Let us tell you a story...

- A study about the understanding of storytelling as a branding tool
Abstract

Branding within business-to-business (B2B) markets has been a highly discussed subject, where some researchers have found that there is no difference between business-to-consumer (B2C) and B2B markets. This is due to that there is always interactions between humans even if it is not towards the end consumer. Because of this, there is a need for more research about the communication tools for the B2B markets. Therefore, this study will focus on one of the communication tools that can be used within B2B branding, which is storytelling. With this said, the purpose is to get an understanding how employees within a B2B organisation can tell and utilize stories externally in order to impact the company brand.

This study is conducted with a qualitative approach, where the empirical findings have been gathered through several interviews with sales representatives from one and the same company. The narrative analysis model from A.J Greimas will then be used in order to analyse the talk to find the underlying from the interviews with the sales representatives. Later the underlying meaning with the stories will be analysed, and its impact on the company brand. With this analysis, the authors have come to the conclusion that all the stories from the interviewees have the same underlying meaning, which is that, the key is always about being flexible. The authors have also found that a united story within the same company will have a positive effect on the company brand.

**Keywords:** Storytelling, narrative, branding, B2B, actantial model, sales professionals
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1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will provide a background of the concept branding and its’ connection to storytelling. Followed by a problem discussion, leading down to a purpose and a research question.

1.1 BACKGROUND

Branding within business-to-business (B2B) markets have been a highly discussed topic, some claim that branding does not even exist in B2B markets, it belongs to the business-to-consumer (B2C) market (Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2007; Lynch & Chernatony, 2004). This is due to that many people believe that when making business within B2B markets it is more about rational decisions, such as quality, price, and features (Pandey, 2007), and things like reputation and the “soft facts” are not attractive (Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2007). However, Kotler and Pfoertsch (2007) claims that this is not the case, they say that behind every B2B business there is a human being and it is impossible just to turn off the emotions and be like a robot only because the person works within the B2B market. Branding and brand management works in almost the same way within B2B as in B2C; it is about creating value and trust to stand out from competitors (Mudambi, 2002; Lynch and Chernatony, 2004) and among stakeholders (Pandey, 2007). Here is one example of when branding have been rejected in a B2B market. The story is about Boeing, whereas for about 10-15 years ago a woman called Judith started to work at that company. At that time, she began to talk about branding, and the others at Boeing thought she was insane (Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2007). The manager asked her if she understood that the company she started to work for was not a consumer-goods company. They then claimed that they did not have a brand (Ibid). And when looking at the company today, they work a lot with branding, and they are very up to date within the area (Ibid).

In brand management, different communications are being used, such as various media channels, advertising, personal selling, direct marketing (Lynch and Chernatony, 2004) or everyday talk (Bourdieu, 1977). This depends on what market you are in and how to reach the particular customer (Lynch and Chernatony, 2004). Most used is a mixture of a few communication tools; however personal selling is the one that is claimed to be the most efficient one (Ibid). The differences between communication within business-to-
consumer (B2C) and business-to-business (B2B) are big, but the most crucial parts, that mediates the company brand are not differentiated between B2C and B2B (Skyword, 2016). When selling to a company, of course, they need more information such as relevant, valuable data why to choose the specific company, but in the end, there is always people that take the end decision (Ibid). Relatively speaking a marketer within B2B markets can use the same communication tools as a marketer within B2C markets in order to make it more personal and relate with the receiver (Ibid). Communication is something that belongs to the basics of the human behaviour, building relationships and connect with others (Lynch and Chernatony, 2004). Bourdieu (1977) argues for the communication through language and its importance for a company’s economic value. He claims that using language in a proper way can command a listener, which gives a linguistic capital and then, to some extent give some economic benefits. According to Lynch and Chernatony (2004) salespeople in B2B markets should adapt their talk in order to be as efficient as possible and create value and evoke the right associations to the company brand in the relationship with the customer. As a result of this, the relation will be built on trust, and the customer will feel secure (Ibid). This is important to take into consideration when developing the brand management (Ibid).

One communication tool that could be used when trying to evoke customer emotions is a tool called Storytelling (Fog et al. 2010). Stories have always been a part of the evolution and our past (Boje, 2014; Gill, 2011; Fog et al. 2010).

“Storytelling is the interactive process of sharing stories with others using an oral medium or sign language” (Banks-Wallace, 2002, p.411).

Storytelling has been used by humans in millennia as a way to communicate with each other (Gill, 2011), and has been a way to pass information about the past to the next generation, by telling stories (Boje, 2014; Gill, 2011). A story is when several different events, situations or similar are being put together in chronological order into a story (Ryan, 1985) and everyone in the society are using storytelling even if they know it or not (Boje, 2014). Since stories are, among other things, built on values and emotions, storytelling can, for example, be used as a communication tool to build a strong brand, in order to evoke emotions for the customers (Fog et al., 2010). According to Fog et al., (2010), a strong brand is a mix of facts and emotions, we use our brain to reason with ourselves (facts), and then we use the heart to decide (emotions). In one article from Skyword written by Taylor Holland (2016), she presents five companies
that have succeeded with storytelling and were among the most successful companies in 2016, one of these companies were Salesforce. The company works a lot with their customers, by doing short videos or texts that contain success-stories where their customers start by telling a compelling story about themselves in order to catch the interest of the receiver (Skyword, 2016). Then they were continuing by telling about the collaboration and success with Salesforce (Ibid). According to Holland, T (2016) this puts the customer in a lead role which is a powerful way to strengthen the value of the brand by using storytelling (Skyword, 2016).

As the storytelling has grown bigger as a business tool, it has been critical for the companies to build and tell stories that will influence the customer (Fog et al., 2010). However, in an article that Neil Patel has written in Forbes (2016) he describes an event about what could happen if you do not think the whole storytelling through. The company was Levi’s, and they created a campaign with the slogan “hotness comes in all shapes and sizes”. The problem here was regarding the picture that they had next to the slogan on the signs (Ibid). There was a picture of a few models that all of them were super skinny, which ended in a confusing storytelling when the text told one thing, and the picture said another (Ibid). This leads to the importance that everyone needs to be involved and aware of the story that is being said (Forbes, 2016; Fog et al., 2010).

1.2 PROBLEM DISCUSSION

There are different views of looking at brand management, and researchers have examined it differently. Some researchers have looked at brand management in a broad perspective (Mzungu et al., 2010 and de Chernatony, 1999), and some researchers have for example examined more specifically, the branding within a company, and the leadership about how to work with it internally (Morhart et al., 2009 and Vallaster and de Chernatony, 2006).

Brand management and its’ importance is also something that has been discussed throughout the years (Merrilees et al., 2013). Merrilees et al., (2013) also talk about their brand management system, which they developed in order to chart all the different dimensions that are important when building a brand. This system involves
“[...] an internal management infrastructure necessary to design, control and sustain brand-building activities and brand equity creation” (Ibid, p.145).

Within these brand-building activities, different communication tools are an essential part (Merrilees et al., 2013; Lynch and Chernatony, 2004). As mentioned earlier, these communication tools can be a variety of things, such as advertising activities through social media, direct marketing or personal selling (Lynch and Chernatony, 2004). There are a variety of people within the company who are using these different communication tools, one of these departments are the salespeople (Ibid). Lynch and Chernatony (2004) argues that salespeople are having a significant role in brand communication, due to their direct contact with customers. Graham (2004) claims that it is then interesting to listen to what salespeople say and what they actually mean. For example, he mentions that a salesperson can express herself to a customer and say “I want to work with you!” But, she actually means is “I want to sell something to you” (Graham, 2004, p.14). When a salesperson is expressing herself, one communication channel is through talk (Boden, 1994 in Nilson, 2015).

Even though researchers have throughout the years studied the use of talk in B2B contexts (Boden 1994; Lenney, 2009; Nilsson, 2015), there is still a lack of empirical studies within the area (Ardley and Quinn, 2014). The interesting part of this is then to explore the underlying meaning with the talk (Graham, 2004). To be able to analyse talk, one way of doing that is through a narrative analysis method (Czarnowska, 2003; Greimas, 1966). By breaking down the talk into a narrative analysis, the underlying story can be found (Ibid).

It is seen in different kinds of literature that a story can strengthen the company brand (Denning, 2006; Fog et al., 2010), and as mentioned in the background stories can be expressed through storytelling. By understanding this, and apply it in the right way it will eventually strengthen the company brand (Denning, 2006; Fog et al., 2010). For example, Denning (2006) made a study of,

“How is a CEO to make effective use of storytelling?” (Denning, 2006, p. 42).

However, the question is how are people actually using it? And how are these salespeople actually presenting the company brand to someone? Even though many practitioners are using storytelling today as a powerful communication tool (Mossberg
and Johansen, 2006; Michaels, 2017; Klarity, 2017), we can still see a gap in the literature regarding storytelling when it comes to its impact on the company brand, when salespeople within the firm are using it. However, it has been seen in different kinds of literature and empirical data that depending on how storytelling is being presented, it could have a huge impact on the company brand (Denning, 2006; Forbes, 2016).

“Successful companies have the ability to tell compelling stories that both reinforce their brand and boost sales [...] an entertaining story that people can relate to makes your brand more memorable” (Michaels, 2017).

The authors could also see a need for this report since there is a Call for papers, where different academics in the field could see a need for extended research in branding theories within the B2B area (Elsevier, 2016), and the need for further research to highlight a

“[...]deeper understanding of how brands are perceived and used in B2B markets” (Lynch and Chernatony, 2004, p. 414). The academics from Elsevier (2016) have also listed different successful brands and their ability to being ranked among the world’s top 100 fastest growing brands when looking at their brand equity (ibid). The noticed gap here is to find

“underlying mechanism that predicts and explains the factors that contribute to a successful B2B brand” (Elsevier, 2016). However, the most relevant Call for paper for this study is where academics claim that there is a need for further investigating of the,

“Role of narration (‘story-telling’) in B2B advertising” (Elsevier, 2016), whereas advertising is defined as a being one very effective tool for companies to build strong brands (ibid). However, they also claim that this is something that has had a significant focus on the B2C market, while it is something that is less clear within B2B (ibid).
1.3 PURPOSE
Therefore, the purpose of this study is to see how employees within a B2B organisation can tell and utilize stories externally in order to impact the company brand. The aim is not to suggest a replacement for the already existing communication tools, but to provide practitioners and researchers with an alternative approach in order to get an understanding of the communication tool “storytelling” used as branding, by adopting narrative analysis.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION
- What stories do sales professionals present? And what affect does it have on the company brand?
2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter will clarify the core concepts regarding brand management, storytelling, and narratology. This will provide the reader with a general understanding of each concept, where the last part presents a summary of each concept in the form of a table.

2.1 BRAND MANAGEMENT

2.1.1 Branding

Branding is a term that is being used in many different situations especially in marketing literature (Ailawadi, 2003). The term is defined as,

“when certain outcomes result from the marketing of a product or service because of its brand name that would not occur if the same product or service did not have the name” (Keller, 1993, p.1).

There is a lot of research to be found about branding within B2C, but the branding area within B2B is very under-researched (Bendixen et al., 2004; Homburg et al., 2010; Leek and Christodoulides 2011; Mudambi, 2002). However, branding within B2B is according to researchers an area that is highly appropriate and important to work with (Kalafatis et al., 2012; Worm and Srivastava, 2014). According to Bendixen et al., (2004) branding within B2B had more focus on the characteristics and performance of the product, he also mentions that it is irrational and non-emotional and that it only had a small impact on the buying decision process (Bendixen, 2004). However, the researchers have found the concept of branding more relevant today, as the customer's perception of the brand (strong brand) plays a bigger role rather than the product quality (Baack et al., 2016; Bendixen 2004). Which means that a customer can associate to the brand and feel a strong connection to it (Keller, 1993), which can be done by using storytelling (Fog et al., 2010).

“Corporate and product brands are increasingly accepted as valuable intangible assets of organisations” (Mzungu et al., p, 605, 2010).

2.1.2 Brand equity

Brand equity is defined as,

“the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand” (Keller, 2016, p.287).
Brand equity is a result of the total brand experience that a customer perceives (Bendixen, 2004; Persson, 2010). According to Bendixen (2004), a high brand equity can create a good price premium, which means that a company has high brand equity towards their customers. This results in that the company can have higher prices than normally because the customer will still choose to buy from the company with high equity (Bendixen, 2004).

“[..]the behaviour of a frontline employee may be an important driver of consumers' brand personality impressions” (Wentzel, 2009, p.359)

2.1.3 Internal brand equity

As mentioned before, the phenomenon of branding in a B2B contexts is a highly under-researched area (Bendixen et al., 2004; Homburg et al., 2010; Leek and Christodoulides 2012; Mudambi, 2002), and that it has gone through an evolution during the past years (Boyd and Sutherland, 2006). A brand is said to be defining one’s relationship with all the people within the firm, such as stakeholders, employees, etc. (Ibid). Tsang et al., (2011) also argue for that the employees are to be seen as the centre of the brand building processes, which makes it is crucial to consider the internal brand management as well. Within the brand management activities, it is no longer only focused on the customer perspective, but also the employees and their perspective on the brand (Chernatony, 2006). Baumgarth (2010) states that the brand is increasingly affected by the internal brand equity and the employee behaviour. He also argues for the fact that

“[..]internal brand equity is strong when employee behaviour is aligned with brand identity and individuals are predisposed to communicate the brand consistently and enthusiastically to internal and external stakeholders” (Ibid, p. 1250).

Biedenbach and Marell (2010) also argues for the employees, that they feel more as a part of the company when the internal brand is well-formed and established in the firm. Supported by Parasuraman et al., (1985) and Baumgarth and Schmidt (2010) who also argues that the employee's performance is having a significant role when it comes to being able to affect the customer’s interpretation of the company brand.
2.1.4 External brand equity

The focus on brand equity in this thesis will mainly be on the internal brand equity, yet the external brand equity should not be forgotten. External brand equity is usually described as the more frequently used term “brand equity” (Baumgarth and Schmidt, 2010). The reason for its importance is argued by Rust (2004), since he claims that a company with a higher external brand equity could generate more revenue in a lifetime of a customer, than a company with low external brand equity. Although the internal and external brand equity could affect each other, for example, Boyd and Sutherland (2006) argues that the higher the internal brand equity, the higher employee brand loyalty which could generate higher profits and more sales.

2.2 STORYTELLING

Storytelling is as mentioned earlier in the background a communication tool that can be used in branding (Fog et al., 2010). Storytelling is, among other things, used to evoke emotions among customers, to find something that the customers can relate to so they will feel a connection towards the brand (Fog et al., 2010). A story is when several events or situations have been put together in order to build a story (Ryan, 1985). According to Boje (2014), everyone is using storytelling even if he or she say that they don't. In a company, it could be for example the CEO that is using storytelling as a tool to communicate with the employees, or it could be two friends that are talking about what they have experienced during the day (Ibid).

This is related to narratology which is, how you can put these different events together in a specific order (Bennett and Royle, 1995; Czarniawska, 2003). Here are some examples of how an organization can practice storytelling:

- “When the CEO delivers a speech or a letter to shareholders, that reporting is storytelling” (Boje, 2014, p.19).
- “When a strategist is presenting a mission, vision, objectives, action plan, and milestones, she or he is doing storytelling” (Boje, 2014, p.19).
- “When the controller presents a plan to update the portfolio of investments, that too is storytelling” (Boje, 2014, p.19).
Storytelling is a powerful tool, as it can be used as a cross-cultural tool (Barker and Gower, 2010). It doesn't matter what culture people are coming from or if you are rich or poor (Ibid). It is a concept that can be perceived very differently depending on who is telling the story or who is listening or reading the story that is being told (Gill, 2011). This depends on the fact that everyone perceives every story differently, which could lead to that as a story is being told it can change over time (Ibid), but in the end, there is no right or wrong way to tell a story (Denning, 2006).

Every company has values, even so, if you can only read and find them in the annual report, hear about them at internal meetings or similar. But in order to communicate the values, a good story is needed in the right language to reach the customer with something that they can relate to from their lives (Ibid).

“The best storytellers will be the winner of the future” (Fog et al., 2010, p.50)

The story should have an impact of the company both internally and externally, which makes the employees an important brick in the game, they need to feel a connection to the story in order to believe in it and pass it forward (Ibid). According to Fog et al., (2010) you always need to start with your employees in order to succeed, it is important that they understand the core story.

“Just as the bricklayers shares the story of the cathedral he is helping to build. It makes him feel part of something far greater and more valuable than laying bricks alone” (Fog et al. 2010, p.63).

2.3 NARRATOLOGY

As mentioned above in the storytelling a narrative is to be described as a series of different events, in a specific order, that is also connected in time (Bennett and Royle, 1995; Czarniawska 2003). A narrative is then constructed with a beginning, a middle and an end (Gergen and Gergen, 2001).

"The stories that we tell about our own and other's lives are a pervasive form of text through which we construct, interpret and share experience: we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticise, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative" (Shiffirin 1996, p.167).
The ancestry of narrative can be traced back as far as to 384-322 BC, to Aristotle and his work Poetics (Shankar, 2001). Traditionally, researchers have claimed that narratives can be found in everything, and in every event, even if it is from science, rhetoric or religions (Bennett and Royle, 1995). This started to take place at the end of 1970’s and the beginning of 1980’s when researchers began to see that narratives could be applicable to everything, not only in literary (Czarniawska 2003). For example, researchers started to analyse advertisements, jokes, and films, etc., (Currie 1998). Different historians have also claimed that history is build up on different narratives with events of coherent plot structure (White 1978). Bennett and Royle (1995) gives another example of science, and how it is composed of different stories, “astronomy attempts to narrate the beginnings of the universe, biology the narrative of animal life in its various forms, and physics the consequences of one moving body coming into contact with another” (Bennett and Royle, 1995 p.42).

However, a narrative does not have to be told as an anecdote, and it could also be recognised as events that are happening in present time, such as strategies or ongoing activities (Czarniawska 2003). Czarniawska (2003) also claims that eventually a narrative could be told about the future, for examples such as planning, actions, and threats. As mentioned before, narratives are stories, but it could also be descriptions or accounts (Shankar, 2001). Shankar (2001) also describes that, as soon as a human being enters the world, people start telling us stories. This means that as people grow up, we are culturally but also, socially trained in understanding different narratives (Ibid). Some even claim that human beings might even be naturally born with the ability to understand the narrative forms (Bruner, 1986). And as people grow up we hear stories about our history and culture, and through these stories, our lives and whom we become comprehensible to others and us (Gergen and Gergen 1966). Everyone are constantly interpreting and telling stories (Czarniawska, 2003).

2.4 THEORY MODEL

Below there is a model that presents the theory in a simple way in order to get an overview of the theory chapter, how brand management and storytelling are linked together. In this model, there are two head areas Brand management and Storytelling.
Table 1.

- **Brand management** will be used in this study as a gathered term for branding, and brand equity (internal and external). Brand management includes, what is a strong brand, why is it important and how could a strong brand be created? (see more in brand management, 2.1).

- **Storytelling** is a way to communicate (see. 2.2). And in this case, it will be the talk from interviews with salespersons from a company within in the B2B sector. In order to break down each told story, narratology will be used in a view seeing the underlying meaning behind each story that the interviewees are telling. Later in the study, an analysis of the narrative model from Greimas will be used, to analyse the interviews (see more in the methodology chapter, 3.8).

So first, the things that the salespersons are talking about in the interview will be analysed by using narrative in order to see the underlying meaning of the stories. After this, the stories will be reflected both with each other and towards the brand management. The authors want to give an understanding of how a story can be used and its impact on the brand.
3 METHODOLOGY

In this section the authors will present how they have chosen to approach the study and which methods that have been used in order to collect relevant empirical data to the subject. Risks that could occur when conducting the study will also be stated together with some ethical values and quality criteria.

From the conducted theory that is about narratology, the authors have decided to do a narratological analysis of interviews from employees within a B2B organisation. This is done in order to answer to the purpose of the study (Bryman and Bell, 2011), which is:

“The purpose of this study is to see how employees within a B2B organisation can tell and utilise stories externally in order to impact the company brand by adopting a narrative analysis method”.

3.1 RESEARCH APPROACH

A research approach is according to Bryman and Bell (2011) how the author/authors choose to approach the research.

3.1.1 Qualitative research

As mentioned, the aim of this research is to see how employees within a B2B organisation can telling and utilise stories in order to impact the company brand. To gain an understanding and knowledge regarding the use of stories in building a company brand a qualitative research approach has been chosen. There are two different approaches to choose between when examining the area or subject that are being studied, qualitative and quantitative approach (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). Qualitative research is done in order to interpret and analyse people's experiences or opinions (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015), which is another reason why this approach is the best suitable option for this study. When doing a qualitative research, it can be done through several different channels, and it can, for example, be through interviews (structured, semi-structured, etc.), questionnaire, participants observation, or by analysing a text from documents (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Race, 2008). According to
Race (2008), many students at University level chooses to do a questionnaire because it seems to be an easy way to collect the data and not so time-consuming. However, he mentions that interviews are the most common way to collect the data (Race, 2008). In this study, interviews will be used to gather the qualitative data that are needed to answer the purpose. Since the aim of the report is to understand the interviewees’ stories, and then interpret them, a qualitative approach was the best suitable approach.

3.1.2 Interpretive quality research

Different approaches can be used for doing research, to mention a few it could be inductive, deductive (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Almalki, 2016) and abductive approach (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2008). In an inductive approach the researcher are doing a study in order to come up with a theory, which includes some risks

“[...] if it is argued inductively that all birds fly (based on a series of observations), this reasoning can be overturned when a single flightless bird is observed” (Fox, 2008, p.2).

This differs from the deductive approach where the researcher has a theory that they want to see if the empirical findings is matching with the theory (Almalki, 2016; Fox, 2008). In this study, there is a clear theory that the authors derive from. With this theory, research is formed and is then being interpreted, this could then in some ways be associated with the term of “deductive approach” that Bryman and Bell (2011), talk about. This is used in order to later get an understanding of the reality of salespeople (Fox, 2008).

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design is how the authors chose to collect and analyse the data (Bryman and Bell, 2011). According to Robson (2002) and Cheek (2008), the research design is a way to transfer the research question to a research project, a sort of plan. There are three ways to design your research, exploratory, descriptive and explanatory (Saunders et al., 2008). The best suitable design for this research is exploratory. According to Saunders et al., (2008) an exploratory research is when the researcher wants to get a deeper understanding in areas that have a lack of earlier research. It is a design that can be used when the subject is a bit diffuse (Saunders et al., 2008), which this study is due to that the authors are supposed to analyse the empirical findings from a narratological point of view. To do this and to gather the empirical data to the narrative analysis a case study
has been used. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), a case study is when the researcher examines one single company in order to get a more detailed and profound analysis. And since the authors are doing their study on four employees within one and the same company in order to get a better picture of the use of storytelling in one company, the case study design was most suitable for this study.

### 3.3 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection is relevant to the fact that you need to have a clear picture and a plan for how to conduct the empirical data to your study (Bryman and Bell, 2011). In this paper, the chosen method is semi-structured interviews, which is a flexible way to collect data to a study (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Horton et al., 2004) and it is mostly open-ended questions (Ayres, 2008; Horton et al., 2004). This method is suitable for this study due to that the authors had a clear picture of what needed to be collected in order to answer the purpose. Since the semi-structured method is used in this study, follow-up questions can be asked as the interview goes on in order to get a broader picture and to make the interview more alive (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Ayres, 2008). In this thesis, semi-structured interviews were also the best suitable approach since the authors wanted to narrow down the alternative options for the interviewee to talk about. Therefore, the authors had prepared some specific questions/areas to talk about. However, to be able to get a more open dialogue between interviewers and the interviewee, these specific questions/areas were not that many.

A semi-structured interview can be held over telephone or face-to-face (Bryman and Bell, 2011). In this study, the interviews were made face-to-face and held place in an office environment at the company that was interviewed. Each interview had a duration of approximately 30 minutes. Face-to-face interviews were chosen to make it possible for the interviewer to get a better and deeper personal connection with the interviewee than is possible over a telephone interview. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), a face-to-face interview demands more resources than an interview over the telephone. However, a face-to-face interview makes it possible to analyse more than just what the interviewee says, body language is possible to analyse as well (Ibid).

There are several reasons why the chosen method is the semi-structured interview. But one of the biggest reasons is due to that author's wants to know how the company is
telling a story about themselves. So only two big questions were planned before the actual interview and then the interview had to change its direction depending on the answers from the interviewee. One reason why the face-to-face interview was the most appropriate method is that the answers needed to be real and not just read from a paper or a done presentation about the company. The authors wanted a genuine answer from each individual person in order to see if the story was the same or not, and also how the interviewee talked about the company to a student like us.

The interview was conducted during one day, at the chosen company, where we got the opportunity to talk to four different individuals that are working with sales. The firm is divided into two different departments, where the salespeople are experts in that specific segment, where they work with various types of customers. Two very broad questions were prepared before the interview, in order to get as big answers as possible, and to start all of the interviews in the same way. The two questions were:

1. If you meet a person, who has no idea what type of company Recticel is, for example a customer, a friend or anybody? How would you present the company to that person?

2. What are the key-words that explain Recticel?

3.4 SAMPLING

When conducting research, the sampling process is something that everyone needs to consider, if it should be used or not (Saunders et al., 2008). Some researchers have the ability to research all cases that are needed, but in most of the cases, sampling is necessary (Ibid). One of the questions you need to take into consideration when conducting the research is if the research is supposed to be generalized or not (Ibid). There are two types of sampling, probability sampling and a non-probability sampling (Ibid).

When picking the sampling for this paper, the non-probability sampling has been used, which means that the probability is not known and it is impossible to do a statistical overview of the research (Saunders et al., 2008). It is, however, possible to make a generalization on the research (Ibid). In a non-probability sampling, there is no right or wrong on how big sample size that is needed, as long as the sampling is logical and relevant to the purpose (Ibid).
3.4.1 Sampling process

This research has been conducted through a purposive sampling, also called judgmentally is one way to do a non-probability sampling (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Saunders et al., 2008), and it is the one that is most suitable for this study. When using purposive sampling it is up to the researcher to use its own judgement when deciding sample, and it is often used when handling small samples, for example when there are specific requirements that need to be answered (ibid).

3.5 RESEARCH METHOD

In this study four interviews were done, with four different salespeople. The salespeople work at various departments within the firm and are all located in the same office.

Why this method is chosen is due to that only a small sample was needed to answer the purpose. In this sampling process, the researchers chose one company and several employees within that company that will be interviewed. If more than one company would have been interviewed, it could have been an issue since the analyse need to be done on the same story from the same company. This is made to see the correlations between the stories that the employees are telling within the same company.

The sampling was done at one B2B company that works in the early stage in the supply chain. Within this company the authors will interview several sales representatives, all from different departments in order to see if they have the same story about the company.

3.6 QUALITY STANDARDS

3.6.1 Reliability

Reliability is how reliable the collected result are in measurement (Bryman and Bell, 2011). If a researcher does several types research will they generate the same outcome or will they differ (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Saunders et al., 2008). It could also be if another research is doing the same study will the result be the same (Saunders et al., 2008). According to Robson (2002), four different threats could occur within reliability, those are:
• Subject or participant error
Which means that you should do a research on a neutral time for example and not on a
time that could affect the participant answer. For example, maybe not Monday morning
or Friday afternoon are the best days to answer to a survey (ibid). For this study, this
will probably not be a big problem since it will be a face-to-face interview and there are
not questions that will give positive or negative answers.

• Subject or participant bias
Subject or participant bias means that employees are answering to a surv

ey accordingly
to what they think that their boss wants to hear (Ibid). This could have an effect on the
result in this study since the employees are supposed to tell the company vision to the
researchers as they use to say it when they are talking to customers or similar. And now
when they know that their boss maybe read this they will most likely say what they are
“supposed” to say and not what they actually says. In this thesis this will not be a big
problem either way, since the stories that the sales representatives gives is not any
critical information.

• Observer error
Which means that everyone can have different ways to tell questions if more than one
are telling questions it is important that the questions are well structured to avoid
misunderstandings (ibid). In this study, there are two researchers, which could be a
problem if they tell them differently, but on the other hand, both of the authors, are
together in every interview. To prevent this from happening the authors have decided
who will say which question and keep that structure during all the interviews.

• Observer bias
This is similar to observer error if there are several ways to say a question it could as
well be several ways to understand a question (ibid). For this study, this could be a
positive thing, since the answers will build a story that the authors are supposed to
analyse by using narratology. So if the authors understand the answers differently, it is
good since it will evoke opposition and that is not a bad thing in this case.
3.6.2 Validity

Validity is whether the researcher measures the right things that it is really about (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Saunders et al., 2008). For example, a store is launching a new product, but they are still selling larger quantities of the old one. But the thing that they did not think about was that they only did promotions for the old product. This could be a problem for the authors. Since the aim is to understand the underlying meaning of each story, the validity could be a problem if the authors understand it wrongly. If the interpretations are not at all comparable to the sales representatives’ stories.

3.7 ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

Ethical principles are something that every researcher need to consider before conducting a research and during the research is being conducted (Race, 2008). Some points that a researcher need to consider when doing research, according to Race (2008):

- anonymity
- Inform everyone involved
- Collected data presented in the right agreed-on way

Before the interviews, each participant was informed that they were participating in this thesis, at that point we also asked everyone regarding their approval regarding anonymity. However, this was not something that was crucial for them, so their real names are being used in this thesis.

3.8 ANALYSIS METHOD

As mentioned, the interviews were conducted through a semi-structured interview (Bryman and Bell, 2011), where only two questions were prepared before. Since the interviews were conducted in Sweden and only with Swedish people, the authors got the feeling that the interviewees would be most comfortable with having the interview in Swedish. Every session with the salespeople was audio-recorded, with the permission of it from each person. After the interviews the authors had been at the company for half a day, almost 2 hours of audio files were conducted. Later when the audio files had been conducted, the were transcribed, meaning that everything that was being said during the interviews was written down in text (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). After that, it had to be translated into English. In order to not miss any important information when translating the material, an alienage read the material and translated it back to Swedish.
After the material had been transcribed and translated, the authors coded all the material into the different headings, derived from the actantial model, that will be used in the analysis. (For instruction on the structure of the analysis, please look at 3.8.1). Since the authors are doing a narrative analysis, the narratives could be described in both the Methodology chapter, as well as in the Theoretical framework. One problem with this could be that all the material will be analysed according to the author’s own interpretations. Therefore, if someone else made this study, the result could be differently.

3.8.1 History of Narratology

As mentioned before, the analysis of this thesis will be done through a narratological perspective in order to break down each story that the interviewee is telling, in order to get the underlying meaning of what the salespeople actually are saying. Therefore, this chapter will present the Actantial Model, so the reader will get a full understanding of what it is.

The history of narratology could be traced back to the 384-322BC to Aristotle (Shankar, 2001). However, one of the biggest influencers to the narratology studies is Vladimir Propp (Czarniawska, 2003). His first edition that was published in 1928, morphology of the folktale, where he was creating seven narrative roles which have since then been a conceptual framework for almost all narrative researchers (ibid). These seven units where; the villain, the dispatcher, the helper, the princess or prize, he donor, the hero and the false hero (Propp, 1959). From this basis, one of the most influential models was being made, the actantial model by Algirdas, J. Greimas (1966).

3.8.2 The Actantial Model - A.J. Greimas

In this paper, the Actantial Model will be used to analyse the narratives in the text from the empirical findings. This is a model that can be utilised as a tool to analyse texts or images in literature, or it can be to analyse an action (Greimas, 1966; Czarniawska, 2003). When this analyse is being done the action, text or images are being separated into six different dimensions, in this case, called actants (ibid). An actant does not necessarily need to be a character, and it can as well be an object or an event (ibid). In this narrative analysis, the authors will pick out these characters (sender, object, receiver, helper, subject, and opponent, see Table. 2), from each story that the
interviewee presented. These stories will be broken down into Greimas Actantial Model, in order to create analyse it properly to fulfilling the purpose.

Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sender</th>
<th>Object</th>
<th>Receiver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The mighty king</td>
<td>The princess</td>
<td>The prince</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Helper</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Opponent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The prince's fairy godmother</td>
<td>The prince from a neighboring kingdom</td>
<td>The vicious dragon who has captured the princess</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Greimas, 1966; Czarniawska, 2003 p,13).

The six different actants are:

1. The subject - The one in the tale that has a mission or a goal (Ex. prince) (Hébert, 2006).
2. An object - The object the subjects mission or goal (Ex. Rescue the princess) (Ibid).
3. The sender - The one who provide the subject with the object (Ex. The King) (ibid).
4. The Receiver - The one who will benefit from the subject’s object (Ex. The King, the princess, the prince)
5. A helper - The one or the thing that will help the subject to reach the object (Ex. The sword or the horse) (Ibid).
6. An opponent - The one who try to hinder the subject from reaching the object (Ex. The dragon or the witch) (Ibid).
These six actants are divided into three different axes; axis of desire, axis of power and axis of transmission (Greimas, 1966; Hébert, 2006).

- **Axis of desire**
  On this axis, it is the Subject versus the object. These two have a relationship called Junction and is about the strive for the subject to reach the object, and the junction can be separated into conjunction or disjunction. Conjoined is for example when the prince wants the princess and disjoined is for example when a murderer gets rid of a body (ibid).

- **Axis of transmission**
  On the axis of transmission, it is the sender versus the receiver. This is a follow up on the axis of desire where the subject and object are presented. This axis will show why the story started and who benefits from the junction between the subject and the object. In most cases, the sender is also the receiver, and the receiver can be several things, for example, the King (which can also be the sender), the Kingdom and the Prince (ibid).

- **Axis of power**
  On the axis of power, it is the helper versus the opponent. The helper and opponent are working towards each other in order to either way help the subject to reach the object or to hinder the subject from reaching the object. As mentioned above, a sword can help the subject meanwhile the which is trying to hinder the subject (ibid).

Even though a lot of academics have been using this model, Denning (2006) criticised this way of thinking. He explains that depending on the type of story that you want to tell, how to tell it will have to be adapted. For example, Denning (2006) says, “a personal narrative in the pattern of a traditional, ‘well-told’ story (i.e. a story with a beginning, a middle and an end, a hero, a plot and a turning point, and a lot of contexts) is also unlikely to inspire listeners” (Denning, 2006, p. 42). On the other hand, he also claims that if a company want to tell the story to a wider audience, this traditional storytelling is necessary (Ibid).
4 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

This section will be a description of the one company that will be used for this study. It will then be followed by sections where each interviewee explains their view of Recticel in order for the authors to be able to do a narrative analysis of each answer.

4.1 RECTICEL

Recticel is a multinational company which manufactures polyurethane foams (plastic foam) for many different types of industries (Recticel, 2016).

“Polyurethanes are condensation polymers, originally produced in 1950 as a by-product of the petrochemical industry. Recticel has played an active part in their production and use for over forty years” (Recticel, 2016).

Today, Recticel is producing for furniture-, insulation-, industrial-, and automotive industries, but they are also a big manufacturer of different bedding materials (Ibid). These various departments are divided within the firm by the names, “Flexible foams, Bedding (comfort), Insulation and Automotive” (Ibid). The corporate group has a head office which is located in Brussels, Belgium. They are approximately 8000 employees altogether and are operating in 28 different countries, in 98 sites, with a turnover of EUR 1.3 million (Ibid). Recticel Sweden, has two production units, with the head office in Gislaved. This thesis will be based on interviews conducted from the Swedish head office in Gislaved.

Since Recticel was a company that was fulfilling our requirements for our sample due to the chosen purposive sample method, they were the best possible fit for this study. Since Recticel have not been working with Storytelling as a communication tool before, the authors found this to be very fascinating. Therefore, one story which presents the company does not exist, although according to Boje (2014), everything people tell to one another can be seen as a story, even if they do not know it.

There were two very broad questions that were prepared before the interview, in order to get as big answers as possible and to start all of the interviews in the same way. The two questions were:
1. If you meet a person, who has no idea what type of company Recticel is, for example, a customer, a friend or anybody? How would you present the company to that person?

2. What are the keywords that explain Recticel?

In order for the authors to later analyse how each interviewee have presented the company during the interview, the empirical findings have been divided into each specific person.

4.2 MR. RUNEBERGER

The first person that was interviewed was the sales manager over one department of the firm. A department that they call “Comfort”. He has been working at the company for 5 years, but he has long experience within this specific business area and has for example, been a customer to Recticel for many years. Mr. Runeberger also has a history with working with marketing, such as PR, social media, etc. Since the authors wanted to start each interview in the same way, the question “If you meet a person who has no idea what type of company Recticel is, for example, a customer, a friend or anybody? How would you present the company to that person?” was asked first.

“[..]when it comes to us presenting ourselves to for example a potential customer I do believe that we talk about things such as being a “solution provider”, that we are good at developing new products, and that we want to do that together with the customer in order to find the exact fit for that specific person” (Mr. Runeberger, personal communication, 2017-05-03).

However, in general terms, people do not know who they are, since Recticel is a company that is manufacturing raw materials, and their company brand is never visual for the end consumers of the products. Mr. Runeberger gives an example;

“If you want to buy a new couch you will never know that we are the ones producing the polyurethane foam in it” (Mr. Runeberger, personal communication, 2017-05-03).

On the other hand, Recticel has existed for many years, and they are well-known for people who are working within this business area.

“[..]what I think people know about Recticel then is that we are 1. A big company, 2. Listed on the stock market 3. That we are a multinational company,
4. That we are good at developing new products (Mr. Runeberger, personal communication, 2017-05-03).

Mr. Runeberger explains that Recticel knows all the different companies who are in the furniture industry in Scandinavia for example, and those companies know about Recticel since there are only two polyurethane foam suppliers in Sweden. Therefore, Mr. Runeberger explains that they are not in need for identifying potential customers for example. It is more about maintaining their already existing relationship.

“[..]we want our customers to know that if they are buying our products, they know that they will get the right products, in the right time, at the right cost. If the customers know that, then they will continue to buy from us” (Mr. Runeberger, personal communication, 2017-05-03).

It was then asked if Mr. Runeberger could think of some negative things that he thought their customers might think of them. He explained that Recticel is a very big corporate group, and could, therefore, be quite slow in their decision making processes for example. Mr. Runeberger explains that there are a lot of internal communication processes which takes a lot of time.

“[..]with this big corporate group, I do believe that some customers can perceive us to be a bit slow because of all of our decision levels. But also that we are not “on the ball” so to speak, and could maybe be perceived as a bit outdated sometimes. I do believe that we have a lot to work on when it comes to this in order to attract the younger market” (Mr. Runeberger, personal communication, 2017-05-03).

Later in the interview, Mr. Runeberger explains that they have not been working with marketing when it comes to promoting their own company name since they have not seen a need for that earlier. Mr. Runeberger then starts to talk about how bad their general marketing is.

“We are completely useless when it comes to, for example, Google optimization, social media, etc. The old men in Belgium have no idea what that even is. We are really bad at these types of things (Mr. Runeberger, personal communication, 2017-05-03).

Mr. Runeberger explains that marketing has never been a thing that Recticel wanted to focus on. They have never had graphical manuals, flashy brochures or Ipads with nice presentations, etc. Mr. Runeberger says that basically, all they have had have been a
logo and some standard pictures that each salesperson have to work with and create their own power point presentation for example.

Later in the interview, the authors asked the second structured question, which was “What are the key-words that explains Recticel?”.


4.3 MR. BORG

Mr. Borg is a sales representative from Comfort, and he has been working at Recticel for over 32 years. Mr. Borg has almost only been working at this company, and he has been working with sales and marketing the whole time. Mr. Borg started by saying that Recticel is a company that exists almost everywhere, but you as an end-consumer are not aware of it. He explains that it could be in, for example, all from beds, to ventilation systems, to acoustical absorption products, etc., and that could be in your house, at the office or wherever. That Recticel is producing materials that are not visual, they just exist for different fields of applications, for example, to get more comfort in a chair at an office. Mr. Borg then says that Recticel is a company who has a big focus on the technical aspects of developing new products.

“We are a company with a lot of technology since we are the leading manufacturer of raw material, we have a lot of chemists who are developing new types of materials, by mixing different chemicals”.

He also emphasises the fact that no new customer is contacting Recticel without them knowing what polyurethane foam is, or what they want to use it for. Mr. Borg then says that if he would present the company to a person like that, he would especially emphasize their “know how”.

“We have long experience within these types of products, so we know what we talk about. Since we are not only selling a product which we have bought from someone else, we are actually producing it from scratch, that gives us an advantage. I would also say that we are actually the biggest manufacturer of polyurethane foam, where we exist all over the world almost, but mainly in Europe, which makes us very dominating” (Mr. Borg, personal communication, 2017-05-03).
However, he continues to explain that as a salesperson you cannot present the company in the same way to all the potential customers. The biggest task for every salesman/woman is to understand the person you are presenting the company to. Mr. Borg explains that this is the biggest task for them since their product could be adaptable to many different applications, and therefore it is necessary to know the exact customer need.

“You need to be out in the field, together with the customer in order to build a relationship. Therefore, you need to be close to the person you are selling to. sometimes that requires you to get hard, challenging and critical questions, but that is something that you have to take, but that is the things that makes it interesting as well” (Mr. Borg, personal communication, 2017-05-03).

Later in the interview, we started to talk about some different things that Recticel could be much better at, where Mr. Borg explained that understanding the customer is one of the biggest parts. He said that they are good at talking about the product itself and what Recticel can do, but that customer intimacy is something that they want to work with a lot more, to get to know the customer on a deeper level.

“[..]and we want to get to know different people within the same company, not only the purchaser himself, that is when the relationship comes in” (Mr. Borg, personal communication, 2017-05-03).

Later, Mr. Borg presented the fact that Recticel could be a bit slow in all of their decision making processes.

“[..]you could look at Recticel as a miniature of the European Union, where every country wants to say something. The Germans have one opinion, the French have theirs and we have ours. Then everyone have to get along, and those things take a lot of time” (Mr. Borg, personal communication, 2017-05-03).

Some of the negative things about Recticel were brought up about Recticel’s marketing. Mr. Borg claimed that they have a lot to work with when it comes to having a brand that is being noticed by people. There is a need for creating a clear profile of who Recticel really is and how they present themselves. Mr. Borg especially emphasis thing such as brochures, their website and everything that is seen by other people outside of the firm.

“I do not think that there has ever been a need for these types of things, that has never been an interest. I think that people have always thought that we do not have an “end-product”, so to speak and that that is the reason why we
have not seen a need for this. But I think that people need to think again and start create a more united brand, so people will start to recognize Recticel” (Mr. Borg, personal communication, 2017-05-03).

Thereafter it came down to the question, “What are the keywords that explain Recticel?”, where Mr. Borg, emphasised 1. Big company, 2. Knowledge, 3. Relationship

“[..] so I would say that we are a big company, that operates in many places in the world, but in the same time we have the ability to be the small company that maybe just operates on a local level, but we will always have the corporate group behind us” (Mr. Borg, personal communication, 2017-05-03).

4.4 MR. PETERSSON

Mr. Petersson is also a sales representative but for the department of flexible foams. He has been working with the company for over 42 years, where he have a history of working at different departments and in different positions. Mr. Petersson started the interview by explaining that Recticel is a large company and that they have existed for many years. They are experts in what they do and they continually tries to find new products that they can invent and produce. In the beginning of the interview, Mr. Petersson talks very much about the polyurethane foam and how many different textures that you can make.

“[..]when people are thinking of polyurethane foam, or plastic foam, people think of mattresses, but we are producing 500 different types of plastic foams for different fields of applications. For example, something that is comfortable to sit or lay on. But what I am selling is everything that you do not sit or lay on, different filters, seals, sponges, etc. I usually says that I am an expert in selling air, since plastic foam contain 97% air” (Mr. Petersson, personal communication, 2017-05-03).

However, Mr. Petersson emphasises that this is usually not something that he would start talking about to a customer. Since the customers that they are usually doing business with, already know what Recticel is producing and how they want to use the polyurethane foam. This is one critical thing, to be able to differentiate each potential customer.

“[..]and if I am going to sell one product to a very small, local customer I cannot start talking about that we are 8000 people in the corporate group, how
much we can produce etc. since that could only drive him away. However, if I am going to meet a very large customer, it would not be interesting for them to know what Recticel can do in Gislaved, but maybe how we can be at their service in 28 different countries, that it takes us 5 minutes to produce the amount one truck etc.” (Mr. Petersson, personal communication, 2017-05-03).

Mr. Petersson explains that it always feels good as a sales person to have the big corporate group behind you, it could also be a liability as well. Sometimes Recticel is too big for their own best.

“Sometimes we could be too administratively, with a lot of slow internal processes, and I think that people can perceive us of being a very slow company. We have many internal rules that have to be followed, which could be a bit problematic sometimes” (Mr. Petersson, personal communication, 2017-05-03).

When it comes to marketing, Mr. Petersson explains that the way of how they have been working with marketing has changed a lot over the years. When he started he explained that the work for the sales representatives included much more marketing towards the consumers.

“[..]for example when it came to the bedding industry, all of our customers who had their own stores required us to come to the store and demonstrate more regarding the plastic foam it selves, since they did not know how to do that, but we are not working with that type of direct marketing today” Mr. Petersson, personal communication, 2017-05-03).

He continues to explain that they do not actually work with marketing as much as they should maybe, but it is all controlled from the headquarter in Brussels, and that Recticel Sweden cannot really do what they want. However, he says that this problem is something that has been brought up the last years and that they are now trying to change some parts of their marketing. They want to be more updated, starting by for example creating a new website.

Later in the interview, the authors asked the second standard question, “What are the keywords that explain Recticel?”

Mr. Petersson finished the interview by saying 1. Product development, 2. Power (from the big corporate group), with the ability to act local, 3. Knowledge, 4. Capacity of producing large volumes. At the same time, he emphasises the fact that these keywords could also change depending on what customers they are trying to do business with.
4.5 MR. MILJEVIC

Mr. Miljevic is a sales representative for comfort, with the specialization within the department of bedding. He has been working at Recticel for over 10 years, where he started working with flexible foams, but is now only involved in bedding. Mr. Miljevic says that the way he would present the company is all depending on who the person is that he is talking to. If it is a large company, a small company or just a friend. But he says that that important thing that he thinks will strengthen the person’s perception about Recticel, is by saying,

“We have a local spirit but we are very professional” (Mr. Miljevic, personal communication, 2017-05-03).

He also says that some people start to talk about how many employees they are, how big they are, but that during these years that he has been a salesperson, he could see that you cannot always do that. Some things could scare people or be seen as they are just self-praising.

“[...] it is the sales representative’s obligation to try to find that specific thing that will attract the specific customer” (Mr. Miljevic, personal communication, 2017-05-03).

However, Mr. Miljevic would say that this is something that Recticel is very good at. That he has the feeling from the customers that they feel safe when they buy their products. Mr. Miljevic also emphasise the importance of the work behind the ability to keep that customer later. He gives an example from one of their biggest customers.

“The relationship started by someone knowing somebody, which gave us a leverage in the beginning. During the years we have had the ability of keeping up with their huge growth, inter alia, and where we kept that connection to the first person, which results in that if we don not make a huge mistake, or if something happens to them, they will not stop buying our products” (Mr. Miljevic, personal communication, 2017-05-03).

Later in the interview, he also started to talk about how little time they put on marketing. How negative this is for the company and how he would want to see a big change. He continued by saying that everything that needs to be done within Recticel takes very long time.
“[...]let’s say that I need to have some help with doing a presentation before a specific meeting, then I need to send that request to Brussels, which just takes a lot of my time. If would be much easier if we had someone or a few who were working with this, who understood exactly what I need, one who was more involved in what we in Sweden are doing” (Mr. Miljevic, personal communication, 2017-05-03).

He also emphasises the fact that since they are a very big company, there should not be a problem with their marketing. But Mr. Miljevic says that some things that they have to work with are to be a little bit more updated on how companies should market themselves, through for example social media etc. That that is one way of marketing themselves, not only to customers but also to people who are not involved in the business area.

“[..]social media is one opportunity for companies to being seen and heard, but that is something that Recticel is really bad at” (Mr. Miljevic, personal communication, 2017-05-03).

Mr. Miljevic also emphasises the fact that they are mostly working with very large customers, which makes it very hard for them to affect them in some way.

“Most of the times, we cannot influence the specific buyer with prices etc. They have some specific rules of how many beds we are allowed to have in their stores, and what prices to put. For example, they say that they want a bed that costs €400, then my job is to sell them a bed for that price, it cannot even cost €401” (Mr. Miljevic, personal communication, 2017-05-03).

He explains that one of their biggest competitors are not that other polyurethane foam producer in Sweden, but the different companies in China who can make extremely good copies to good prices. However, he also says that this is only important to know within the Bedding department, since there are completely different in for example Flexible foams.
5 ANALYSIS

This chapter will first present a narrative analysis where each interviewee’s story will be carefully analyzed individually, through the authors’ own interpretations with the knowledge that is gained through Greimas Actantial Model (1966). Secondly, the outcome of the narrative analysis will be interpreted together with the brand management and storytelling.

5.1 GREIMAS ACTANTIAL MODEL

5.1.1 Mr. Runeberger

The subject
The subject is the one in the tale that has a mission or a goal (Hébert, 2006). In Mr. Runeberger’s story, the subject is the salesperson himself. The salesperson is the one who is representing the company, but is still in command of the story and will be the first who will benefit from it.

The object
The second part is the object, which is, the subject’s mission or goal (Hébert, 2006). In the story that Mr. Runeberger told there is one object that is seen very early in the interview. The story is presented as Recticel wants to be perceived as a solution provider, but also that they are very good at developing new products. From this story, it is therefore visible that this is the salesperson’s mission or goal, and therefore being the object.

The sender
The sender could be explained as, the one who provide the subject with the object (Hébert, 2006). As mentioned above the subject in each story is the salesperson. The sender will then be the one who provides the salesperson with the goal (object), which makes the sender to the company Recticel since the salesman is an employee there.

The receiver
The receiver is the one who will benefit from the subject’s object (Hébert, 2006).
“[..] and that we want to do that together with the customer in order to find the exact fit for that specific person” (Mr. Runeberger, personal communication, 2017-05-03).

This part of the interview can be seen as the receiver from Greimas actantial model. Mr. Runeberger says that when they are developing new products they want to do that together with the customer, which will benefit the customer in question, this will then benefit them in the process of developing new products, but also for Recticel to achieve the goal of being perceived as being a solution provider.

**The helper**

The helper could be described as, the one or the thing that will help the subject to reach the object (Hébert, 2006). As mentioned, the helper is the one that will help the salesperson to achieve the goal (object) that Recticel has. In the story that Mr. Runeberger tells, he brings up different things about the things that he thinks people know about Recticel. Things such as them being a,

“[..] 1. A big company, 2. Listed on the stock market 3. That we are a multinational company” (Mr. Runeberger, personal communication, 2017-05-03).

For example, if Recticel was a very small company, it could be harder for them to be solution providers, due to lack of resources and capacity. The multinational company is connected with this, since they then have the ability to be very close to the customer, which will benefit them both. These are things that Recticel could use in a story, since Mr. Runeberger did not mention any false things about the company. He also explained some things that are helpers for them in their marketing perspective, when building their brand. They have helpers such as a logo, standard pictures, and power points. It is clearly seen that each of the keywords that Mr. Runeberger presented in the interview could be helpers.


The fourth thing, typical Swedes, are more about culture, which is not something that Greimas bring into his actantial model. Therefore, we will not present this as being a good or bad thing to include in their story.

Another thing that is a helper for Mr. Runeberger is when he says,
“[..]we want our customers to know that if they are buying our products, they know that they will get the right products, in the right time, at the right cost. If the customers know that, then they will continue to buy from us” (Mr. Runeberger, personal communication, 2017-05-03).

Since this radiates safety, this could benefit the salesperson to achieve their goal. This is also connected with the fact that Recticel has existed for many years, which also gives their customers a feeling of being safe.

**The opponent**

The last actant is the opponent, which is, the one or the thing who try to hinder the subject from reaching the object (Hébert, 2006). In Mr. Runeberger’s story, he also mentions some problems about Recticel, such as being a big corporate group for example. That some things within their decision making processes are quite slow, and that each of their internal processes take time. In the story, he also mentions that they are not very updated on new things, he calls themselves “out-dated”, and that they are really bad when it comes to adapting new communication processes etc. These are all things that will make it harder for them to achieve their goal, and therefore makes these things to the “opponent” in the story.

**5.1.2 Mr. Borg**

**The subject**

In the story the interviewee talks about how to present the company Recticel and when he does he always use words as we, I and “as a salesperson”. This makes the subject, in this case be “a salesperson”, since that is the one who presents the company in this story.

**The object**

As object it is being told in the story that it is important for a salesperson to present the company in different ways, since their products are very adaptable and can be used in many different ways. One other thing that is the goal in this story is when he mention that Recticel needs to be better with the customer intimacy, in order to get a deeper understanding of potential customers.
The sender

The story is telling how a salesperson from Recticel present the company and who they are, since the salesperson represents Recticel is makes Recticel to be the sender.

The receiver

As mentioned above, the goal (object) in Mr. Borg’s story is to get a better understanding of the customer. When doing so, the receiver could appear to be the customer, as he mentions that they do it in order to be there and help the customer in the best way (better customer intimacy).

The helper

There are a few things that are being mentioned in the story that works as a helper in the process of reaching the object. First of all, as mentioned in the interview, Mr. Borg has worked for a long time at the company which leads to that he, according to the story, already have a lot of experience about the product. Mr. Borg say that Recticel is a leading manufacturer of raw material and that they have a long experience in the area. This only proof the part that they are well educated about what they sell and it is a good starting point to be even more understanding towards the customer because they know what they are talking about.

The opponent

One thing that Mr. Borg mentions could be an opponent is that Recticel could be a bit slow in the decision making process. The other opponent from the interview he mentions that Recticel do not have a brand that is being noticed by people, he says,

“I do not think that there have ever been a need for these types of things, that has never been an interest. I think that people have always thought that we do not have an “end-product”, so to speak, and that is the reason why we have not seen a need for this. But I think that people need to think again and start create a more united brand, so people will start to recognize Recticel” (Mr. Borg, personal communication, 2017-05-03).

This could be a hinder for Recticel, that they say about themselves that they are a brand that is not noticed by people. But he also mentions that this is something that they need to be better in.
5.1.3 Mr. Petersson

The subject

The subject will be the same as stated within the two earlier analysis. The one who is presenting the company and in this case a sales representative from Recticel.

The object

In Mr. Petersson’s story he tell the researchers that one of the most important things for him as a salesperson is to be able to differentiate depending on the customer. He gives one example like this,

“[..]and if I am going to sell one product to a very small, local customer I cannot start talking about that we are 8000 people in the corporate group, how much we can produce etc. since that could only drive him away. However, if I am going to meet a very large customer, it would not be interesting for them to know what Recticel can do in Gislaved, but maybe how we can be at their service in 28 different countries, that it takes us 5 minutes to produce the amount one truck etc.” (Mr. Petersson, personal communication, 2017-05-03).

With this the authors can see that the object of this story is, to be able to differentiate depending on the customer.

The sender

The sender will be same as in the two previous analysis, which is Recticel, since the salesperson is the subject and the salesperson is working for Recticel.

The receiver

Since being able to differentiate is the object (goal) in this story the customer will be the one who receive from this since they will be provided with what they need and not unnecessary facts since the salesperson will adapt the information after the customer need.

The helper

In order to be able to reach the goal in the story (differentiate depending on the customer). Mr. Petersson mentions some things that could make it easier to reach the goal. The first thing is that he has worked for a long time within the company at different departments, which results in a lot of knowledge about different areas. In the story Mr. Petersson also mentions that Recticel always find new solutions and invent
new products in order to find solutions that fit the customer. One last thing that Mr. Petersson tell the authors is that Recticel has the capacity of producing large volumes, which means that they can help many different customers and they are able to not only adapt to what product they need, they can produce big volumes.

**The opponent**

The opponent is what different problems that could occur when trying to reach the goal (object), in this case a problem that Mr. Petersson mentions is that sometimes Recticel is too big for their own best, he says,

“Sometimes we could be too administratively, with a lot of slow internal processes, and I think that people can perceive us of being a very slow company. We have many internal rules that have to be followed, which could be a bit problematic sometimes” (Mr. Petersson, personal communication, 2017-05-03).

The other thing that could be a problem according to the story is that sometimes the employees needs to check with the head office in Brussels, which could hinder or slow down some decisions.

**5.1.4 Mr. Miljevic**

**The subject**

The subject is the same as in the other interviews, the person that the story is about. In these cases, it is about the salesperson himself.

**The object**

The object that could be found in the story is that Mr. Miljevic explains that a sales representative need to be able to understand the customer and adapt his story to the customer, to strengthen the perception of Recticel.

“[..]it is the sale representative’s obligation to try to find that specific thing that will attract this specific customer” (Mr. Miljevic, personal communication, 2017-05-03).
The sender
As in the previous stories, the sender in this story is Recticel, since the salesperson is a representative of them.

The receiver
The receiver in Mr. Miljevic story could be different people. For example, since the object is flexibility, the goal is for the customer to feel safe and hopefully the customer is then the one who will benefit the most from it. But on the other hand, it could also be Recticel, since the company will benefit if the customers are happy. The salesperson himself will also benefit from the goal, since he will then be the one who is selling something and is generating money for the company.

The helper
In order for Recticel to be able to be flexible in their sales approach, some things could help them achieve that. For example, when Mr. Miljevic says,

“The relationship started by someone knowing somebody, which gave us a leverage in the beginning. During the years we have had the ability of keeping up with their huge growth, inter alia, and where we kept that connection to the first person, which results in that if we do not make a huge mistake, or if something happens to them, they will not stop buying our products” (Mr. Miljevic, personal communication, 2017-05-03).

In Mr. Miljevic story, he is talking about a big client, who has grown a lot over the years. For example, if Recticel was not a big company, who had the capacity to expand the production of the customer’s products, they would not have had the ability to fulfil the customer’s need. Therefore, one of the helpers in this story is the fact that they are big company. However, at the same time in some situations, the story that is being presented is also about the ability to “act locally” as well. Since some customers are quite small, it is important for Recticel to have the ability not to scare them away.

The opponent
The opponent in Mr. Miljevic’s story should be something that hinders him from reaching the object which is, that it is important to be flexible. So the first thing that could be an obstacle is one thing as Mr. Petersson mentions in the interview as well, that things internally takes time, Mr. Miljevic says,
“[..]let’s say that I need to have some help with doing a presentation before a specific meeting, then I need to send that request to Brussels, which just takes a lot of my time. It would be much easier if we had someone or a few who were working with this, who understood exactly what I need, one who was more involved in what we in Sweden are doing” (Mr. Miljevic, personal communication, 2017-05-03).

Which makes it hard to be flexible in every situation when you need to check with someone else before you can take a final decision.

Another opponent that the authors can see in Mr. Miljevic’s story is that the biggest competitor that Recticel has is not other producers in Sweden, but companies from China that produce really good copies. This makes it harder for Recticel to be as flexible in for example price as China.

5.2 OVERALL ANALYSIS

As it is shown from the interviews, the subject is always about the same since they are the employees that talks about Recticel, in most cases a sales person. The sender (the company, Recticel) is also always the same, since the storytellers are all representatives of the same company, and the story is told about the company. Even though the receiver is almost always the same, it can sometimes differ depending on who is benefitting from the goal (object) of the story.

The first actant that differs in the talk is the object since all of the interviewees have different ways of expressing themselves in the story they present. Mr. Runeberger says that they want to be a solution provider and develop new products in order to fit the customer’s need. Mr. Borg talked about the importance of getting a deeper understanding of the customer. Mr. Petersson emphasized the importance of being able to differentiate yourself according to the customer, and Mr. Miljevic claimed that knowing the customer that you are talking to. With the use of the narrative analysis method, the underlying meaning of talk can be found (Graham, 2004; Czarnowska, 2003; Greimas, 1966). Therefore, the authors interpreted the interviews in order to find the underlying meaning of each object, which in this case, was about the ability to be flexible. For example, in Mr. Borg’s object, it could be seen that by getting a deeper understanding of the customers, it will make it easier for the salesperson to be flexible to fulfil the customer need. Recticel (2016) claimed that they do not have one specific
company story. However, Boje (2014) says that storytelling is used by everyone even if they know it or not. The authors can, by using a narrative analysis, see that each object in the story they present has the same underlying meaning, but it is expressed differently. Parallels to this can be drawn to the internal brand equity since Baumgarth (2010) claims that when employees communicate the brand consistently, the internal brand equity is strong. Also, Tsang et al (2011); Chernatony (2006); Baumgarth and Schmidt (2010); Parasuraman et al (1985), argues for the importance of the employees (salespersons) being a centre in the brand building process.

“[..]the behaviour of a frontline employee may be an important driver of consumers' brand personality impressions” (Wentzel, 2009, p.359), whereas the external brand equity is a result of the total brand experience that a customer perceives (Bendixen, 2004; Persson, 2010).

The other actants that differ in the talk are the helper and the opponent. Greimas actantial model (1966) shows that the helper and the opponent are derived from the object, and since the interviewees have different ways of expressing their objects, they also have different ways of expressing their helpers and opponents. As in Mr. Runeberger’s story, working in a big company is a helper, due to that it gives more resources and capacity to work with for the fulfilment of the underlying goal of being flexible. In Mr. Petersson’s story, he mentions that he has worked at different departments within the company, which gives him a lot of knowledge about what he is selling. This is then to be considered as a helper since this gives Mr. Petersson the ability to adapt to the customer’s needs. The opponent of Mr. Miljevic’s story is the competitors in China who are producing similar products at a lower price. This can be seen as an opponent since Recticel cannot compete with the low prices, and therefore not be able to be flexible. Mr. Borg mentions that Recticel could be quite slow in their internal processes, whereas the outcome of this is then that their decision making process takes time. This makes it difficult for Recticel to be flexible when it comes to lead times etc. Despite the wide range of helpers and opponents, the object remains the same in each story, which is about the ability to be flexible. Gill (2016) mentions that everyone can perceive a story differently depending on the storyteller and who is listening to it. The authors can see a connection to the interviews, where the interviewees mention, that it is important to adapt your story depending on who is listening, so the story holds the right meaning.
As Fog et al., (2010) say, a story has an impact on the company brand, both externally and internally, and therefore it makes the employees an important part. Therefore, it is important to make the employees understand the core story, and thereafter, they need to feel a connection to the story in order to believe it and to pass it forward (Ibid).

“Just as the bricklayers shares the story of the cathedral he is helping to build. It makes him feel part of something far greater and more valuable than laying bricks alone” (Fog et al. 2010, p.63).
6 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter is based on the analytic discussion above and will provide the reader with a conclusion of the study to fulfil the purpose. This will be followed by practical and managerial implications, and finally, further research will be presented.

To answer the purpose of this study, which was

“[..] to see how employees within a B2B organisation can tell and utilise stories externally in order to impact the company brand, by adopting a narrative analysis method”, the research question “What stories do sales professionals present? And what affect does it have on the company brand?” was asked.

With the use of the narrative analysis method, the underlying meaning of each story that the salespeople presented can be understood. From this analysis, the authors interpreted that the object was one essential part of each story. By using the narratological perspective, the authors could see that the underlying meaning of each story was about the importance of being flexible. Even though it can be viewed in the stories that each sales person is expressing himself differently, they still present the same meaning of it. Even if the object is seen as one of the most important parts of the stories, the subject, sender, and receiver should not be forgotten, since these are the bricks that makes it even possible for the object to exist. The helpers are also very important, due to its necessity when working to maintain and develop the object. The opponent is also an essential part due to the fact that it is important to have knowledge about this. The authors can draw conclusions to that there are always things within a company that needs to be developed, and these things are to be seen as the opponents in each of the stories.

Having that said, this indicates that even though they do not know that they are using storytelling, they are still presenting the same story. With this, parallels can be drawn to the relationship to brand management, since one important part of building a strong brand is to have a united front line of the employees’ behaviour.
6.1 PRACTICAL AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Researchers have a disagreement regarding, whether the use of branding within B2B should be utilised or not. This is why we have chosen to research this area more by doing a study on the communication tool storytelling used as branding. This study will provide a deeper understanding of how storytelling can be used in B2B markets and how it could affect the company brand, since there is an inconsistency within this area.

We believe that, sales representatives and other employees that are working with customer contact, can benefit and relate to this study. Firstly, we will show an explanation how narrative analysis can be used by breaking down already existing stories within a company, to find the underlying meaning of the stories. Secondly, we will study the relations between the underlying meaning of a story to what how it can affect the company brand.

6.2 FURTHER RESEARCH

The aim of this study was to contribute to a better understanding regarding how sales representatives tell and utilize stories in order to strengthen the company brand. Where the result was that the authors could see that the underlying meaning of the sales representatives stories was about the importance of being flexible. With this study, the authors suggest further research regarding other representatives within organizations, by taking different standpoints such as the managers, purchasers, etc. in order to see if the stories are aligned throughout the company. Also, to investigate the impact the managers can have on the stories, about how it could be presented.

The authors can also see a need for a further research on storytelling and its external impact on the brand equity, to study how the stories can be perceived by the customers, and to measure its effects. It would also be interesting to see how these stories that the sales representatives presented to us would apply to an actual customer. For example, do an ethnographic study to get the understanding of how it actually is, rather than them telling how it is.
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