hope where content is distributed and then one must stay patience until eventually it catches the attention of the targeted audience (Ibid).

All the respondents believe that companies, even their own, are dependent on content marketing through social media. They view it as an important gateway to communicating with stakeholders and current and potential customers (Respondent 1; Respondent 3). When they create their content, they ensure to plan it and design it carefully to achieve the following goals: generate interest, transmit the message that the company wants to get across and be entertaining for the audience.

4.1.2 Benefits of Content Marketing

Content marketing, as explained by the respondents, can generate interest and increase the reach of information by the audience. As the content is meant to engage a vast audience, it can have a significant reach as people may share the content further; this may and usually results in more people seeing the content campaign (Respondent 7). Respondent 3 stated to strongly believe that by reaching more people a great chance of obtaining potential customers and business cotatcs is created.

” The advantages are obvious, if and when a content marketing campaign is done right and they should be somewhere along the lines of: increased reach, impressing the audience with great content that they are interested in, creating content that the audience would want to share, etc.”
– Respondent 5

The respondents state that the exact outcome of any content marketing campaign cannot be fully predicted. According to Respondents 5 and 7, there could always be additional, temporary factors that could cause a marketing campaign to either go viral or be underexposed.

” The results of a content marketing campaign cannot be entirely predicted. The one sure thing that companies should be expecting from a well-planned out and executed campaign is an increase reach. Through an increase reach, the pool of potential customers and business partners increases significantly” – Respondent 6

Respondent 4 brings up the importance of producing and sharing high quality content, stating that using high quality content, constantly, companies can succeed to form a loyal audience that will constantly return to the social media channels of the company. Furthermore, the respondent argues that through this, the audience will always, subconsciously, keep the company in mind.

” Companies can create highly distinctive and recognizable content by adopting a certain style, color palet, tone or structure, etc. By constantly using the same type of content, not only will customer want to come back to the copmpany’s social media channels for content, but they will as well be able to spot and differentiate it in any other context” – Respondent 5

Most respondents agree upon the fact that having a loyal audience is the key to B2B Interactions. Through engaging with the existing audience and existing pool of customers and business partners, companies can and will strengthen their brand and increase their recognition on social media.

4.2 Social Media

4.2.1 Usage of Social Media Platforms

The Respondents are relying quite heavily on social Media for their business activities. All of them most existing platforms, such as. Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to their full potential and including all the features and attributes in their marketing efforts.

According to Respondent 1, content existed long before social media appeared, but nowadays it is the easiest and most efficient way for companies to share information with their stakeholders. Respondent three goes further to state that their marketing efforts are almost entirely focused on social media and through its use the amount of existing and potential stakeholders that can be reached is higher than there would be using any other channels.

Respondent 2 says that Social Media allows for a very quick transfer of information and an unprecedented reach. Through social media you can reach people from all over the world, with only a few clicks. The disadvantage of it is that many companies use it completely wrong – they do not understand how to use it to their advantage. Understanding the proper use of social media according to their intended use – sharing the right type of content through the right type of social media platform is aspect that has been emphasized by all of the respondents.

While respondent 1 and 3 mostly use Facebook and Instagram as the main channels of content distribution, respondent number 2 focuses mostly on Twitter. All the respondent haves stated that they choose the social media platforms that they are to be sharing content through, based on the type of content that they need to be sharing. Respondent 2 stresses the importance of using the right social media platform to distribute different types of content as the overall perception of certain types of content differs from platform to platform.

Respondent 2 states that Twitter is a very efficient way to communicate with stakeholders, be them customers, suppliers or business partners. The 140- characters limit allows for short and full of meaning messages. When it comes to other social media websites, it is harder to interact with people and the process is much harder and complicated.

Respondent 1 states that Twitter is a highly efficient way of keeping in touch with customers, replying to complaints and for customer support– stating that the short 140- characters format of Twitter posts allows for comprised information to be shared in a quick and efficient way that is easy to write and understand.

Respondent 3 stated that the company mainly focuses on Facebook and Instagram. The company shares a large amount visual content and direct links to their events. Therefore, Respondent 3 considers Facebook to be the main platform as it allows them to organize and share events, as well as streaming them live, followed close in second by Instagram due to its superior reach when it comes to photos and short videos.

According to Respondent 1, companies can tell stories about the actual company show the activity of the company behind the scenes and overall offer to the stakeholders a more personal perspective about the companies. Continuing, Respondent 1 states that this will as well aid future employees and business partners get a clear and accurate image of the company, the work environment and company culture – allowing for a quicker integration and an increased stakeholder relationship experience.

4.3 Creating Content

4.3.1 Planning Content Creation

Respondent 1 states that the most important part of the process of content creation is the planning stage. Respondent 7 goes to explain that by creating a strong and well-structured creation and distribution plan, companies can ensure that the content that they are creating is transmitting the right message.

” When a company contracts us for a content creation project they always have a goal in mind; they know what effect they want the content to have. Together we take into consideration all aspects and elements needed to achieve their goal.” – Respondent 5

The respondents confirmed that in the design phase of the content creation process, the content creators work closely with other departments within the company to ensure that no aspects are neglected. Respondent 7 stating that all the different departments that could provide relevant information are met for nothing to be missed. The respondent continues by saying that through doing so, content creators, ensure that no information is missing. Furthermore, through doing so, they can ensure that that the message transmitted is as clear and genuine as possible.

“When working within the B2B sector, it is of outmost importance to understand what type of customers, companies want to attract. To do so, the content creators need to carefully design the content and decide upon the distribution channels.” – Respondent 2

According to Respondents 1, 2 and 5 determining the right audience and the way to reach them is essential. To be able to determine the right audience, the respondents state that a clear image of the audience the company desires is needed. Furthermore, in order to be able to find the right

channels of communications, the previously targeted audience needs to be studied and understood.

” From the title, to the length of the text and from the colors to the location of a photo shoot, every single aspect needs to be discussed with every relevant party, beforehand. This ensures that there is no misunderstanding over what we are trying to achieve, what is needed to create the content and the way the final piece of content will look like.” – Respondent 6

Most of the respondents have agreed upon the importance of the content design and appearance. Furthermore, all the respondents have emphasized the fact that the content only has a few seconds to attract the interest of the audience before scrolling over it. Therefore, the importance of every aspect of the content needs to be taken into consideration as the final design needs to: raise the interest of the audience, provide information, be entertaining and provide value to the audience.

4.3.2 Process of Content Creation

According to the Respondents, content is represented by any form of visual or written material that has been created with the purpose that a company wants to achieve in mind. According to Respondent 2 and 5, content is represented by any photos, videos, visual material, storytelling material and written material that has been thought out and structured in advance of its creation.

Randomly producing content that is to be distributed through social Media, without respecting certain uniformity regarding the looks, tone, color scheme and type, is according to Respondent 1, 2 and 7 the biggest mistake that companies make. According to the respondents, in order for content to be well perceived by the target audience that it is being shared with, a company needs to: plan ahead, be aware of what they want to achieve and determine the right audience they would like to reach

According to Respondent 2, most companies that have already implemented Social Media as part of their Marketing Efforts are completely dependent on Content Marketing and Content Creation, no matter if they are aware of this or not. For companies to be able to clearly and constantly communicate with their target audience, the content flow needs to be consistent – in terms of quality, looks and subject matter (Respondent 2, 4, 5).

Respondents state that the content which the company is sharing through social media, must take into consideration both the needs of the company and the audience. According to Respondent 1, the most important stage in the creation of content is the planning part. All the aspects of the content need to be mapped out in order to ensure that the final product will succeed to transmit the message that it contains and in order to be able to produce the desired reaction that is expected from the target audience. To this aspect, Respondent no 2 adds that in the planning and designing phases needs to be treated as inter-departmental tasks - where the content creation, marketing managers and the management department come together in order to ensure the quality of the content.

When it comes to short written content, such as Twitter posts, Respondent 2 states that although it does not seem like a lot of thought is put in these 140-character posts, that is wrong.

According to respondent no 2, even within the 140-character limit, companies make sure to create a narrative and incorporate clear messages that are mostly meant to both raise the interest of the target audience as well as drive the audience to interact with the content – by replying to it, commenting on it or sharing it. This goes to show the importance of content marketing the need for properly created content. According to Respondent 2 and 3, the realization of these facts are the reason behind somany companies enlist the help of professional media content creators. Companies are doing it in order ensure that the content that they will be sharing is of the highest quality.

When it comes to the difference between content created for B2B and B2B Content Marketing Campaigns he respondents have confirmed that there is a seemingly thin line. They continued, by adding that the line between them, although perceived to be insignificant by some, in reality there are significant difference. On the subject of differences, Respondent 6, 2 and 4 state that when creating content for consumers, within a B2C context, “the content is more directed towards their so called soft side, targeting their emotions and wishes” and the goal of the company is based around a one-time sale. On the other hand, when it comes to B2B content, it is geared towards “hard facts, added value and the portrayal of a company image with which other companies would wish to be associated in the long run” – the content needing to be fully portray everything about the company it represents.

5. Analysis

This chapter aims to analyze the empirical data in order to identify patterns and similarities between the collected data and the previous research that has been compiled in the theoretical framework. This will be done in order to answer the research questions and to achieve the aim of this study.

5.1 Perception of content marketing

Content marketing, in previous research, is referred to as being about creating content which will be of value to the audience and with the intention to inform and engage (Baltes, 2015; Pulizzi, 2014; Gupta, 2014; Brennan & Croft, 2012). Through the carried-out interviews, the authors have realized that this believed is shared by the practitioners as well. Both the researchers and the practitioners understand that when it comes to content marketing, the creation of value for the stakeholders must be considered.

When it comes to the understanding of what content marketing is supposed to achieve, both for the receivers and the transmitters, it seems like both the researchers and the practitioners are on the same page. Pulizzi (2014) points out that content marketing is not focused on the idea to push sales on the audience, but rather to inform them and bring awareness to one's company. Furthermore, Baltes (2015) argues in his research that creating content needs to be done with the end customer in mind and tend to their needs, therefore providing value to them. This is an interesting aspect which was of essence to research among the companies, to see whether they would have a similar understanding.

The respondents have a general understanding that content marketing is much more than advertising or simply selling, but rather a way of telling a story to the audience. More specifically it is a story which will take its time to generate benefits. Stakeholders may not immediately be influenced or act upon the distributed content. Despite this, in the time following the receipt of the content, there will be those who remember the content and the brand behind this content. This will in turn lead to the audience being eager to engage with the company as they will feel like they are already familiar with it, according to respondent 1 and 7. It is relevant to emphasize that this is an interesting finding as all of the respondents differ in their business, content marketing and aim to target different audiences. Nonetheless, by their statements they have a related understanding of the meaning of content marketing

By both the researchers and the practitioners having the same understanding regarding the role of content and content marketing, it can be stated that the role of content marketing is indeed that of a telling story to the customers. The authors consider that through the above presented data it can be stated that content needs to bring benefits not only to the company that is distributing, but as well to the receivers. Furthermore, all of the respondents emphasize this point. Furthermore, all of the respondents argued that content can have various traits, as it can be informative, engaging, entertaining or simply a mix of these.

Both the theoretical and empirical data seems to provide a united front regarding the importance of the content being entertaining. Furthermore, the respondents unanimously state that due to the fact that most of the content created by them is distributed through social media it is a necessity for it to be entertaining.

Through the implementation and use of content marketing, companies aim to achieve goals such as building brand image, reinforcing trust, as well as building and maintaining relationships with their stakeholders. The importance of these goals being combined with the desired entertaining aspects is crucial according to the respondents. A company's goals can only be achieved if the content is well received by the audience that it is delivered to. Gupta (2014) argues in her research that companies must manage to create informative content that simultaneously enlightens and pleases their audience.

It is no doubt that companies see the benefits and importance of content marketing through social media (Kaplan & Hainlein, 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). By designing and creating the content carefully, they can aim and achieve interest and entertain the audience. As stated by

Respondent 1, 3 and 5, the entertaining aspect is done by constantly having an updated feed which may appeal to the audience and create an interest. This interest was further argued by Respondent 2 & 6 when they stated that it can be generated by posting content e.g. pictures of hotels or destinations which will generate value and a desire. Through this information, a better understanding of the role that consistency plays in content marketing will be achieved.

The respondents all state that striving for a consistent presence on social media could be done through delivering content on a frequent basis. Furthermore, they state that only through maintaining a consistent feed, both from a qualitative and quantitative perspective is essential for any company. One of the arguments from the respondents regarding this component of content marketing relies on the objective to make the company seen by the audience. Gupta (2014) stated that by managing to create an interest from e.g. consumers or stakeholders, the audience will remember the company and its content and later on when a need arises and they aim to buy, they will come to you. However it is significant to mention that Gupta (2014) also claimed that delivering content is about mastering the way where one delivers the right message at the right time. From this, it is to be understood that in order for the audience to notice a company, the company needs to deliver qualitative content constantly. It is the author's understanding that by doing so, companies can ensure that the audience will be returning constantly for more content. Therefore, through doing so, companies will succeed to remain constantly on the mind of their audience.

The authors and respondents seem to agree that patience is key when it comes to creating and distributing content for social media. Alagöz & Ekici (2016) mentioned that companies should be prepared to wait and not to focus on quick results. This is also where the difficulty comes in as some companies yet do not see the direct value of content marketing. From the answers received from the respondents, it can be argued that this represents the main cause for doubting the efficiency and results of content marketing. Most companies would like to have a direct and immediate result, without having to wait. It seems like ensuring companies that content marketing is effective is a challenge, especially as content is individually designed for the needs and purposes of each company. Therefore, it is very hard to compare the success and failures of content marketing in other companies, with any particular new case. Respondent one goes to explain that his company must then make it their job to describe and create the content in a way that will show the value and exactly as to why it is worth investing in it. This goes to show that marketing and all its meaning has a long way to go to become the industry standard when it comes to marketing practices. This is the reason why numerous researchers have suggested future research in this field, as well as all of the respondents suggesting that more information should be widely available regarding this topic

It is relevant to mention the statement from the respondents which has yet not been claimed by any of the theories. They stated that many companies are not seeing the direct value of content marketing and what is meant to contribute with. Even though these companies are approaching them for creation of content, they still need to be convinced of the value it can bring. Despite there being numerous studies that have treated the subject of B2C content marketing, both content creators and clients altogether do not seem to be able to find "set in stone" research regarding the benefits, downsides or differences of B2B marketing (in regard to B2C). Furthermore, this goes to show that since B2B clients are interested in finding out more about

B2B content marketing, they should be able to find conclusive information regarding this information and not just speculations.

5.2 Why Create Content for Social Media

Järvinen & Taminen (2016) stated that social media itself, as previously mentioned in this study, can be defined as a channel of delivering content. Respondents argued that the different platforms are a crucial component to their business activities, one reason being that they are seeing it as an access to communication. Additionally, some of the respondents gave further opinions that social media enables an easy and fast way to deliver and share their content with the targeted audience (Respondent 1; Respondent 2; Respondent 3). In fact, Erdoğan & Cicek (2012) expressed that the users on social media are often interested in high quality content and that firms should therefore look to use the platforms to their advantage.

Researchers further claim that there are many benefits of companies engaging on social media, e.g. communication with stakeholders, promote business offering or increasing brand recognition (Järvinen & Taminen, 2016) and companies are tending to obtain these benefits (Kaplan & Hainlein, 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Many firms are therefore implementing this into their marketing efforts (Siagmagka et al., (2015). Respondent 1 and 3 explained that one of the significant benefits is that the platforms allow an extensive reach of the audience; which in turn allows them to obtain an increase of brand recognition through their content marketing and get in contact with stakeholders.

This goes to prove that in nowadays business world, social media plays a very important role. Both the researchers and the respondents agree on the efficiency of communicating through social media. Therefore, it can be said that social media does indeed represent a great way to distribute content.

However, there are still some firms, more specifically those working within a B2B context, that still are either struggling to understand the benefits that content marketing could bring to them. Therefore, many of these companies, knowing about the benefits of social media, end up sharing content in a random and disorganized manner that could end up hurting the business (Siagmagka et al, 2015, Respondent 1). It can be argued that if companies succeed to acknowledge the importance of social media, then they should be able to get an understanding of the importance of content marketing. This is because in order to reach any audience on social media, content must be used and therefore the companies must understand the way to create engaging and informative content.

In relevance to this, Respondent 2 mentioned that in order for a company to properly manage social media and content marketing through various channels, they must first choose the right platform. After choosing the right platform, they must create the right content which will be suitable for the channel. Keating et al. (2015) specify that different platforms are of unique design and purpose and it is crucial to firms to understand this aspect. The respondents have highlighted this understanding throughout the interviews. In fact, all respondents talked about creating diverse types of content depending on what type of message or objective they intend to achieve; and then adapting the content to different platforms. This would make sense as the

reality is that the channels are different, some are focused more on photos such as Instagram. On the other hand, some other channels, such as Facebook offer a variety of content distribution; it may be photos, videos, long text, short text etc. (Järvinen et al., 2012). Respondent 3 for instance favors Facebook for the company's business and content marketing as it allows the company to create events which further on can be marketed and targeted towards a certain audience of various stakeholders. On the other hand, Respondent 2 prefers Twitter as they consider it to be a much more efficient way of transmitting information in a way that grasps the attention.

Respondent 1 gave examples of how companies may go about using Instagram as a platform for content marketing. Many companies take advantage of the idea that the platform is about sharing photos because they can for instance share their corporate story. The respondent went about explaining how firms may take photos which are 'behind the scenes', meaning of the office space or coworkers, to tell their company story. By doing this they can share what is going on with the audience, they can share their journeys and passions and perhaps by that build trust and improve brand image (Ibid). Järvinen et al. (2012) in fact described Instagram to be a platform where people use it as a photo blogging platform, and blogging is about sharing stories. There is the expression that a photo says more than a thousand words, and this can perhaps be the main value to the audience as they can get to the firms go about their business activities; activities which contribute to the final product or service or overall brand image.

From this it can be understood that the unique features and designs of the social media platforms should be considered. Companies must understand these differences and use them to their advantage. Through understanding the features that make these platforms unique, companies should and could be able to create content that will succeed to engage the desired audiences in the most effective way. From the data collected, it has become clear that there are many companies which do not pay attention to this and they end up using the same content types across various platforms. Therefore, it can be stated that this is one of their main issues when it comes to content marketing. As pictures accompanied by long texts could function very well for both Facebook and Tumblr, on Instagram there is a very high chance for the text to be completely ignored as there, the users focus mostly on the visual content. Furthermore, the long text could not even be shared through Twitter as there, the length limit is of 140 characters.

Analyzing both the empirical and theoretical data, it can be stated that selecting the right social media platform and creating the appropriate content for it, are essential to achieving the goals of a content marketing campaign.

5.3 Process of creating a Content Marketing Campaign

5.3.1 Designing Content

The respondents, state that content is represented by any form of visual or written material that has been created with a clearly defined purpose, continuing to say that in order to facilitate and ensure the proper creation of the content, its creation needs to be clearly planned out. According to all of the respondents, the designing phase it is essential for all of the involved parties to agree upon the main aspects of the content. Aspects such as the transmitted message, the channels

through which the content will be distributed, the way the content will be providing value to the customer, etc. need all to be taken into account. Furthermore, besides taking all these aspects into account, they all must be incorporated in the final content.

Respondent 7 goes to state that the final design of the content is entirely dependent on the content creator having a clear understanding of the message that shall be transmitted and the form that the messages shall take. Furthermore, Respondents 1, 2 and 5 state that meetings with the relevant parties within the companies, such as the management and marketing departments are essential in order to ensure that the message that is to be transmitted and the target audience are accurate. Therefore, it is to be understood that in the designing phase it is essential to gather as much information as possible from all involved party.

The respondents state that the needs of the companies depend from project to project and for every project there are variations and differences. It is to be understood that this is due to the fact that the content created has the aim of representing the company and transmitting highly personalized messages. Therefore, although similarities can be found regarding various content marketing campaigns, it is still difficult to compare the campaigns in between each-other. Respondent 6 and 7 did indicate that in some cases there are similarities between projects, especially if the companies operate in the same field of activity and they are advertising comparable products and/or services. All this show that there are differences between B2B and B2C content marketing and content creation. According to previous research regarding B2C content marketing, many products are advertised to consumers in the same ways, using highly similar methods, There are many examples of content marketing campaigns for B2C being based on the same framework and being so similar that have sparked media controversy and even legal actions (such as constantly reoccurring marketing disputes between Mc.Donald's and Burger Kind, Apple and Samsung, etc.) (Williams et al., 2010; Schultz and Peltier, 2013, Siamgka et al. 2015. The responses provided by the respondents indicated that B2B content marketing and content in general has a proprietary nature that needs to be considered. This proprietary nature leads to the need for modern designs and plans for every project.

5.3.2 Process of Content Creation

The respondents state that creating content that is to be distributed through Social Media, without respecting a certain uniformity regarding its looks, title, tone etc. is the biggest mistake that companies could make. According to Respondents 1, 2 and 7, the biggest mistake that companies make in general is not considering the esthetic of their content but ignoring the importance of consistency and uniformity. Newman (2012) backs these statements up, sharing the same beliefs throughout his research, which state that content should put importance on title and visuals. The esthetics of the content are highly important. Therefore, the way that the content looks influences the way that the audience will be perceiving it. The way that the content is perceived by the audience is highly important as when it comes to social media, companies have only a few seconds to capture the attention of the audience and raise their interest.

Baltes (2015) states the fact that the marketing strategy should emphasize on the quality rather than the quantity and that companies should always make sure to take into consideration the interests of the audience. All the respondents state the fact that in order for content to be well perceived by the target audience, a company needs to plan ahead and ensure that they understand the needs and wants; in order to be able to deliver the right type of content.

Both the theoretical and empirical sources agree upon the importance of consistency and maintenance of high quality standards when it comes to content. To be able to constantly capture the interest of the target audience, the content needs to maintain its quality (Baltes, 2015). Furthermore, according to the respondents maintaining a certain uniformity throughout their content – in the form of colors, text, aesthetics, etc. - the brand recognition of the company will constantly increase as the target audience will start perceiving all similar content to be created by the same company.

This makes it clear that creating appealing content can and will ensure that the initial purpose of the content is not lost along the way. Furthermore, it is now clear that by creating relevant and attractive content will raise the interest of the audience. As well, by consistently maintaining the quality of the content, companies can ensure a better relations with their audience and a better brand recognition.

Baltes (2015) and Kaplan & Hainlein (2010) mention the benefits and importance of social media, in their research. They state the fact that social media allows the audience to interact and deliver content as they wish, continuing by stating the fact that it is important for companies to be active on social media so that they can keep their audience constantly engaged and interested. Furthermore, Respondents 2, 4 and 5 state the same thing as Baltes (2015) and Kaplan & Hainlein (2010), adding to the conversation the key role played by high quality content in this interaction. Therefore, there is a common front in between the used theory and empirical data regarding the overall importance of communication through social media in the business world.

Thus, it is now clear that social media enables its users to share information and communicate in a highly efficient way. Furthermore, the benefits that social media and content marketing through social media are starting to become clear. This has been proven by the fact that many companies have understood and started using to their benefit. Furthermore, as both previous research and the respondents confirm that the number of companies implementing social media in their marketing process, the benefits are clear. As content represents the base of any social media campaign, its importance is therefore clear.

Respondent 4 states the fact that companies should always think about the target audience and take into consideration the common elements of interest; respondent 3 continues the same line of thought, stating that company should not focus only on their needs and wants, but take those of the target audience into consideration as well. This aspect provides companies with an advantage when it comes to content marketing as through understanding the purpose that content is meant for, they can create content fit to achieving their aims.

Alagöz & Ekici (2016), discuss in their research the fact that companies should not only aim to attract new customers or prospects, but also entertain and inform the existing audience, to create an affinity which can further help the company. All the respondents have emphasized in the

interviews that having a loyal audience is the key to B2B activities. Furthermore, Respondent 3 and Respondent 7 state that through engaging with the existing audience and the existing pool of customers/partners/etc. companies can and will strengthen their brand and increase their recognition. Constantly keeping the existing audience engaged and interested is a highly beneficial aspect that companies shall take into consideration according to both Alagöz & Ekici (2016) and the respondents. Overall, there is a general agreement regarding the importance of forming and maintaining long lasting business relationships and that content can and does help in this aspect when used properly.

From this, it becomes clear that the focus of companies should be long term oriented. Companies should focus on building an audience and their reputation. As well, it is important for the companies to understand that this is a process that takes time, but can be highly rewarding. Furthermore, we are to understand that throughout this process, companies should remember to stay true to their brand and be honest to their audience. By offering a genuine and accurate image of the company, both the existing audience and any potential business partners or customers will be able to understand the corporate culture of a company. Therefore, it is to understand that through offering an accurate image about the company, potential business partners and customers can clearly evaluate if they would like to form a business relationship with a certain company. As stated in the previous paragraph, in both theory and empirical data, relationships are a key aspect of the B2B world; and insights in a company's culture and activities would enable new relationships to be fostered, as well as enabling the nourishing of already existing ones.

5.4 Benefits of Content Marketing

According to all the respondents, content marketing can generate interest and increase the reach of the information. Respondent 7 argues that as the content is meant to engage a vast audience it can have a significant reach; as people may share the content further. Regarding this, Erdoğan & Cicek (2012) states that social media offers tremendous amount of power to its users and therefore companies should pay attention to the ways they could use social media to their advantage. Therefore, it is to be understood that both the respondents and the researchers agree upon the fact that companies need to be active on social media. By being active it is meant to constantly provide content and engage. Through this, companies can maintain relationships as well as facilitate the creation of new ones.

From all the information collected, it becomes clear that that the content that is to be shared through the social media can be both extremely beneficial, as well as detrimental. The content can prove to be beneficial if the creation and distribution are carried out in a carefully planned and well thought out method. On the other hand, the content can have detrimental impact on a company if the creation and distribution of content is not carefully planned and if the possible effects are not predicted and accounted for.

All the respondents agree upon the fact that the exact outcome of any content marketing campaign cannot be fully predicted. Despite this, Respondent 5 states that the advantages of content marketing through social media are obvious and states them as being: increased reach,

impressing the audience to the point where they will want to share your content, etc. Baltes (2015) share the same belief, arguing that the ideally, content shared on social media would create digital word of mouth, create discussion and determining the audience to engage and share the content.

Through this information, it is to be understood that although the outcomes of a content marketing campaign cannot be fully predicted, content could and should, ideally, increase the reach of a company. Companies shall understand that through doing so, digital word of mouth is created; and through its creation, the opportunities of attracting potential customers and potential business partners, will increase significantly.

Having a loyal audience is key to B2B interactions. Therefore, the level of engagement between a company and their audience need to be consistent. Furthermore, the companies need to take the following into account when creating their content, they will be communicating trough: by creating highly distinctive and recognizable content that adds value to the customer, companies can maintain their audience. Furthermore, we are to understand that the content created needs to be unique so that the audience will be able to make the connection between a company and its content. As Gagnon (2014) argues, companies should create content in such way that it will subconsciously place itself on the audience's mind.

6. Conclusion

This concluding chapter provides the conclusion of the research. It also provides subchapters regarding managerial implications, theoretical implications and a suggestion for further research. The conclusion aims to give a relevant answer to the main purpose of this research study and its research question.

6.1 Conclusion

This research has set out with the purpose of understanding and describing how companies deal with the content creation process, within content marketing through social media. Therefore, the overall focus has been on understanding how companies handle content creation and what is involved in the process.

Through analyzing and contrasting the empirical findings with the theoretical framework, it has been established that there are similarities in the way that the studied companies handle the process of content creation and the way they deal with the subject of content marketing.

This research study shows that the content creation process involves multiple parties that need to collaborate with the content creators to ensure the quality of the content that is delivered to the audience. This is done to ensure that the message that the company wants to transmit is well integrated

and delivered in a way that the audience will feel interested in. The research study shows that the content creators must (and do) collaborate with all the relevant internal stakeholders in the content creation process. Furthermore, the desires and needs of the audience need to be considered.

Furthermore, the study concludes that the following traits are being used by all the companies in their content creation process:

- Long Term Planning – the effect of the content is considered on both a long and short term
- Effect Assessment – the effects that the content created will have on the company and the relations with their audience
- Providing Value to The Audience – the created content needs to raise the interest of the audience as well as provide them with value
- Design – the final form of the content in regards of looks is highly important for the audience
- Well thought-out and conveyed message – the content created needs to be able to transmit a clear, but in the same time subtle message to the audience
- Choosing the right channels for distribution – to be able to reach the right audience, the channels must be thoughtfully chosen.

All the above stated and uncovered traits represent the main steps that the studied companies consider when creating content. The study has found that all the studied companies are utilizing these traits. Therefore, it is considered that these traits are the steps that companies use in order to handle their content creation process.

Additionally, to the intended purpose of the research, this study succeeds to provide a better insight into the thin line between B2C and B2B content marketing, providing empirical information regarding some of the differences between the two, as well as overall deepen the research in the field of content creation and content marketing

6.2 Managerial Implications

This research study aims to both showcase the importance of content marketing through social media and the process of content creation. By understanding this, B2B companies will not only be more open towards implementing content marketing, but as well have an idea of how to do it. Through this study, B2B companies can get a better understanding of how content should be created in order for them to be able to effectively reach their stakeholders. Furthermore, through this study, examples regarding the way that these processes are being carried out in other companies are being provided.

Additionally, through this study, companies that do not currently understand the concept of content marketing, do not see the direct value or are struggling to implement it, this research paper offers fundamental insight into the core of content marketing. By being offered these insights, companies can analyze and decided for themselves if dedicating more time and resources towards content marketing is the right decision.

6.3 Theoretical Implications

This research study fathers the research on the topic of content creation and content marketing, within a B2B context. The paper showcases real life examples of companies and professionals working within the studied fields and how they deal with the studied topics. Furthermore, this paper showcases the elements that some professionals consider that shall be taken into consideration in the process of content creation.

Currently existing theoretical material on the topics of content creation and content marketing states that no clear framework for it can be devised. This is due to the low amount of research regarding the differences and similarities between B2B and B2C content creation. Taking this into consideration, this study aims to further the research in this field. This study aims to bring the research on the topic to content marketing and more specifically of B2B content marketing, one step closer to the creation of a clear content creation framework. The creation of such framework would imply a perfect understanding of the differences and similarities between B2B and B2C content marketing – differences and similarities that are yet to be proven or disproven by future research.

This research paper provides a more in depth understanding of the elements that shall be taken into consideration when creating content and planning a content marketing campaign. Furthermore, this study is adding valuable knowledge to the currently existing research, about the process of content creation and the possible benefits that content marketing could bring to companies working in B2B

6.4 Future Research

This research has focused on the use of content marketing on social media and how companies may go about creating content for their social media campaigns. This research study aims to add onto the knowledge pool regarding the studied subject. Therefore, aid future research regarding the difference between B2B and B2C content creation processes. Further studies that aim to deepen the understanding of the processes of content creation are recommended by the authors. Furthermore, these studies are needed in order for a possible framework for content creation within B2B, to be created.

Additionally, the conclusions can reach a higher degree of validity if further research would utilize a larger sample selection of companies into their study. This would provide a more accurate and generalizable result. It would be beneficial to investigate how other variables or aspects play a part into content marketing, for instance specific benefits which can be obtained. Researchers could focus and choose specific benefits such as building relationships as a variable and study this aspect up close. These types of studies could further contribute with great value to the research field regarding content marketing in general or on social media.

As shown in this research study, there are several researchers that note the small amount of research regarding B2B content creation and therefore any future research will bring the field one step closer to understanding this subject in full. Future studies, together with this one could ultimately be used to map out the key to a successful content marketing campaign for B2B.

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Personal Communication:

Respondent 1 – Interview conducted 08.05.17

Respondent 2 - Interview conducted 04.05.17

Respondent 3 – Interview conducted 05.05.17

Respondent 4 – Interview conducted 12.05.17

Respondent 5 – Interview conducted 12.05.17

Respondent 6 – Interview conducted 15.05.17

Respondent 7 – Interview conducted 15.05.17

Appendix

Interview Guide for Semi-Structured Interview

1. Do you use Social Media?
2. How Long has Social Media has been used by your company?
3. What was the reason behind engaging on social media?
4. What do you think that are the advantages and disadvantages of social media?
5. Do you communicate with customers and suppliers through social media platforms?
6. Do you focus on certain social media platforms? Why?
7. In which way do you communicate with the customers through Social Media?
8. Do you use Content Marketing?
9. How would you define Content Marketing?

10. In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of content marketing?
11. What kind of content do you usually share/use and does it depend from project to project?
12. Does the company create the content internally or does it hire outside help? Why?
13. How does your company benefit from content marketing on social media?
14. How much of social media activity is based on content marketing?
15. What factors are taken into consideration when creating content?
16. Does the content marketing bring value to the audience?
17. Do you always focus on all social media channels or does it depend on different projects?
18. Do you always focus on the same target group or does the target group differ from project to project?
19. Is there some predefined criteria that is being taken into consideration when deciding the target group? If yes, what is the criteria?
20. Do you adapt your content according to the target groups or the other way around?
21. How is this adaption being made?
22. Generally, what is the desired outcome of a content marketing campaign?
23. Are there certain things you can do in order to ensure this outcome?