Analyzing the usage of digital marketing and relationship marketing within Swedish SME’s in the B2B sector
- Examining what is most effective
Abstract

Many small/medium-sized businesses to business companies today struggle with deciding what marketing strategy to adopt since they do not have the same resources as larger companies have. Large businesses have certain inherent advantages over smaller companies. They are usually more established on the market, they have more established customers and they have greater amounts of funds and resources in terms of, for example, personnel. Yet, SMEs play a crucial role in the European economy where they represent an overwhelming majority of 99.8% of enterprises active within EU’s non-financial business economy. The research that has been made regarding the social media marketing usage and adoption also points to that there is lack of research within the B2B sector comparing to the B2C sector. Yet, the research that has been made indicates that there are several potential benefits of utilizing social media, it has the potential to generate higher brand awareness, exposure, increased traffic and higher purchase intentions than what, for example, traditional marketing has and it is also known to be more cost effective. Still, many businesses have still not fully understood the potential benefits of utilizing social media as a marketing communication tool, especially SMEs within the B2B sector. Something that they do seem to adopt is relationship marketing which is not a new phenomenon, it has been one of the major paradigms in the marketing literature the last decades and is also known to be cost effective and beneficial in many areas. Therefore, the authors in this study chose to make a comparison between relationship marketing and digital marketing, to see what strategy is the most effective one in terms of awareness, purchase intentions and return of investment. So, the authors carried out a qualitative and multiple case study with seven SMEs in the B2B sector in Sweden. The result show that for creating awareness digital marketing seems to be more effective and for creating purchase intentions. Regarding ROI, it was challenging for the authors to draw any connections or to make an overall conclusion about it. It was also found that the companies utilize social media marketing mostly for relationship marketing purposes and not as sales channels and that most of the companies lack resources both in terms of personnel, time and funding’s when it comes to social media marketing.

Keywords

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1 Introduction

This chapter will start off with a background section that brings forward the topic of the paper, followed by a problem discussion and specifying a purpose. Moreover, the research questions will be stated as well as delimitations and the outline of the paper.

1.1 Background

Previous research has shown that SMEs in the B2B sector seem to not utilize the full potential of the new digital tools and are therefore not deriving the benefits from the opportunities they provide (Taiminen and Heikki 2015). So, what the authors will investigate in this paper is how effective digital marketing is compared to relationship marketing in terms of creating awareness, return of investment and purchase intentions and also look in to the benefits and barriers of both marketing types. The study will target SMEs in the business to business sector in Sweden because micro and small/medium-sized companies play a crucial role in the European economy with a representation of 99% of all the enterprises. They contribute with entrepreneurial knowledge, innovation and employment (European Commission, 2003). Yet, research show that the marketing reality in SMEs differ from larger companies in several ways, for example by having restricted resources, limitations when it comes to knowledge and personnel and a smaller customer base (Forsman, 2008). But also, because the digitization is a greater challenge for them. Literature argues that traditional marketing theories are not even applicable to SMEs (Taiminen and Heikki 2015). A more in-depth definition of SMEs and B2B will be provided under section 2.

Social media have in many ways changed how today's society works, social media has made it faster and easier to access real-time information, around the world (Neti, 2011; Brennan & Croft, 2012). By producing smaller bits of information, it is easier for people to digest and communicate with each other, either if it is through a post on Facebook, Instagram or with a simple tweet on Twitter, one can immediately be made aware of events happening all over the world (Siamagka et al., 2015; Houtari et al., 2015). A company can create awareness, strengthening their brand and communicate with their customers like never before (Bolat et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2016; Karjaluoto et al., 2015). Today's social networks allows companies around the world to spread their
message in a way that no one could have predicted 10 or 20 years ago. Social media can be defined as a collection concept for different platforms of websites and services on the internet which can be used for creating and sharing content and being able to communicate with each other (Moncrief et al., 2015; Alves et al., 2016). It is still a quite new and technically difficult area to understand and implementation of such digital strategies can be challenging for companies that lack resources or knowledge (Salo, 2017; Kärkkäinen et al., 2014; Bernard, M., 2016; Lehtimäki et al., 2009).

Research also shows that there has been less research devoted to digital marketing and especially social media, within a B2B context compared to the much more extensive research that has been made within the B2C sector (Kärkkäinen and Immonen, 2014; Wang et al., 2016; Flanigan et al., 2016; Habibi et al., 2015; Rodriguez et al., 2012; Cawsey et al., 2016). Although the research that has been made shows that social media marketing is a cost-effective tool of marketing a company's brand, creating awareness and purchase intentions, just to mention a few, many B2B companies still find it challenging adopting social media as a marketing strategy. Some of the factors are for example perceived ease of use, organizational innovativeness and many B2B companies perceive social media as a less effective marketing channel and they also consider social media less important in customer relationship oriented activities than other business models (Ianko et al., 2018; Andersson and Wikström., 2017; Alves et al., 2016; Siamagka et al., 2015).

As markets turn more and more competitive, companies might have to change their marketing approach. From having performed transactional marketing many companies are now shifting towards relationship marketing (Gligorijević, M., 2009). Relationship marketing is strategy that emphasizes customer retention, satisfaction, and lifetime customer value. Relationship marketing can be defined as marketing to current customers’ vs new customer acquisition through sales and advertising, it encompasses the study of interactions, relationships and networks (Gummesson, 1994). Furthermore, he states that relational approaches in marketing gradually became the object of research and conceptualization during the past decades. In the 1990s it hit a breakthrough and the interest raised even higher (ibid). Strong relationships are crucial when it comes to dealing with business to business partners, innovative managers worldwide are
experimenting with a myriad of approaches to make relationships with their business suppliers and customers more productive and enduring (Cannon and Perreault, 1999). Academics and practitioners agree upon that long-term collaborative relationships often lead to improved business performance (Spekman and Carraway, 2006; Ulaga, 2003; Ulaga and Eggert, 2006). Gummesson states that “relationships are part of human nature. They are timeless. They are independent of culture. They are there in every type and size of business” (2014, p.5).

Geraldo et al. (2007) states that business customer loyalty is mainly due to effective relationship-marketing policies, most of all for SMEs, which are more vulnerable to the aggression of moneyed advertising and information campaigns on carried out by large competitors. Relationship marketing is built on the idea that people want to do business with someone they know, like and trust and when it comes to business within the B2B sector lead generation, relationship marketing becomes even more important since the value of the sale increases and the number of potential, viable customers increases. Comparing to the B2C sector who can find new customers around every virtual corner. So, for companies with niche or very complex products relationship marketing is a crucial component (Morgan and Hunt, 1999). Furthermore, they state that enthusiasts of relationship marketing encourage firms to seek customers or partners for long term relationships by for example focusing on customer retention rather than transactional sale (ibid).

Therefore, the authors have chosen to target the B2B sector to be able to contribute with further knowledge on the subject and by comparing relationship marketing to digital marketing, this report strive to provide useful information for managers on what would be most effective in terms of ROI, creating awareness and purchase intentions when it comes to Swedish SMEs (Flanigan and Obermier, 2016).

1.2 Problem Discussion

It has been stated by Yazdanfar & Öhman (2015) that for a firm to survive in today's market it must continue to grow and could also be beneficial for other firms as well. The capability of innovation and the ability to take advantage of opportunities such as for example, digital marketing is mentioned as an important ambition in contributing to a
firm’s growth. It will impact both the organizations’ capability to explore unpredictable markets and the employment growth (Swee Lin Tan and Smyrnois, 2013). However, it has been noticed that businesses should be careful with their marketing ways because depending on how the business is being presented, it could have a different impact on the company brand than what is intended (Lohrke et al., 2006). Social media within digital marketing have attracted significant attention the last decade, as academics and practitioners are eager to understand its potential when it comes to supporting brands, sales, customer service, and product development (Dahnil et al., 2014; Siamagka et al., 2015). However, previous studies have shown that there is a lack of research regarding the how to utilize digital marketing in the best possible way within SME:s (Carroll and Wagar, 2010; Dholakia and Kshetri, 2004).

Galloway (2007) argues that the various forms of digitization is related to SMEs growth, performance and competitiveness in a positively way. Spruge and Roberts (2005) also mention that digital marketing such as social media can add opportunities for small and medium sized businesses such as attracting new customers and in reaching existing customers more efficiently. It has been shown that digital marketing brings compelling opportunities such as reaching new target audiences, increasing efficiency and performance and improving growth and competitiveness to SMEs organizations (Shideler and Badasyan, 2012; Galloway 2007). Lohrke et al., (2006) and Kaynak et al., (2005) both point to the fact that digital marketing can help to benefit SMEs by reducing costs, and at the same time facilitating both internal and external communication (Chong and Pervan, 2007; Eriksson et al., 2008). However, the reality of SMEs digital marketing is, in comparison to larger organizations, a greater challenge according to Reijonen (2010). Their marketing techniques are more informal, reactive and spontaneous (Gilmore et al., 2004). Also, resources which are afforded by larger organizations might be a strategic hindrance and challenge for SMEs (Morgan and Hunt, 1999). It is argued by Hill (2001) that SMEs are in general disorganized and unplanned, although still pointing to that some SMEs do engage in formal and more conventional marketing practices such as marketing planning. Previous research shows that the adoption process of new technologies within SMEs has been widely covered, however, it is stated that knowledge regarding how SMEs utilize digital marketing requires more in-depth research (Chatzoglou et al., 2010; Dholakia and Kshetri, 2004;
Lohrke et al., 2006; Carroll and Wagar, 2010). Even though social media marketing may have become a huge part of organizations marketing strategy, enterprises ought to consider how to best engage in the most effective way with potential and already existing consumers (Lohrke et al., 2006).

Although the previous section points to that digital marketing is highly beneficial to SMEs, it is also argued by Handriana (2016) that consumers view relationship marketing as a possibly even more sustainable strategy for SMEs to be successful. It is stated that the voice of businesses heard by other businesses increase and depend on mutually satisfaction and long term relationships with key constituents to earn and retain their business (Kotler and Keller, 2016). Morgan and Hunt (1994) argue that relationship marketing should however be handled with concern, both when it comes to selecting appropriate partners as well as engaging in relationships only when it provides a sustainable competitive advantage. Meanwhile, most of the previous research regarding relationship marketing has shown to focus on larger businesses (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Luo and Donthu, 2007), pointing to the fact that relationship marketing within the context of SMEs is still also limited (Butigan and Mahnic, 2011). Therefore, the researchers of this thesis examine the effectiveness of both relationship marketing and digital marketing within SMEs in Sweden.

1.3 Purpose
The purpose of this study is to understand how SMEs in the B2B sector, in Sweden, market themselves and for what purpose. Also, to analyze relationship marketing and digital marketing and how they are utilized, to get a better understanding of whether one tool is more effective than the other or if they go hand in hand.

1.4 Delimitations
This research delimitates itself to study marketing processes within SMEs in the B2B sector in Sweden. Due to the limited research about the usage of digital marketing and relationship marketing within SMEs in the business-to-business context, it was decided to make a research report about them, seeing what is more effective when it comes to creating awareness, purchase intentions and return of investment. However, since relationship marketing and digital marketing are broad topics, the study will not cover
Swedish firms overall. This report will therefore be delimited to focus on firms that operate within the B2B sector in Sweden. Also, the study is delimited to interviews via Skype/Zoom due to the interviewees lack of time and since the chosen companies are spread out throughout Sweden. The interviewees are managers or employees who are in direct contact with the marketing and sales of the company. Moreover, SMEs within the B2B sector was studied to make the study narrower.

1.5 Outline of thesis

The thesis starts off with an introduction and there is a discussion about the topic. Already existing knowledge is put forward as well as where the missing gaps lie. This should provide the reader with a more in-depth understanding regarding the purpose and focus of the thesis. Research questions are mentioned and then the theoretical part comes next. Following will be the methodology section part that explains what has been done, how it was conducted and the reasons behind it. Ethical principles and quality criteria are also points that are brought forward. The next section will provide empirical data since this study is based on a qualitative research method and the information is collected through in-depth interviews with the chosen SMEs businesses within Sweden. Continuingly, there will be an analysis section with the collected data. The discussion leads up to a conclusion and implications, also suggestions for future research. At last there will be a critical review of the whole study.
2 Theoretical framework

In the theoretical chapter, suitable theories, concepts and models will be presented, clarified and also discussed based on previous research and literature. This chapter aims to provide an overall understanding regarding the concepts. Models are brought forward which will act as a guideline for the analysis.

2.1 Small and Medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

In this report, the authors define SMEs according to the European commission's standard. The factors that determine whether a business is an SME is “staff headcount and either turnover or balance sheet total” and SMEs consists of three different categories of enterprises, micro-enterprises, small enterprises and medium-sized enterprises:

- Micro businesses have less than 10 employees and a turnover under €2 million
- Small businesses have less than 50 employees and a turnover under €10 million
- Medium sized businesses have less than 250 employees and a turnover under €50 million

SMEs represent 99.8% of all business in the EU and are considered to be the backbone of the EU economy (ec.europa.eu). In the annual report on European SMEs 2016/2017 it is stated that these companies employ 93 million people and account for 67% of the total employment in the “EU-28 non-financial business sector” and they generate 57% of value added in the EU-28 non-financial business sector (Annual Report on European SMEs 2016/2017) SMEs are expected to continue their relatively steady pace of growth in 2017 and 2018 (ibid).

2.2 Business to Business (B2B)

Business to business, also referred to as B2B, is defined by Cawsey and Rowley (2016) as a sort of transaction which exists between different businesses that conducts business between themselves rather than between a business and an individual consumer (B2C). They also mention that companies within the B2B sector usually have fewer, but larger consumers with long-term business relationships. However, a company within the B2B
sector can at the same time sell directly to consumers as well. According to Kotler and Keller (2006), co-operation and collaborative innovation is usually a huge part of the B2B firms. It is also discussed by Li et al., (2011) that trust is a crucial factor for B2B companies to build these long-term relationships since the transactions usually has a higher price and volume. It is stated that other key sales and marketing differences for B2B transactions compared to B2C include that the amount of money of the goods or services being sold is much higher and that the decision-making process can take up to days, weeks or even months, depending on the size and nature of the order as well as how the company works (Cawsey and Rowley, 2016).

2.3 Digital marketing

Digital marketing as a support to modern marketing has been called many things by academics and professionals, for example digital marketing, internet marketing, e-marketing and web marketing. In this report the term digital marketing is being used since it consists of the use of a range of digital platforms. One can define digital marketing as “achieving marketing objectives through applying digital technologies and media” (Chaffey, 2016, p.11). The activities that make up digital marketing include company websites and social media company pages in combination with online communications methods like for example: search engine marketing, social media marketing, online advertising, email marketing and partnership arrangements with other websites. These tools can be used for obtaining new customers and providing services to existing and new customers which can help to develop customer relationships (ibid). Ainscough and Luckett (1996) states that the Web can be used for publishing, online sales, market research, and customer support. Digital marketing can generate several potential benefits and Scholars like Whitla, (2009) argues that the Web can assist in brand building, generating word-of-mouth, communication among consumers, buzz marketing, and crowdsourcing. In addition to helping with the fulfillment of marketing strategies, the Internet can also improve the firm’s overall performance (ibid).

Chaffey, (2016) divides media into three groups:

- **Paid media** - which is bought media where the company pays for visitors, reach or conversions through search, display ad networks or affiliate marketing.
Owned media - this is the media own by the company like company websites, blogs, email list, mobile apps or their social media channels

Earned media - is publicity generated media generated through PR invested in targeting influencers to increase awareness and it also includes word-of-mouth which can be stimulated through viral and social media marketing and conversions in social networks, blogs and other communities.

Furthermore, the 5Ss of internet marketing created by Chaffey and Smith, (2012) is a model for developing a digital strategy and the model is focused on increasing brand presence, client engagement and ultimately boosting online transactions through 5 objectives presented in Table 1. This model can work as a framework for those companies that are not following a digital marketing plan or just work as inspiration for those who need it.

Table 1: 5S, Internet Marketing (Chaffey and Smith, 2012)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sell</strong></td>
<td>Use the internet as a sales channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Includes direct online sales and sales from offline channels influenced online.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Serve</strong></td>
<td>Use the internet as a customer service channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Achieved through giving customers online or inform about product development through online dialogue and feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speak</strong></td>
<td>Use the internet to interact with customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creating a two-way dialogue through web interactions like forums and surveys and conducting online market research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Save</strong></td>
<td>Take advantage of technology and save on operational costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Achieved through online email communications, sales and service transactions to reduce staff, print and postage costs and through “web-self-service”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sizzle</strong></td>
<td>Extend the brand online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Achieved through providing new propositions, new offers and new experiences</td>
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2.3.1 The concept of social media

It is proven by the new 2018 Global Digital suite of reports from We are Social and Hootsuite that over 4 billion people around the world are using the internet, with a 7 percent year-on-year. The reports also show that there are around 3.000 billion social
media users and that Facebook is still the dominant global-user platform with almost 2.17 billion users at the start of 2018 (www.wearesocial.com). Continuing, both scholars and practitioners are eager to get a deeper understanding of social media and the potential it brings in supporting sales, brands, customer service and product development (Siamagka et al. 2015; Dahnil et al., 2014). It is suggested that social media have attracted significant attention (Siamagka et al., 2015) and Zahoor and Qureshi (2017) argues that social media is the usage of web-based and mobile technologies to create, share and consume information and knowledge without any social, political, geographical or demographical limits through public interaction in a participatory and collaborative way. Possible resources for providing valuable insight, that includes for example, lead generation, brand insight and consumer attitudes and satisfaction levels can be found through sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter (Mehmet et al., 2016). It is mentioned that even though the executives of B2B companies interpret how powerful social media can be, they continue to either under allocate funding or not even allocate anything, to promote and develop social media strategies within the company. This lack of foresight might depend on the lack of understanding about how social media can be implemented, what social media is and what it can do for the company (Järnvinen et al., 2012; Michaelidou et al., 2011; Iankova et al., 2018). It is suggested that adopting social media into an organisation can be highly beneficial (Bolat et al., 2016; Kärkkäinen and Immonen, 2014; Brennan et al., 2012). Siamagka et al., (2015) indicates that social media can generate higher purchase intentions and brand attitudes compared to traditional digital media. As stated by Lacka et al., (2016), social media has the potential to create capabilities within organizations that could translate into useful resources, which could lead to competitive advantages and higher performance. However, according to Andzulis et al., (2012) there is a need for a social media strategy and framework for implementation and transformation to be successful with it.

2.3.2 Social media platforms
It is acknowledged by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) that social media platforms can be defined as applications which allow for “user-generated content” that is created and shared. Social media sites are mentioned to be both capacious and mercurial (DeNardis and Hackl, 2015). Hogan and Quan-Hasse (2010) points to the fact that definitions regarding social media platforms can also focus on the ability to interactively exchange
information with different groups of recipients. According to DeNardis and Hackl (2015) social media platforms can be divided into three specific technological affordances:

- The intermediation of user-generated content
- The possibility of interactivity among users and direct engagement with content
- The ability for an individual to articulate network connections with other users.

There are various types of information intermediaries where these three common characteristics materialize within (ibid). It can be for example social networking sites like Facebook and Instagram, networking sites aimed for the business community and professionals like LinkedIn, microblogging platforms such as Twitter, content creating sites like YouTube and mobile image messaging services like Snapchat (Chae, 2018).

2.3.3 Social media as a marketing communication tool

According to Baruah (2012), social media refers to the use of web-based and mobile technologies which turn communication into an interactive dialogue. Social media comes in many different forms such as magazines, internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, microblogging, wikis, podcasts, photographs or pictures, video, rating and social bookmarking which are used extensively for communication. The term social media is, according to Andersson and Wikström (2017), a group of internet-based applications which are built on both the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, that allows the creation and exchange of user generated content. Furthermore, the researchers state that B2B companies are increasing their use of social media as a communication tool to enhance customer relationships, support sales and build their brand. Scholars such as Alves et al., (2016) and Holliman et al., (2014) describe social media as a tool that enables communication between businesses and help to build brand loyalty beyond traditional marketing methods. Social media is, according to Siamagka et al., (2015), a powerful marketing communication tool due to its capability of spreading viral messages and therefore generating WOM (word-of-mouth). Baruah, (2012) states that social media has transformed how businesses communicate with each other and that the social tools that are being used today are very cost effective compared to traditional approaches like email and online advertising. Yet, many businesses have
still not fully understood the potential benefits of utilizing social media as a marketing communication tool, especially within B2B organizations (Järvinen et al., 2012; Mehmet et al., 2016; Iankova et al., 2018).

2.3.4 Social media marketing adoption and usage within SMEs

Some of the most popular social media channels today are for example Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, blogs and Instagram (Andersson et al., 2017; Gruner et al., 2018; Bernard, M., 2016). According to Alves et al., (2016), microblogs and social networks are the most commonly adopted social media channels by firms and among others Facebook, Twitter and YouTube seems to be in favor. Marketers operating in the B2C sector actively adopt social media as a marketing tool whereas B2B marketers, especially in SME’s seem underestimate the importance of social media marketing (Bernard, M., 2016; Flanigan et al., 2016; Gruner et al., 2018). Lacka et al., (2016) provides one explanation for it, saying that B2B marketing was traditionally carried out in an offline environment but that in the last decades B2B marketers have also included several online platforms into their marketing strategies. However, those platforms are restricted to a one-way communication for example a company’s website. Other researchers, such as Swani and Brown (2011), propose that many B2B marketers believe that the nature of the B2B sector requires face-to-face interaction during the purchasing process and that both parties are actively involved. They claim that this approach cannot be satisfied online, which prevents the adoption of social media usage. According to Karjaluoto and Leinonen, (2009), search engine optimization (SEO), the process of improving the website’s search engine rank in organic search results, and search engine advertising (SEA) has commonly been used among larger companies but SMEs has not quite understood its full potential yet. Although there are obvious uses of social media in B2B companies, academic research indicates that B2B marketers are not as sophisticated or skilled in social media usage as B2C marketers (Andersson and Wikstrom, 2017).

Despite the criticisms of B2B social media usage, B2B marketers in SMEs have in recent years increased their usage of online communication channels, which enables a two-way interaction between B2B partners. Among the different online platforms, social media sites have caught the B2B marketers’ attention and this growing interest
seems to be directly related to the numerous advantages deriving from the utilization of these types of sites (ibid). B2B marketers are starting to recognize the value of social media and utilizing it to support their marketing strategies. So, the use of social media in small and medium sized B2B companies is evolving (Andersson and Wikstrom, 2017).

In line with prior research small and medium sized B2B companies use social media as communication and marketing tool to enhance customer relationships, support sales and build their brands. They also use social media for recruiting, as a seeking tool, product information tool and service tool (Andersson and Wikström, 2017). In a study written by Malhotra et al., (2013), it is claimed that for example Facebook has become an important channel in engaging consumers and creating brand awareness and blogging is said to be a good relationship tool for both marketing and PR and many large companies have adopted blogging as part of their routines (Singh et al., 2008). Twitter and LinkedIn are also among the top channels that are being utilized by SMEs but Google+ and Pinterest remain slow (ibid).

2.3.5 Benefits and barriers of social media marketing within SMEs

As mentioned before, it is suggested by previous research that social media marketing adoption and usage can be significantly beneficial for more organizations, within the B2B sector (Andersson et al., 2017; Siamagka et al., 2015; Flanigan et al., 2016; Michaelidou et al., 2011; Habibi et al., 2015; Järvinen et al., 2012). Social media has the potential to generate higher brand awareness, exposure, increased traffic and higher purchase intentions than traditional marketing has (Karjaluoto et al., 2015; Michaelidou et al., 2011; Holliman et al., 2014). More specific, previous research points to that SMEs are more often being able to employ digital marketing to perform key organizational activities faster and more efficiently (Lohrke, 2006). Due to this, Carson and Parker (2001) and Oftel (2003) argue that it is not surprising to have seen an increasing worldwide SME digital use. Also, since it is seen to decrease the cost of employing this technology (Tessler, 1999). Furthermore, Sadowski et al., (2002) and Santarelli and D’Altri (2003) point to that managers within SMEs view the communication with customers through digital platforms as beneficial. It is also mentioned that social media provides the opportunity for business operations to be
handled in a more effective way since the communication with other businesses enhances (Alves et al., 2016; Karjaluoto et al., 2015; Kärkkäinen and Immonen, 2014; Alawan et al., 2017). However, it is identified by Bernard (2016) that B2B firms have a hard time utilizing digital marketing to its fullest. Organizations can find it challenging in keeping up with all the changes within technology as well as creating the right content (Sharma, 2002; Moncrief et al., 2015).

Nonetheless, as described before, the possibility in creating capabilities that could be turned into useful resources, giving organizations competitive and higher performance is higher when utilizing digital marketing within social media (Holliman et al., 2014; Moncrief et al., 2015; Alves et al., 2016). Firms can also benefit from digital marketing by increasing their geographic reach, reducing print costs and execution effectiveness (Dholakia and Kshetri, 2004; Poon and Swatman, 1999). Yet, it is discussed by Wang et al., (2016) that barriers and challenges within digital marketing do exist, especially in the B2B sector. Also, there has been studies that identify obstacles with digital marketing specifically within SMEs such as knowledge, human resources and lack of money (Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015). However, it is stated that the main obstacles is the uncertainty of how to utilize new digital tools and also in finding the right person to handle the digital marketing. Even though some managers might be aware of the limited IT competence within their organizations, it may not necessarily be perceived as a barrier (ibid).

Previous research brings forward that a problematic barrier is that B2B organizations and their marketers might underestimate the importance and relevance of digital marketing, in comparison to B2C organizations (Lehtimäki et al., 2009; Veldeman et al., 2017; Lacka et al., 2016). It is argued by Mehmet et al., (2016) that challenges exist when it comes to branding, measurement, sales technique and lead generation. Michaelidou et al., (2011) also brings forward perceived barriers regarding lack of money, time and training as well as the unfamiliarity with the technology which was also mentioned in the previous section. Many B2B organizations may find it hard to state the actual ROI and there might be seen a risk when it comes to distribution of information since it is hard to control all messages that are being shared on the social media platforms (Järvinen et al., 2012). Habibi et al., (2015) further acknowledges that
B2B marketers find it challenging when it comes to represent the business products authentically while at the same time managing consumer-generated content and opinion-sharing. Since B2B organizations usually provide products with higher value than B2C organizations, the consumer risk perception is likely to increase. Nonetheless, B2B organizations can use social media to provide reassurance through rational content and eliminate risk perceptions (Habibi et al., 2015). Furthermore, Habibi et al., (2015) continues by discussing that B2B marketers within SMEs, as mentioned before, may find it challenging, in terms of social media, to understand the way of paring the chosen social media platform and content with the decision maker of another business. However, it is stated by the previous research that if B2B organizations were to be more frequently active within social media marketing, it might save both time and resources due to that it is a more cost-effective method (Flanigan et al., 2016; Karjaluoto et al., 2015). Despite this, it is the organization's own responsibility to figure out how to dedicate the resources needed for being successful within it (Habibi et al., 2015; Karjaluoto et al., 2015).

Additionally, it is indicated by previous researchers that B2B organizations can benefit higher opportunity to gain word-of-mouth advertising from the using of social media (Jävinen et al., 2012; Habibi et al., 2015; Flanigan et al., 2016. Moreover, using digital marketing as a marketing tool enhances business relationships, supports sales and establishes the brand and product awareness (Bolat et al., 2016; Karjaluoto et al., 2015; Siamagka et al., 2015; Lacka et al., 2016; Kärkkäinen et al., 2014; Andersson et al., 2017).

2.4 Relationship marketing

Relationship marketing (RM) is not a new term but has been one of the major paradigms in the marketing literature the last decades, RM can be defined according to Ndubisi and Nataraajan (2016, p.228);

“deliberate actions and initiatives by organizations and personnel to develop, maintain, and sustain strong relationships with customers and other interest groups”.
According to Gummesson (2014), relationships between customers and suppliers are the ground for all marketing. Marketing theory evolved during the industrial era, where mass manufacturing of standardized goods gave birth to mass marketing and mass distribution. During this time marketing theory and education mostly evolved around consumer goods marketing (B2C) whereas service marketing and B2B marketing was dedicated less research. The research and practice within marketing the last decades has shown that relationships, networks and interaction is significant. Gummesson (2014) continues by saying that the literature on RM and CRM (customer relationship management) has increased in a rapid pace and in many different languages, yet the literature is restricted and it is characterized by treating single subjects in RM such as consumer loyalty, databases for smarter direct marketing, call centers, customer clubs or CRM software systems. These are all important parts but they lack the coherent framework of an overriding theory (ibid). According to Gummieson (2014) service marketing, B2B as networks and traditional marketing management are a central root in the relationship marketing and customer relationship management system. Other areas that has contributed is quality management like customer perceived quality and customer satisfaction which in turn has inspired the concept of relationship quality (ibid).

Researchers, such as Doyle and Roth (1992), indicate that the aim of relationship selling is to earn the position of preferred supplier by developing trust in key accounts over a period. Berry (1983) suggest that relationship marketing is about attracting, developing, and retaining customer relationships. Companies that adopt a relationship marketing approach make every effort to keep their current customers through maintenance and promotion of a mutually beneficial long-term relationship with them. Rather than only focusing on maximizing the efficiency and volume of individual sales which is the main objective of the transactional marketing approach (MacMillan et al., 2005). The RM approach has resulted in increased customer cooperation, increased purchases and decreased customer defection (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Gummesson, 1999). Ndubisi and Natarajan, (2016) mentions further positive outcomes like customer satisfaction, trust, commitment, and loyalty.
2.4.1 Relationship Communication Model

Andersen, (2001) says that many of the relationship and communication models that exist today offer an overview of the relation-building process and they show a variety of stages and of provoking factors progressing the relationship from one stage to the other has been proposed. So, Andersen, (2001) says that instead of choosing one model at the expense of another, he created a compound model that captures three phases of the relationship marketing development process

A. a pre-relationship phase  
B. a negotiation phase  
C. a relationship development phase.

From a marketing communication point of view, all these phases include several challenges in terms of the design of communication means and strategies. The top part of the model shows the degree of mutual relationship adaptation over time as well as the three phases of relationship development that was presented above. The bottom part of the model describes the three aspects of marketing communication in the relation to the three phases.
Figure 1 - Design of Communication means and strategies, Andersen, (2001).

A. The communication task - which is about the goals of the communication activities

B. The sort of communication - which concerns whether the communication activity is bidirectional or unidirectional

C. The communication strategies - which addresses the operational issues of relationship marketing communication

This model can be used for companies that wants to develop their relationships and communication strategies by showing the different phases more in detail and the different communication tactics.

2.4.2 The Honeycomb Model

The honeycomb of social media was created in 2011 by three Canadian professors named Jan Kietzmann, Kristopher Hermkens and Ian McCarthy. They claim that the internet was in the earlier days used for consuming content in different ways, you could read it, watch it or use it to buy products and services. However, it was noticed that consumers started utilizing platforms like content sharing sites, blogs, social networking
and wikis to create, modify, share and discuss internet content. In the end they realized that this social media phenomenon can now directly impact a firm’s reputation, sales and even survival. They further noticed that many managers have not understood this form of media and have avoided and/or ignored it and that is for several reasons. The managers might lack an understanding of what it is, the different forms it can take and how to engage with it and learn. Therefore, they started looking at why users engage with social media and created a framework that defines social media by using seven functional building blocks: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups. The idea behind it is that companies can select the ones most relevant to their business and focus their attention on those areas. Each square in Figure 2 shows a specific aspect of social media user experience and in the second model its potential implications for firms (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

Figure 2 - The honeycomb model (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

- **Identity** - This block represents the extent to which users disclose their identities on social media. This can include revealing information like name,
age, gender, profession, location, and information that portrays users in certain ways.

- **Presence** - This block represents the extent to which users can know if other users are online. It includes knowing where others are both in the virtual world and/or in the real world, and whether they are available.

- **Relationships** - This block represents relationships and the extent to which users can be related to other users. Relate means that two or more users have some form of association that leads them to converse, share objects of sociality, meet up, or simply just list each other as a friend or fan.

- **Reputation** - This block represents the extent to which users can identify the standing of others and themselves, in a social media context. Reputation can have different meanings on social media platforms but in most cases reputation is a matter of trust.

- **Groups** - This block represents the extent to which users can form communities and sub-communities. The more ‘social’ a network can get, the bigger the group of friends, followers, and contacts.

- **Conversations** - This block represents the extent to which users communicate with other users in a social media setting.

- **Sharing** - This block represents the extent to which users exchange, distribute, and receive content.

The most popular social media networks today does not usually focus on only one block but rather on three or four primary blocks, and some focuses more on identity while others focus more on sharing etc (ibid). Social media has an unbelievable power to affect a company's reputation, yet, companies cannot completely control the conversation which means that companies need to be more transparent than ever. In summary, the Honeycomb model is a framework for considering social media networks.
but it is not a decision tree and therefore the final decision as to what networks a company should select still, needs to be taken within the organization. It can also be used as a framework for managers that lack knowledge regarding the subject or want to look into it more deeply (ibid).

2.4.3 The Commitment-Trust Model
According to Morgan and Hunt (1994) the commitment-trust theory can be defined as the explanation of the development of a long-term relationship between two parties. They continue describing the simultaneous adoption of relationship commitment and trust as being inseparable and critical factors that are needed in order to form and maintain business relationships between businesses. The commitment-trust model shown below explains that commitment depends on four different variables which are: relationship termination costs, relationship benefits, shared values and trust. Trust depends on the different variables which are: shared values, opportunistic behavior and communication. Also, seen in the model is five outcome variables for relationship development, which are acquiescence, propensity to leave, cooperation, functional conflict, and decision-making uncertainty, for relationship development (ibid).

Figure 3 - The commitment and trust model (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).
Since trust between two parties assist in reducing the vulnerability that the parties might perceive when committing to an exchange relationship, this theory proposes that the trust directly influences relationship commitment (MacMillan et al., 2005). It is argued that the commitment-trust theory has drawn the attention of many of today's e-commerce researchers (Jang et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2016) and that relationship trust and commitment are the two key factors which influence a consumer’s attitude towards a business (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Also, previous researchers point to the fact that B2B firms usually adopt the relational view and emphasizes the effects of trust on consumer’s behaviors (Wang et al., 2016). So, overall this model can be utilized within SMEs to get a deeper understanding of how to create a higher level of commitment and trust with their customers. Companies can compare this model to their own strategy of building commitment and trust which might have a beneficial outcome for the organization.

2.4.4 Commitment

Morgan and Hunt 1994 explains that commitment can be described as one’s belief that a specific relationship with someone else is meaningful and profitable. It is also mentioned to be when the two parts believe it is worth putting a significant effort and maintenance into ensuring that the specific relationship is an ongoing process (Morgan and Hunt, 1995; Gil-Saura et al., 2009). Furthermore, commitment is described by Dwyer et al., (1987) as the perception that no other exchange partner would be equally as profitable to have a relationship with as the one the party already has. It has also been stated the fact that it would be unlikely for the partner to change to other exchange parties (ibid).

Commitment has been seen through the years as one of the most essential and important aspects that should be taken into consideration when it comes to relationship marketing (Rauyruen and Miller 2007; Gil-Saura et al., 2009). As suggested within previous research, it can be seen in for example., when managing a business relationship. Rauyruen and Miller (2007) clarify that for those organizations who want to generate long-term relationships in a successful way, commitment is believed to be a crucial factor since it is described as the willingness in continuing a development of a certain relationship. Yet, there can be a commitment relationship towards the firm and one
which is towards a specific employee within the organization. Additionally, it is part of a growing process within the social exchange network which continues to increase knowledge of other parties and can provide more certainty and a greater trust between two parties (Lawler and Yoon, 1993). Rauyruen and Miller (2007) argue that commitment can also lead to a greater word-of-mouth for an organization.

2.4.5 Trust

Trust is something that many previous researchers has been studying (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Salmond, 1994; Wilkinson and Young, 1994) and is defined as what a consumer should feel when believing that an organization can meet their standards (Cowles, 1997). Rauyruen and Miller (2007) acknowledges that trust is the first step into building a relationship with their customer that generates both loyalty and commitment. It is seen to be very essential for organizations to be aware of how important trust is and how it is built since it has shown to have a large impact on how they work and daily deal with customer and their relationships. Trust can make both parties feel comfortable and that they have their own relationship, making them be confident in that both their best interest is at heart (Rauyruen and Miller, 2007; Gil-Saura et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2016). To dig deeper in trust itself, it can be explained to be when a party has confidence in that the other party is able to execute what has been agreed upon and then also trust in that the other party has the knowledge in how to succeed in the executing the tasks (Wang et al., 2016). Furthermore, as previously mentioned in the report, trust can be both for either a whole organization or for a specific employee within it or both (Rauyruen and Miller, 2007).

2.4.6 Benefits and barriers of relationship marketing within SMEs

Previous research points to the fact that relationship marketing is indeed becoming increasingly important to the overall marketing strategy of many organizations and it is explained that there there are important factors that should be taken into consideration regarding this (Morgan and Hunt, 1999). They mention three challenges a firm must acknowledge and understand;

1. Resources needed from the gained through marketing relationships.
2. The suitability of various partners from economic, strategic and social perspectives.

3. The sustainability of advantages that arise when relationship marketing strategies, based on specific resources, are pursued. (Morgan and Hunt, p.289, 1999)

Relationship marketing is built through communication which leads to stronger relationships, by helping to resolve disputes, align goals and uncover new value-creating opportunities (Morgan and Hunt (1994). It involves having a close communication with the firm's consumers which leads to benefits such as reduced uncertainty, managed dependence, exchange efficiency and social satisfactions from the association (Spekman et al., 1985). Relationship marketing also includes investing a lot of time and effort by the organization, which however, can be seen as a barrier for SMEs due to the fact that these firms have a smaller number of employees, with fewer resources than larger businesses. Also, since the costs of acquiring resources must be lower than the gains they convey for them to result in a truly and high competitive advantage (Morgan and Hunt, 1999). Nonetheless, if the organization invests in this, it can usually lead to that the organization can generate expectations of reciprocation which in turn can help strengthen and maintain a relationship (Ganesan, 1994).

Furthermore, since it is more cost-effective for firms to sell to current consumers than to new ones, it is beneficial for firms to focus more on the emphasis on relationships that already exist and to try to maintain them for a longer period (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998). However, it is shown that firms sometimes fail to realize the necessity of managing their already existing customer relationships (Dwyer et al., 1987). Ganesan (1994) continues by mentioning that this can also positively influence relational mediators. The possibility of together achieving significant gains for two firms and consequently the individual firm's’ payoff can be described as a beneficial result of effective communication and collaboration between two firms (Dwyer et al., 1987). Also, they continue by discussing that a challenge that can be an outcome from this is, the consumer’s perception of the effectiveness of the exchange relation.

Previous researcher such as Mehmet et al., (2016) acknowledges that challenges within relationship building, branding, usage, measurement, sales techniques and lead
generation exist within relationship marketing. Morgan and Hunt (1999) continuously state that in order to maintain the relationship between two firms, resources are required. Despite this, it has been argued by Dwyer et al., (1987) that the real or anticipated relationship marketing costs could outweigh the real benefits of a specific relationship. It has been seen through previous research that even though some organizations that have high divergent goals and who spend a lot of money and psychic resources on the relationship, it might not be beneficial after a longer period (ibid).

Communication barriers have been noticed to exist within business relationships and they point to the importance of firms developing a language that is shared and can reflect similarities in consumers’ interpretation, understanding and response to information” (Hutt, Walker and Frankwich, 1995). Hence, to be able to generate long term business relationships, it is very important for firms to first recognize all the communication dimensions within all marketing levels and also to manage them in a correct way (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998).

3 Research Questions

- **RQ 1:** How do SMEs within the B2B sector, in Sweden, market themselves and for what purpose?

- **RQ 2:** Which of digital marketing and relationship marketing is most effective in terms of:
  1. Awareness
  2. Return of Investment (ROI)
  3. Creating Purchase Intentions

3.1 Operationalization

According to Bryman and Bell (2011) operationalization is a process where the researcher(s) defines the measurement of a phenomenon that is not straightforwardly measurable. It allows them to be measured empirically and quantitatively and it also makes it easier for other researchers to follow the exact same methodology (ibid). In
The authors demonstrate and define the concepts that will be explored in the study, they also provide a theoretical and operational definition. Bryman and Bell (2011) describe operational definition as the characteristics of a concept, regarding the activities that will be performed during the measurements. Also, the interview questions that are connected to each concept are also presented in the table. The interview guide that has been utilized in order to collect data for the report can be found in the Appendices.

**Table 2 - Concept Overview**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Theoretical Definition</th>
<th>Operational Definition</th>
<th>Interview questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Marketing</td>
<td>Deliberate actions and initiatives by organizations and personnel to develop, maintain, and sustain strong relationships with customers and other interest groups (Ndubisi and Nataraajan, 2016, p.228).</td>
<td>How the companies use RM in their marketing strategies daily</td>
<td>Question 8, 9, 12, 13 &amp; 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital marketing</td>
<td>Achieving marketing objectives through applying digital technologies and media (Chaffey, 2016, p.11).</td>
<td>How the participants use digital marketing in their marketing strategies and what tools they utilize</td>
<td>Question 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media</td>
<td>The usage of web-based and mobile technologies to create, share and consume information and knowledge without any social, political, geographical or demographical limits through public interaction in a participatory and collaborative way (Zahoor and Qureshi, 2017)</td>
<td>What social media channels they use and for what purpose</td>
<td>Question 10, 12,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4 Methodology

This chapter will present what chosen approaches has been made for the study. There will be a discussion regarding different choices of methods that the authors have decided from, followed by an explanation of why a specific method was used to collect the relevant empirical data to subject. Also, a statement of risks that could occur will be presented together with some ethical values, quality criteria and reliability.

4.1 Research purpose
The purpose of this research took start when first conducting a literature review that was focusing on digital marketing in SMEs in the B2B sector and when understanding that there was limited research within this specific area. Hence, there was an interest in contributing with further knowledge. Also, it was of interest to dig deeper into digital marketing and relationship marketing and in seeing how the SMEs utilize these tools and for what purpose.

4.2 Research Approach
A research approach is according to Bryman and Bell (2015) the decided way to approach the research problem in a study. It can be for example, an deductive, inductive, or abductive study and also a quantitative or qualitative study (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009; Bryman and Bell, 2015). This paper is a qualitative multiple case study with a deductive approach and there will be further explanation of the different research approaches and also why they are being utilized, in the sections below.

4.3 Inductive, Deductive or Abductive
According to Bryman and Bell, (2015) the deductive approach is mostly utilized when conducting a quantitative study and is concerned with developing a hypothesis based on existing theory and then and after that design a research strategy to address the hypotheses. The result of the research is confirmation or rejection. The inductive approach is used mostly when carrying out a qualitative research and this approach begins with specific observations or real life examples of events, trends, or social processes. The findings are thereafter connected to theory that can be tested in further
research and does typically give new and rich data. Although the deductive approach can also be used when carrying out an qualitative study and vice versa (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The third research approach is called abductive approach which combines the use of both the deductive and inductive approaches (ibid). The abductive approach is more similar to the inductive research approach where the research is based on empirical data, but it does not reject previous theory and is therefore also linked to a deductive approach (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The weaknesses with a deductive and inductive approach is being addressed by the abductive approach, it can be seen as a logical interpretation that starts with an observation or several and then seeks to find the simplest and most likely explanation (Patel and Davidson, 2011). One of the main benefits of using an abductive approach is that the empirical data can be reinterpreted and developed hand in hand with the theory, and that in turn can also be used as a way to find patterns and understand the concepts (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009). As mentioned above, the deductive approach has been utilized in this report, because the research questions in the report emerged from already existing theories and then the authors designed a research strategy and collected data to test the hypothesis. This approach was also chosen since there was limited time available to complete the study and also because it provides a possibility to explain causal relationships between concepts and variables (ibid).

4.4 Quantitative versus Qualitative

Bryman and Bell (2015) explains that one of the main differences between quantitative and qualitative research is that the quantitative research is collected through data in form of hypotheses measurements which is tested with quantified data and numbers. Hollensen (2014) also mentions that quantitative research lays it focus on a larger number of respondents with less information from each participant. The results are then usually finalized in statistical numbers rather than words (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Also, as argued by Creswell (2014), the interpretation and analysis of collected data is more easily done through a quantitative research, if however, the purpose near at hand. Furthermore, it is often combined with a deductive research approach (Bryman and Bell, 2011) and the qualitative research method focuses more on gathering in depth information from a low number of participants (Hollensen, 2014). The qualitative research method collects more complex and detailed data, provided through interviews
with participants (structured, semi-structured, etc.), from observations of behaviours, questionnaires and examinations of different documents (Race, 2008; Bryman and Bell, 2001). Yin (2009) points to that this research method involves questions about “what”, “why”, “how”, “who” and “where” and Saunders et al., (2009) clarifies that it provides the possibility to gather deeper knowledge about individuals experience or opinions within a specific topic.

This study is based on a qualitative approach in order to gain more understanding and knowledge about the subject. This was the most suitable method for this report since the purpose of this study was to interpret the opinions and experiences of the employees within chosen SME businesses. By using this research approach, it provides the possibility to discover marketing processes and managerial perceptions that would have been too difficult and complex to explore with quantitative questionnaires. Although it is argued by Race (2008) that a lot of students at University level conduct a questionnaire since it is less time-consuming in comparison to having longer in-depth interviews, it is also mentioned by him that interviews are the most common way to gather the data needed. Additionally, since the aim of this report is to understand the interviewees’ thoughts, opinions and experiences and being able to interpret them, this research method selected. Moreover, the idea is to collect rich and more in-depth findings in form of words through interviews rather than generalizable data collected through surveys. To see a clearer difference between the two research methods, see Table 3 below.

Table 3 - Quantitative Vs. Qualitative (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p.113)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Numbers</td>
<td>Words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point of view of researcher</td>
<td>Point of view of participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research distant</td>
<td>Research close</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory testing</td>
<td>Theory emergent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Static</td>
<td>Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured</td>
<td>Unstructured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalization</td>
<td>Contextual understanding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.5 Research Design

A research design is a systematic path that a researcher uses to conduct a scientific study. Depending on what type of research that is being carried out, different designs suits different purposes (Bryman and Bell, 2011). There are three main ways of how to design a study which are exploratory, descriptive and explanatory (Saunders et al., 2008). The chosen design for this research is exploratory because according to Saunders et al., (2008) an exploratory research is appropriate when the researcher wants to get a deeper understanding in areas that are lacking research or when the researcher gets an idea or has observed something and seeks to understand more about it. That is the case for this study since there is a knowledge gap that needs to be investigated further. The exploratory research design focuses on discovering ideas and insights instead of collecting statistically accurate data. Most often, this type of research lays the basic groundwork for future research (ibid).

The next research design is called descriptive and it seeks to give a correct and clear view of a person, event or situation while providing additional information about the studied topic, without changing the information (Saunders et al., 2012). With this strategy, the researcher tries to describe what is happening more in detail, filling in the missing parts and expanding the understanding (ibid). The primary purpose of choosing an explanatory research is to explain why something occurs and to predict future happenings. Explanatory research, also called causal research is conducted in order to identify the scope and nature of cause-and-effect relationships. Researchers can carry out this type of research to evaluate influence of specific changes on existing norms or various processes (Saunders et al., 2012).
4.5.1 Case Study

It is described by Bryman and Bell (2011) to be when the researcher examines a single case to get a more in detailed analysis and according to Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) it is a research design that has become very popular when conducting a study. Moreover, Bryman and Bell (2015) explain that the concept itself that be defined and viewed as a case which can include four different aspects:

- A single organization
- A single event
- A single location
- A person

Researchers such as Saunders, et al. (2012) and Yin (2009) argue that it is most appropriate to utilize a case study design when the aim of the research is to gain in-depth knowledge and understanding about the chosen topic and the involved processes. Subsequently, a case study will be used in this thesis as the aim is to to gain an in-depth understanding and analysis of the comparison between digital marketing and relationship marketing within Swedish SMEs in the B2B sector. Hence, this study will be utilizing a multiple-case study design since it will assist in finding and comparing the differences and similarities between the multiple cases (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

In this report, there will be case studies from seven different businesses who work within the studied research field and they will focus on what kind of marketing methods these businesses utilize. It will also aim to provide deeper knowledge about what the businesses sees as the most effective marketing method in terms of visibility and awareness, return of investment (ROI) and when creating purchase intentions for the customers. Thus, the chosen research design is the most suitable method for this study since it implies that certain decisions are examined to the base of how they were implemented and why certain decisions were taken within a business (Yin, 2009). To be able to provide professional safety and also to fulfill privacy requirements in this study, all the participants were asked if the company and/or themselves wanted to remain anonymous before conducting the interview itself. This was also important since the participants might share specific information about their marketing process and clients.
4.6 Data Sources

Two forms of data that can be utilized when conducting research is primary data and secondary data (Saunders et al. 2012). Secondary data can be published articles, raw data and data that has been collected for other research and purposes and primary data includes information that has been collected for the purpose of the actual research and purpose in mind, it is first-hand information from the original source. Primary data can consist of for example interviews, surveys, questionnaires, focus groups or observations (Saunders et al. 2012; Bryman and Bell 2015). There are some downsides connected to primary data, for example the researchers that are carrying out the project can have subjective interpretations on the data, meaning that it can be misinterpreted. They might also be looking for data that 'fits' in with the hypothesis they are trying to test which will lead to an irrelevant conclusion. Another risk is that it can also be time consuming and costly (Bryman and Bell, 2015). There are also many advantages of using this approach, like the information being up to date and tailor-made for the specific study (ibid).

Secondary data is data that has already been collected from other sources and can be obtained by other researchers. This sort of data is usually cheaper and quicker to access then the primary data. It can also make the primary data more specific since it can help to point out the gaps and what other information that needs to be collected (Saunders et al. 2012). Yet, it can be hard to find secondary data that match the exact requirements of the research study and it can also be hard to verify the correctness or find up to date secondary data (ibid). This study focus on primary data, by interviewing marketers and experts within the studied field. According to Kvale (2009) and Merriam (2009) interviews are primary data and the most efficient way of getting a deeper understanding about the subject and also to get better responses from participants. In order to analyze the two marketing strategies and find out about the perceived benefits and barriers and also the potential gaps within the research in-depth interviews was chosen in order to collect specific and in depth information. Yet, gathering primary data requires more time and effort than gathering secondary. Although there was a strict time frame in when writing this report, it was still the most suitable data source for the report. It also gives the researchers a better control and understanding of the subject.
4.7 Data Collection Method

Some methods used for collection data are more applicable than others, depending on the research methods that is used within a specific study (Yin, 2013). Furthermore, Bryman and Bell (2015) explain that interviews, surveys, focus groups and content analysis are most used collection methods. For this paper, the data collection method that was chosen was interviews which has been defined as one of the most crucial tools in a case study due to that most of the data in a qualitative research is collected through interviews (Yin, 2009). It is described to be less controlled than other qualitative methods, also providing the opportunity to ask follow-up questions (Jacobsen (2002). He continues by mentioning that interviews preferably should be conducted in a physical location, however if not possible, digital solutions are also a valid option. Continuously, there are three different interview types used for collecting data for qualitative studies and those are referred to as unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews and structured interviews.

This report is based on semi-structured interviews since it is seen as a flexible way to gather the needed data (Horton et al., 2004; Bryman and Bell, 2011). It is explained by researchers (Horton et al., 2004; Ayres, 2008) that semi-structured interviews usually involve open-ended questions, either through face-to-face or also through telephone (Bryman and Bell, 2011), and since there was a clear picture of what information was needed to be gathered to be able to answer the purpose of the report, this method was the most suitable. Nonetheless, there were follow-up questions directly addressed throughout all interviews to get a wider picture, making the interview more alive (Ayres, 2008; Bryman and Bell, 2011). The companies were in different locations in all of Sweden, making it difficult to get a face-to-face interview, so the interviews were made through live video calls. Although, it has been pointed to that live video interviewing via telephone still provides the possibility for the interviewees to analyze more than just what the interviewee says, but also the body language (ibid). Also, another reason for utilizing this data method in the report was because of the aim to narrow down the alternative options for the interviewees to talk about. Hence, there was prepared several specific questions in the chosen area to talk about, in beforehand. This was make sure that the relevant topics and questions of the study would be covered (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The interview guide (see Appendices A) show the formulated
research questions. This allowed the participants to both interpret them and also answer freely, from both their own experience and point of view.

Since interviews conducted through live video calls add to more personal, spontaneous, accurate answers, this method was preferable. This method provides more accurate and less filtered information and knowledge in comparison to interviews conducted through written communication such as for example, through email. It also allows both the interviewees and the interviewers to be fully committed to the interview and the conversation (ibid). Jacobsen (2002) clarifies that selecting participants to interview is of high importance since there might be different knowledge and views depending on which employee you ask regarding a specific subject. Hence, this is a study where either managers, CEOs or employees within the marketing/PR department are interviewed to get a deeper insight and a broader view of the chosen topic.

4.7.1 Pre-study
When conducting a study and deciding what field to look deeper into one can choose to make a pre-study (or pre-interview) to test an interview framework or questionnaire in order to ensure that the questions are clearly formulated. Also, to make sure that the researchers and respondents define the questions in the same way.

Pre-testing can discover not so easily understood terminology and unknown references, it also gives the researchers a rough an idea of how long time it takes to conduct an interview (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Therefore, in this study a pre-interview was held to get a better understanding about the topic. After that it was discovered that there had been some assumptions made regarding definitions, therefore it was needed to re-formulate some of the questions, which in the end contributes to making the study more reliable. Nevertheless, the information that was collected during the pre-interview turned out to be very relevant for the report and is a part of the findings in this study.

4.7.2 In depth-interviews
An in depth-interview is described by Bryman and Bell (2015) to be an interactive approach that often has a duration of 30-90 minutes, depending on if it is a structured or unstructured interview. As mentioned before, the interview questions used in this study
can be seen in the Appendices. This study has semi-structured questions which is argued to be a formal context with the framework of a two-way communication, where there is a red line that the interviewer follows with a broad range of questions within a specific area. It is pointed out by Kvale (2009) that the data gathered through interviews depends a lot on the interviewers interviewing skills and knowledge regarding the area of the study. Also explained by Bryman and Bell (2015) is that the sequence of questions might be varied, also making it possible to ask follow-up questions for a deeper understanding regarding the case. It is considered that these type of interviews are, according to Saunders et al., (2012), favourable when conducting a descripto-explanatory study that aims to provide new and deeper insight of a topic. As previously mentioned, there was valuable information gained through the pre-study, leading to some changes for the upcoming interviews. It provided knowledge needed to be able to change some of the questions so that the collected information would be of contribute to the results of this report. Additionally, the concepts of the subject of the report was more clear after conducting both theoretical framework and the pre-study.

Moreover, since the aim was to gain gain more insights and deeper knowledge regarding the chosen topic through these different Swedish SMEs, in-depth interviews was preferred and the most suitable way of collecting qualitative data. Open questions which were brought up during the interviews provided an honest change to answer as they pleased, not putting words and definitions in their mouths. To make the data be as real as possible, it was crucial to get all the participants to answer and define concepts with their own words.

Seven interviews were conducted with seven SMEs. They were conducted with either CEOs, marketing and/or PR managers and employees within the marketing and sales departments. All interviews were conducted either via Skype or Zoom and took around 30-60 minutes. Unfortunately, there was no chance of face-to-face interviews due to financial and time limitations, hence Skype/Zoom calls were the most suitable way of conducting the interviews. During every interview, both the interviewees and the interviewers had the camera on during the whole time, providing as close face-to-face meeting as possible online. To be able to provide higher validity and reliability, the interviews were recorded and directly transmitted afterwards. The participant was also
always first asked if it was okay to be recorded and if they wanted to be anonymous in any way, to make them feel comfortable with the situation.

4.8 Sampling

When conducting research the researchers will usually be dependent on some form of sampling and that is regardless the research question(s) and the objectives of the study. Since the chances are small that one can study the whole population or all the relevant groups, it is of great importance for the researchers to choose the most suitable sample method regarding the resources that are available for the study (Bryman and Bell, 2015). If the research that is being conducted demands access to an organization, it is important to make sure in the beginning of the study that one will be granted to do the research and to get access to the proper people for the study (ibid). Questions that one can ask oneself is according to (Bryman and Bell, 2015, p.12) for example:

- Who or what do you need to investigate to meet your research questions?
- How easily can you get access to the chosen sampling frame?
- What kind of sampling strategy will you adopt?
- Can you stand up for your choice of sampling method?

Another important factor one should keep in mind is if the research is supposed to be generalized or not (Ibid). There are also two main types of sampling that one can adopt which is probability sampling and a non-probability sampling (Bryman and Bell, 2015). In this report, the non-probability sampling technique has been utilized, meaning that the probability is unknown and it is not possible to do a statistical overview of the research. It is the opposite of probability sampling, where you can measure the odds (Saunders et al., 2008). Yet, a generalization can still be made on the research and probability sampling also involves random selection. The non-probability sampling can be divided into two broad types, accidental or purposive. Purposive sampling has been used in this report and is the most common sampling method because sampling is usually carried out for a specific purpose. This method was chosen because it is the most appropriate one for dealing with small samples so, the researcher(s) then have to use their own subjective judgement when deciding about suitable sampling (Bryman
and Bell, 2015; Saunders et al., 2008). The sample selection will be further discussed in the next section.

4.8.1 Procedure

Initial contact was made with the seven companies to be able to conduct the interviews for this study. This was made by emails that lead to bookings of suitable dates and times for the interviews. In total, it was seven people from the seven different companies that were interviewed. From the beginning, there was contact with over fifteen companies all together, which later was reduced to seven due to the companies’ time limitations. To start off with, a clear view of the subject was presented as well as the purpose of the report. All the participants had the interview guide emailed to them in beforehand, to provide an insight of what information was aimed and supposed to be collected. As well as allowing the participant to get more prepared, especially if their time was limited for the interview.

Both of researchers of this study were present during every interview which ensures, according to Bryman and Bell (2011) that the information being collected is accurate and understood in a correct. They also explain that it is beneficial in the way that both can come up with follow up questions and that one might think of a question that the other interviewer did not think of. As mentioned before, all interviews took place through Zoom/Skype meetings (live video calls). Each participant was asked whether either they or the company or both preferred to be anonymous within this study and also if it was okay for them to be recorded. After every interview, the participants were informed that they would get a written transcript of the interview so they could make sure everything was stated correctly. The possibility of receiving a copy of the whole thesis, when completed, was also mentioned. However, none of the interviewees or companies wanted or felt the need for being anonymous, instead only mentioning that some of the given information might be preferred not to be shown within the report since it could be sensitive information. There was a variety of the duration of each interview since the interviewees provided different lengths of answers but also due to their schedules and time limits. 25 minutes was the average time per interview.
4.8.2 Respondent validation

Trustworthiness is a key factor when it comes to the results of a qualitative research and respondent validation or also known as member checking is a part of this. It is an important process where the readers should be provided with the necessary information about the participating parties of a study which has contributed with the primary data to show that the result has accuracy, credibility, validity, and transferability (Bryman and Bell, 2015). So, the data that has been collected should be returned to the participants involved in the study so they can critically analyze and comment on the findings and they can either confirm that what has been stated is their views, feelings and experiences or not. If they confirm the data, that shows that the study is credible and that the data is accurate and complete. Although respondent validation might not always be correct but it does decrease the incidence of incorrect data (ibid). All the interviewed parties in this study are professionals within the fields of digital marketing and relationship marketing. The participants provide their professional services in the mentioned fields to other companies which means that all the respondents use both digital marketing and relationship marketing to attract their own corporate clients and further they also use digital marketing to create content marketing campaigns on social media for their corporate clients. In total seven companies has been interviewed for this research and seven people, one from each company. All the participants in this study were selected due to their experience and knowledge within the studied field. Table 4 demonstrates the participants in this paper, their profession, years of employment, date and length of the interview(s), as well as how the interview was conducted:

Table 4 - Respondent Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Years of employment</th>
<th>Date and duration of the interview</th>
<th>Interview conducted via:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project Manager</td>
<td>Company A</td>
<td>1 year and 6 months</td>
<td>09/04-2018 - 45 minutes</td>
<td>Skype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of Sales</td>
<td>Company B</td>
<td>1 year and 3 months</td>
<td>10/04-2018 - 30 minutes</td>
<td>Zoom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of Analytics &amp; Digital Marketing</td>
<td>Company C</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>18/4-2018 - 30 minutes</td>
<td>Zoom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 4.9 Ethical Principles

Always when conducting any kind of research there is a need for taking ethical principles into consideration by the researcher, both before and during the research (Race, 2008). Bryman and Bell (2011) points to four different areas to how ethical principles can be divided into:

- Lack of informed consent
- Harm to participants
- Invasion of privacy
- Deception

It was in beforehand made clear to each participant of the study, that this research is being a part of a thesis. As well as previously mentioned, all participants were asked if they wanted to be anonymous but none of them or the businesses felt that there was a need for this. Although, due to respect, the decision was made to leave both the companies and the interviewees anonymous.

#### 4.9.1 Lack of informed consent

Lack of informed consent is a subject that has been highly debated within business research ethics according to Bryman and Bell (2011) and it stresses the importance of informing the participating parties to the full extent regarding the research topic or when information is being collected. It is important that the participants are being given as much information as possible for them to decide whether they want to take part or not (ibid). Before the interview was conducted in this report the participants were contacted
via email where it was explained about the purpose of writing the report and about the research topic, information about the researchers was also shared to some extent. Some of the participants asked for more information regarding what type of questions that would be asked to make sure that they would be a good fit, so, they were provided with some of the questions that would be asked during the interview to reduce any unwanted surprises or misunderstandings.

4.9.2 Invasion of privacy
Researchers need to carefully respectful and not invade any individual’s privacy in the sole purpose of research since this is something sensitive for a lot of people (Bryman and Bell, 2015). They also define the aspect of privacy as closely linked to the previous discussed aspect of lack of informed consent since the participant will need to be informed, before the research is conducted, if any level of personal information will be needed from either an individual, an organization or both. Throughout the entire process of carrying out this study, there has been ensuring of carefulness, objectiveness and in being as professional as possible. There has been fixed clear interview schedules with proper communication channels, also taken professional values and beliefs of the participants into consideration. According to Bryman and Bell (2011) it is impossible for the researcher to forecast which questions would and could be experienced as sensitive since each and every participant has different personalities, feeling and experiencing things differently. It should be clear to the participants that they can withdraw from any question or topic that might be too sensitive for them.

4.9.3 Harm to participants
Another important aspect to take into consideration when writing a report is harm to participants which according to Bryman and Bell, (p.156, 2011) can come in several forms such as:

1. Physical harm
2. Harm to participants’ development of self-esteem
3. Source for stress
4. Harm to career prospects or future employment
5. Inducing subjects to perform reprehensible acts
Therefore, in the beginning of the interviews, the interviewees were asked if they wanted to be anonymous or not and they were also asked if it was okay that the conversation would be recorded.

4.9.4 Deception
Bryman and Bell (2011) define deception as to be when a researcher presents the research as something different than what it really is, simply something else than what it was promised to be. Still, deception can, to some extent, take place in most research since researchers usually try to bring forward the most natural answers by limiting the participants’ knowledge regarding the topic of the study (ibid). In this study, there was provided an explanation to all the participants about the focus of the paper. Also, it was made clear that the participants could ask questions regarding the report, both in beforehand, during and/or after the interview took place. Additionally, it was also informed to the participants that there existed the possibility to be presented with the full research when completed to ensure them that there has been no deception.

4.10 Data Analysis
According to (Saunders et al., 2009) qualitative data refers to all non-numeric data or data that have not been quantified like in interview transcripts, notes, video and audio recordings, images and text documents. In order for this data to be useful it needs to be analyzed and understood and by utilizing qualitative data analysis (QDA) procedures, the researchers are allowed to develop theory or explanation and understanding from their findings and it can be either deductive or inductive approaches (ibid). Qualitative data analysis can be divided into the following five categories:

- Content analysis
- Narrative analysis
- Discourse analysis
- Framework analysis
- Grounded theory

In this report, the deductive framework approach is being utilized which means that the coding will be guided by a fixed framework and the data will be organized into
concepts. The analysis section will involve identification of common patterns within the responses and critically analyzing them and compare to the pre-defined concepts to achieve the research aims and objectives. The QDA is a complicated process, which is why Miles and Huberman (1994) have divided the process into three steps; Data reduction, Data display, and Drawing conclusion. These will be explained and discussed in the subsections below.

4.10.1 Data Reduction
In this report, the data gathered was reduced to get a better understanding as well as being able to erase the unnecessary and irrelevant findings from the interviews conducted. This process involves simplifying, selecting and transforming the transcriptions as well as opening new relationships and meaning with the research (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Less relevant follow-up questions within the findings have been excluded from this report since these did not contribute to anything important for the research.

4.10.2 Data Display
Data display is the last step of the research process and here the researchers can develop explanations and identify links related to existing theory and it is very important that this is being displayed in a correct way because that will demonstrate the findings of the research efficiently to the readers. The purpose of data displaying is to make the findings more visible and make it easier to compare. Data can be presented in two primary ways, either in tables or graphs. This is more seen when it regards quantitative research since it is very important to display the findings but when it comes to qualitative research the researchers of the study can choose themselves if they believe that it is necessary to display the data or not (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In this study, there are no graphs but a few tables to draw theories together and create an understanding.

4.10.3 Drawing Conclusion
It can be argued by Miles and Huberman (1994) that drawing conclusions is when the researcher should clarify and conclude what things mean and how they can contribute to the research aim within a study. For this study, an analysis of in-depth interviews
together with theory was conducted in order to be able to draw conclusions. The interview data in this report was based on seven case studies within different SME businesses in Sweden.

4.11 Quality Criteria

For the findings of a report to be utilized in practice the researcher(s), evaluating the quality of research is essential. So, for a study to be perceived as trustworthy it should live up to certain criterions and this chapter discusses the quality and trustworthiness within this specific study. According to Bryman and Bell (2011) validity and reliability are one of the most important criterions and they describe validity as the degree to which the measure of a concept really measures that concept and reliability refers to consistency about if the research will produce the same results if repeated or by other researchers. Miles and Huberman (1994) explains that validity stresses the accuracy or correctness of the findings, so the findings must be believable, consistent, applicable and credible if they are to be useful to readers and other researchers (ibid).

Trustworthiness can be divided into four parts; credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability which will be discussed further in the sections below. In this report two types of validity control has been utilized; prolonged time, meaning that an understanding of the concepts has been made beforehand so the results can be reflected into the knowledge the researcher possess and enhance the validity (Creswell, 2014). Member checking has also been utilized meaning that after each interview the transcribing was sent back to the interviewees to be checked and approved (ibid.). This contributes to making the findings more trustworthy, which can be challenging in qualitative research according to Bryman and Bell, (2011). It is also discussed by them that it is often hard to generalize case studies since they usually do not widely apply - being based on a specific example. However, trustworthiness and reliability is achieved to some extent within this research since it is a multiple case study that is based on seven businesses (ibid).

4.11.1 Credibility

It has been argued by Shenton (2004) researchers with a positive attitude address one of the key criteria to be internal validity, which seeks to ensure that a study measures
and/or tests what is intended. The question, “How congruent are the findings with reality?” is usually brought forward within the qualitative investigator’s equivalent concept, i.e. credibility. Credibility is defined by researchers such as Bryman and Bell (2011) as how believable the findings of a study are and Lincoln and Guba (1985) point to that it is one of the most crucial factors to assess trustworthiness within the study. To ensure high credibility in this study, all the gathered data was sent back the participant, making sure that the information provided was correct. According to Bryman and Bell (2011) this is referred to as respondent validation due to that each participant had the possibility to provide suggestions for any changes needed or simply approve that the information given is accurate. Also, as mentioned earlier, it was made clear that the final draft of this thesis could be submitted to all the parties who had an interest for it.

4.11.2 Transferability

Transferability is defined by researchers such as Saunders et al., (2009) and Bryman and Bell (2011) as to if the findings within a study provide the possibility to be adapted into other different contexts and situations or be generalizable beyond the study. If people from the outside concede their own situation to be like what and how it is described in the study, then they might relate the findings to their own positions (Shenton, 2004). He also brings forth the six issues of information that should be given at the outset;

- The number of organizations taking part in the study and where they are based
- Any restrictions in the type of people who contributed data
- The number of participants involved in the fieldwork
- The data collection methods that were employed
- The number and length of the data collection sessions
- The period over which the data was collected

Nonetheless, since this study is based on a lower number of participants being interviewed, also being within the SME sector, it can be difficult to argue for the fact that the findings as well as the conclusions of this paper can be applicable into other settings. Though, this study’s results should not be forsaken since it can still be of interest to other similar businesses who desire deeper knowledge and insight regarding this subject.
4.11.3 Confirmability
Confirmability is the last part of trustworthiness that researchers must fulfil and it refers to the degree to which the results can be confirmed or backed up by other researchers and to what extent the researcher has allowed his or her own values to affect the investigation (Bryman and Bell 2011). Shenton (2004) explains confirmability in the same way and says that the findings should be the views and experiences of the participating parties and not the researchers own view. Therefore, it was necessary for the researchers in this report to be as objective as possible and when designing the semi-structured interview questions, only open ended questions were asked. It was also explained to the interviewees that they should interpret the different concepts by themselves and try to define them so the data does not end up being influenced by them. It was also explained to the interviewees that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions, there is simply a need to get as rich and thick data as possible to get a deeper understanding about the research area. According to Creswell (2014) there are also other ways of increasing validity and confirmability within a study, for example by having external auditors that analyses the work and its processes and give constant feedback and in this paper two external auditors has been utilized, one tutor and one examiner. They have had weekly contact with the authors of this report in terms of seminars and by email and phone to make sure that the work is going as planned and that the original plan is being followed.

4.11.4 Dependability
This criterion is important to trustworthiness because it establishes the researchers’ findings as consistent and repeatable so if other researchers would look over the data they would end up with similar results, interpretations, and conclusions about the data (Bryman and Bell, 2011). It is therefore suggested that researchers should adopt an “auditing approach” meaning that there should be complete records of all phases of the research process such as problem formulation, selection of research participants, fieldwork notes, interview transcripts, data analysis decisions, and so on (ibid). In this report, all the interviews was recorded and transcribed, so that no data was ignored or left out and it was kept for future potential researchers. Yet, Saunders, et al (2012)
argues that both in-depth and semi-structured interviews are not repeatable since they only apply to the social world from when they were collected.

4.12 Reliability

According to Bryman and Bell (2011) reliability is defined to indicate how reliable the collected results are in measurement and also whether the research can be repeated in the exact same manner, hence being able to generate the exact same outcome (Saunders et al., 2009). It can be argued that the number of researchers being part of the data collection phase of a study as well as how the team sees and hears everything, has a huge impact on internal reliability (Bryman and Bell, 2011). For this study, there was no possibility to repeat any of the studies or display results over time since there was time and money limitations. However, what provides reliability within the study is that both researchers were present during all the different stages of data collection and they together agree to what has been seen and heard during the interviews. Also, the transcript of each interview were sent to that specific participants to make sure everything was correct and that changes could be made if necessary. Furthermore, the methodology chapter in this thesis is structured and detailed which enables the possibility for other researchers to be able to redo the same study at another period.
5 Empirical findings

This section start by presenting the SMEs companies that are used in this study. The empirical data which is gathered through in-depth interviews is presented as well as a description of how they work with digital marketing versus communication marketing.

5.1 Company A

Company A is an event and communication organization and was founded in May 2000 (Company A, 2018, Project Manager). It is a small/medium-sized enterprise which is located in Stockholm, Sweden, with ten employees that produces and manages all types of meetings and events from an idea, to implementation and the monitoring of it all.

Company A is today working with well-known customers such as Coca Cola, Axfood, Hemköp, Volvo, Microsoft and many more. The team is handpicked after each project’s needs/wants and the organization strives to inspire, engage and make reality of the customers ideas. So, the company works close to their customers, trying to develop ideas and concepts, provide coaching for the speakers, suggest different technical, interactive and schenographic solutions and clarifies messages (ibid).

5.2 Company B

Company B is a small/medium-sized enterprise that was founded in January 2017. It is as a digital platform for companies, media agencies and influencers (Company B, 2018, Head of Sales). The organization is a currently located in Malmö, Sweden, and has 10 employees in total. They work close together with other businesses, handling product placement for different brand (ibid). Through their digital service, they make it possible to market the brands and products through influencers on social media. The company decides the most suitable influencers for the right product and/or in order to provide the best possible outcome for their customers and sponsor them with the products. They store, pack, send and report everything, making it as easy as possible for the customer (ibid).

5.3 Company C

Company C is a digital business agency that combines services as digital services, app development, digital marketing, web development, design & message, integration,
strategy & consulting, SEO/SEM, integrated communication and conversion (Company C, 2018 Head of Analytics & Digital marketing). The company was founded in 1998 and is situated in Örebro, Sweden. It is a small/medium-sized enterprise that work towards other business to business companies. They have customers such as Drupal, Android, Iphone, Wordpress, Embraco and Sitevision. They have 30 specialists who are all passionate about what they do either if it is coding, design or about creating profitable strategies (ibid).

5.4 Company D

Company D is a PR and Communications Agency and was founded in 2010 and is based in Örebro, and has offices in Stockholm, Sweden. They work with clients across a wide range of industries in four main areas; branding, internal communications, public relations and PR training. The company provides services such as analysis and insights, brand strategy, PR plan, environmental monitoring, PR in social media, PR content in digital channels, media relations, media training and crisis communication. They are hired by customers both in and outside of Sweden, for example by Ford Motor Company Sweden, Engcon, Chamber of Commerce Mälardalen, Lantmännens Unibake, Knauf Insulation and Transics International.

5.5 Company E

Company E is a communication agency based in Örebro, Sweden and was founded in 2004. It is a small/medium sized business that work towards other business to business companies and today they have 50 employees. They help their customers with communicative challenges and their offer consists of three different parts: the brand journey, the purchasing journey and the loyalty journey. In the brand journey, they lay the foundation for successful and goal-oriented branding and this is where they create the prerequisites for the communication they work with in the next journey. In the brand journey they map the customers behaviour from the information seeking regarding the purchase of new products, they find out on what social media channels their customers are active on and where and when they should be seen with relevant content. On the loyalty journey they continue to build loyalty and actively listen to the customers experience so far in order to constantly improve the relationship because it is much
cheaper to keep a customer than looking for new ones. Some of their customers are for example ÖBO, Atlas Copco, Rejmes, Swecon, Aftonbladet and Örebro airport.

5.6 Company F
Company F is located in Malmö, Sweden (Company F, 2018, CEO). The small/medium-sized firm was founded in 1948 and has 74 employees. They are working in the B2B sector with a turnover at 215 million SEK. The company produces and provides potato starch and is currently the world’s largest potato starch company, existing in different branches within food, technology and industry. They have customers such as Nestle, Unilever and Matsutani. Company F’s starch contributes to viscosity and texture in food and groceries regardless how they are going to be cooked or eaten. The starch that is produced is for products that shall be cooked or prepared cold (ibid).

5.7 Company G
Company G is an IT-company that digitizes warehouses and stores and it was founded in 1991 (Company G, 2018, Head of Marketing). The organization is situated in Göteborg, Sweden, and works within the B2B sector. They are a small/medium-sized enterprise with 49 employees and has customers like Volvo, Scorett and JULA (ibid). Company G provides their customers with modern and future proof IT tools that help them enhance their work routines, increase their profitability and in getting better ergonomics (ibid). Their aim as partner and supplier is to utilize methods that minimize the environmental impact that our operation generates. The company has several solutions that customers can decide from within Retail, Warehouse User Mobility, Voice, Warehouse Management, WaaS, C&I, Raptec Pantilt and Raptec Portal.

5.8 Marketing tools for acquiring new customers
Company G says that their strongest marketing channel are their sales people. They usually make the first contact over the phone and thereafter tries to initiate a meeting, because for them the personal meeting is key. They also use other channels such as their website, although they believe that it is a bit out of date at the moment and does not generate a lot of new customers. They also work a lot with references and explain that:
“we take our new or potential customers to our current customers and show them how we work in practice and let our current customers tell them how well it works, so we basically sell through our existing customers” (Company G, 2018, Head of Marketing).

They also use Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+ and twitter, but continues by saying that they are not very active there. They continue by stating that those channels are also for internal purposes and also very important when they recruit new people. Company C says that they attract customers mainly through digital marketing and they also purchase meetings from booking agencies. They also attract new customers through word of mouth and by taking part in conferences. It was explained that:

“Buying meetings is very effective for us in terms of number of closing deals, but digital marketing is more cost efficient for getting leads but it might not always be the right kind of leads, the quality of the leads is usually a bit lower” (Company C, 2018, Head of Analytics and Digital Marketing).

They continue by saying that they use tools such as Albacross to see what company that has visited their website through their IP-address and then use that information to contact them and initiate a meeting. Company D mention that they get most of their customers through recommendations from current or old customers because of previously well performed jobs. Many of their customers have also grown a lot and therefore giving them more work. They also get new customers through a partnership with another advertising agency in Örebro called Strateg. Company A says that they attract customer through their website and through LinkedIn which is their biggest channel at the moment, company A continues by saying that:

“My bosses have over 20 years of experience within this type of business, so it is very effective when they share a post via LinkedIn showing one of our cases... it helps in attracting new customers” (Company A, 2018, Project Manager).

Company B says they attract new customers through social media, LinkedIn, Mailchimp to do newsletters, or events where they showcase their business and show people what they do. Company F explains that they work with direct and personal communication
and contact. A sell-cycle for them usually takes around 1,5 to 2 years so they do a lot of relationship selling. Company F continues by saying that their marketing tools are not that evolved and they do not have any knowledge about all the applications that exist today. Moreover, they go to a lot of fairs but telephone and personal meetings are the tools they mostly use.

When it came to asking the interviewees how they would refer to the different marketing tools they utilized, their answers differed. Company G claimed that the marketing tools such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+ and Twitter where more or less only relationship building for them. They refer this to the fact that since they are probably not the only one who can provide their type of service, so for them it already start with communication and creating trust within these channels and thereafter works towards a physical meeting with the customer where the relationship gets even stronger. Company A explains that everything that occurs through cyberspace is digital in some way, however they do it for the relationships. So that is why they see the tools they use, Facebook and Instagram, as more relationship marketing. Face to face branch mingle also goes under relationship marketing, but LinkedIn is the only tool that they mention when describing digital marketing. It is described by Company C that their experience with social media is that they are better at a certain type of relationship marketing when developing for example., your ‘fan base’ meaning that the people who are active within your channels are often customers or potential customers.

Company D believes that digital marketing tools through social media can be compared to the relationship marketing in the way that they both actually goes under relationship marketing. According to them, relationship marketing and digital marketing goes hand in hand and both are used for creating a long-lasting relationship. The personal contact is key but in order to provide continuously trust and commitment, the digital tools come in handy. Hence, both relationship marketing and digital marketing are very important and crucial when it comes to how they work with customers and how they sell to them. Company B refers customer meetings as relationship marketing but points to the fact that somehow the relationship starts somewhere through the digital marketing. So, they argue that both the marketing types are equally as important. However, they point out that to get a longer relationship with more trust and commitment, the direct and physical
meetings are the way to go. When talking to Company E, they note that the physical newsletters with candy they send out each month is referred to as relationship marketing, where there is a lot of value seen from it, through the customers. And then the email and social media channels are more within the digital marketing, yet also pushing to build a relationship with the customer. Company F refers the physical interaction with customers as the relationship marketing type and social media as digital marketing. They both are very important according to them, however they are more active within the physical meetings at fairs than through digital marketing.

5.9 Interaction with B2B customers and partners
When it comes to interaction with current customers and partners Company G says that when they interact with current customers they collaborate a lot with their suppliers which they often bring to customer meetings in order for them to answer more technical questions that Company G cannot. Their current customers are also very open to participate in meetings with their potential clients and in those meetings, they almost handle the sale by themselves. They continue by saying that:

“A few times our current clients have met with our potential clients without us even being there to discuss our service” (Company G, 2018, Head of Marketing).

If they need to install something that they do not have the competence to execute, like for example wireless networks, they usually collaborate with suppliers like installation and mounting companies. So, in those cases they are not there themselves to do these kinds of installations but their suppliers/partners are. All the other participants have slightly different ways of interacting with current customers and/or partners comparing to Company G and they all utilize similar approaches. For example., Company C says that they interact with their current customers and partners by email, phone, video call and physical meetings and that they don't tend to use digital marketing when interacting with current customers. Company D and Company F agrees with this and says that they have a very close contact with almost all of their customers, either they have contact via email or over the phone and they also meet with their customers in person on a regular basis.
It is explained that:

“We have 4 different customer-teams, each team works with 10 customers and has some sort of developing day where the whole team meets with the customer and goes through the challenges the customer has and then they actively work with the customer so it is contact all long with them, depending on how many projects it’s about. But some customers we have a very very close contact with” (Company E, 2018, CEO).

5.10 Activity on social media channels

Regarding the participant’s activity on social media channels the interviewed companies seem to favor the same channels with just a few exceptions. Company G is active on Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+, YouTube and Twitter, but they are not very active on Twitter. Both company C, Company D and Company A are active on Facebook and LinkedIn and company C also have a blog while company A also uses Instagram. Company B are active on Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn and they do live on Instagram and live on LinkedIn and they have plans about setting up a YouTube account soon as well. Company E says that Instagram and Facebook are the two most important channels for them and company F does not seem to use any of the social media networks.

Table 5 - Activity on social media activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>LinkedIn</th>
<th>Twitter</th>
<th>YouTube</th>
<th>Instagram</th>
<th>Blogs</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 out of 7</td>
<td>6 out of 7</td>
<td>1 out of 7</td>
<td>1 out of 7</td>
<td>3 out of 7</td>
<td>3 out of 7</td>
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</tbody>
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There are some differences regarding the purpose of using these channels but also similarities. For example company A, B, C, D, B and G uses social media channels mostly to create awareness, they use Facebook and LinkedIn to share posts about their previous cases, blog posts for sharing their knowledge and for recruitment purposes but they all seem to agree on that LinkedIn is a bit more professional than Facebook. Company E says that they use Instagram to show the everyday life at the company so they post a lot of shorter movies, showing the people who work there and it is more
about sharing “a nice feeling” and nothing corporate or any offerings there. Regarding Facebook and LinkedIn Company E uses them for the same purposes as the mentioned companies above. Company A and B say that the digital presence today is crucial and if they are not there, if they are not seen there, then they do not exist.

5.11 Effectiveness in terms of awareness and purchase intentions

When comparing the effectiveness between digital marketing and relationship marketing in terms of costs and creating awareness and purchase intentions many of the companies say that the recipe for success is a mix of both strategies. When it comes to creating awareness company G believe that they have to work more with PR (public relations) as well as more often document the great references they get. They also need more resources in terms of staff who works directly with their social media channels and they further mention that is important to be up to date with the new technology and having the courage to try out new things. Company A agrees with Company G on these points and further mention that one should update a lot but not too much so that consumers get tired of you, but at the same time, they believe that it is important to invite consumers to a mingle event or breakfast meeting in order to show that one exist on another level and get more of a personal relationship with the consumers. Company C believes that depending on what your goal is there are different ways to go:

“let’s say your goal is to attract more customers, in our experience it is more effective to use a mixture of both digital marketing and relationship marketing. The first initial contact, meaning the first time the customer notices our company on the internet I believe it is less effective via social media channels, but more effective by using some form of remarketing. If the customer has been searching for something online that matches our competence like ads that contain headings like “read more, or “did you know this?” are more effective... and we use SEO to show up on search results for specific keywords.. email marketing to subscribers also has a high effectiveness in getting clients to buy” (Company C, 2018, Head of Analytics and Digital Marketing).

Company D agrees with Company C regarding the importance of SEO in terms of creating awareness and also by working on their website because that is what the customers will click on after. So, the content they produce on their website and blog has
to be SEO customized so the topics they use show up when the customer searches for something. Company B is a complete online business so the most effective tool for them is Instagram where they get the most response because that is where their customers are and then LinkedIn. Company E has a different strategy for creating awareness, they send out newsletters by post with candy in it:

“I think our newsletter with the candy is the best thing!... then we have some sponsoring, a lot through football and is hockey, so there we are seen a lot so.... Everybody knows who we are and have seen our logo, and we collaborate a lot with the University in Örebro, so there we are also well known. We also have an internship program for students and we do some contests with the University sometimes as well which of course creates awareness” (Company E, 2018, CEO).

5.12 Measurements of ROI and conversions
When asking the different SMEs if and how they track the measurements of ROI and conversions on social media, it was explained it was done through different ways. Company C mentioned that when they measure return on investment, they look at a customer’s lifetime value and the reality in their accounting and see how much money they make during the whole relationship with the customer. They point to the fact that in some of their campaigns, social media marketing and digital marketing are combined but if they were to look at relationship marketing and digital marketing in form of search engines, it shows that digital marketing has a higher ROI. Furthermore, they also use Attribution modeling (ATM) which takes into account a variety of parameters and measures the actual effect in each channel.

“We can measure for example how big of a role Facebook played in a certain deal or AdWords and find out actual statistics on how much each part plays and what the costs are in ad-spend and labor costs for a certain campaign” (Company C, 2018, Head of Analytics and Digital Marketing).

Company D explains that they measure a number of key ratios and compare the numbers from month to month since it can be difficult to measure ROI on social media if your company does not have the budget for buying advertisement and actually have
something like that to measure. It is described by Company B that they measure return on investment by three categories, 1. Sent email, 2. Sent offer and 3. Won deal. And it does not matter if the customer gets the deal offered to them through digital channels or a real-life meeting, it will still be a return of investment for them. According to Company G, they collect data regarding how people interact with their website, analyzing different types of mails that are sent out and what type of responses they get, they measure different headlines and overall try to see what they can eventually enhance.

When it comes to how the organizations measured conversions such as leads, site visits, reviews and downloads, Company D points out that this is something they need to work a lot more on but google analytics is one way to conduct it. Regarding Company E, they utilize Hubspot, which is a tool that controls sales and they can get daily information regarding the site visits, how long the viewer has been there and what steps she/he took. However, it is noticed that analyzing how many viewers and readers they have, might not be of the highest priority within their organization even though it might be through that which the actual physical meeting derives from. Company B utilizes Mailchimp as their foremost way to measure conversions.

It is explained that: “Mailchimp is a program where emails are sent out to pretty much everyone you have in your CRM system, supplier system and so on. You can adapt newsletters to specific email addresses providing them with the relevant information they could want or prefer” (Company B, 2018, Head of Sales).

And so, in Mailchimp you get conversions back on how many have clicked where in the newsletter, how long time they have been looking at it and if they have clicked themselves further. Since it is linked to the specific email address, the company can see which person has looked where and for how long. And this system is suitable together with the CRM system.

Company C argues that they always try to connect conversions to what their actual company goals are and usually it is to make money by offering their services to customers but they do not consider traffic metric as conversions. However, when it
comes to search engines such as google display and networks, they believe that this is more effective in getting quality leads, considering that they do not have any relationship with them from before.

“A download is an assisting conversion if our organization gets some kind of value from it, such as an email address so that we can contact them or if they take part in our email marketing list for example. We also look at statistics dealing with how many downloads that is needed in order to gain one customer” (Company C, 2018, Head of Analytics & Digital Marketing).

Company A were clear about the fact that they measure conversions only through statistics and not in money. So, it is mostly regarding how many followers they have on social media channels and how many are checking their profiles and website etc. They also try to analyze what content gets a word of mouth leading to higher conversions.

5.13 Challenges with digital marketing and relationship marketing

One of the overall main challenges when it comes to the different marketing types within the interviewed SMEs is defined as time. In today’s society people are becoming more stressed and busy resulting in limited resources for new potential customer meetings, according to all the companies. Company C also mentions the limited time that is acknowledged within their organization, that collecting enough data in order to make more informed decisions can be challenging. It is explained that, even though social media is good for segmenting audiences and finding the correct customers, it can be very time consuming to collect data and finding the right segment in a short time span.

Company D confirms that: “Our firm won't always get the amount of time from our customers that we might wish to have so we always have to adapt and trust in ourselves and our own expertise” (Company D, 2018, PR Consult).

In addition, Company F mentions that both marketing and sales is very person depending and that can sometimes be difficult since the organization wants to fit it together with specific customers and at the same time reaching out to as many as
possible. It is described by Company G that there is exists a struggle when it comes to finding the time to work within the digital channels and continues talking about having the need for someone specifically putting the time and energy into chasing new customers.

When it comes to reaching out to new potential customers through digital marketing, there has been noticed that an organization constantly needs to be updated and active if it shall be seen as effective. Company A indicates that it is challenging to be unique and stand out in today’s society, since there are so many similar companies and a lot of the larger firms buy ads and can therefore can get seen more often than SMEs. SMEs might not have the resources or money to do this. Also, it is clarified by Company B that the digital marketing can always get improved and updated which is a defined as a constant battle. As mentioned before by Company F, Company B also point to the fact that is can be challenging creating the right marketing content as well as fitting it to as many potential customers as possible at the same. It is agreed by Company E there is a challenge in providing the right content for the right viewers and readers, however it is noticed that it is even more challenging to provide the right content that is more interesting than what other companies provide. Company G mentions that they see a challenge when it comes to knowing exactly which social media sites create the most awareness and provides the most effect.

Furthermore, Company C acknowledges that customers might lack competence within digital marketing, making it more difficult for them to see all the benefits with it compared to more traditional marketing. It means starting from scratch since the customers marketing department might never have worked goal oriented with conversions and data analytics. Educating customers about the firm’s potential and what they could gain from investing in it can be both time and resource consuming.

“However, it is crucial that the value of digital marketing is understood since uploading posts on social media channels without measuring them against actual goals, is just a waste of time” (Company C, 2018, Head of Analytics & Digital Marketing).
Continuingly, Company A discusses the importance of building up a trustworthy account on the digital platforms and not getting associated with something that they do not want to be associated with. It can be seen as difficult to build up a relationship and communication with your followers and according to Company G it is challenging to get customers to engage in liking and sharing the firms posts. They argue that even through using specific programs to be able to see who has been visiting them where, it is hard to see exactly who it is. The domain is viewable and from there conclusions can be drawn. However, email marketing makes it easier to see who actually clicked on the newsletter and followed through to our website. Company D concludes that it can be difficult to measure ROI on social media if your company does not have the budget for buying advertisement.

Another remark by the company is that: “Working with search engine optimization and our own website is also challenging because we always have to be cautious with what we write and how we write it” (Company D, 2018, PR Consult).
6 Analysis

This chapter analyzes the empirical data with the aim of defining similarities and differences between the data collected and theories presented, this to provide answers to the research questions and purpose of this paper.

6.1 SMEs marketing and purpose

The aim of this study is to look deeper into SMEs marketing processes and what content these companies are publishing online and for what purpose. To get a better understanding of what marketing strategy would be most beneficial for Swedish SMEs in the B2B sector and in terms of creating awareness, purchase intentions and return of investment it was decided to look further into relationship marketing and digital marketing. This provided the possibility to answer the research questions. To this end, a couple of basic findings emerged from the study. First, the results show that both relationship marketing and digital marketing play a significant role within SMEs and their marketing. The findings also show that the SMEs are well aware of the potential benefits that social media marketing can generate and that it can have a great impact on their organization which differs from what theory points to, which suggests that B2B organizations have less knowledge regarding this, and that being the reason for why they have not yet implemented it (Salo, 2017; Kärkkäinen et al., 2014; Bernard, M., 2016; Lehtimäki et al., 2009). This is an interesting finding but not very shocking to the authors because five out of the seven participating companies are actually mostly working in the digital world and the two remaining companies are working in the industrial and warehouse sector. The findings show that the participating SMEs struggle with limited resources, that was noticed to be true within all companies which did not come as a surprise to the authors, having studied literature and other research papers pointing to the same fact.

Second, while digital marketing has been referred in theory as online marketing, the findings reveal that digital marketing such as the social media network sites like Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn, are perceived as relationship marketing as well. It shows that the SME organizations, in this study, see this as a major part of the marketing approach but from a relational point of view. This is in line with what Malhotra et al., (2013) claims when he points to the fact that Facebook has become an
important channel in engaging consumers and creating brand awareness and also that blogging is mentioned as good relationship tool (Singh et al., 2008).

Following how Chaffey (2016) defines digital marketing as activities that include advertisement through company websites, social media company pages in combination with online communication methods such as social media marketing, online advertising, email marketing and partnership arrangements with other websites, it goes along with how the seven participating companies explained it. However, for each company the utilization varied amongst all the different kinds of tool. The authors interpretation is that, it could be because they are not operating in the same field and are selling different types of products/services. All companies pointed to that social media marketing tools are used for trying to acquire new customers as well as providing services to both existing and new customers, which is aligned with previous researchers (Alves et al., 2016 and Holliman et al., 2014) saying that social media marketing enables communication between businesses that helps to build brand loyalty beyond traditional marketing methods.

When it comes to how the participating companies market themselves and for what purpose there are split opinions, for example company G says that their strongest marketing channel are their sales people and since they work with very large companies that are global it is cheaper for them to work with an already well-functioning channel rather than acquire a new one and the personal meeting is key for them. This could be because they sell a complex and costly product which requires face to face interaction and the situation could be the same for company F that also sells a more complex product in comparison to the rest of the companies. When it comes to their digital marketing, they say that they do not believe that their website generates a lot of new customers at the moment but rather works as some sort of proof of what they say they do is actually true and their website and social media channels are a proof of that. They also work a lot with references. But, what is interesting is that company G says that their social media channels are mostly being used for creating awareness, for recruiting and for internal purpose. On for example, Facebook and LinkedIn they share previous well performed jobs and their references, so these marketing channels are more or less only relationship building for them and not at all a sales channel.
Company F mentioned that they work with direct and personal communication and contact rather than using digital marketing and they pinpoint that they sell mostly through relationship selling. When it comes to their social media channels they are kind of non-existing. A sell-cycle can take up to 2 years for them before they actually make the sale, also company G mentioned that their sell-cycle can be long-spun. According to theory The RM approach has resulted in increased customer cooperation, increased purchases and decreased customer defection (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Ndubisi and Nataraajan, (2016) mentions further positive outcomes like customer satisfaction, trust, commitment, and loyalty. This seems to be the fact for most of the companies since they are able to sell through references and current customers which in general only should be possible if they are satisfied, committed and loyal. Company D also explain that for them relationships are everything, they work a lot with PR and with references and trough their existing customers but also through digital marketing like for example social media. But they further mention that they combine all of the digital channels, rather than just focusing on one channel. And when it comes to RM marketing company D mentioned that they use a lot of relationship marketing since that is really what PR is all about and about creating long term relationships with both current and potential customers. Although they believe that social media networks are very much relationship marketing as well. The same seems to go for the rest of the companies, they use digital marketing and especially social media marketing to a far greater extent than for example company G and F. Even though, they also pinpoint that many of the social media sites they use are also for relationship marketing purposes and that digital marketing and relationship marketing goes hand in hand. The companies that do not have a proper social media marketing strategy could benefit from following a framework that has proven to be widely accepted such as the Honeycomb model by Kietzmnn et al., (2011). The idea behind it is that companies can select the ones most relevant to their business and focus their attention on those areas. Using these blocks individually and together can be of help to managers to make sense of the social media ecology and also to understand their audience and their engagement needs and also to get a better understanding of what implications it can have for the company. Another strategy the companies can adopt is the 5Ss of internet marketing created by Chaffey and Smith, (2012). This model is for developing a digital strategy and the model is focused on increasing brand presence, client awareness, purchase intentions and return on
investment engagement and ultimately boosting online transactions through 5 objectives. Which could be useful since most of the companies wanted to create for example more awareness.

Awareness, purchase intentions and return on investment

After interviewing the seven participants the authors found that the recipe for success seems to be a mix of both strategies, but that these strategies serve different purposes. In terms of creating awareness, several companies believe that it is most effective via digital marketing like search engine optimization and social media channels. In fact, all the participants in the study use SEO except company F, which is interesting because according to Karjaluoto and Leinonen, (2009), search engine optimization (SEO) has commonly been used among larger companies. But Chong and Pervan (2007), explains that SEO have certainly become better known among SMEs in the last few years and that is because their influence on website visitors is easily confirmed and both tools are also relatively cost effective and easy to use. This view is in line with the previous research that indicates that important factors affecting the adoption of digital marketing tools are tangible benefits that the company can identify and ease of use of the new channels (Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015; Michaelidou et al., 2011). According to research, brand awareness is one among several benefits of using digital marketing and especially social media marketing (Bolat et al., 2016; Karjaluoto et al., 2015; Siamagka et al., 2015; Lacka et al., 2016; Kärkkäinen et al., 2014; Andersson et al., 2017).

Six out of the seven participants are using different social media channels, but mostly Facebook and LinkedIn are used to create awareness and both Company A and B literally said that “if you are not out there, you do not exist”. Company C specifically mentioned that new customers are usually introduced to them through either one of their digital channels and thereafter they contact them to initiate a meeting. Email marketing is also something that most of the participating companies are utilizing to create awareness. It was also mentioned that it can also be hard to reach out to a wider public on social media and to engage customers to share and like their posts, especially if you do not purchase advertising. All the participants agree on that there is a need for creating more awareness and for example company A and G said that they need more resources in terms of staff who works directly with their social media channels. This
seems to be in line with what scholars such as Järnvinen et al., 2012; Michaelidou et al., 2011; Iankova et al., 2018 suggest.

They mention that even though executives of B2B companies interpret how powerful social media can be, they still continue to either under allocate funding’s or not even allocate anything, to promote and develop social media strategies within the company. So, the findings suggest that digital marketing seems to be in favor amongst almost all companies when it comes to creating brand awareness and the first contact and thereafter they use relationship marketing to build a relationship with the customer and create purchase intentions. Company F could not relate to this and said that they work mostly with relationship selling and initiates the first contact via telephone fairs/events and thereafter tries to set up a meeting, same thing goes for company G who said that their sales people usually initials the first contact over the phone and thereafter tries to book a meeting, since the personal meeting is key for them. It seems like the companies need both marketing strategies just as much and that they complement each other.

There were split opinions regarding digital marketing and the creation of purchase intentions, most of the companies wanted to separate digital marketing and social media marketing saying that they served different purposes. For example, company G said that the social media channels are not being used for the purpose of selling but rather for strengthening the company culture. For example, their LinkedIn account is mostly being used by their sales people to track down stakeholders, so they use it mostly as a database to collect information rather than distribute their own services. Company C said that they believe that social media is mostly a place for sharing your knowledge and your work rather than a sales channel and more for creating awareness and to recruit new staff. This is in line with theory, according to Andersson and Wikström, (2017) they also use social media for recruiting, as a seeking tool, product information tool and service tool. Almost all companies agreed on this, except for company B that has a complete online business and social media in particular plays a big part for them. This is interesting since researchers such as Swani and Brown (2011) claims that many B2B marketers believe that the nature of the B2B sector requires face-to-face interaction during the purchasing process and that both parties are actively involved. They claim that this approach cannot be satisfied online, which prevents the adoption of social media usage. This seemed to be particularly true regarding company G and F.
Company C further mentioned that digital marketing like SEO and display networks is more effective for creating purchase intentions as it is more aligned with the purchase intent, also email marketing to subscribers, in particular, has a high effectiveness in getting clients to buy. Company D said that they work with both marketing strategies and for them they work as one and they do not measure them separately within these terms.

When it comes to measuring return of investment some of the companies use digital tools like google analytics, attribution modeling (ATM) to measures the actual effect in each channel. Company C mentioned that when they measure return on investment, they look at the customers lifetime value and company B say that they measure return on investment by three categories, 1. Sent email, 2. Sent offer and 3. Won deal. Company D explains that they measure a number of key ratios and compare the numbers from month to month. Two of the seven participating companies does not even measure return of investment but rather conversions. Therefore, it was challenging for the author to draw any connections or to make an overall conclusion about it.

But two companies did mention that if they were to look at relationship marketing and digital marketing, it shows that digital marketing has a higher ROI. One company said that it can be difficult to measure ROI on social media if the company does not have the budget for buying advertisement and therefore does not have numbers to measure.
7 Conclusion and implications

The final chapter is based on the analytic discussion above, highlighting the findings and providing the reader with a conclusion of the study to fulfil the purpose. Following, suggestions for further research will be presented as well as both practical and managerial implications and ending it with a critical review.

7.1 Discussion

In this study, the current marketing processes have been studied within Swedish SMEs in the B2B sector, digital marketing and relationship marketing has been examined and why they are being used. The authors have also been investigating which of these two marketing types that seem to be most effective for the companies when it comes to terms such as awareness, return on investment as well as when it comes to creating purchase intentions. The framework for the different marketing strategies has been developed providing a systematic way to analyze the information from the SMEs. So, the results may provide more insights and knowledge regarding the marketing for Swedish SMEs and also what is effective within these two marketing types for the participating companies. However, the authors noticed quite early in the study that one should not compare the two strategies with each other because many of the participants believed that these two marketing strategies goes hand in hand and that they cannot just utilize one of them. Also, since most of the interviewed companies utilize social media marketing mostly for relationship marketing purposes and not as sales channels.

It was found in the study that most of the companies lack resources both in terms of personnel, time and funding’s when it comes to social media marketing. So, the authors believe that small companies that lack funding’s could employ an intern that only focuses only on social media marketing. When the company sees that it pays off, the employee might be able to become a paid employee within the firm. Continuingly, it was however mentioned that they were all aware of the relevance and the beneficial impact social media marketing can have. This came as a surprise for the authors since the previous research points to that B2B organizations have yet to understand the impact that social media marketing can have for their business or how to actually utilize the tools. Yet, the authors believe that if the SMEs actually invest wisely and having
someone focusing and working daily with this specific area, can be an exceptionally important resource for these types of firms. It was also shown that most of the companies did not have a specific plan when it came to digital marketing such as the social media networks, neither did they have any clear structure regarding their marketing budget and where to invest their money. Therefore, it can be concluded that the SMEs that create and more strictly follow a digital marketing plan should benefit from it since this has been found to be one of the key factors of successful marketing in SMEs. A suggestion would be to use either the Honeycomb model or the 5s framework. Another suggestion could also be for the SMEs in the B2B sector to invest in the younger generation that has a modern way of thinking and competence when it comes to social media marketing. Also, since the marketing processes within digital marketing continuously evolves and the younger generation seems to be more up to date regarding this. It can also be beneficial for these companies to follow a well-known strategy such as the for example, the Honeycomb model to be able to choose what sites to focus on or for example the 5S which are brought up in this report.

Additionally, it has been seen within previous research that the greatest barriers to adopting digital marketing channels are lack of resources; mostly lack of knowledge and time, also lack of knowledge of different digital channels (Järvinen et al., 2012; Karjaluoto and Leinonen, H, 2009). Our empirical findings suggest that this is accurate to some extent, however when it comes to relationship marketing, theory points to that this strategy can be time consuming (Salo, 2017). It was found interesting since the data in this study show that it is rather the customers or potential customers that seem to have limited time and not only the organization itself.

Also, another noticeable barrier to adoption of digital channels was argued to be the businesses lack of knowledge regarding its perceived benefits and usefulness according to researchers (Lehtimäki et al., 2009; Veldeman et al., 2017; Lacka et al., 2016), however according to the authors findings this does not seem to be the case. Most of the SMEs point to that they are familiar with the benefits of utilizing social media marketing but might not have the ability to adopt it due to previously mentioned reasons like limited resources.
7.2 Answer to RQ1
The digital marketing tools that are being utilized, within the interviewed SMEs, for marketing purposes are for example search engine marketing, email marketing, display networks, company website and social media marketing which are all connected to theory about digital marketing (see Chaffey, 2016). All companies are also using relationship marketing but in different ways such as participating in fairs and events to speak directly with the customers, meeting with their clients in person and working on their relationships on a daily basis. The participants use social media mostly to create awareness, for recruitment purposes, to share their knowledge and well performed cases and this is in line with what Andersson and Wikström, (2017) suggests.

7.3 Answer to RQ2
The findings point to that the most beneficial strategy in terms of creating awareness seems to be digital marketing such as search engine optimization, remarketing, social media and display advertising but also through relationship marketing, like working with one’s references and through existing customers. This is probably possible due to that the RM approach has resulted in increased customer cooperation, customer satisfaction, trust, commitment, and loyalty (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Ndubisi and Nataraajan, 2016). The authors noticed that some of the companies do not even measure return on investment within their social media marketing, but rather just measure conversions. This is confirmed by Järvinen et al., (2012), who says that many B2B organizations may find it hard to state the actual ROI on social media. The companies that do measure ROI use digital tools like google analytics and attribution modeling (ATM) to measures the actual effect in each channel. But since there were so many different answers regarding ROI, it is challenging for the authors to draw any connections or to make an overall conclusion about it. It was mentioned that digital marketing like SEO, display networks and email marketing to subscribers is more effective for creating purchase intentions as it is more aligned with the purchase intent. According to theory both RM marketing (see Gummeson, 2014) and digital marketing (see Siamagka et al, 2015) can be helpful in creating purchase intent.

However, when comparing smaller firms to larger ones, it is clear that they do not have the ability to prioritize everything simultaneously which points to the need of planning
their marketing processes in greater detail and caution. Furthermore, the implementation process of specific marketing processes becomes more complicated if the firm does not have anyone that is fully responsible for handling the different marketing activities. Overall, the findings speak for that relationship marketing is extremely important to the overall marketing strategy of many firms, especially since the authors noticed that almost all companies believe that social media marketing also is relationship marketing, which the authors did not expect.

Key points:

- For creating awareness digital marketing seems to be more effective and also for creating purchase intentions, although the data about purchase intentions was rather weak.
- Regarding ROI it was challenging for the authors to draw any connections or to make an overall conclusion about it.
- It was also found that the companies utilize social media marketing mostly for relationship marketing purposes and not as sales channels.
- Most of the companies lack resources both in terms of personnel, time and funding’s when it comes to social media marketing but they do not lack knowledge about utilizing it or about the benefits it can generate.
- Almost all companies use social media marketing for relationship marketing purposes.
- The digital tools that are being utilized is mostly the company web page, email marketing, SEO and social media sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn. The main purpose is to creating awareness, share knowledge and previous jobs and for recruitment purposes.

7.4 Further Research

Although this study investigated the marketing processes and its effectiveness of seven SMEs in the B2B sector, the subject is still under researched. Future studies could together with this study be used to map out the key to a successful overall marketing strategy for B2B companies. Also, since this multiple case study only has focused on the seven companies mentioned, it results in a call for further research regarding the
subject in a larger sample selection of companies. Especially, when it comes to social media marketing since there is claimed to be a knowledge gap within this field. This would also lead to a higher degree of validity in the conclusions and provide a more accurate and generalizable result. Furthermore, these types of studies are needed to be able to create a wider possible framework for marketing strategies within SMEs, in the B2B sector. It would also be interesting to conduct more interviews with different employees within the SMEs from this study, to see if the marketing interpretations and are aligned throughout the company.

7.5 Managerial implications

The conducted study makes a minor contribution to understanding the field of digital marketing and relationship marketing within SMEs in the B2B sector, within Sweden. It is believed that this study can inspire further research regarding this subject. SMEs need to be more aware of the fact that not having a proper established digital marketing plan within the organization can lead to loss of potential benefits like for example, company performance. When understanding the organization’s own capacities in terms of resources and personnel, it might in turn lead to creating possibilities for SMEs to tackle the limitations within this area. For the companies that lack a framework or strategy for their social media channels the authors suggest that they collect inspiration from for example the Honeycomb model.

Both previous research and the data in this study claim that the common problem for SMEs is the challenge regarding limited resources, hence reduces the focus of firms digital marketing such as social media marketing activities. Thus, the managerial point of view of digital marketing should be corporate and beware of how they deal with questions regarding this to broaden their knowledge as well as show more interest since this study has shown that social media marketing can be a very beneficial marketing tool if used correctly, especially for SMEs. It is also believed that interest and knowledge begin at a managerial level in all businesses and that the managers have the responsibility to inform the whole organization regarding the importance of this. If they do not have the knowledge regarding certain areas such as social media marketing, it could be favorable for both them and the company to reach out for help from others, it could be for example employing someone from the younger generation, who has a
deeper understanding about it, as an intern, if the company lacks monetary resources. This way it could lead to that the manager gets a clearer view and greater insight of how it works and how useful it can be if utilized correctly. Furthermore, hopefully the readers of this report will be inspired when getting an insight of the SMEs experiences and create motivation to implement it more within their marketing strategy.

7.5 Theoretical implications
This research paper has aimed at highlight how SMEs in the B2B sector within Sweden market themselves and for what purpose, also to find out how they use and understand digital marketing and relationship marketing, to see what tools are more effective in terms of creating awareness, return on investment and purchase intentions. The study showcases seven different companies with professionals who work within the chosen specific area and who can provide knowledge and information regarding it. It has been noticed that there is a less devotion for research within this area in previous studies which points to that no detailed current framework exist. If however, there would exist such a detailed framework it could provide a deeper understanding of how the SMEs in Sweden within the B2B sector market themselves and what is most beneficial for them when it comes to digital marketing and relationship marketing. This study manages to contribute with a somewhat deeper understanding of the two marketing tools and that they are usually not seen as two separate tools but that they go more hand in hand within these SMEs. Furthermore, this research paper also adds awareness regarding the fact that social media marketing is mostly utilized in SMEs for marketing purposes only and not as a sales channel as well as that there exists a lack of resources for utilizing it but not a lack of knowledge regarding the benefits digital marketing can provide.

7.7 Limitations
This study has obtained some limitations when conducting it, which can have affected the results. The researchers had contact with over ten SME companies in the beginning, however, only seven of them came through for participating within an interview. Also, one specific individual within one of these companies was targeted due to his position, however, the person lacked knowledge regarding the subject and the company was not even that active within social media marketing. Though, this might have been a very minor limitation since there were still six other companies that could provide a lot of
information within the subject. Furthermore, due to the irregular answer regarding return on investments, it was hard to make an overall conclusion about that.

Continuously, a qualitative study such as this one, certain limitations might mean that the findings cannot be generalized to the larger population. This concerns this report since the definition is quite broad. There authors also came across inaccessible articles due to certain restrictions when trying to read them, however, since they were never reviewed the authors are unaware of the usefulness of them.

7.8 Critical Review

This thesis is written by two students with the purpose to receive a bachelor's degree, and these authors have a certain type of previous knowledge and interests within the field of digital marketing and relationship marketing. The results in this report are based on the researcher’s interpretations and experience of the interviews that was conducted. Other people that has different experiences and more or less knowledge regarding this subject could perhaps interpret the data differently. Other things that can have affected the outcome of this research paper is for example, that it was written as a case study with multiple companies involving subsidiaries belonging to the same company group. This means that the result could have differed if the study was conducted with another company, as well as it could have turned out differently if the authors utilized another research approach and design. The results could also have been different if other respondents within the companies participated since they might see the subject with different eyes. The reader should also keep in mind that the multiple case study was conducted in Sweden, leading up to that it might have been affected by the country culture. The results could therefore have turned out different if the study was carried out in another country with a different culture. Lastly, the data was only collected from seven companies so if the authors had conducted more interviews there might have been a different result with more conclusive information.
8 References


Mieg, HA. (2001). The social psychology of expertise: Case studies in research, professional domains, and expert roles, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.


Appendices A

Interview guide with semi-structured questions

1. Is it OK to record this interview?
2. Do you/your company want to be anonymous for this interview?

Part 1: Participant role and experience
3. What is your name and what kind of position do you have?
4. Describe your projects that you are involved in and what your role is within them?
5. How long time have you been working at this company? And how many years of experience do you have within your current position?
6. Do you have previous experience within your profession area from other employments from before?
7. How many employees are there in the company?

Part 2: Digital marketing vs Relationship marketing
8. How does your company attract B2B customers and what kind of tools do you utilize? Any tools you utilize more than others?
9. How would you refer to these tools, are they more relationship building type of marketing or are these more digital marketing?
11. How important are the different marketing tools for your company? (Digital marketing versus relationship)
12. If your company uses social media marketing, on which social media channels is your business active within? And for what purpose?
13. How do you believe that your company can create visibility and awareness in the best possible way? Through which marketing tools? Anything that was more/less effective?
14. How does your company track ROI in digital marketing?
15. Do you measure conversions? (e.g. site visits, reviews, downloads, leads)
16. What kind of marketing tools do you believe your company benefits more from? And why? In terms of costs? Purchase intentions? Brand awareness?

17. Is there anything you find challenging when it comes to these different marketing types?

18. How do you allocate the marketing budget?