“From Listening to Action”

A case study on how businesses co-create with their customers through engagement in Swedish family owned retail businesses.
Abstract

With the constant changes in society, the way companies market themselves has changed and customer engagement, relationships and transparency has become a more important factor. Significantly in how businesses should conduct their business to create as much value as possible. And through this ever-changing environment in which retail exists, flexibility and the need for responsiveness is key where co-creational strategies can help a long way in opening up companies to reach, create and maintain good relationships through communication.

The qualitative research method of a case study with semi-structured interviews was conducted to gather empirical findings for this study. The interviews were conducted with five employees of a family owned retail business to obtain a full perspective and understanding of their work towards customer engagement and co-creation. The authors of this thesis have adopted a deductive approach in this thesis.

The thesis conclusion shows several reasons why co-creation strategies could amplify engagement and how the company needs to be aware and acknowledge their customers, to further build relationships. Findings indicate that a more structured approach is needed for their social media communication platforms. Moreover, it is important to note that this research is conducted from the companies’ perspective. Lastly, it is important to recognize the dynamics and reputation of the family business, as local status and size influence the overall experience and view of the company.

Key words
Customer Engagement; Co-creation; Family owned business
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# Table of Contents

1 INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................... 1
   1.1 BACKGROUND ........................................................................................................ 1
   1.2 PROBLEM DISCUSSION .......................................................................................... 3
      1.2.1 The Rise of Customer Engagement in Retail .................................................... 3
      1.2.2 Collaborative Creation and Destruction in Retail ........................................... 4
      1.2.3 Customer Engagement and Co-Creation Issued in Family Owned Businesses 5
      1.2.4 The Research Gap .......................................................................................... 6
   1.3 PURPOSE ............................................................................................................... 7
   1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS ....................................................................................... 8
   1.5 DELIMITATIONS ................................................................................................... 8

2 LITERATURE REVIEW ................................................................................................. 10
   2.1 CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT ................................................................................. 10
      2.1.1 Cognitive, Behavioural and Emotional Engagement ....................................... 11
      2.1.2 Social Media Engagement ............................................................................. 12
   2.2 CO-CREATION ....................................................................................................... 13
      2.2.1 Opportunities and Challenges of Co-Creation ................................................. 14
   2.3 THEORIES IMPLEMENTED ON FAMILY FIRM SETTINGS ................................ 15
      2.3.1 Customer Engagement in Family-Owned Retail Businesses .......................... 15
      2.3.2 Co-Creation in Family-Owned Retail Businesses ........................................... 16
   2.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ............................................................................... 17

3 METHODOLOGY .......................................................................................................... 19
   3.1 RESEARCH APPROACH ....................................................................................... 19
   3.2 RESEARCH STRATEGY ......................................................................................... 20
      3.2.1 Qualitative Research Strategy ......................................................................... 20
   3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN ............................................................................................ 21
      3.3.1 Case Study .................................................................................................... 21
   3.4 TYPE OF DATA ..................................................................................................... 22
   3.5 RESEARCH METHOD .......................................................................................... 22
      3.5.1 Semi-structured Interviews ............................................................................ 23
   3.6 OPERATIONALISATION ....................................................................................... 23
   3.7 SAMPLING .......................................................................................................... 25
      3.7.1 Purposive Sampling ....................................................................................... 25
   3.8 DATA ANALYSIS ................................................................................................ 26
   3.9 QUALITY OF RESEARCH ............................................................................... 28
      3.9.1 Reliability of Qualitative Research ................................................................ 28
      3.9.2 Validity of Qualitative Research ................................................................... 28
   3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS .......................................................................... 28
   3.11 SUSTAINABLE CONSIDERATIONS ................................................................. 29

4 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS .................................................................................................. 30
   4.1 RESPONDENTS ................................................................................................... 30
      4.1.1 Respondent Sven .......................................................................................... 30
      4.1.2 Respondent Ida ............................................................................................. 31
      4.1.3 Respondent Anna ......................................................................................... 31
      4.1.4 Respondent Elsa ........................................................................................... 31
      4.1.5 Respondent Kristoffer .................................................................................. 31
   4.2 CUSTOMER INTERACTION ................................................................................. 32
   4.3 CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT ................................................................................ 33
   4.4 SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT ................................ 34
   4.5 CO-CREATION ..................................................................................................... 35
   4.6 FAMILY OWNED BUSINESS .............................................................................. 36
5 ANALYSIS ................................................................................................................. 38
  5.1 CUSTOMER INTERACTION .................................................................................. 38
  5.2 CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT ................................................................................. 39
  5.3 SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT .................................. 41
  5.4 CO-CREATION ....................................................................................................... 41
  5.5 FAMILY OWNED BUSINESS .................................................................................. 43

6 CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................ 45
  6.1 ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS ......................................................... 45
  6.2 IMPLICATIONS ....................................................................................................... 46
    6.2.1 Managerial Implications .................................................................................... 46

7 LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH ......................... 47

REFERENCE LIST ........................................................................................................ 48
  APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE – SWEDISH VERSION ........................................... I
  APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE - ENGLISH VERSION ............................................. III

List of tables
Table 1: Operationalisation Table
Table 2: Criteria for Choosing our Participants
Table 3: List of respondents

List of figures
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
Figure 2: The Process of Deductive Approach
Figure 3: Thematic Analysis
1 Introduction

In this chapter, the authors will lead with a background to the themes of family owned business, engagement and co-creation. Followed by a problem discussion, where the themes will be further discussed in both a managerial and theoretical manner. Lastly, a presentation of the research questions, the purpose, and delimitations will conclude the chapter.

1.1 Background

When analysing the last two decades, companies have tried many different approaches to reduce their costs by creating a more automotive, technological and customer reliable environment, creating strategies to make the customers do the work. For example, self-checkout at stores or self-check-in at bookings. Ramaswamy and Ozcan (2013) state that from these ideas and strategies the core element of customer involvement with the business is still in the hands of the companies, where they control the conditions, and therefore determine the type of experience for their customers. All and all to primarily create some kind of economic generation and saving. However, the relevant topic, theories and strategies created in the aspect of co-creation has gotten more attention and has now become a process which is more discovered. As companies have realised the value and process of co-creation and the chance to devise and prosper new opportunities together with their customers, partners and other stakeholders.

As society evolves into a new age, one can argue that now is a time for sustainability and growth for the environment and our surroundings. As pollution, global warming and sustainable thinking in terms of how we treat each other, inclusivity and our morals become a huge topic in today's society, the need and demand for change is upon us. Lidén and Stranne (2023) states that this ever-changing climate of hot topics, the reliance on sustainability, community and growth has flourished and with it family owned retail businesses (FORB) has risen up to the task and has started to develop and accommodate the needs and demands of today's society. Furthermore, together with the stable development of FORB’s growth and trust from their customers the reliance on the branch has grown. In turn, this has shown to be a reason to evolve and change businesses to adaptable companies ready to accommodate the new market conditions and societal trends to meet societies changes and grow.
However, family firms (FF), or as we will refer to them as FORB lacks a consensus throughout as multiple authors agree on the lack of conducted research to be able to define the term. For instance, Rajan Salunkhe and Kumar (2023) claims that after reviewing multiple papers and studies related, they concluded that FF has multiple viewpoints where the existence of multiple variations must be recognized. However, they also present the fact that multiple authors have tried to define FF as firms which involve multiple family members, which comprise the entrepreneurial firm. Additionally, Botero and Litchfield-Moore (2021) presents an understanding that FF works as a means for differentiation, utilising the marketplace, but also concludes that FF lacks a general consensus as to the definition of FF. Furthermore, Marvel (2012) states that family-run companies are the backbone and engine in which the global market economy stands on. Building the highest gross domestic product in most countries around the world, achieving and creating new jobs and opportunities. Stressing the importance of FF on a global scale and its impact on society.

But it is not only the society in terms of social conduct and how we hold ourselves in this day and age that has changed. Camargo-borges and F. Rasera (2013) states that technology and strategies has also delved into a new era of revolution and transformations at a global scale, where more functions affect the status and being of the social society. Therefore, the transition into a new social-technological society has created a shift in the sense of value creation bringing about a whole new way to conduct business with consumers. Furthermore, this shift in logic and technological advance has also brought about the indication of a more interactive value creation, highlighting the importance of stakeholders’ engagement in co-creating value, where this warrants businesses to be more sustainable in all aspects.

Additionally, together with the technological evolution, the social media technologies also grow and evolve, especially in the last decade, and one cannot ignore the significant impact the evolution of social media has had on marketing communications. As such, tactics and new ways of working with strategies have to be devised. Where value co-creation strategies are being inducted into the world of social media (Gyimothy and Larson, 2015). An important aspect of value co-creation is also the service-dominant logic (SDL) which gives the consumers the perspective and position to co-create value with the companies (Cheung et al., 2021). Additionally, Le et al. (2022) adds that service in the sense of SDL sees the engaged parties, such as customers or stakeholders as vital parts in co-creation. Where the parties must engage voluntarily in activities to be able to build and facilitate resources through interactions, activities and experiences. Where the well-being in the co-
creation process shows how customers contribute more resources, emphasising improved and positive interactions to create beneficiaries for all parties.

1.2 Problem Discussion

1.2.1 The Rise of Customer Engagement in Retail

The retail industry has undergone significant changes in recent years, driven by the rise of e-commerce, shifting consumer behaviours, and increased competition (Vander Schee, Peltier and Dahl, 2020). The use of social media has opened for more opportunities and possibilities for communication. In this context, customer engagement has emerged as a key strategy for businesses to stay competitive and build long-term relationships with customers. The engagement is referred to as the involvement and participation of a customer together with the brand (Vivek et al., 2014). Additionally, customer engagement can be defined by prior studies as the emotional, cognitive, and behavioural connection between a customer and a brand, characterised by interactions that lead to increased loyalty and satisfaction. These types of engagement affect the psychological process of the overall behaviour of the customer (Vivek, Beatty and Morgan, 2012; Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas, 2016). However, the research on engagement and all the factors is a challenge as several attempts have been made by different authors to establish customer engagement and it is a problem today to understand what kind of factors in engagement it actually concerns.

Previous studies have been done in customer engagement and has been a topic discussed in marketing, business, and management. The theoretical framework of customer engagement can create value in the offerings of exchange in the market (Brodie et al., 2011; Vargo and Lusch, 2017). In customer engagement the factors of cognitive, behavioural, emotional and social engagement will bring theories to better understand the engagement in the brand. Vivek, Beatty and Morgan (2012) and Cheung et al. (2021) have both proposed a conceptual model of customer engagement that includes these four factors. Cognitive engagement refers to the customer's mental processing and understanding of the brand, while behavioural engagement refers to the customer's active participation in brand-related activities. Emotional engagement involves the customer's emotional connection to the brand, while social engagement relates to the customer's interactions and relationships with others related to the brand. These four factors can help organisations to better understand and measure customer engagement.
Although customer engagement has no real consensus and is yet to be exactly defined, many researchers have their own deception of the engagement of customers (Bowden, 2009; Vivek, Beatty and Morgan, 2012; An and Han, 2020). The root of customer engagement can be traced back to the early days of marketing (Vivek, Beatty and Morgan, 2012), when companies relied on traditional advertising and direct marketing to reach their target audience. However, with the advent of digital marketing and social media, the concept of engagement has evolved to encompass a much broader range of tactics and strategies (Vander Shee, Peltier and Dahl, 2020). Therefore, by providing customers with a platform to interact with one another and with the brand, businesses can foster a sense of loyalty and advocacy that can be incredibly powerful in driving growth. As social media engagement has evolved at a rapidly changing pace, companies can for that reason have a hard time catching up with the most effective strategies. Researchers highlight that emotional brand engagement in social media is essential to build brand loyalty (Hollebeek, Glynn and Brodie, 2014).

The benefit with customer engagement is the ability to create a sense of community and belonging around a brand (Brodie et al., 2011; Van Doorn et al., 2010). Today, customer engagement involves a variety of touchpoints across multiple channels, both online and offline. These touchpoints are designed to provide customers with personalised and convenient experiences that keep them coming back for more. The struggle here is to know how to use and take advantage of these engagement from customers. The psychological attachments to a firm can make the customer act and engage more. Kemp et al. (2021) explains that through storytelling, it is possible to engage the audience and increase sales for the company. The storytelling gives the chance to emotionally engage with the customer, and as a smaller retail business can benefit from the sharing of information and knowledge about the brand. As a family owned business, the reputation can grow along with the personal relationship with the customer. For instance, connected customers are 52% more valuable, according to an industry report, than customers that are simply very satisfied (Magids et al., 2015). As this explains, looking into storytelling engagement as a small and medium enterprise (SME) business strategy is significant and interesting to develop into the companies.

1.2.2 Collaborative Creation and Destruction in Retail

In the retail sector, customer engagement and co-creation has taken on new dimensions in recent years, as brands look for innovative ways to create value for their customers. The idea of co-creation, which refers to the collaborative process of designing products and services with input from customers (Vargo
and Lusch, 2007), is one of the most intriguing advances in this field. Co-creation allows retailers to tap into the knowledge and expertise of their customers to create products and services that better meet their needs. By involving customers in the product development process, retailers can create a sense of ownership and investment in the final product (Yi and Gong, 2013).

However, co-creation is not without its challenges. Previous studies state that one of the biggest risks is the potential for co-destruction, the negative impact that customer feedback and input can have on the final product (Järvi, Kähkönen and Trovinen, 2018). While co-creation can be a powerful tool for engaging customers and driving loyalty, it is important for retailers to strike a balance between incorporating customer input and maintaining a clear vision. With careful planning and execution, co-creation can be a highly effective strategy for creating products and services that better meet the needs of customers and growth for retailers (Yi and Gong, 2013).

Furthermore, in the context of co-creation, frameworks such as customer co-creation value (CCCV) can provide a useful framework for exploring these concepts. The CCCV framework proposed by Metz, Zarantonello and Grappi (2018) emphasises the importance of customer participation, resource integration, and value co-creation in the co-creation process. This framework provides a structured approach for organisations to involve customers in the co-creation process and create value together. Although, despite the potential benefits of customer engagement and co-creation, there are also potential risks and challenges associated with these strategies. For example, businesses may struggle to manage customer feedback and suggestions in the co-creation process or may face negative feedback or criticism on social media. Nangpiire, Silva and Alves (2021) highlight the importance of developing effective strategies for managing customer feedback and addressing negative feedback or criticism to mitigate these risks.

1.2.3 Customer Engagement and Co-Creation Issued in Family Owned Businesses

As family owned businesses are the most dominant form of all business, big to small enterprises, in Europe more than 70% of all firms are family owned, the reputation of the firm and family are closely linked together (Alonso Dos Santos, Llanos Contreras and Mahto, 2021). For family-owned retail businesses in Sweden, and specifically for the company this case study is about, finding new ways to differentiate themselves and engage with customers to drive sales and build relationships is imperative. According to a study by Bjuggren, Duggal and Tung Giang (2012), small and medium
enterprises in Sweden with 20-99 employees account for around 45% of all family-owned businesses. A challenge for them is to know how they can identify and use the engagement from customers for their benefit. As growing closer to the customer and involving them more in the business, it is important to have strategies that will lead to more engagement. Furthermore, to encourage customers to engage and interact with the company.

In addition, family owned retail businesses must effectively leverage social media to engage with customers and build brand awareness (Alonso Dos Santos, Llanos Contreras and Mahto, 2021). Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram offer a range of opportunities for businesses to create engaging content, interact with customers in real-time, and build brand loyalty (Ohliati, Yuniarty and Bismo, 2022). However, social media also presents various challenges, including managing negative feedback or criticism, monitoring and measuring the impact of social media activity on customer behaviour, and managing social media accounts effectively. While the concept of customer engagement has gained increasing attention in recent years, there is still much to be learned about how it can be effectively leveraged in the context of family-owned retail businesses. Family owned retail businesses are unique in their values, goals, and decision-making processes, which may impact how they approach customer engagement (Botero and Litchfield-Moore, 2021).

Moreover, Heider, Hülsbeck and von Schlenk-Barnsdorf (2022) discuss that compared to non-family enterprises, family businesses place less value on innovation and creativity, and they are less focused on growth and change. Family businesses' complex connection with innovation results from their long-term relationships with conservatism and outlook as tradition and prevention of family-wealth destruction risks comes into play. So another challenge is the innovation in family businesses, as there are risks associated with development and that it is very traditional as it has always been.

1.2.4 The Research Gap
There are several reasons why further research in this area is necessary. Firstly, there is no consensus on customer engagement and co-creation (Franke and Piller, 2004), making it essential to explore these topics and understand how managers in family-owned retail businesses can incorporate them (Rajan, Salunkhe and Kumar, 2023). Secondly, previous research has mainly focused on goods or services, and it is essential to understand how customers can interact with businesses to develop value for both tangible and intangible contexts (Vargo and Lusch, 2007). Finally, it is necessary to understand how
family owned businesses can use their customers to advance their business and prevent risks with the gained knowledge and research.

Prior studies have established that significant factors in customer engagement and co-creation are associated with each other (Nangpiire, Silva and Alves, 2021). Nevertheless, the studies were most focused on the generality of customer engagement together with co-creating in all businesses, and the relationship between these factors are still evolving. There have been some investigations in family firms but not to this extent. To address these challenges, businesses need to consider how they can effectively engage with customers across multiple touchpoints, including physical stores, websites and social media (Dolan et al., 2019). Furthermore, businesses must understand how to leverage co-creation to involve customers in the product or service development process, leading to more personalised and relevant offerings (Alexander and Jaakola, 2015).

The objective of this research is to survey the existing research on customer engagement and co-creation and put both theories into the context of family owned retail businesses. The aim is to explore how engagement affects customer behaviour and use co-creation to motivate and initiate customer motivation (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004), from the perspective of the company. This research will help organisations make use of their customers to evolve and develop value for them both. Therefore, it is important for businesses to have a clear strategy for managing customer engagement and co-creation, and to monitor and measure the impact of these strategies on customer behaviour, attitudes, and emotions. Despite the potential benefits of customer engagement and co-creation in family-owned retail businesses in Sweden, there is a significant gap in research on this topic. Specifically, there is a lack of research examining co-creation and customer engagement in the context of family owned retail businesses, as well as limited research on engagement and co-creation in this setting.

1.3 Purpose

The research purpose of this study is to explore the co-creation strategies that can be employed by family-owned retail businesses in Sweden to enhance customer engagement. The study aims to identify the key factors that may facilitate or hinder the use of these strategies, and to provide insights into how family-owned retail businesses can effectively leverage co-creation to involve customers in the product or service development process. The findings of this study can help family owned retail businesses in Sweden to develop effective
co-creation strategies that can differentiate them from competitors and build long-term customer relationships.

1.4 Research Questions
From gathering information and knowledge from previous research we have gained interest which have allowed us to discover a gap in the existing research. With this awareness, we have chosen to devise these following research questions:

- What co-creation strategy can family-owned retail businesses in Sweden use to amplify customer engagement?
  - What are the key barriers and facilitators of the use of co-creation strategy?

1.5 Delimitations
This thesis paper is limited to a company situated in the south of Sweden within the retail sector, focusing on family owned small and medium enterprises. Where the definition of an SME is as stated by the European Commission in the EU recommendation (2003), that the main factors lie in staff headcount and turnover of the company. Even though the company has become bigger and expanded or has become an incorporated company, the core structure of the company will be viewed as a family owned business and hence it will not be taken into account for the purpose of this thesis.

This thesis attitude will be conducted towards the B2C market, and it will be written from a sellers (company workers) perspective, in regard to how they work with enabling interaction and engagement through co-creation towards and with their customers. Consequently, this thesis will not include or take into consideration the customers perspective of how they interpret their chance to interact, engage and effect the companies through co-creation. Hence the end-customer perspective will not be applied or taken into consideration as well. Thus, the reasoning has its foundation in the purpose of the thesis which is to investigate how the company can amplify and adapt their strategies. Therefore, we find it more pivotal to research it from the company perspective. Additionally, the research would in regard to the limited time be too broad to look from both perspectives, leaving the customers perspective as an area which can be discovered in future research.
Within this study research, the conceptualisation and theories of customer engagement and co-creation will only be produced to expand and create a wider perspective creating more depth and understanding. Thus, each dimension will not be discussed in-depth further than to create context and an explanation in the literature review to create an understanding of the concepts and theories, as well as showcasing the perspectives of the company’s perspective of said concepts and theories.
2 Literature Review

In this chapter, the literature review will be presented by the authors and serves as the foundation for this thesis. The chapter begins with explaining the main concept of Customer Engagement, followed by different aspects of engagement. Further on, Co-creation is explained, and how engagement and co-creation can work together in the concept of family owned retail businesses. A summary of the literature review together with a conceptual framework and how it applies to the identified knowledge gap concludes the chapter.

2.1 Customer Engagement

Customer engagement has been a topic of interest in various disciplines, such as marketing, management, and psychology. It is the process by which a brand or company creates a connection with its customers that leads to increased loyalty, brand advocacy, and revenue. It is a multidimensional construct that encompasses various aspects of customer behaviour and brand interactions (Bowden, 2009; Vivek, Beatty and Morgan, 2012). Customer engagement has become increasingly important for companies as they seek to build long-term relationships with their customers in a highly competitive marketplace. It refers to the level of interaction between a customer and a brand or company, which can be both transactional and non-transactional. Therefore, it is not just about purchasing, but it also involves cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and social elements that impact engagement (Vivek, Beatty and Morgan, 2012; An and Han, 2020).

During these interactions, the customer’s resource investments are reflected in their level of engagement. The level of investment may lead to different outcomes. For instance, highly engaged customers invest considerable time, effort, and thought in their brand interactions, while unengaged or disengaged customers exhibit a limited willingness to invest in their interactions. These differences in engagement levels can impact dependent variables such as customer loyalty or self-brand connection (Harrigan et al., 2018). Kempt et al. (2021) have done prior studies on storytelling and engagement and how the emotional attachments to the brand can affect the action of customers. Stories are a powerful way to communicate meaning, convey significance and evoke emotions in the listener or reader, which in turn can establish a deep connection. For businesses, establishing a strong connection with customers through storytelling can foster engagement and lead to mutually beneficial relationships.
2.1.1 Cognitive, Behavioural and Emotional Engagement

According to Lim et al. (2022), cognitive engagement involves the mental processes and thoughts associated with customer engagement. It involves collecting and processing information during brand interactions. Cheung et al. (2021) describe cognitive engagement as expressing thoughts, exchanging information, and generating suggestions for improvement. This type of engagement drives active search behaviour, as customers actively seek information about a brand or product. For that reason, cognitive engagement is crucial for understanding the level of customer interest and motivation towards a brand or product. It encompasses various activities such as reading reviews, comparing different products, and searching for information.

Behavioural engagement, according to Lim et al. (2022), refers to the actions taken by customers when interacting with a brand. Cheung et al. (2021) explain that this type of engagement is characterised by the time, effort, and energy invested in consumer-brand interactions. It demonstrates the level of commitment and loyalty that customers have towards a brand. Moreover, it includes observable behaviours such as leaving feedback or comments, participating in events or contests, or sharing content on social media. Behavioural engagement can lead to positive outcomes such as increased repurchase intentions and positive word-of-mouth communication. Therefore, understanding and measuring behavioural engagement is crucial for brand managers to develop effective engagement strategies (Lim et al., 2022).

Emotional engagement, as defined by Lim et al. (2022), indicates the level of customer happiness or satisfaction during brand interactions. It is driven by interactive communication or activities initiated by customers and reflects their passion and dedication towards the brand. Hollebeek and Chen (2014) state that emotional engagement is important because it leads to customer loyalty, positive word-of-mouth communication, and increased repurchase intentions. It is associated with the emotional attachment or happiness that customers experience when interacting with a brand. Creating positive experiences such as exceptional customer service, personalised experiences, or a sense of community can enhance emotional engagement. Understanding and measuring emotional engagement is essential for brand managers to develop effective engagement strategies that foster long-term relationships with customers.

Customers' intention to make a repurchase or actively seek out information depends on their cognitive, behavioural, and emotional engagement. The cognitive, emotional, and behavioural aspects of involvement are
interconnected and can influence one another (Bowden et al., 2017). For instance, buyers may be more inspired to look up information about a brand or product as a result of a favourable emotional response, which might improve cognitive engagement. Similar to this, a high level of behavioural engagement where customers actively participate in activities or events that have a closer connection to a brand or product, can result in enhanced emotional engagement (An and Han, 2020).

2.1.2 Social Media Engagement

The rise of social media has transformed the way companies interact with their customers and has become an essential tool for businesses to build relationships, increase brand awareness, and engage customers. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter offer a range of opportunities for businesses to create engaging content, interact with customers in real-time, and build brand loyalty (Vander Shee, Peltier and Dahl, 2020).

Proponents of this strategy argue that social media can be an effective way for businesses to create a sense of community and foster customer loyalty. Social engagement is vital in customer engagement because it provides customers with an avenue to communicate with the brand directly. It allows customers to share their thoughts, opinions, and feedback with the brand, creating a two-way dialogue between the customer and the company (Vohra and Bhardwaj, 2019). A non-transactional behaviour, as it includes helping others on social media with opinions of products. This engagement can be used to provide customer support, respond to queries, and provide relevant information and will lead to more interaction and engagement (An and Han, 2020).

Although social media engagement is an effective communication channel it also has its downsides. Vohra and Bhardwaj (2019), discuss the consequences of social media presence for companies and how it can affect the reputation of the brand. To create effective social media engagement strategies, brands must understand their target audience and tailor their social media content accordingly. This content should be engaging, relevant, and provide value to customers. Brands should also be responsive to customer feedback and engage with customers on a personal level (Bowden et al., 2017). This engagement can help build trust and create long-term relationships with customers. Provide insights into customer preferences and behaviours, which can be used to develop more targeted marketing campaigns. Measuring social engagement through various metrics can provide valuable insights into customer preferences and behaviours (Dolan et al., 2019).
2.2 Co-Creation

Experiential marketing, personalising the customer experience by the usage of customer involvement and customization to reach the personal level of customer experience, which can shape potential and added experience. This is what Ramaswamy and Ozcan (2013) defines as the theory of co-creation where companies use strategies and methods to include and maximise the potential and work together with their customers. Le et al. (2022) propose the thought that co-creation is a reference to customers’ behavioural, cognitive interactions and activities with the companies. Where the interactions and behaviours combined with the resources available convert into interest for all involved parties and stakeholders. As a SDL mindset is prominent and key to maintain the co-creational connection and sustain the cooperation between the parties.

Merz, Zarantonello and Grappi (2018) add that the value of co-creation has become more widely constructed as an observation of the market has concluded that the marketing world is becoming more service-centred. It relies on the fact that service has become a more fundamental basis of exchange than the product itself, and with the logic resting behind that, co-creation between multiple actors can lead to beneficiary results. As co-creation evolves the research and frameworks expands as well. And with the scale and new framework of the construct of customer co-creation value (CCCV) being created, companies can come to understand how to measure, scaling the gauges how the CCCV can contribute to a company’s co-creation efforts.

The framework rests on the assumption that SDL and value is always co-created through multiple actors, whereof it can be seen as either an individual consumption-based construct or as a collective organisational construct. Furthermore, CCCV is highlighted as a construct which is built as multidimensional where two major factors customer-owned resources and customer motivation extend into seven dimensions, scaling the customers reliability and validity for co-creational efforts. Additionally, CCCV is a rich concept which flourishes in revealing the level of positively related impact of brand co-creational value and willingness from actors and stakeholders, extending the range of tools to measure co-creation value (Mertz, Zarantonello and Grappi, 2018)

Additionally, as Tommasetti, Troisi and Vesci (2017) further express, there is a lack of frameworks for behavioural CCCV to be able to accurately measure actions in relation to theories such as SDL. Therefore, as Mertz, Zarantonello and Grappi (2018), Tommasetti, Troisi and Vesci have constructed a
conceptual model of measurement for CCCV. Which meets the needs of the service-centred marketing world, working to assess the behavioural aspects of CCCV. Thus, making conceptual models and researched frameworks complement each other to further create value following SDL and customers, specifically affirming the interaction between employees and customers (Tommasetti, Troisi and Vesci, 2017).

Tommasetti, Troisi and Vesci (2017) conceptual model is built equally to Mertz, Zarantonello and Grappi (2018) where procedures of a multi-phase protocol and multiple dimensions is the definite structure as to search and analyse variables to measure appropriate data of a multidimensional theory such as value co-creation with a perspective of SDL. Whereas the model is refined, to specifically identify the relevant variables and dimensions to create a better understanding of value co-creation activities. Furthermore, the conceptual framework is developed to devise assessments of the behavioural aspects of participation, and to make ease when categorising classifications for clarification of dimensions in the aspects of SDL and value co-creation (Tommasetti, Troisi and Vesci, 2017).

Baumann and Meunier-FitzHugh (2015) also comes to the conclusion that more research is required to generate a richer understanding and insight into what engagement in co-creation value process actually entails. They state that the construct of value co-creation in actuality is not the value fixed to selling but to engage and get the customer fixed, which in turn entail engagement and co-creators of value for the companies. But they also mention that the joint value for both employees and customers are important, and to affirm the customer value is a necessity. Which then leads back to how you should interact and initiate with the customer to create development in the relationships, and in turn enable the customers to become co-creators. Furthermore, they argue that value-creating activities could help facilitate the service experience and with the help of SDL reach a productive exchange of value for all stakeholders and actors.

2.2.1 Opportunities and Challenges of Co-Creation
Ma et al. (2017) insists on the statements made from previous studies that value co-creation benefits from the association customers’ and companies have through interaction and engagement, creating value in terms of increased profits and enhancements. With the intended help of SDL and its focused role to create and activate the value co-creation process and integration, opening up for opportunities and learnings in how to conduct an efficient co-creation practice. Bonamigo et al. (2020) formulate that after an extensive study, the
prerequisites for reaching value co-creation proceeds in the happening of resource integration and humans, intellectual, financial or technological. Where integration and engagement characterise co-creation and the mutual benefit for all involved actors. They also succeeded in identifying multiple facilitators and inhibitors of co-creation, whereas involvement, synergy, and effective resourcefulness were some facilitators. While lack of compatibility between parties, lack of knowledge in the field, lack of measurement and theoretical foundations were inhibitors of a revolutionary co-creation strategy.

Furthermore, Järvi, Kähkönen and Torvinen (2018) states that there are possibilities and occasions where value co-creation becomes value destruction or value co-destruction. Where they align themselves with Bonmigo et al. (2020) as an interactive process that happens when companies fail to obtain their effective resourcefulness. As parties involved fail to integrate with each other and misalign, thus creating the consequences of value co-destruction as the trust and communication falters. Furthermore, the reasoning behind faltering co-creation can come from the conditions set in the start as unrealistic expectations, unrealistic goals and unclear communication. However, they also state and make it clear that value co-creation and value co-destruction can coexist, where the handling and alignment of the involved parties play a huge role (Järvi, Kähkönen and Trovinen, 2018).

2.3 Theories Implemented on Family Firm Settings

2.3.1 Customer Engagement in Family-Owned Retail Businesses

Customer engagement, in the setting of family owned retail businesses, is positioned as a strong leverage to strengthen the strategies of the businesses. According to Bargoni et al. (2023), researchers emphasise how strongly family businesses are perceived as having a social component and how much of an impact this participation has on the areas in which it operates. Customers benefit from the firm's embodiment and humanization that family firms bring. It is important to capture and preserve a positive public view and image of the family firm since consumer behaviour and engagement with the family firm are influenced by brand perception. According to research by Botero and Litchfield-Moore (2021), it is crucial to maintain positive individual perceptions because they have an impact on both internal and external stakeholders.

According to Bargoni et al. (2023), strong connections and a trustworthy relationship between the family firm and the customer generate a reliable communication thread that influences how both sides communicate, engage,
and influence one another's decisions. Multi-sided platforms that expressly foster electronic word of mouth (eWOM) are a means for family firms and consumers to communicate with each other, providing an innovative model of business for both parties as the digital world grows. Even though the eWOM business model is not exclusive to digital platforms, "normal" WOM (word-of-mouth) is still a very effective instrument for two-way communication of expectations and needs when there is a good and established relationship.

However, Rajan, Salunkhe, and Kumar (2023) contend that there is still a lack of data on customer engagement that is essential to family businesses. In order to learn more about the moderators and drivers of consumer engagement, it is necessary to focus on customer interactions. However, because of their adaptable nature, family firms can change and adapt to meet the needs and demands of their customers. This creates opportunities for the customers' opinions to be heard and establishes and encourages customer engagement, interaction, and communication. They also exaggerate the significance of an overall objective of a company, which is to make a profit as the results of financial performance are reflected in the company's perceived performance.

### 2.3.2 Co Creation in Family-Owned Retail Businesses

As stated earlier, value co-creation correlates with organisational service systems and SDL to include both customers and stakeholders where the proposed goal is to “provide input into the value creating process...” (Gamble, Clinton and Diaz-Moriana, 2021, pp 648). Where the involved actors play a constructive role in conceptualising bringing forth a network to reach organisational goals. Which in turn means that family firms (FF) need to be in connection with their customers and stakeholders to build and preserve a process bringing value, heightening satisfaction and engagement. Pushing on the importance of creating interactions through value creating activities bringing transparency for the company and customers alike (Gamble, Clinton and Diaz-Moriana, 2021).

Kallmuenzer, Peters and Buhalis (2019) adds to the importance of open communication and transparency through activities that can engage their customers to participate in co-creational activities. Where the value gets recognized and materialised from the input given from the customers and stakeholders, because after all, without the given chance to influence and make a change through engaging, the co-creational process of bringing value, heightening satisfaction and engagement would not be accomplished. As Bergamaschi and Randerson (2016) agrees that the co-creational approach only brings new value in relation to the legitimacy to how FF engages in co-
creational activities, where collective and shared values are needed to construct what is projected in terms of goals.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

The authors will summarise the literature review and have produced a conceptual framework explaining how the topics relate to each other and how these themes can help answer the research questions.

As presented in the literature review and in the conceptual framework (see Figure 1), the research revolves around the numerous aspects of customer engagement and co-creation where its connection with FORB is the central content of this thesis. Barriers and facilitators of value creation (Bonamigo et al., 2020) for FORB are displayed to build and create an understanding of the field and our study. For businesses to bond and build relationships with their customers and in long term co-create value along with them, the need to apply well sought out and planned strategies of customer engagement and co-creation is imperative and crucial in their journey to succeed (Vargo and Lusch, 2017).

The development of these theories and strategies has allowed a new way for businesses to connect and build relationships with their customers, further enabling them to evolve their firms into innovative thinking, flexible and sustainable companies. As mentioned earlier in the thesis by Ramaswamy and Ozcan (2013), they express that the discovery and process in which the strategies have evolved, and allowed companies to devise and prosper new opportunities and ways to work with their customers, partners and other stakeholders, to in the end create value.
However, as Järvi, Kähkönen and Trovinen (2018) states that even though strategies which involve and all concerning actors are good and can lead to a progressive business. They also mention the barriers of the development and usage of these theories and strategies, introducing co-destruction which is the result of these theories flaws, and complications.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
3 Methodology

In this chapter a methodological insight will be provided by the authors into how the thesis was conducted, to get a better understanding on how the empirical findings was conducted and for the reader to follow the research process. The topics that will be explained are research approach, research strategy, research design, type of data, research method, operationalisation, sampling, data analysis, quality of research and lastly the ethical and sustainable considerations.

3.1 Research Approach

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019) state that a research approach refers to the method that a researcher employs to conduct their research. The two primary categories of research approaches are deductive and inductive approaches. A deductive approach entails utilising a theory or hypothesis as a guide for the research process, whereby the researcher begins with a specific theory and tests it against empirical evidence through data collection and analysis (see Figure 2). Whereas, an inductive approach, builds on first collecting the empirical evidence and afterwards develops theories by looking at patterns.

For this thesis, we have chosen a deductive approach that will be the most suitable for our research. Deductive approach with qualitative methods is not as common, but we find that with the use of existing theories it will be the most fitting approach for us. There are several advantages to using the deductive approach in qualitative research. First, it allows researchers to test pre-existing theories, such as “pattern matching”, which can provide a more rigorous and structured approach to qualitative research (Hyde, 2000). Another advantage of this is that it can help to increase the validity and reliability of qualitative research. By using a pre-existing theory or hypothesis as a starting point, the researcher is more likely to produce findings that are consistent with existing knowledge. This can help to increase the credibility of the research, as well as the generalizability of the findings. By using the frameworks in customer engagement and co-creation to measure our study, we will be able to implement the results and connect them to the frameworks presented in the literature, such as the cognitive, behavioural, social and emotional engagement, as well as the measure of value in co-creation. By utilising the deductive approach, we were able to use the organised framework for deciding themes for the coding process (Azungah, 2018).
Following shows Figure 2 of the process of the deductive approach inspired by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019) that we have had in mind when conducting this research.

3.2 Research Strategy

In this thesis, we have chosen to conduct a qualitative research method where we believe that this is the most relevant method for the purpose of this thesis, compared to a quantitative research method. For our area of research, where we are going to explore how companies work with co-creation and engagement strategies, a qualitative research case study will be the most sufficient in our opinion. As presented by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019) research strategy refers to the general plan or approaches that researchers use to conduct their research. Depending on the research method chosen, research strategies are structured differently.

3.2.1 Qualitative Research Strategy

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019) explain that there are many ways to approach qualitative research as the most common variety is to use an inductive approach to the theory progress, which is where you build a theory to develop or enrich an already existing theory. However, there are cases...
where qualitative research is approached with a deductive approach, testing existing theories by using qualitative methods, which is what we have decided on. Bell, Bryman and Harley (2022) add that qualitative tends to cover research concerning words and visual data rather than numbers, hence another reason as to why we chose to conduct a qualitative research method in connection with our research method which is semi-structured interviews. And since we have chosen to conduct our data collection using semi-structured interviews only, our technique and corresponding qualitative analytical procedure can be called mono method qualitative study (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

3.3 Research Design

3.3.1 Case Study

As well as qualitative is more indicative to inductive research so are case studies which is what we will be using in our study to collect data to explain our research questions even though we have a deductive approach. However, with case studies being so widely used, the widespread use has resulted in case studies being multipurpose and flexible depending on purpose and approach (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Our choice to use case study as our way to collect data lies in our interest in analysing how the company works specifically in-house, comparing staff to staff, asking similar questions but to different employees to get a wider perspective on the company’s different levels of employment.

This thesis is confined to be a single detailed case study, focusing on one specific SME that piqued our interest where the aim of this thesis is to discover how the chosen SME works with their customers to create value through engagement and relationships. This case study and SME was chosen to help create an understanding, to see if there are any bonds between theories and practices, and if not, to try and provide an overview and tools of improvement. Our choice to focus on one SME lies in the intimacy of the study and goal which is to provide an overview of key barriers and facilitators as well as showcase how the family firm can use co-creational strategies to amplify their customer engagement. Hence, by targeting one company we can provide concrete tips for their specific situation and work.

According to Patel and Davidson (2019) case studies are cases which examine concentrated smaller and delimited groups, where holistic perspective is normally used to get as big an overview as possible, to cover as much information as possible. Case studies thrive in studying processes and changes,
looking into information from different perspectives to get as broad a picture as possible of the actual situation. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019) adds that case studies are set out to understand the dynamics of what is being processed investigating the setting and context. And since we have only chosen to concentrate on one company our case study will be a single detailed case study as mentioned before, where we observe and analyse one single organisation.

3.4 Type of Data
Qualitative research involves collecting and analysing data to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. This essay discusses the use of primary and secondary data in a deductive qualitative research study that uses interviews and a case study. Primary data refers to data that is collected firsthand by the researcher for a specific research project. In qualitative research, primary data is often collected through methods such as interviews, focus groups, and case studies (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Case studies provide an in-depth investigation of a particular case (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2022). Secondary data, on the other hand, refers to data that has been collected by someone else for a different purpose but is used in a subsequent research study (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

The study utilises both primary and secondary data. The secondary data comprises relevant theoretical articles well selected to address the research topic and explore any potential gaps. Key words such as “customer engagement”, “co-creation”, “co-destruction”, “family firms” and “retail” have been used when searching for peer-reviewed articles. Other secondary data from literature on business research methods have been utilised. The primary data will be collected through semi-structured interviews by the research group in this case study. The primary data’s objective is to explore the research gap and develop an in-depth comprehension of the subject matter and strengthen the research questions validity.

3.5 Research Method
Our plan is to interview family business owners in the south of Sweden for qualitative semi-structured interviews. The reasoning for this is because of convenience and earlier contacts in the field, hence finding potential companies to conduct our interviews with gets easier, which in turn simplifies the process forward. We believe that the agile model of semi-structure will fit
our thesis for the field which we will study where open answers may be the case, and that it is a strategy that sits well for us as moderators.

3.5.1 Semi-structured Interviews

According to Bell, Bryman and Harley (2022), there are two main research strategies which are qualitative and quantitative methods where the authors must identify what method highlights and connects with their research. We, as mentioned above, have chosen a qualitative method for our thesis in which semi-structured interviews are a research strategy following qualitative research.

The research strategy, semi-structured interviews are a type of interviews originating from qualitative research, and they are defined as interviews with predetermined interview themes, commonly followed by some key questions in relation to the themes to help the researcher moderate each interview (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). And from the flexibility of semi-structured interviews, we find that the opportunities of this strategy will allow us to have more open discussions and room for comments, in which to probe and promote further answers and dialogues. We have from our literature review and our formulations of our research questions worked accordingly and composed our questions for our interviews by following what we consider to be our main topics and areas of interest. And the main topics and areas of interest in turn stand for the majority and weight of our key questions which compose our interview. With the charm of semi-structured interviews, we have also had room to create supplementary questions for expected answers, but where we also have left room to ask spontaneous questions on the spot.

3.6 Operationalisation

According to Patel and Davidson (2019) operationalisation involves when collecting intonation in a verbal or numeric form. In our case we have the interviews conducted to collect in a verbal form. To achieve this a guide was created to cover the specific head topics of our conceptual framework and what was needed to be collected in order to answer the research questions. An interview guide was designed to help the process of data collection and include mostly open-ended questions with prob questions if needed, to achieve as detailed answers as possible. As seen in the operationalisation table (see Table 1), it shows the layout of order and reasoning behind the guide. The interviews were conducted in Swedish in order to minimise misunderstandings from the interviewees part, the reasoning behind this is that it was the easiest way to conduct the interviews as both parties are Swedish speaking. The answers,
however, have later on been translated into English when conducting the analysis by the authors.

Table 1: Operationalisation Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concepts</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
<th>Reasoning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>As an introduction the authors explained about anonymity, the recording, and detailed information about the research purpose and what information we wanted to gather from the participants. Each participant got a consent form where they got to sign and keep a copy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about the company and interviewee</td>
<td>2-7</td>
<td>In order to get a better understanding about the company and the interviewee, questions were asked to know their background in the company and in their own words describe the business and their roles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Interaction</td>
<td>8-11</td>
<td>As integration and interaction of the customer is a big part of the relationship and communication, questions were asked in which part they involve their customers and why. Also, how they see the behaviour of the customer in the different interactions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Engagement</td>
<td>12-14</td>
<td>With these questions the respondents got to answer how they perceive the engagement from the customers in general, for us to easier analyse how each participant looks at engagement. Lastly, questions about the information collection and the behaviour to satisfy our need for answer on the cognitive, emotional and behaviour engagement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media Communication and Engagement</td>
<td>15-16</td>
<td>To get an understanding of how the company uses their social media to communicate with their customers, the authors asked how they see the engagement from the customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-Creation</td>
<td>17-20</td>
<td>As authors we wanted to know how they integrate the customers in the choices that they make, and to give examples where they use co-creation strategies and what advantages the respondents perceive with the communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Owned Business</td>
<td>21-22</td>
<td>As family owned business is an essential part of our study, the authors asked questions about how customers perceive them as a business and if they</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
notice a reputation and pressure to act a specific way.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Closure</th>
<th>23-24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The authors thanked for the participation in the interview. Asked if the interviewee had any questions or wanted to add any information, and the authors asked for consent if they could contact afterwards if further questions will be needed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.7 Sampling

A non-probability sampling is the method most appropriate for this study to generalise the answers to our research questions. This sampling is described by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019) as the range of different techniques to select the samples for the research. Rich and deep information about the study will be provided by the sample to explore and gain theoretical insights. Examples of non-probability sampling techniques are purposive sampling, snowball sampling and convenience sampling.

#### 3.7.1 Purposive Sampling

According to Bell, Bryman and Harley (2022) a purposive sampling is when the sample is chosen in a purposive and strategic manner, that the participants are relevant to the research being conducted. In sampling for our research, we have had the research goal in mind, and selected a priori purposive sample, where the criteria of the selected participants are decided early on in the process.

To ensure the selection of an appropriate sample, we adopted a purposive sampling strategy. Specifically, we selected a company that we have direct contact with and, which allowed us to easily obtain the number of interviews required to answer our research questions. The company selected, works closely with their customers and involves them considerably in the process of business strategies. For the purpose of obtaining a comprehensive and rich understanding of the company's operations and customer engagement practices, we conducted five semi-structured interviews with employees from diverse levels and departments of the company. Our sample included participants with various roles, such as administrators, owners, and managers with responsibility over the cafe, store, and other areas of the company. The criteria used for selecting the participants are presented in Table 2.
Table 2: Criteria for Choosing our Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria for Choosing our Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The selection of the company must adhere to our definition of a family firm, given the existence of multiple definitions of such enterprises.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The chosen company should be situated in the southern region of Sweden, where the targeted gap is located. Additionally, it is necessary that the company possesses autonomy over its production processes and business operations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The inclusion criteria specify that the company has less than 200 employees, which corresponds to the SME category. However, a minimum of 5 employees must be available for interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The participants selected for the study must perform diverse roles and duties within the company, while also having some level of interaction with customers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.8 Data Analysis

One of the most used analysis methods used in qualitative research is thematic analysis. With this type of analysis, the approach is to search for themes or patterns that occur in the data set. To conduct further analysis related to the research questions. It is a systematic way as it provides a logical and orderly way to analyse the data. With this type of analysis, we can draw and verify the conclusions of the themes and patterns that we find (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). The themes we will look for are linked to the existing theories, as we use a deductive approach. Inspired by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019); and Bell, Bryman and Harley (2022) we will use a combination of their guides in the procedure of analysing our collected empirical data.

Furthermore, a description of the thematic analysis guide is presented in Figure 3. The first step will be after the data are collected, we become familiar with our data set as the procedure of transcribing of the interviews conducted begins. Following this, the second step involves coding the data with the help of the operationalisation table (see Table 1) that highlights key interview questions and their corresponding concepts. Where Customer Engagement are
(CE); cognitive (CEc); behavioural (CEb); emotional (CEe); social (CEs); and Co-creation (CC). These codes are as Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019) describe them ‘a priori’ codes, as they are obtained from existing literature and theory. Next step in coding is to look at each participant's answer to code their responses. The coding of the data could change as prior to the decided coding of the analysing, but as the process goes on, new discoveries on codes that will help answer the research questions and address our research objectives, could appear. The third step of the analysis involves identifying patterns and themes within the coded data and examining relationships between them. Afterwards, the fourth step is focused on refining the themes and rearrange the data accordingly to the development found in the previous step. Additionally, also check if the themes are supported by enough data and to see if some themes are overlapping each other and can be emerged this way. The final step involves supervising the overall result of the analysis and ensuring that all the themes are identified and are adequately supported.

Figure 3: *Thematic Analysis* (Inspired by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019, pp 652-658; Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2022, pp 531)
3.9 Quality of Research

The quality of data is defined with the validity and reliability of the study. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019) consistency and replicate earlier study designs and find likely results, we are talking about reliability. The validity is when the measures are appropriate for the analysis and looking for generalisability. It is important to have a quality control of the research since the trustworthiness, credibility, ethics, dependability, transferability and reflexivity are looked at. To ensure the quality of research we have taken into consideration biases and risks and taken action to prevent these, also to give each participant a consent form with the purpose of the research and what kind of rights they have to their own primary data that they provide us with.

3.9.1 Reliability of Qualitative Research

To establish the internal reliability, two researchers will analyse the data and evaluate their interpretations to ensure agreement and consistency, as recommended by Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2022). Furthermore, to achieve reliability we will do constant data comparison and verify the information and data collected. To minimise the impact of errors and biases in the results, we will work diligently to reduce any potential sources of bias in our data collection and analysis process.

3.9.2 Validity of Qualitative Research

In reaching the validity, we employed both internal and external validation techniques, in order to measure what we intend to measure. Bell, Bryman and Harley (2022) explain that internal validation means selecting appropriate theoretical ideas that will align with the perspective of the respondents. The external validation, on the other hand, is when the generalisation of the finding in the environment. In addition to this, we adopted the approach of participant validation, as described by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019), when conducting our qualitative research. Through this, we provided participants with the opportunity to review and confirm its accuracy of the research data by sharing the interview transcripts from their own interview, if they wish so. Participants were given the option to comment on or correct the data to ensure its validity.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethical consideration while conducting our research is of high importance and by that, we will take into consideration the importance of an ethical approach with utmost seriousness. In accordance with Swedish laws regarding confidentiality and GDPR, we will actively work to align our work and
research. With the help of “the code of ethics” produced by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019, pp 254), we will take precautions following the principles and ethical rationales, using a deontological view of rules. Moreover, this will help us conduct our research in the way it is intended, helping us avoid poor practice and handling of information. In addition, we will work ahead by informing our participants, using forms and other tools to ease in and be as transparent to our participants as possible. Furthermore, before conducting our gathering of information, we will research our topic at large to be able to prepare as relevant questions as possible.

To begin with, we will inform the participants in advance about our purpose of the thesis and explain what the material will be used for. To continue, we will request the participants to fill out and agree on forms in the matter of their consent before any interview starts and information gets relayed. In addition, with the forms, we will make sure to guarantee the participants that their participation is voluntary, and that they at any time can withdraw from the interview and their statements made. Consequently, we will also assure the participants of their anonymity during all stages of the thesis. Continually, the participants will be informed of how we plan to store and use the information, stressing that the information gathered will only be used for research purposes only. Additionally, making sure that it will not be tampered with, meaning that it will be true and accurate from the official results.

3.11 Sustainable Considerations

As mentioned earlier throughout the thesis paper, sustainability is a very important factor and topic, and we will of course have and work with sustainable approaches throughout the degree project. Sustainability is discussed among all businesses and affects every aspect and makes a huge difference in how businesses act and how they conduct their business.

We will also conduct our thesis paper according to the other aspects of sustainability as mentioned earlier in the paper, where we will not only focus on the environmental aspect but also economic and social aspects of sustainability. With an economic perspective of seeing how well the company can benefit from our research to gain further knowledge and strategies to cultivate more sales and awareness without spending their own resources. And from a social perspective, where we aim to work with good communication and intentions, where we will stress a good environment to work in. Where we as researchers will strive to create value, respect and freedom for our participants working to be as transparent and clear as possible.
4 Empirical findings

In this chapter, the empirical findings collected from the semi-structured interviews will be presented. It will follow the structure of the operationalisation table and interview guide in order to cover all the areas discussed. The themes that follow are customer interaction, social media communication, co-creation, customer engagement and lastly family owned business.

4.1 Respondents

The empirical findings are related to question 2-7 in the interview guide (see Appendix A and B), to get to know the company and the respondents. As all the respondents wanted to stay anonymous, we will therefore present them with fake names that can be found in Table 3 below with information of how the interviews were conducted. As well as the company wanting to stay anonymous, we will refer to it as Company X.

Table 3: List of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Date of interview / Time</th>
<th>Place of interview</th>
<th>Length of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sven</td>
<td>Co-Owner</td>
<td>April 28th, 2023, 11:00</td>
<td>On site at the company</td>
<td>39 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ida</td>
<td>Worker</td>
<td>April 28th, 2023, 11:45</td>
<td>On site at the company</td>
<td>23 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Worker</td>
<td>May 5th, 2023, 08:00</td>
<td>On messenger/zoom</td>
<td>31 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elsa</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>May 5th, 2023, 17:30</td>
<td>On messenger/zoom</td>
<td>27 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristoffer</td>
<td>Co-Owner</td>
<td>May 8th, 2023, 07:30</td>
<td>Phone call</td>
<td>35 min</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Company X is a SME with approximately 60 employees, where only a handful are permanent employees active throughout the whole year. The company works in seasons as their products in turn are dependent on weather conditions, but they strive to be functional all year around by developing new products.
The company is divided into segments as café, stores and other areas of retail and service. The company itself started back in the 1950’s with selling and retail in business-to-business, and throughout the year started to sell to customers directly. But it was not until 2016 that they expanded the company into a destination with a store, café and other areas of retail.

4.1.1 Respondent Sven
In the first interview with Sven, we find that he is a co-owner and son to the man who started the company from the beginning. He is responsible for the creative thinking, and cultivation as well as bigger parts of the business entailing tasks commonly connected with being co-owner of a business.

4.1.2 Respondent Ida
The interview with Ida was conducted, where we find that respondent B started working at the company by selling their own produced products at the square in town. In 2019, she started at the store and cafe to sell. Her position in the company is mainly sales, specifically customer service and the store, but jumps in where she is needed. If the supervisor is not there, she assists to manage the sales, it is important for her position to be flexible and be on duty.

4.1.3 Respondent Anna
Anna was born into the company being one of the new co-owners' daughters, and she started working at the company at a young age, applying for summer jobs. And she has since worked there continuously, with a small break once. Her role in the company is to care for the store and cafe, working as a manager in the warm seasons, and during winter she is working with maintenance and wine production.

4.1.4 Respondent Elsa
In the fourth interview we meet Elsa, who is the wife of Sven, and she has married into the company. She has been working in the company a long time on and off, and actively been working since last year. Her main role in the company is scheduling, and the workers making sure everyone is ok and trained. Elsa also drives the creativity and works as supply manager stocking the store to elevate the destination.

4.1.5 Respondent Kristoffer
In the last interview with Kristoffer we get to meet the other co-owner and son of the man who started the company from the beginning. He on the other hand compared to Sven is responsible for the logistical things as he works with
accounting and economics, working informative with good communication between the company and wholesalers.

4.2 Customer Interaction

Upon examining the interview responses from questions 8-11 concerning customer interaction, it is evident that the company's approach to customer interaction and integration varies across the respondents. According to Anna, who works in the company's main destination which contains the café and store, they have the most direct customer contact with those visiting the store, as well as those who buy their products from stalls located around the area. When customers visit the store, the salesperson initiates the first contact. Additionally, Elsa further explained that the company also integrates and interacts with customers online.

Despite working in different areas of the company, the respondents noted some similarities in customer behaviour. When asked the question if they can see differences, Ida mentioned that age plays a crucial role in how customers behave, with some being more curious and willing to engage, while others are not. The older generation is more interested in discussing local products such as vegetables and planting, while families with children tend to focus on the food served and products available in-store. Respondent Anna (2023) noted that “the best response is that they come back”, which shows their loyalty and appreciation for the company's services. Just by looking at the remarks about behaviour, you can detect positive and negative aspects from comments. However, negative behaviour is more commonly highlighted in comments and reviews. Elsa and Ida both use the same example when discussing this matter. The example was that they have to charge for water and have good reason for this that they explain each time, it has unfortunately become a vicious spiral behind that topic that is frequently discussed by customers in reviews and comments.

The respondents noted that locally produced products are highly appreciated and perceived positively by customers. The fact that they have self-produced products available is what distinguishes the location and the business itself. The company's collaborations with other locally produced products are also recognized and valued by the customers. Elsa notes that producing one's products and owning a business will become more significant over time since customers are becoming less interested in semi-finished products and products made from China. Many customers choose to shop at the company precisely because they appreciate locally produced and manufactured products. Sven
notes that they use the family history as a way to storytell on their websites but also talks about it in person with the customer at site. By including a story of how they make some of the products and see the production of it.

4.3 Customer Engagement

In summarising the responses to questions 12-14 regarding customer engagement, it is evident that involving the customer in the company is viewed positively by all interviewees. Customers are ultimately the ones who purchase the products or services and can provide valuable feedback on their needs and preferences. However, it can be challenging to balance the ideas and desires of the workers in the company with those of the customers, especially when selecting new products or ranges. It is crucial to listen to customers to understand their needs and ensure that the company's products are profitable and meet customer expectations. As Kristoffer (2023) said “if no one wants your products, it is not something that you sell”.

Sven and Elsa mentioned that they aim to provide a complete shopping experience for customers, offering everything needed for a whole meal in one location. Collaborations with local companies were also noted as a way to offer a broader range of products to customers. While customers are willing to provide feedback, some are more active and vocal than others. Kristoffer noted that customers are more willing to provide input in person rather than online, and many customers prefer personal and specific responses rather than general ones. In the past, there has not been sufficient effort put into asking customers questions on social media platforms; instead, more customers have asked the employees in-person or online.

All respondents generally viewed the information available to customers online as satisfactory, although there were some concerns about the clarity of the information provided and the need for improvement in communication. The website provides information about the products, business and opening hours, while social media platforms often announce different opening hours based on the season and location it applies to. However, some customers have experienced confusion due to inaccurate or incomplete information, as there have been times when customers show up and it is not open. In the store and café, salespersons provide additional information to customers about the products, including tips on how to care for plants and suggestions for product combinations. Otherwise, there are signs with information about the products in-store. Respondents agreed that improving communication and providing clear and accurate information online could enhance customer engagement.
Finally, respondents acknowledged that customer engagement varies depending on the season and that it can be challenging to keep all communication platforms updated. As the business is very season based, the difference of engagement also changes with this, Ida and Anna took up an example that in the summer a more high-level interaction occurred, and the environment of the outdoors affected the emotional engagement and response of the customer. Nevertheless, the interviewees expressed a shared goal to improve customer engagement by providing clear and accurate information, making it easier for more customers to find their way to the company.

4.4 Social Media Communication and Engagement

To gain a comprehensive understanding of how social media is utilised by the business, respondents were asked questions 15 and 16 from the interview guide regarding their use of social media to communicate with their customers. Sven, the individual responsible for managing the Facebook and Instagram accounts, said that these accounts have been active since the company rebranded in 2016. The objective is to post content 3-4 times per week; however, determining the content that appeals to and stimulates customers is challenging. Additionally, Sven further states that it is difficult to identify engaging content consistently, as monotony may seem off-putting for the customer. Previously, the company employed traditional marketing techniques such as local newspaper advertisements; however, this strategy has proven ineffective due to generation-dependent preferences, making it challenging to adapt.

A common pattern discussed by all respondents was the need to improve communication and information spreading on their platforms. Customer communication typically occurs via comments or direct messages; however, the respondents received feedback indicating their response time was suboptimal, with multiple customer messages needing to be sent before receiving a reply. Sven claims that it is making it difficult to prioritise responding to customer inquiries. “It is so that you do not have time all the time as there is a lot to focus on other things besides sitting with the administration.” (Sven, 2023). On the other hand, customer feedback is appreciated as it informs the company of areas that require improvement to prevent a recurrence. Elsa suggests investigating other communication approaches such as LinkedIn, which can increase engagement and commitment from both companies and customers.
For major events, Facebook is the primary platform of communication where customers can obtain all necessary event information in one location. This approach promotes customer engagement and simplifies information dissemination. An example brought up by Anna was an event that took place in April 2023, where Facebook facilitated the promotion of the event. Anna thought it went very well, resulting in the easiness of spreading events and reaching the customer. Kristoffer and Anna noted that for a small amount of money, it is a flexible way to get noticed on social media, which could attract customers and increase engagement. This can be verified by analysing statistics, even though the analytics may be challenging to interpret, it may be a good way to reach more people. However, Kristoffer mentions that this increase may be observed physically by face-to-face engagement in the form of more people visiting the location and getting involved in the company. The respondents also disclosed the use of polls to co-create with customers and evaluate their preferences. This approach has received positive feedback and is perceived as engaging, appreciated, and enjoyable by customers as they participate in the development of new products or services.

4.5 Co-Creation

As we examine the interview responses through 17-20 regarding co-creation, the influence in which the customers have when communicating with the company is widely sought out as a positive thing as all respondents see advantages with communication being held with their customers. As recalled by the majority of the respondents, the positive advantages of communicating and co-creating with the customers come from the mood and consequences of interacting with the customers. They highlight the importance of needs and demands, listening to what the customer’s request and to develop and expand the assortment. However, as Kristoffer states, the company has to be careful as to when developing further and to what feedback the customers give since it may not always be in the company’s best interest.

Through the communication tools provided by social media the respondents also gave answers in which way comments and likes have affected the overall assortments. Where some of them state that they keep tabs on the statistics and numbers to try and get an understanding of what triggers high activity amongst their customers. They do agree that the statistics and numbers are easy to produce but to understand and analyse is harder as patterns and responses can differentiate, hence immediate action in assortments are harder to implement, but that they stress flexibility.
When being asked about concrete events or situations where development or ideas has originated from customer interaction the general answer was that nothing pronounced has happened in the history that has directly affected the assortment. However, in connection with communication and social tools, the feedback fed from the customers has, as Sven states, helped them work with seasonal comments and negatives to further improve their assortment. And as Kristoffer also state that they try to work and take into account every need, but difficulties and hindrances limit their effectiveness in some areas. Yet, the ideas and tips from the customer drives the company fourth as they listen and take in as much feedback as possible. As both Ida and Elsa mentioned that they get inspired by talks and inquiries made by customers, and new additions, changes have been made to accommodate as much as possible. Gathering this information however has not been made through studies, quoted by the majority of the respondents but through word of mouth interacting and approaching the customers of the destination, hence the immediate impact if the new implementations work or not is according to them hard to measure and define.

4.6 Family Owned Business

Now to get a bigger picture of what we believe separate smaller SME businesses we asked the respondents questions regarding how the local interaction and size combined with rumours and possibilities as a family firm setting matters in the way they engage and work with their customers. The respondents note that since they are a family driven business, the customers feel a bigger understanding, positiveness and a stronger bond, where they express the feeling of a more open relationship where appreciation is more noticed. Ida states that the power of being a local company with products being locally grown in house is an advantage. Where Elsa also adds that semi-manufactures are not as appreciated in this day and age as society throughout the years has become more environmentally dependent and caring. They also note that through creating relationships they create a setting which is positive to return to, and with it being a family business, usually the same people work, and the same people come, which also makes it easier to create relationships.

As reputation comes, there are split views as some act as brand ambassadors thinking about image and how they conduct themselves, but some do not mind it as they separate work and company from private life. As Anna states, when she does not have the company clothes on, she does not consider herself as a representative and henceforth she is her own private person. But Sven pushes on the fact that he believes that you should be real all the time, whether you
work or not, putting no stress in behaving differently depending on where he is or if he works or not. But as a general consensus, rumours and reputation is not something that matters as thoughts like that can be seen as more traditional, or an issue for a bigger company.

As it is a family firm the business decisions and lines in which they choose to act can be a little different as new possibilities and hindrances are prominent. On the one hand the respondents feel that they have room and opportunities for possibilities and changes, where change and voicing of opinions to better the company is easy. But they also state that hindrances such as dynamics and relationships in such an intimate environment can slow down certain changes as the openness also opens up for more criticism. But the respondents also mention that for a company that size, the flexibility and ability to change is easy where the contact and discussions can be voiced fast.
5 Analysis

In this chapter the authors will present an analysis of the collected empirical data and draw connections with previous theories presented in the literature review. The chapter are divided into the same themes as the operationalisation table and the primary data from the empirical findings. The structure of themes are as follows: customer interaction, social media communication, co-creation, customer engagement and family owned business.

5.1 Customer Interaction

Bowden (2009) and Vivek, Beatty and Morgan (2012) state that interaction with the brand as customers is a crucial aspect to understand as a company. We can see that the empirical findings express that customers’ investments of interaction reflect their level of engagement. Highly engaged customers demonstrate a willingness to invest significant time, effort and thought in their brand interactions. This aligns with the concept proposed by Harrigan et al. (2018), who argues that engagement levels can impact variables such as customer loyalty and connection with the brand. The findings support the notion that higher levels of engagement and interaction lead to positive outcomes, as highly engaged customers exhibit a stronger connection to the brand.

Storytelling emerges as a powerful tool for fostering emotional attachments and deep connections with customers. The empirical findings indicate that stories can effectively communicate meaning, convey significance, and evoke emotions, leading to a strong connection between customers and company. This supports the theoretical perspective put forth by Kemp et al. (2021) regarding the role of storytelling in fostering engagement. By incorporating storytelling into their marketing strategies bands can create narratives that resonate with customers, obtaining emotional responses and establishing long-lasting relationships. Sven (2023) discussed that they use the family history to engage and interact with the customers, to get a deeper connection with the products and the company.

The empirical data also highlight the impact of customer preferences for locally produced products. Respondents consistently mentioned the positive redemption and appreciation of locally produced goods by customers. This aligns with consumer trends favouring sustainability, supporting local businesses, and seeking authentic and high-quality products. Hollebeek and Chen (2014) supports these findings, as it emphasises the importance of...
aligning brand offerings with customers preferences. By focusing on locally produced products and collaborating with local producers, the company can cater to enhance engagement and differentiate themselves in the market. However, it is important to address negative aspects of customer behaviour and concerns. The example of charging for water, which resulted in negative discussions among customers (Elsa and Ida, 2023), demonstrated the need for communication and addressing customer concerns. Brand managers should proactively address such concerns and ensure clear and effective communication with customers to prevent negative perceptions and foster positive engagement. As Sven (2023) mentioned, it is hard to structure the time for administrative work, when there are so many more things to have in mind.

5.2 Customer Engagement

From the empirical findings of customer engagement, the interviewees expressed a positive view of involving customers in the company. We can see that the company is aware of the engagement but does not put effort into acknowledging it and using it. The statement highlights and aligns with Lim et al.'s (2022) description of the interconnectedness of cognitive, behavioural, and emotional engagement and their impact on customers' intention to repurchase or seek information about a brand or product. According to Lim et al. (2022), cognitive engagement refers to the mental processes and thoughts associated with customer engagement. The empirical findings support this notion by providing insights into how customers actively seek information and engage in cognitive processes. Specifically, when discussing information-seeking behaviours, the respondents mentioned that customers often inquire about tips and alternatives when buying plants. This aligns with Cheung et al.'s (2021) description of cognitive engagement as involving the exchange of information and generating suggestions for improvement.

The empirical findings also shed light on a potential limitation in stimulating cognitive engagement. It was noted that the desired information, such as tips and alternatives, is not always readily available on the company's website or social media platforms. This can present a challenge in fostering cognitive engagement among customers. As Lim et al. (2022) describe that when information is lacking or difficult to find, it hinders customers' ability to actively engage in collecting and processing information during brand interactions. This finding highlights the importance for the company to improve their updates of information and make it easily accessible to customers. Furthermore, the empirical findings acknowledged the impact of seasonality on customer engagement. Different seasons can lead to variations
in customer engagement levels. For instance, the outdoor environment in the summer was mentioned as influencing emotional engagement and customer response. Keeping all communication platforms updated was identified as a challenge due to these seasonal variations.

The need for improved information updates becomes evident from the empirical findings, which indicate instances of confusion and misunderstanding among customers. The respondents acknowledged that inaccurate or incomplete information has led to customer dissatisfaction or misinformed decisions. This signifies a potential gap in the company's communication strategy, as unclear or inconsistent information can hinder cognitive engagement and negatively impact the overall customer experience. The company should prioritise enhancing their communication channels and ensuring that accurate and comprehensive information is available across their website and social media platforms. By providing the desired information, such as tips and alternatives, customers can engage more effectively in cognitive processes, leading to better-informed decisions and a more satisfying brand experience. Moreover, aligning the information provided on different platforms can help eliminate confusion and promote consistent engagement.

The findings also indicate the influence of emotional engagement on cognitive engagement. When customers have a positive emotional response to a brand or product, they are more likely to be inspired to seek further information (Lim et al., 2022). This emotional connection creates a favourable mindset that motivates customers to actively engage in cognitive processes such as researching and gathering information. This is supported by what Elsa and Anna (2023) said in the empirical findings. For managers, this highlights the importance of cultivating positive emotions and building emotional connections with customers. By creating experiences such as being a part of the process of production and learning how the products are made.

Bowden et al. (2017) state that when customers actively participate in activities and events that are closely related to a brand or product, their level of behavioural engagement increases. This heightened behavioural engagement, in turn, has the potential to enhance emotional engagement. By this, customers develop a stronger sense of connection and passion. The empirical findings correlate with this as the example that Anna (2023) took up of events happening or as Sven (2023) stated with the whole experience of seeing the production of some of the products. These findings should focus on providing opportunities for customers to actively engage and participate in events or activities that are brand related. By facilitating such engagements, brands can foster emotional connections, leading to increased loyalty and
positive word of mouth communication. Understanding and taking advantage of the cooperation between these dimensions are essential for brand managers to create meaningful and engaging experiences that drive customer satisfaction, loyalty, and ultimately, success of the business.

5.3 Social Media Communication and Engagement

As mentioned above the engagement on social media has been stated by empirical findings, the respondents expressed the need to improve communication and information spreading on their social media platforms. It sheds a light on how the business utilises social media platforms to communicate with customers. We can see that the company poses a challenge to understand and comprehend the knowledge to fully create content that satiates and stimulates their customers to engage. This aligns with what Vohra and Bhardwaj (2019) describe, who empathise with the need for engaging, relevant and valuable content on social media platforms. As previously mentioned, the need for time management and structure are needed even for the social media and administrative section. Vohra and Bhardwaj (2019) further discuss how social media presence can affect a brand’s reputation. It is essential for brands to understand their target audience, tailor content accordingly, and be responsive to customer feedback. Building trust and creating long-term relationships with customers through personal engagement online is crucial (Bowden et al., 2017).

Measuring social media engagement through various metrics is important for gaining insights into customer preferences and behaviours (Dolan et al., 2019). While the respondents mention the challenges of interpretive analytics, they acknowledge the potential benefits of reaching a wider audience and increasing engagement. Kristoffer (2023) notes the potential physical impact of social media, as more people visit the location and engage with the company. These findings emphasise the need to analyse metrics to understand the effectiveness of engagement strategies and their impact on customer behaviour.

5.4 Co-Creation

Now from the answers which are provided in the empirical chapter we can see that the company is aware of the value that creating relationships with their customers have, and that they highly seek good communication with their customers, valuing their opinions and feedback for improvements and growth. The importance of catering to the customers’ needs and demands are
prominent, and the company is trying as much as they can, however as Kristoffer stated, too much canter can derail the company and its own road to success. And with the insight from Ramaswamy and Ozcan (2013) personalising the customer experience by involvement and to reach the personal level of customer experience to obtain the potential and added value that comes with it. We can see that the company itself is on the right path of business and focuses on important aspects of today's B2C marketing.

We can also see in connection with Le et al. (2022) who propose the idea of being resourceful, converting resources and energy into interest for all parties involved, which the company tries to achieve by communication and actions to accommodate the customers’ needs and demands. That the company attempts to be as flexible and open to changes as possible to meet the ever-changing needs and demands of their customers. But where Kristoffer’s (2023) statement is crucial in how they work forward with the reasoning laid by Järvi, Kähkönen and Torvinen (2018) that co-creation can lead to co-destruction. And if the parties misunderstand or read each other wrong and fail to integrate with each other the consequences can lead to mistrust and faltering communication which would be devastating in today's retail environment. Which stresses the fact and importance for the company to do a thorough analysis before taking drastic actions.

As Merz, Zarantonello and Grappi (2018) also add that value co-creation is becoming a more widely used instrument of observation, the respondents mentions that they try to monitor and keep tabs on the statistics and numbers they gather through customer interactions and engagement. Where they however state that they lack the tools or knowledge to analyse and understand the happenings. Which further stresses the importance of conducting studies, using methods and instruments to gather information about their customers.

From this data we believe that the company has some aspects right and the right theoretical thinking, but where we believe that the company lacks the methods and structured strategies to completely successfully reach the potential which co-creation has. Where we believe that further work and involvement, with studies, and concrete information gathering would be necessary to completely understand and involve their customers into an equilateral co-creation process. And Ma et al. (2017) and Bonamigo et al. (2020) support the need of an extensive study to open up the opportunities and learnings to conduct an efficient co-creational practice. Where methods and frameworks such as Merz, Zarantonello and Grappi (2018) and Tommasetti, Troisi and Vesci (2017), CCCV and multiphase protocols would be a proposed tool. But where the company need to focus on the right area which is not the
products but the producing of feelings, mood and relationships to further produce value from engagement and co-creation, as supported from Baumann and Meunier-FitzHugh (2015) who stress the importance of understanding what research generate what understanding to enable the customers to become co-creators.

5.5 Family Owned Business

For the perception of family owned businesses and how the company works with co-creation and customer engagement in the setting of being family owned. We can see from the answers that the respondents value their position as a local company highly as it presents the possibilities to create close relationships with their customers, building up a bigger understanding, positiveness and stronger bonds leading to more open and transparent relationships. Where the respondents argue for the local factor being an advantage and power, especially since according to Elsa (2023) semi-manufactures are not as appreciated as society changes into more environmentally friendly. Which is in alignment with Bargoni et al. (2023) who state that family businesses are recognized as a component in the society as a strong local participant in the area in which it exists. Where they also express that strong connection and transparent relationships with good communication can foster and influence how the sides interact and value each other.

Botero and Litchfield-Moore (2021) claim that in connection with the business presence, it is crucial for the individual perception to be maintained properly as they can have an impact on both internal and external stakeholders. But whereas the respondents do not align to this logic as the majority of the respondents differentiates their status, role and part in the company separately from their private life, where they put little emphasis on rumours and image.

As both the respondents and Rajan, Salunkhe, and Kumar (2023) states, the advantages of a family firm and the size of the company enables them to work and be flexible to meet the needs and demands. As opportunities for change and new ideas are more open and require less steps in decision making. Which makes the opportunity for customers' opinions to be heard easier and more relevant as it can establish and build more encouragement for engagement and interaction from the customers, which is something that the company wants. But as Gamble, Clinton and Diaz-Moriana (2021) state, it is up to every involved stakeholder to play its constructive role to bring forth value, both company and customer. Where the respondents have the responsibility to open
up for criticism and be transparent. As Kallmuenzer, Peters and Buhalis (2019) support the importance of open communication and transparency to the co-creational process to bring value in the end for all parties involved.

From this information, we in our opinion believe that the company is applying many relevant and good practices to uphold itself as a family business, where they work with the key components to building relationships, focusing on local growth and the strengths maintained in the location. However, we do consider Botero and Litchfield-Moore (2021) claim to how the presence should be maintained as the respondents, whether or not they are brand ambassadors or directly connected to the brand should uphold a rather professional image. But rather than not, we believe that the openness and transparency work should be continued, and as a more structured and understanding co-creational process takes place the company will be able to utilise all the advantages they have as a local and small SME family business.
6 Conclusion

This chapter presents the thesis’ conclusion by addressing the research questions. Additionally, the section delves into managerial implications of the study. The chapter concludes by outlining the study’s limitations and presenting the author’s suggestions for future research.

6.1 Answering The Research Questions

The purpose of this conclusion is in direct connection with the purpose of this research which is to present what co-creational strategies family-owned retail businesses in Sweden can use to amplify their engagement. This is obtained from the information and analysis found from the empirical and analytical chapters where we find that our study has grounds to explain our research question:

*What co-creation strategy can family-owned retail businesses in Sweden use to amplify customer engagement?*

As presented throughout in the analysis chapter, we as authors with connection with our empirical research and theories, have introduced how the company can work and make use of relevant frameworks and strategies to amplify their position and approach to co-creation. Showing that the company is aware of the strategies and actions needed to be a successful company, but that they lack the experience, knowledge and right methods. And through our findings, we have presented ways, examples and concrete methods for them to further be able to work with their customers to build and amplify their customer engagement through co-creational strategies. The paper also provide answers to our sub research questions which is:

*What are the key barriers and facilitators of the use of co-creation strategy?*

Where the findings conclude that the emphasis on selling relations and connections with the local community is a stronger focus and key facilitator than selling the products themselves. Where the company must build on the mood and feelings of their customers to generate more engagement to get co-creational value for all parties involved. And for the company to succeed, the findings present the need to be transparent and open, as critical facilitators of reaching out and maintaining good customer relationships relies on good communication. Where responsiveness and resourcefulness from good
customer interactions support the equilateral co-creation process, to bring forth co-creational value for all involved parties.

But the findings also highlight barriers such as bad structure, bad readings and misunderstandings or disknowledge of how to interact and communicate. Which showcases the need for the company to do an extensive study before conducting co-creational practice to avoid co-destruction. Throughout this study, we have developed a conceptual framework to further aid in how we perceive that all themes can further help the company get a clearer picture of how to work and how all parties and factors are connected.

6.2 Implications

6.2.1 Managerial Implications

The thesis will provide managerial insights into leveraging customer relationships and generating added value by employing co-creation and customer engagement strategies. This knowledge is particularly relevant for a family-owned retail business, as it equips them with the necessary understanding and tools to enhance customer engagement and foster loyalty through co-creation. The objective of this research is to transform the company's mindset and refine their customer interaction strategies, focusing on key co-creation factors as a means to gain valuable insights.

By conducting this study, the authors anticipate uncovering fresh perspectives on co-creation within the company, including strategies for effectively measuring and reducing potential misunderstandings. Furthermore, it explores how the company can develop strategies to address structural and planning issues. Additionally, this research contributes to bridging the gap between theoretical concepts and practical implementation. The chosen case study holds significance as it highlights the importance for family-owned businesses to adopt innovative co-creation strategies to collaborate with customers in novel ways. It will showcase the benefits and challenges associated with co-creation in a real-life context, highlighting the unique opportunities.
7 Limitations and Suggestions for future research

In order to enhance the research and address the research questions effectively, certain limitations have been acknowledged. Firstly, this thesis puts its focus on the retail sector, specifically from a case study companies’ perspective on their B2C target, which limits it. For future research the gap is that more research can be conducted where a multiple case study and where more respondents, subjects and information can be gathered. This would provide a broader perspective on co-creation and customer engagement strategies. By incorporating multiple case studies, researchers can compare the findings across different businesses and industries. This approach will allow for more robust and generalisable conclusions by looking at commonalities, differences and the best practices in co-creation. The standpoint from the customers could also be taken into consideration looking into how they perceive their customer engagement, impact and possibilities for co-creation looks. This customer perspective can provide valuable insights into how customers perceive and evaluate their engagement with businesses and for the company to get a full picture and insight from both parties’ perspectives.

While this thesis emphasises the importance of co-creation for customer engagement, future research can delve into measuring the direct impact of co-creation on business performance metrics such as sales growth, market share, and profitability. Developing robust frameworks and methodologies to assess the return of investment (ROI) if co-creation initiatives will provide businesses with concrete evidence of its value. Considering the dynamic nature of customer engagement and co-creation, longitudinal studies can be conducted to examine how these practices evolve over time and their long-term effects in customer relationship and business outcomes. As there was a limited period to collect the empirical data. A longer period of time would allow an examination of changes in customer engagement behaviour and see the effectiveness of co-creation strategies. These suggestions for future research aim to expand the current understanding of co-creation and customer engagement, addressing different contexts and exploring diverse perspectives. By pursuing these research directions, scholars and practitioners can further advance the field and unlock new opportunities for businesses to engage with their customers and create value collaboratively.
Reference List


Appendix A: Interview Guide – Swedish Version


Generella frågor
1. Är det okej för dig att vi spelar in intervjun?

Frågor om företaget och respondenten
2. Berätta om dig själv och din bakgrund i företaget.
3. Berätta om företaget. (Vad säljer ni? Vad är eran målgrupp?)
4. Vad är din roll i företaget?
5. Vad är dina arbetsuppgifter?
6. På vilket sätt har din position möjlighet till att ta till förändringar och implementera dem?
7. Har din position några hinder eller kan du förändra och implementera dem själv?

Frågor om kundens integration, interaktion och beteenden
8. Integrerar ni kunden i alla delar av företaget eller bara i vissa?
9. Hur ser du på integrationen mellan er som företag och era kunder?
10. På vilket sätt ser ni olika beteenden från olika kunder i deras interaktioner, deltagande och engagemang?
11. Hur har ni märkt av att kunderna uppför sig annorlunda när det gäller hur de bemöter och interagerar med er för att ni producerar era egna produkter?

Frågor relaterade till kundengagemang (Customer Engagement)
12. Hur ser du på att engagera kunderna i valen av produkter?
13. Hur villiga är kunderna till att hjälpa till att ge svar på era förfrågningar? Varför anser du att det är den nivån?
14. Hur arbetar ni i företaget för att ge kunder all information som de behöver kring produkterna?

Frågor relaterade till sociala medier kommunikation och engagemang
15. Hur ser ni på engagemanget hos kunderna sedan ni (företaget) implementerat sociala medier som kommunikationsverktyg?
16. Hur brukar ni använda av sociala medier för att kommunicera med era kunder?

Frågor relaterade till samskapande (Co-Creation)
17. Vad ser du som fördelar med att kommunicera och samskapa med kunden?
18. Har kommentarer och gillningar gjort att ni anpassat ert sortiment uteftor effekten av agerandet?
19. Nämn en händelse eller situation där ni (företaget) har använt er av kunden för att utveckla sortimentet eller företaget.
20. Hur introduceras nya idéer till företaget?

Frågor relaterade till familjeföretaget
21. Med tanke på att det är ett familjeägt företag, på vilket sätt märker ni av att kunden påverkas av detta?
22. Hur ser ni på ryktet som ett familjeföretag? Förväntas det mer av er?

Övriga frågor
23. Är det något du vill ändra eller framföra mer?
24. Får vi återkomma med kompletterande frågor om det behövs?
Appendix B: Interview Guide - English Version

In the guide attached, questions are inserted to facilitate the process during the interview for the authors. The questions are there to guide and to ensure that valuable information is not missed. During the interview, the questions will be adapted to the participant’s answers to avoid repetition, and follow-up questions will be added to get a conversation going around the main topics.

General Questions
1. Is it okay with you if we record the interview?

Questions about the company and the respondent
2. Tell us about yourself and your background in the company.
3. Tell us about the company. (What do you sell? What is your target group?)
4. What is your role in the company?
5. What are your duties?
6. In what way does your position have the ability to take changes and implement them?
7. Does your position have any obstacles, or can you change and implement them yourself?

Questions about the customer’s integration, interaction and behaviours
8. Do you integrate your customers in all parts of the company or only in certain parts?
9. How do you look at the integration between you as a company and your customers?
10. In which way do you see different behaviour in different customers from how they interact, participate and engage with the company?
11. How have you noticed that customers behave differently when interacting and engaging with you because you produce your own products?

Questions related to Customer Engagement
12. What do you think about engaging the customers when choosing your products?
13. How willing are your customers to help you get answers on questions? Why do you think that grade?
14. How do you work in the company to give the customers all the information they need concerning your products?

Questions related to social media communication and engagement
15. How do you interpret the engagement of your customers since you as a company have started with social media as a communication tool?
16. How do you use social media to communicate with your customers?
Question related to Co-Creation
17. What advantages do you see from communicating and co-creating with your customers?
18. Have comments and likes affected you to adjust your assortment from the effects of their acting?
19. Name an event or situation where you as a company have used your customers to develop your assortment or company.
20. How do new ideas get introduced into the company?

Questions related to Family Owned Businesses
21. Since you are a family company, in what way do you notice that the customers get affected by that?
22. What do you think about your reputation as a family company? Do you believe that they expect more from you?

Other questions
23. Is there anything you want to add or change?
24. May we return with supplementary questions if necessary?