Like us on Facebook!

–A qualitative study about online communication on Facebook

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Level and semester: Bachelor Thesis - Spring 2012
Acknowledgements

There are some persons that we would like to acknowledge and thank for their help and input while writing this thesis; the examiner Dr. Pejvak Ogahazi, the tutor Dan Halvarsson, Dr. Vinit Parida who gave us a lot of input during seminars, and Dr. Magnus Hultman who provided clear guidelines for the methodology. We would also like to thank our fellow students who contributed with much feedback during the seminars.

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Växjö, Spring 2012
Abstract

Title: Like us on Facebook! - A qualitative study about online communication on Facebook

Subject: Marketing Communication

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Background: As of the moment Facebook is the world’s largest online social network with over 800 million active users and more than 50% of the users log on to the website on any given day. It is considered to be the most important social platform on the Internet since it reaches more people than any other social network. Social networks present a completely different way for consumers and companies to interact with each other, compared to traditional communication, and create an incredible challenge for corporations. The hard task that companies have to face is how to engage their consumers through interaction, participation, entertainment and innovative creativity. The pursuit of consumer engagement plays a key role in coping with the ongoing changes in social life as well as in consumer behavior.

Purpose: To investigate how companies engage customers through online communication at Facebook.

Research Question: What factors are important when companies communicate on Facebook, in order to engage their customers?

Method: The chosen method was observations, more specifically non-systematic, non-participant observations. The observations were carried out on Facebook, and six companies were observed; Marabou, Nelly.com, McDonald’s Sweden, Liseberg, ICA and Fotografiska. The companies were chosen randomly based on their amounts of likes.

Results: The research showed that companies use integrated marketing communication as a tool to involve and engage customers on Facebook. The results imply that there are key factors that characterized the observed companies’ Facebook communication. Frequent updates, clear information, visualized messages and customer involvement were vital in creating customer engagement and indicate how communication on Facebook is carried out by companies.

Key Words: Communication, Engagement, Word of Mouth, Social Networks, Social Media, Facebook
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1. Introduction Chapter

In the introduction chapter a background of the emphasis of the thesis is presented, followed by a discussion about the problematic aspects of the subject. Lastly in the chapter, the purpose of the thesis is presented.

1.1 Background

Social networks can be found throughout society, in schools, workplaces or neighborhoods, where people interact with each other. Often these networks consist of people with similar interests or that have hobbies in common. (Social Networking, 2012-03-10) With the emerging role of the Internet in society, social networking sites have earned an increasing popularity. In the beginning online social networks were built by people who emailed messages to each other, simply without any specific web site to gather them all. (Mislove et al 2007) However in recent years the concept of online social networking has grown bigger and bigger, where web sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn and MySpace have become some of the most popular and most visited websites on the World Wide Web. (Harris & Dennis, 2011) Most social networking sites are built on similar features where users have the ability to socialize with other people, and create big networks of friends and associates. (Li & Bernoff, 2011) Moreover the most common feature that all of these sites have is that users are able to create their own personal profile page. The profile pages often include basic information about the users, such as a photo of themselves, gender, age, occupation, work place or location. (Mislove et al 2007)

Users of social networks sites can do different activities, one of the most common activities is called “friending” where users becomes “friends” with other users on the social network that they know from real life, or people they know in the virtual world of the Internet. (Li & Bernoff, 2011) Other general activities that users conduct
on social networking sites are to share their experiences, photos, music, different video clips or simply to interact with other people. (Li & Bernoff, 2011) Another popular feature on social networking sites is to create groups for different events, where users can invite other users to participate in the event or just discuss it. (Mislove et al 2007) Moreover in the recent years social networking sites have become a place for third party developers to place their applications and games for users to use. This has enlarged the use of social networks, where now except communicating with people users can also play games. (Li & Bernoff, 2011)

As of the moment Facebook is the world’s largest online social network with over 800 million active users and more than 50% of the users log on to the website on any given day. It is considered to be the most important social platform on the Internet since it reaches more people than any other social network. (Facebook, 2012-02-10) Facebook launched in 2004, and was from the start a online social network site for college students in the United States. However it has rapidly grown and fast became available to other people around the world. (Facebook, 2012-03-12) Facebook has rapidly grown since the start and still do, and new changes in the design and applications are periodically added. The most recent is function of timeline, this is a change in design that makes users profile pages show as a timeline, displaying everything that they have done on Facebook from the day they became members. (Facebook, 2012-03-12) For an overview of Facebook as well as a word list, see Appendix 1.

1.2 Problem Discussion

Social networks present a completely different way for consumers and companies to interact with each other, compared to traditional communication, and create an incredible challenge for corporations. Marketing communication has changed in recent years and become much more complex. It is not enough with simple
advertisement techniques anymore, instead marketers face the problem of discovering consumers’ needs and design communication strategies that speak to those needs and at the same time engage the customers. (Kotler et al 2009) Modern technology has changed everything about how people socially interact, this force marketers to become aware of that consumers spend their time and attention online, and must thus act to translate that attention into advertising power. (Li & Bernoff, 2011)

The rivalry online is highly competitive, and speed is a crucial element for companies to handle. Whoever gets an idea first gets the visitors first. Online, people can change their consumer behavior whenever they find something new and better, thus making it hard for companies to develop loyal customers and dealing with social networks become a difficult task. (Li & Bernoff, 2011)

Online social networks have shifted the balance of power, and are enhancing customers’ control. Anybody can put up a website that connects people with others, and if it is designed well people will use it and tell their friends to use it. The roles that stores, governments, or banks used to fill are far less relevant today, and the online environment eats up their profit margins, cut down market shares and marginalize their sources of strength. (Li & Bernoff, 2011) Forward-thinking businesses must move away from relying simply on traditional media as marketing channels towards the development of personal and localized relationships with more well-informed and demanding customers. Consumers today increasingly expect consistent engagement with their preferred brands across a range of different online and offline channels. (Harris & Dennis, 2011)

In the digital context, website providers are finding it increasingly challenging to hold on to visitors to their sites, in effort to sell or communicate with them. Companies cannot afford to let go of its consumers having got them once, because
Traffic on a company’s website equals money. (Tripathi, 2009; Li & Bernoff, 2011) The changes in media, particularly the Internet, are forcing companies to reconsider their media mix. The rapid development of social networks is presenting companies with both new opportunities as well as obstacles. Companies must aim to break through the advertising clutter. However, only breaking through the clutter is not enough in today’s market. The hard task that companies have to face is how to engage their consumers through interaction, participation, entertainment and innovative creativity. (Gambetti & Graffigna, 2010) If companies neglect to keep engaging their consumers, they allow them to be persuaded by the company’s competitors. (Tripathi, 2009)

The pursuit of consumer engagement plays a key role in coping with the ongoing changes in social life as well as in consumer behavior. Companies must be able to make the consumers a part of the consumption process. (Gambetti & Graffigna, 2010) In order to attain engagement, the needs of the consumers must be identified, and these needs must be met by the company’s resources and capacity. (Tripathi, 2009)

The problem for marketers is not only to make the company desirable and attractive to its consumers, but to do whatever it takes for the consumers to remain associated, interested and involved with the brand. The consumers must be convinced that the company is worth their time, effort, money, and commitment. Consumers that become emotionally attached to a product or a company are less likely to switch to a competitor. (Tripathi, 2009) Li & Bernoff (2011) brings up a problem of engagement. Customers could become engaged in a way that the company did not expect. If the way that online social networks change customer relationships is not assessed and addressed communication online may be doomed to fail. (Li & Bernoff, 2011)
1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this research is to investigate how companies engage customers through online communication at Facebook.

1.4 Chapter Summary

The introduction chapter has provided a background on the subject of social networks, and more specifically Facebook which will be focused on throughout the paper. The problem discussion brought up problems facing companies in the online environment, more specifically how social networks are a marketing tool and can be used for engaging customers. The problem discussion also brought up the harsh competition that companies face online. Lastly in the chapter, the purpose of the thesis was presented.
2. Literature Review

In this chapter the theoretical framework for the thesis is going to be described. This is going to enable readers to get more in depth appreciation of the chosen subject area, as well as an understanding of the following analysis chapter. Chosen theories that are described in this chapter are Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), Engagement and Word of Mouth (WoM). Firstly however follows a discussion about source criticism applied when conducting the literature review.

2.1 Source Criticism

Source criticism is a scientific method of examining information, with the aim of through critical assessments determine whether or not a source's informative content is believable or not. The method of source criticism helps to establish which sources are useful for the information the researcher is seeking. (Nationalencyklopedin, 2012-02-24) To conduct source criticism the first step is to identify of the source, and its level of legitimacy. To identify the level of legitimacy the researchers should keep two questions in mind; what is the purpose with the source, and who is the author. (Nationalencyklopedin, 2012-02-24)

For this literature review articles were found with the help of Google Scholar, and OneSearch database, available through Linnaeus University’s library webpage. The goal was to gather mostly only scientific articles that have been peer reviewed, in order to get relevant and trustworthy information. Furthermore the aim was to use sources that were relatively new and therefore more relevant for this particular area of interest that is investigated.
All of the articles used were checked with Google Scholar as well Ulrich Periodicals in order to check the status of articles, mostly if they were scientific, published in an academic journal, as well as if they were peer reviewed.

2.2 Integrated Marketing Communication

Communication creates relationships between two or more parties since it is an activity that links people together. The communication used by companies serves as a way to develop, organize and disseminate knowledge. Communication helps companies to focus their efforts at better acquiring and retaining relationships with customers. During later years the increase to manage relationships has brought up a variety of “new generation” marketing approaches, and one is integrated marketing communication (IMC). (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998) The involvement within the virtual environment with customers is essential to co-create customer value, build and manage relationships. (Nambisan & Baron, 2007)

In reality, there is no universally agreed upon definition of integrated marketing communication (IMC) and the concept of integrated marketing communication is an evolving process. (Cornelissen & Lock, 2000; Duncan, Schultz & Patti, 2005) Integrated marketing communication has since the early 1990’s become an accepted practice in the marketing communications field. (Kitchen et al 2004) Research has shown that an increasing amount of advertising executives consider the concept of IMC as a key competitive advantage associated with marketing. (Kitchen and Schultz, 2001)

According to Lee & Park (2007) enhancing the marketing communications of a chosen target group and managing various communication messages and communication mix components is the main goal of IMC, rather than attempting to manage all aspects of marketing management.
Lee & Park (2007) stress that integrated marketing communication is a concept that systematically coordinates a company’s communications channels and its multiple messages and integrates them into a cohesive and consistent marketing communication mix. This is to send a clear and consistent message to the chosen target group about its offerings. According to Kotler & Armstrong (2005) several major interrelated factors have had a considerable impact on the process of marketing communication practices and the emergence of IMC. During the past several decades, markets have increasingly fragmented and moved away from the concept of mass marketing.

Duncan (2002) defines IMC in a more descriptive and more in-depth manner, a cross-functional process for creating and nourishing profitable relationships with customers and other stakeholders by strategically controlling all messages sent to these groups and encouraging data-driven, purposeful dialogue with them. Duncan's definition can be connected to Kotler and Armstrong (2005), both emphasizes the importance of building a close relationship with customers in the chosen target market to generate tangible results for the company using IMC.

## 2.3 Engagement

Engaging customers is the key in building brand success, and adds that customer engagement is emerging as a central concern in brand managing strategies. (Tripathi, 2009; Gambetti & Graffigna, 2010) Engagement should not be regarded as a direct indicator of advertising results, rather advertising engagement is the goal. (Wang, 2006) The concept of customer engagement is new in market research and has been dealt with so far widely differing, and therefore an understanding of the nature of engagement is both current and necessary. (Gambetti & Graffigna, 2010) By engaging the customers, firms can enjoy benefits and payoffs such as increased frequency of purchase, sales, profits, customer retention, positive word of mouth and increased market share. (Tripathi, 2009) In today’s global market scenario, the
pursuit of customer brand engagement plays a key role in a new customer-centric marketing approach designed to cope with the constantly changing individual and social dynamics of postmodern consumer behavior. (Gambetti & Graffigna, 2010) Ahuja & Medury (2010) stress that the ability of marketing to engage and commend customers will eventually determine whether a customer enters into a greater relationship with the company or brand.

Today, engagement is concerned with complex, evolving customers living in a postmodern, increasingly connected, multi-tasking society. (Gambetti & Graffigna, 2010) Engagement talks of a deeper connection with the customers, which is enduring and emotional, and engagement initiated by contextual relevance can be very influential on customers. (Tripathi, 2009; Wang, 2006) From a cognitive perspective, engagement is a positive state of mind, characterized by high energy, commitment and loyalty toward a firm. From a behavioral perspective, engagement relates to actions towards a company that go further than transaction. Such actions are driven by both cognitive and emotional forces. (Porter et al, 2011) The process of purchasing and consuming a product is an emotional, psychological and physical investment by the customer onto the brand. This investment is translated into engagement, and varies from customer to customer. (Tripathi, 2009) Gambetti & Graffigna (2010) agree, and add that engagement is a complex concept and its nature is multi-faceted, variable and difficult to predict since it involves interaction between individuals, and between individuals and their context. Wang (2006) presents engagement as a way of breaking through the advertisement clutter. Customers tend to avoid many advertisements and therefore engagement initiated by the contextual relevance may help advertisements escape the clutter. Wang (2006) goes on and identify that drivers of engagement may differ by demographic, product category, medium, and genres within media. The context and content of an advertisement increases its effectiveness, and this is magnified if engagement is achieved at the personal or social level with the customer. Engagement adds a new
dimension that helps the company to obtain marketing information about the customer’s preferences while interacting with them on a personal level. (Harris & Dennis, 2011) The level of customer engagement achieved by interaction between organization and consumer is an important factor contributing to product adoption, thereby driving sales and brand loyalty. (Ahuja & Medury, 2010)

Tripathi (2009) emphasize the importance of engagement in the digital context, website providers are finding it increasingly difficult to hold on to visitors in an effort to sell or communicate with them. The evolving field of interactive and digital media, such as the internet, is providing companies with new opportunities to generate higher customer engagement with online advertisements. (Wang, 2006) Social network use among consumers provide company managers with the opportunity to shift relationships with customers from dialogue to triologue, in which customers engage in meaningful relationships with one another and with the firms. (Porter et al, 2011) Harris & Dennis (2011) talk about the concept of social commerce, which is the use of social technologies to connect, listen, understand, and engage the customers in order to improve the shopping experience. One example that they relate to social commerce is “enlightened engagement” where companies recognize that customers expect that the structure and processes are in place for regular online interaction, both between the brand and the customers and between customers. Media-related factors that are concerned with the ongoing changes in the media are forcing companies to rethink how they plan their media mix. Rapid advances in media technology are encouraging the spread of digital technology. (Gambetti & Graffigna, 2010) Many managers believe that engaging customers through online networks can create significant value, however it is also evident that it comes with financial risk. They stress that when a firm executes a customer engagement strategy there is no room for errors. (Porter et al, 2011)

In the online community context, members’ basic needs are often rooted in their relationships with fellow community members who share a mutual admiration for a
certain firm and its brand. (Porter et al, 2011) When customers add friends, network with one another and create fan communities online are all factors contributing to the highest degree of engagement. In the digital context, consumer engagement is visible through the means of publishing, posting comments, subscribing, bookmarking, emailing, distributing and networking. (Ahuja & Medury, 2010) By understanding when and how customers’ profile information (e.g. name and demographic) and social connections data will be displayed and accessed through their online behaviors, policy makers can develop promising regulations that help consumers and brands interact in a mutual manner and establish a long-term relationship. (Chu & Kim, 2011)

Nurturing and sustaining customer engagement on social networks requires considerable effort. Some engagement behavior leads to short-term financial benefits, such as repeat purchasing, while others create value for firms in the future. (Porter et al, 2011) Companies interact with customers, treat them as organizational assets, learn about them and through the process of incorporating feedback and co-creation, develop a level of intimacy with them. (Ahuja & Medury, 2010)

Porter et al (2011) identify three major, interconnected sources of value that emerge through customer engagement in the online environment. Firstly participatory value, which is the benefit associated with a firm’s efforts to promote participation in an online network, and it constitutes a platform for both relational and financial value. Relational value is the benefit associated with efforts to motivate cooperation from social network members, which leads to sustained levels of member engagement. Participatory and relational values pave the way for firms to extract financial value from a virtual community. A major source of financial value is the sale of products, content and advertising placements.

Harris & Dennis (2011) and Porter et al (2011) relate customer engagement to trust. Trust is central when customers purchase products online. Online communications,
which have a peer perspective, create messages that are more believable. (Harris & Dennis, 2011) Trust is essential in driving value from customers through online communities, without it customers could interpret attempts to extract revenue from the community as opportunistic behavior on the part of the company. (Porter et al, 2011) Harris & Dennis (2011) present a hierarchy of trust. They mean that customers are likely to trust firstly “real” friends, then Facebook friends, then expert blogs and independent review pages, last in the hierarchy comes e-retailer sites. Trust is positively associated with social network users’ overall behavior on their favorite sites. From a social networking perspective, trust serves as an important mean for customers to evaluate the source and value of information. When social network users trust their social connections in their ‘friends’ list, their willingness to rely on those connections is enhanced because of the connections’ perceived reliability and trustworthiness. (Chu & Kim, 2011)

To attain customer engagement, companies need to understand the needs of their customers, and then decide which of these needs to be met through their brands in line with their resources and capacity constraints. (Tripathi, 2009) Porter et al (2011) developed a three-stage process that firms can follow in order to effectively foster and sustain engagement through online communities. First, the needs of the community members must be identified. Second, the customers’ participation must be promoted, while also understanding that customers choose to engage in social networks to help meet their fundamental needs. Third, after achieving participation, managers can sustain customer engagement by motivating members to cooperate with one another and with the firm. Tripathi (2009) means that customer satisfaction is only the first step of building a lasting relationship with the customer. The customer will stay with the company if he or she is continuously engaged. Customers will not buy a product just because the brand is made sufficiently attractive. Even if the customer buys a product once, there is no guarantee that they will repeat the purchase. For repetition to happen, the company must keep the customer engaged
to the brand. The customer should not only be satisfied with the purchase but also willing to promote and defend the product to others. (Tripathi, 2009)

To develop an internal organizational culture of engagement within the company is not an overnight process, it must start at the top and flow downwards. The staff of the company must be engaged before they can get their customers to be engaged. (Tripathi, 2009) There is a lack in senior management support, staff skills and general interdepartmental co-operation that represents a significant barrier to effective engagement with social networking sites. Many companies are lacking any real integration between their web channel and social networks. (Harris & Dennis, 2011) Managers can identify customer engagement when they see it, when members participate and cooperate within the online community in order to create value for themselves and for the firm. (Porter et al, 2011) There is a strong professional focus on operational management issues of engagement, oriented towards decision-making, problem solving and optimal use of corporate assets such as communication, which emerges as a fundamental corporate tool to stimulate and enhance customer engagement. (Gambetti & Graffigna, 2010) However, Gambetti & Graffigna (2010) also put forward that companies has not yet turned its attention to long-term engagement initiatives and strategic vision, the focus today is on tactical approaches and tools aimed at achieving short-term results. A more rigorous, strategic approach could help practitioners to get a broader theoretical understanding of the drivers and consequences of engagement, preventing engagement from being seen as just another new marketing trick to get customer attention and refresh the media market in the short term.

2.4 Word of Mouth

According to Goads & Mayzlin (2004) word of mouth is an interesting marketing tool, where many managers state that the success of a product is related to the word of mouth it generates. Since social networks entered the market, word of mouth has
gained more power in its way to make products desirable. (Kozinets et. al, 2010) Smith et al (2007) and Lee & Youn (2009) stress also the fact that social networks changed the way of consumer-to-consumer communication because it enables consumers to discuss with each other about product related information in a faster and more effective way, and generating positive word of mouth has become an important marketing tool. Since marketers identified the potential of social networks the sums of money that companies spends on social network advertising has rapidly increased. (Chu & Kim, 2011)

Chu & Kim (2011), Goads & Mayzlin, (2004) & Kozinets et. al (2010) implies that the speed in which consumers can communicate with masses through social networks is the main reason for why word of mouth has become so powerful. Mainly since consumers are today able to share their opinions with hundreds of their friends in just a couple of seconds. Word of mouth marketing via social networks sites is considered as a necessary element in today's promotional mix. (Chu & Kim, 2011) The influence of word of mouth in decision making is for instance approximately twenty times higher than the influence of marketing events. Since word of mouth data can be easily collected through social networks, it gives companies the opportunity to fast prevent negative word of mouth. (Trusov et. al, 2009) Cheema & Kaikati (2010) and Trusov et. al (2009) also agrees with the other researchers, that the word of mouth has shown growth in importance since social networks entered the market and information availability has become higher. Trusov et. al (2009) stresses the fact that this is the case since traditional forms of communication seem to be losing their effectiveness in influencing consumers.

Researchers describe and stress the importance of word of mouth in todays' marketing. None the least with the fast growth of social networks where consumers can communicate with each other in a matter of seconds, it is important for companies to send out positive word of mouth. (Kozinets et. al, 2010) Word of mouth has become so strong in influence, that it has seven times higher influence on
decision making than newspapers have. This is a very interesting evolvement, and has made the word of mouth a necessary component of marketing tools. (Cheema & Kaikati, 2010)

2.5 Chapter Summary

The literature review presented and discussed the theory that lies as a foundation for the thesis' research question and further on analysis chapter. In the literature review the authors presented integrated marketing communication, engagement and word of mouth by assessing current scientific literature in the area. These different theories were chosen since they all have connecting features with each other. By communicating with the customers, the firms can get engaged customers which can lead to benefits and payoffs such as increased frequency of purchase, sales, profits, customer retention, positive word of mouth and increased market share. The theories are connected further in the following chapter.
3. Research Model and Research Question

In this chapter the research area is clarified and the theory presented in chapter 2 is conceptualized. Key concepts are displayed in a research model, followed by a brief discussion and explanation of the model anchored in theory. Thereafter, the research question of the thesis is presented.

Figure 3.1: Research Model.

The research model presents the assumption that customer engagement is a result of integrated marketing communication in the online environment. Customers can become engaged in different ways, and all customers will not have the same type of
engagement. Customers can be positively engaged, which mean that they praise the company and are enthusiastic. Customers can be neutrally engaged, when they do not express their thoughts of the company. Customers can also be negatively engaged, meaning that they are spreading their negative opinions of the company. If customers become engaged, it could result in word-of-mouth. Positively engaged customers will spread positive word-of-mouth, and neutral customers might as well. Negatively engaged customers will spread negative word-of-mouth. In the model there is also an arrow from negative engagement to positive WOM, which assume that even the most negative customers can be turned to positive if the company puts in an effort to get involved in engaging them and communicates with them.

This model is grounded in the theory presented in the literature review. Nambisan & Baron (2007) connect integrated marketing communication within the virtual environment as essential in building customer value and relationships. Social network use among customers is an opportunity to shift relationships with customers from dialogue to triologue, in which customers engage in meaningful relationships with one another and with the firms. (Porter et al, 2011) In the digital context, consumer engagement is visible through the means of publishing, posting comments, subscribing, bookmarking, emailing, distributing and networking. (Ahuja & Medury, 2010) The customer should not only be satisfied with the purchase but also willing to promote and defend the product to others. (Tripathi, 2009) By engaging the customers, firms can enjoy benefits and payoffs such as increased frequency of purchase, sales, profits, customer retention, positive word of mouth and increased market share. (Tripathi, 2009) Due to social networks word of mouth gained even more power in its way to make products desirable. (Kozinets et. al, 2010) Social networks enable consumers to discuss with each other about product related information in a faster and more effective way, and generating positive word of mouth has become even more important marketing tool. (According to Lee & Youn, 2009)
3.1 Research Question

The research question is based on the research model. In order to fulfill the purpose the following question will be answered throughout the thesis; what factors are important when companies communicate on Facebook, in order to engage their customers?

3.2 Chapter Summary

This chapter conceptualized the theoretical framework and the authors presented a research model, based on the theory as well as in line with the purpose of the thesis. The research model states that integrated marketing communication leads to engaged online customers. Customers can be either positively, neutrally or negatively engaged. When the customers become engaged it will lead to word of mouth in different forms, positive or negative word of mouth. Lastly in the chapter the research question of the thesis was presented. The research question will be answered in the conclusion chapter.
4. Methodology

In this chapter the methodology of the thesis is described and justified. Research approach, research design, data sources, research strategy, data collection method, data collection instrument, sampling, data analysis method and quality criteria are defined and the authors' choices of method are provided. The subsections of the chapter are structured as first providing a description based on literature and thereafter follows a justification of the authors' choices. Lastly in the chapter a summarizing table of the thesis' methodology outline is displayed.

4.1 Research Approach

The research process and methods used are influenced by the researcher's background when it comes to the research approach. A specific approach prescribes the relationship between methods, data, theories and values of the researcher. (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005)

4.1.1 Inductive vs. Deductive Research

There are two approaches for a researcher to establish what is true or false and to draw conclusions, deduction and induction. Deduction is based on logic while induction is based on empirical evidence. (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005)

Deductive research is a more common approach than inductive research, and follows a linear process. (Bryman, 2011) Deduction means that the researcher draws conclusions though logical reasoning. (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005) A deductive approach has a well-established role for existing theory, and informs the development of a hypothesis, the choice of variables and the subsequent measures. (Malhotra & Birks, 2003) When conducting deductive research the researcher first
finds appropriate existing well-developed theories within the subject of interest, thereafter one or several hypotheses are deduced for empirical review. Included in the hypothesis are concepts that will be operationalized into measurable instruments. The theory and the hypothesis will control the data collection process. After the data has been gathered and analyzed the researcher will accept or reject the proposed hypothesis. When using a deductive approach the last step the researcher goes through is to reformulate the theory based on the collected data. The results of the research are connected back to the theory and previous research in the field of study. (Bryman, 2011) The deductive research process is displayed in the model below.

Figure 4.1: Processes involved in deduction.

Bryman (2011) puts forward that there are researchers that, unlike the deductive approach, prefer the apprehension that the connection between theory and research is inductive. The inductive approach provides that theory is the result of research. (Bryman, 2011) Through induction the researcher draws general conclusions based on empirical observations, and the process of induction goes from observations, to findings, to theory building. (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005) Malhotra & Birks (2003) argue that the researcher reaches conclusions without complete evidence, and the validity of the inductive approach is based upon fair samples. Moreover, the resultant theory should be subject to constant review and revision. (Malhotra & Birks, 2003)

The research approach for this thesis was deductive. This approach was chosen since the research is based on a theoretical foundation and the authors were interested in employing existing theories to their empirical collection. The aim of the authors was not to construct theories of their own, therefore the inductive approach was ruled out.

4.1.2 Qualitative vs. Quantitative Research

Scientists gather data to support or reject theories using specialized techniques. The data is empirical evidence or information that is gathered carefully through the use of rules or procedures. There are a wide variety of different available techniques, however the two main are qualitative research, which is gathering data using the form of words or pictures, and quantitative research, which is collecting data in the form of numbers. (Neuman, 1994)

Quantitative data can be collected through different methods. One option is surveys which is a technique often used in descriptive or explanatory research. The researcher asks the chosen target group questions in the form of a questionnaire,
which is mailed or handed to people or through an interview, and then the data is recorded. The questions, which are stated, should not be manipulated, they should simply be answered, and the questions should be stated in an identical order. The data from the research is typically summarized in percentages, tables or graphs. The surveys give the researcher a picture of what the respondents think or report doing. The results are usually gathered using a smaller group of selected people e.g., 150 students, however these results are generalized to a larger group e.g., and 5000 students. From which the smaller group was chosen. (Neuman, 1994)

The purpose of a qualitative data collection is to obtain a deep understanding for a problem, before proceeding to the more analytical portion of the study. There are a variety of methods in order to gather information, for example individual- and group- interviews and case studies. The qualitative research method is collectively a less structured and more intensive interview form than the standardized questionnaire-based interview forms. The data that is gathered has more depth and greater richness and this resulting from a more flexible relationship with the respondent. The qualitative data is collected to get a larger knowledge about factors that cannot be directly measured or observed. The main characteristics is the small number of respondents, it is usually only a partially representative of the chosen target population. (Aaker et al 2010)

The authors chose to conduct a qualitative research. The qualitative approach was most suitable for the proposed research question. Other reasons were that the aim was to create a deep and rich study, rather than a broad one. The authors intended to involve a small sample in order to create a profound understanding of the research problem.
4.2 Research Design

All research approaches can be categorized into three general research designs; exploratory, descriptive, and causal. These categories differ in terms of research questions, the precision of the hypotheses that are formed, and the data collecting methods that are used. (Aaker et al, 2010) Choice of research design can be considered as the overall strategy to get the information wanted. A strategic choice of research design should come up with an approach that allows the researcher to solve the research problem in the best possible way, within the given restraints. In other words, the research design should be effective in producing the wanted information within the constraints put on the researcher, such as monetary and skill limitations. (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005)

An exploratory research design is appropriate when the researcher has no or little knowledge about the field of study and is seeking insights into the general nature of a problem, the possible decision alternatives, and relevant variables that need to be considered. (Aaker et al, 2010; Christensen et al, 2010) Exploratory research is used in the beginning of the research process and could be referred to as a pre-study. This research design does not provide the researcher with any exact answers but circles in and delimit the research problem. (Christensen et al, 2010) The research methods are very flexible, unstructured and qualitative, so that the researcher begins without presumptions about what will be found. Exploratory research is useful for establishing priorities among research questions and for learning about the practical issues of carrying out the research. (Aaker et al, 2010)

When the researcher has knowledge about a research situation or problem, but lacks a clear and distinct overview, descriptive research design is suitable. (Christensen et al, 2010) As the name implies, the major objective is to describe something, usually market characteristics or functions. (Malhotra & Birks, 2003) Moreover, descriptive research provides an accurate snapshot of some aspect of the
market environment. Hypotheses will often exist in descriptive research but they may be tentative and speculative. (Aaker, 2010) The process of descriptive research is, unlike exploratory research, pre-planned and structured and the methods for selecting data sources and for collecting that data are specified. (Malhotra & Birks, 2003) By carrying out a descriptive research the researcher will be able to answer inquiries such as how, who, where and when. Exploratory research is used to describe a process rather than finding new phenomenon that affect this process. (Christensen et al, 2010)

The causal research design is applicable when the researcher is well familiar with the phenomenon and has a clear and distinct description of it and wants to find out causes behind why the phenomenon functions in a particular way. (Christensen et al, 2010) When it is necessary to show that one variable causes or determines other variables, a causal research must be applied. (Aaker, 2010) Causal research is based on exploratory and descriptive research but takes it one further step by identifying causes behind an effect. (Christensen et al, 2010) The hypotheses and research questions will be very specific while using causal research design since the requirements for proof of causality are so demanding. (Aaker, 2010)

Christensen et al (2010) argue that most marketing research is exploratory, however in practice much research include exploratory and causal elements and it is often difficult telling them apart. In order to describe a marketing phenomenon the researcher must have knowledge about the current situation and thus be explorative. Moreover the researcher will through defining the phenomenon be able to describe why the phenomenon occur and even predict what will happen in the future. This is the reason why most marketing research has a descriptive focus, and it is considered to be the approach that is most worth of money and time. (Christensen et al, 2010)
In order to gain more background knowledge and insight into the chosen subject and to delimit the research problem the authors applied exploratory research in the beginning of the research process. However, the empirical investigations of this study were of descriptive character. A descriptive research design was used since the authors wanted to look deeper into the research problem and create a profound understanding beyond what exploratory research could contribute. In the authors' opinion a causal research was not applicable before descriptive research had been carried out.

4.3 Data Sources

The researcher must consider which data information he or she needs in order to solve the research problem. Data can be distinguished depending on when, how and why it was collected. (Christensen et al, 2010) Data sources are often referred to as primary and secondary data, and methods for collecting data can be grouped according to which sort of data sources they use. (Aaker, 2010)

Secondary data have already been gathered in another context and for another purpose than for the research at hand. In other words, this data was already available for the researcher when he or she started their research. (Christensen et al, 2010) Secondary data are useful when finding information to solve the research problem and also to get a deeper understanding and explain the research problem. One example of secondary data used in research is the literature review where the researcher gathers earlier studies on the topic of research. (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005) Secondary data could be found in a company's information system, in databanks of other organizations such as the government, or from syndicated data sources such as consumer purchase panels. (Aaker et al, 2010) When using secondary data the reliability of the information should be considered, the researcher must check the authenticity of the information. Once the secondary data is included into the research the information becomes the researcher’s
responsibility. (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005) Advantages with secondary data are that it is cost- and time effective and there is a large selection of sources. Disadvantages include lack of useful information, inaccurate data and the data could be wrong for the researcher's specific purpose. (Christensen et al, 2010)

Often, secondary data is not enough to solve a research problem and in many cases it is required of the researcher to gather more or other information than is already available. Consequently, the researcher might have to acquire new data on their own, so called primary data. (Christensen et al, 2010) Primary data can be collected through a variety of methods, ranging from qualitative research to surveys and experiments. (Aaker et al, 2010) Primary data can include attitudes, opinions, awareness and knowledge about a product or a commercial for example. Advantages with using primary data include that the information is adapted to the specific research problem, the information is up to date and that it is possible to structure the collection. Disadvantages are that it requires some competence from the researcher and that it is an expensive and time consuming activity. (Christensen et al, 2010)

In the empirical and analysis chapter primary data sources were used in order to find information that was suitable and customized for the chosen purpose and research question. Only using existing data information was perceived as not enough to solve neither the research problem nor reaching valid results, and the researchers therefore decided to conduct data gathering research in order to find new empirical information.

4.4 Research Strategy

The research strategy decides what type of research method will be conducted and what type of possible results can be generated. A research strategy can be generating either a broader, surface analytic dimension of the study field or a
narrower, deeper analytic dimension. The research strategy also have time dimensions, it can be performed at one specific point in time thus creating a still picture of the research problem. The other option is to perform the strategy over a period of time and consequently gaining a dynamic picture of the subject of study. (Christensen et al, 2010) There are several research strategies that a researcher could choose from, and each strategy can be used with exploratory, descriptive and causal purposes. What strategy to apply is decided by evaluating (a) what type of research question that have been posed, (b) the degree of control that the researcher have over behavioral events, and (c) if there is a focus on contemporary or historical events. (Yin, 2007) Yin (2009) present five main research strategies; experiment, survey, archival analysis, historical study and finally case study displayed in the figure below.

Table 4.2: Research Strategies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Strategy</th>
<th>Form of research question</th>
<th>Requires control over behavioral events</th>
<th>Focuses on contemporary events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experiment</strong></td>
<td><em>How, why</em></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Survey</strong></td>
<td><em>Who, what, where, how many, how much</em></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Archival Analysis</strong></td>
<td><em>Who, what, where, how many, how much</em></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>History</strong></td>
<td><em>How, why</em></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Case Study</strong></td>
<td><em>How, why</em></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Yin (2009), page 9.

Case studies will be explained further. A case study can be defined as a detailed study based upon the observation of the essential details of individuals, groups of individuals and organizations. Moreover case studies constitute an empirical
investigation that observes a current phenomenon in its actual context. (Malhotra & Birks, 2003; Yin, 2007) A case study is a study of qualitative character where the researcher thoroughly studies cases at one specific point in time or over a period of time and can be entail either singular or multiple cases. (Christensen et al, 2010; Yin, 2007) Yin (2007) emphasizes that studying multiple cases is preferable and strengthens the research. Case studies make it possible for the researcher to preserve the context and value in situations in reality, such as individual life cycles or organizational processes. (Yin, 2007) When conducting a case study the researcher is not aiming for cases that provide statistical representativity but rather cases that are rich in information and can generate understanding. The case study strategy is appropriate when the purpose is to study complex social processes where the researcher must pierce through the surface and understand “what is happening”, “how is it happening”, “why is it happening”. Case studies are fitting for grasping processes where people interact with each other and where it is difficult for the researcher to separate the phenomenon to study and the situation where the phenomenon occurs. The case study is an unstructured strategy which is necessary in order to pierce a research problem, but it is also one of the strategy’s biggest weaknesses. Since there are no given rules to follow it is easy for the researcher to make mistakes, to drown in too much information, or make premature conclusion that lack anchoring in data. (Christensen et al, 2010)

The research strategy chosen for this thesis was case study, more specifically multiple case studies. This strategy was chosen since the authors aimed to conduct a broad and deep qualitative research. Case study was perceived as appropriate to the thesis’ research question.

4.5 Data Collection Method

When conducting qualitative research, there are several forms of data collection methods that the researcher could use. Examples of available methods are in-depth
interviews, focus groups and content analysis. (Aaker et al 2010) However, the observational method is discussed further in this section.

Observation is considered one of the least expensive and most accurate methods of collecting purely behavioral data. During some occasions observation is the only research alternative, for example when conducting case studies on physiological phenomena. (Aaker et al 2010) Performing observation as a data collecting method entails listening and watching other people’s behavior, which leads to learning and an analytical interpretation of the respondents. (Ghauri & Grönhaug, 2005)

There are different types of observation techniques; when the observed respondents are with knowledge participating in the research and non-participating, also known as direct observation. (Aaker et al 2010) When the researcher becomes an active participant in the group that is being investigated, a participant observation is taking place. (Christensen, 2007) Non-participating observation is frequently used to obtain insights into research behavior and related issues. The main advantage with observation is that the researcher can collect first-hand data through a natural setting. Moreover, one can understand the observed behavior and the situation more accurately and capture the dynamics of social behavior in a way that is not possible through questionnaires. Research has shown that the main disadvantages are the observations which are conducted by one researcher who systematically observes and records a phenomenon, which can lead to a difficulty to translate the events or happenings into scientifically useful information. This is the particularly important when the purpose is to generalize from the observations. (Ghauri & Grönhaug, 2005)

In order to boost the observations’ reliability many case study researchers often take use of multiple observers that conduct either structured or non-structured observations. If the resources are available, it is therefore important to consider using multiple observers. (Yin, 2007) Regardless the structure of the observation, it is desirable that the respondent that are being observed are unaware of the study. Research has shown that there is a tendency when respondents know
that they are being observed that they most likely would change their way of behavior. (Aaker et al 2010)

Considering that it was already established that this research would be qualitative and a case study several data collecting methods could be ruled out. By evaluating available qualitative methods the authors agreed upon choosing to conduct observations, more specifically nonsystematic (i.e. not structured) and nonparticipant. Observations were picked as a method since the authors wanted to observe behavior on Facebook, how companies communicate to their customers and whether they keep their customers engaged. Since there were three authors of the thesis it was considered beneficial to conduct observations and to have the ability of being multiple observers. Another motive for choosing observations was that the authors were interesting in studying current events on Facebook, and not than historical ones.

4.6 Data Collection Instrument

4.6.1 Operationalization and Measurement of Variables

Researchers rely on theory to determine which variables should be investigated and how variables should be operationalized and measured. (Malhotra & Birks, 2003) An operationalization is a set of procedures that describe the activities to be performed to empirically establish the existence or degree of existence of what is described by a theoretical concept. Operational definitions are crucial in measurement, and they tell the researcher what to observe in order to bring the phenomenon defined within the range of the researcher’s experience. Moving from the conceptual to the empirical level in the research, concepts are converted into variables by mapping them into a set of values. (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005) Variables should have measurable characteristics (Malhotra & Birks, 2003) and are properties that take two or more values and is subject to change. (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005)
By evaluating the literature review the authors agreed upon which concepts were most prominent and that should be emphasized when gathering data. The authors also took help from the research model presented in chapter 3 when conducting the operationalization. The concepts that were chosen were integrated marketing communication, word of mouth and customer engagement. In the operationalization table the theoretical definition of concepts are provided, followed by operationalized variables that were used on an empirical level. The operationalized variables are the foundation for creating the observation schedule (4.6.2). The operationalization facilitated creating the observation schedule and provided the authors with an understanding of what to actually observe while carrying out the data collection. The operationalization also gave the authors a guideline of what conclusions that would be reached. The operationalization is presented in the table below.

Table 4.3: Operationalization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Theoretical definition</th>
<th>Operationalized variables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrated marketing communication (IMC)</td>
<td>A cross-functional process for creating and nourishing profitable relationships with customers and other stakeholders by strategically controlling all messages sent to these groups and encouraging data-driven, purposeful dialogue with them. (Duncan, 2002)</td>
<td>→ B2C messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>→ Dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>→ Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>→ Customer stimulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word of Mouth</td>
<td>Word of mouth marketing via social networks sites is seen as a necessary element in today’s promotional mix. (Chu &amp; Kim, 2011) Consumers are today able to rapidly share their opinions with hundreds of people on social networks. (Chu &amp; Kim, 2011; Goads &amp; Mayzlin, 2004; Kozinets et. al)</td>
<td>→ C2C communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>→ Positive or Negative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interactive and digital media is providing companies with new opportunities to generate higher customer engagement with online communication. (Wang, 2006) Social network use among consumers provide company managers with the opportunity to shift relationships with customers from dialogue to triologue, in which customers engage in meaningful relationships with one another and with the firm. (Porter et al, 2011)

### 4.6.2 Observation Schedule

When conducting observations the researcher can develop an observation protocol, as a part of the case study protocol. By using a protocol, the observer will keep track on a certain behavior under a certain time frame. (Yin, 2007) When carrying out nonsystematic observations the observer continuously record or register what is happening, without analyzing or valuing what is being observed. (Christensen et al, 2010)

Even though the research method applied in this research was nonsystematic observations, where the aim was to continuously keep track of what was being observed, the authors still wanted to have some sort of schedule to follow. Namely in order to make sure that the three authors followed similar guidelines and observed similar behavior. The schedule was developed by using the operationalization as a foundation and developing inquiries from the variables. The schedule was a guideline for what results that was to be gathered. The observation schedule can be found in Appendix 2.
4.6.3 Pretesting

A last preparation before collecting the empirical data is to do a pretest, a so called pilot study. A pretest can be conducted regardless of what criteria the researcher establishes for sampling. Informants in the pretest might be extra complaisant and useful, the place might be geographical convenient or there might be an overflow of information. A pretest contributes improvements and adjustments to the data collecting plan, both regarding what data to collect and how to collect it. (Yin, 2007) In order to be prepared for the observation process it is important to practice the observation in an environment similar to the observation environment. (Christensen et al, 2010)

The observation schedule was reviewed and commented upon by the tutor of the thesis. It was also send to a professor in social media. He provided some valuable feedback and the schedule was altered. The authors then tested the schedule in reality by observing one randomly chosen company Facebook page, with the same criteria as presented in 4.7.1. The company chosen was Blocket.se, and the observation was carried out on one occasion. The authors together went through the observation schedule and tested if it was possible to find answers for the questions. After the testing the schedule was refined further, some of the questions were removed while other were added. The results of the pretest were not included in the empirical investigation.

4.6.4 Data Collecting Process

After creating the observation schedule, reviewing and pretesting it, the researchers decided on which guidelines to follow when conducting the observations. Since there were three researchers it was seen beneficial to conduct individual observations, and thus it was decided to divide the workload equally. Practically, that entailed that each researcher would observe two companies (a list of observed
companies can be found in 4.7.2). In order to gain valid results the data would be gathered during similar conditions. It was decided to collect the data during a two week period, where observations took place on seven occasions. The reason for why a two week time span was applied was that the observations took place during Easter, when the frequency of companies updating their Facebook pages was considered as low. When conducting the observations the researcher carefully studied the companies’ Facebook pages by using the observation schedule as a guideline. Due to ethics and integrity the researchers decided to not include names or gender of any customers that happened to be observed. Only the companies that were observed were mentioned by name.

When conducting the data collection the researcher marked down their observations individually. When the collecting was finalized, the researchers carefully read each other’s transcripts. When writing the empirical chapter, the authors together compiled and evaluated which data that was relevant to present.

4.7 Sampling

When conducting primary data collecting the researcher must define the target population and derive a sample from the population that should be studied. (Christensen et al, 2010) A population is a broad term and can be defined as the universe of units from which a sample is selected. It is not necessarily people that will be sampled; the researcher might study nations, cities, regions, firms and so on. A sample is the segment of the population that is selected for investigation. (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005) The researcher could conduct a census study, where the whole population is investigated, however this is often very costly and time consuming. Therefore a sample study is preferable, in order to be able to draw some conclusions about the population as a whole. (Christensen et al, 2010)
For this research the population was decided to be Swedish companies that have their own page on Facebook.

4.7.1 Sampling Frame

A **sampling frame** is the listing of all units in the population from which the sample will be selected. The sample can be selected in numerous ways, for example by choosing a representative sample, a probability sample or a non-probability sample. (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005)

In order to find a useable sample of the population the authors used some additional guidelines:

- That the company should have more than 100,000 likes from customers on Facebook.
- That the company should be active on Facebook (i.e. that the company regularly update their site with posts and such).

These criteria were used in order to narrow down the sample group and by following these guidelines the authors aimed for choosing a heterogeneous sample. The first criteria related to that the authors wanted to guarantee that the companies in the chosen sample had much customer activity that could be observed. The second criteria related to that the companies’ activity on the Facebook page should be frequent enough in order to generate much empirical information. In order to find some sort of register of companies active on Facebook the authors conducted some research and found one webpage (**http://fblistan.se/**) that listed the biggest Swedish pages, companies and products on Facebook. By using the list of companies as a guideline, the researchers investigated what companies could fulfill the criteria above before coming to a final decision of the sample.
4.7.2 Sample Selection

There are numerous ways of deciding the size of the sample and how to choose the sample. One strategy that can be applied is strategic selection, a non-probability sample approach, which is a common in qualitative studies. By strategically choosing and evaluating who or what to include in the sample the researcher could gain more in-depth information and a profound insight into a phenomenon. (Christensen et al, 2010)

Considering the research being a qualitative case study the researchers aimed at selecting a rather small sample size. Time aspects and resources were also taken into account. It was considered that there were three authors of this research, meaning there were more resources than a single researcher would possess. The authors decided on strategically choosing sample size based on the guidelines provided in 4.7.1, in order to generate a deeper research rather than a broad research. The final number that came up through evaluations and discussions was a sample size of six companies. This number was considered appropriate since there were three authors and six companies could be divided equally between the authors. Also, in order to gather valuable data the authors did not want to have too few companies. It was seen desirable to gain too much information rather than too little. The chosen companies were picked since they were the six first companies listed by http://fblistan.se/ at the time being. It was considered as a convenient choice. The chosen companies are as follows;

- Marabou (producer of chocolate)
- Nelly.com (online fashion store)
- McDonalds Sweden (chain of hamburger restaurants)
- Liseberg (amusement park in Göteborg)
- ICA (chain of supermarkets)
Fotografiska (museum in Stockholm)

More information about the companies is provided in the following empirical chapter.

### 4.8 Data Analysis Method

The best preparation a researcher can do before conducting a case study is to formulate a general *analytic strategy*. (Yin, 2007) When conducting a qualitative research there is no given standardized method to apply when analyzing the collected data. (Christensen et al, 2010; Yin, 2007) There are however multiple more or less standardized and systematic qualitative analysis methods that can be followed. Most methods have similar characteristics and are based on the same logic; aiming to discover and illuminate underlying patterns and processes in the social context that is studied. (Christensen et al, 2010)

In order to make the qualitative empirical data manageable and create a synoptic overview of the research the researcher must continuously *reduce* the amount of collected data. In practice, it means that notes or observation schemes constantly must be reorganized, summarized and coded. Coding means that the data is transformed into keywords or key sentences that describes the content. These keywords will be the basis of the structure and pattern that the researcher aims for. (Christensen et al, 2010)

Even if the researcher reduce and structure the data it should also be visualized in order to be more accessible and useful. To *visualize the data* means to display the reduced data and the emerging pattern in brief and structured summaries or figures. It can be displayed in matrices or diagrams, for example. When the researcher feels that it is impossible to collect new data that will change, develop or contribute to the emerging pattern a state of theoretical saturation is reached. The researcher is then ready to finish the analysis. (Christensen et al, 2010)
When conducting a qualitative case study one of the most desired techniques is *pattern matching*. Pattern matching compares an empirically grounded pattern with an anticipated one. If the patterns match, the results can strengthen the case study’s validity. If the case study is of descriptive character the pattern matching is relevant if the anticipated pattern is defined before the data collection. Pattern matching leaves space for the researcher to interpret the identified patterns. (Yin, 2007) In practice, pattern matching means that the keywords that the researcher has continuously gathered are put together and related to each other, this process is driven by the theoretical framework of the study that decides which data the researcher will be interested in finding. (Christensen et al, 2010)

In order to analyze the collected empirical data the planned analytical approach was to apply reduction, visualization, summarization and data discovering patterns. The aim was to discover patterns that could be grounded in the theoretical framework and thus enhances the validity of the thesis. The theory decided what patterns to look for, as displayed in the operationalization (see 4.6.1). The authors relied on investigating how the theory relates to reality, through the chosen research question.

4.9 Quality Criteria

An analysis must be trustworthy in order for the whole study, the results and the conclusions to be useable. (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005) The quality of a research can be evaluated based on some logical criteria, the most regular being *validity* and *reliability*. When conducting a case study it is important to continuously handle these criteria throughout the entire work process, thus not only in the introductory procedure. (Yin, 2007)
4.9.1 Validity

When a researcher measures something he or she wants to make sure that the measures are valid, that the measures are capturing what they are supposed to do. (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005) Validity can be defined as the extent to which a measurement represents characteristics that exist in the phenomenon under investigation. (Malhotra & Birks, 2003) Both internal and external validity are relevant when evaluating a qualitative analysis. (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005)

4.9.2 Content Validity

Content validity, sometimes referred to as face validity, is raised when the argument is made that the measurement self-evidently reflects or represents the various aspects of the phenomenon that there can be little disagreement with it. (Aaker et al, 2010)

Content validity was achieved by allowing the tutor of this thesis to review and comment on the variables of the operationalization, before the data collecting process started. It should be noted that since the observations were carried out on a Swedish sample group the language observed was in general Swedish. The authors took the decision to write the transcripts directly in English, thus translating simultaneously as the observations were carried out.

4.9.3 Construct Validity

When assessing construct validity the researcher attempts to answer theoretical questions about why the operationalized variables work and what deductions can be
made concerning the underlying theory. Construct validity is the most sophisticated and difficult type of validity to establish. (Malhotra & Birks, 2003) Construct validity is essential for meaningful and interpretable research findings and can be assessed in various ways. (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005)

Construct validity was improved by getting input on the draft of the case study by the thesis’ tutor. The authors also aimed to establish a chain of evidence through proper referencing and saving original transcripts from the observations.

4.9.4 External Validity

External validity determines whether the study’s findings can be generalized to and across particular persons, settings and times. (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005) Threats to external validity arise when the specific set of variables does not realistically take into account the interactions of other relevant variables in the real world. (Malhotra & Birks, 2003)

Since this research was conducted in a qualitative nature where depth rather than width was prioritized one should act cautiously when drawing generalizations based solely on this research. However, in order to create more external validity it was decided by the authors to conduct replicable multiple case studies rather than a singular case study.

4.9.5 Reliability

Reliability is to which extent the research results can be repeated if the study would be set up in an identical or similar way and refers to the stability of a measure.
(Christensen et al, 2010; Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005) The aim of reliability is to minimize errors and deformities in the research. A necessity for a study to be repeated is that the researcher has documented the procedures as concrete as possible. Without such documentation it would even be impossible for a researcher to repeat his or her own study. A study can be documented by keeping case study protocols or by using a case study database. A good rule of thumb is to conduct the research in such a way that a controller could use the same procedures and reach the same results. (Yin, 2007)

In order for this study to be reliable the authors conducted multiple case studies. To enhance the repeatability of the research process of the data collection and the data analysis was carefully documented and declared in the data collecting process (see 4.6.4).

**4.10 Chapter Summary**

The following table presents a simplified overview and summary of the methodology of this thesis. In short, the research was a deductive and qualitative research approach. The research design was of descriptive character, and primary data was used in the empirical and analytical chapters. The research was a case study carried out through observations. The population was defined as Swedish companies that have their own page on Facebook. From the population a sample was derived consisting of the companies Marabou, Nelly.com, McDonalds Sweden, Liseberg, ICA, and Fotografiska. The collected data was analyzed through reducing and visualizing data, as well as pattern matching. Finally, the quality of the research was secured through validity and reliability criteria.
Table 4.4: Research Method Overview.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method Summary</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Research Approach**| • Deductive  
                       • Qualitative                                                   |
| **Research Design**  | • Descriptive                                                   |
| **Data Sources**     | • Primary Data                                                  |
| **Research Strategy**| • Case Study                                                    |
| **Data Collection Method** | Observations, nonsystematic and nonparticipant.                 |
| **Data Collection Instrument** | Operationalization  
                       • Observation Scheme                                            |
| **Sampling**         | • Population: Swedish companies that have their own page on Facebook.  
                       • Sample: Marabou, Nelly.com, McDonalds Sweden, Liseberg, ICA, Fotografiska. |
| **Data Analysis Method** | • Reduce Data  
                       • Visualize Data  
                       • Pattern Matching                                               |
| **Quality Criteria** | • Validity  
                       • Reliability                                                     |
5. Empirical Chapter

In this part the data collected through observations is provided. The data was collected from six different companies, and in the empirical chapter the accumulated observations are presented. The outline of this chapter is structured company by company, firstly including a short description of the company. The empirical material is thereafter divided into three categories; company communication, customer communication and activity. The authors decided to include these categories in order to structure the collected data and facilitate the overview of the chapter. Company communication relates to the observations of what and how the company communicates. Customer communication relates to how the observed customers communicate. Activity gathers more numerical data that was observed, such as frequency and number of likes and comments.

5.1 Marabou

Marabou is Sweden’s largest producer of chocolate, with one main factory in Upplands Väsby. Marabou is owned by Kraft Foods Sweden, which has about 800 employees. Marabou provides many different ranges of chocolate, from regular milk chocolate to chocolates with different tastes as strawberry or orange. (Kraft Foods, 2012-05-04) Marabou’s (Kraft Foods Sweden) turnover for the period 2010-2012 was 3,392,484,000 SEK. (Allabolag.se, 2012-05-16)

5.1.1 Company Communication

Firstly, information concerning the communication from the company to its customers was observed. In Marabou’s case, the company was constantly sending out messages directed to the followers of the Facebook page. The posts were mostly about their own different products, what they were providing and what sorts of
products that were going to be launched in the future. They also conducted small questionnaires about products as well as concerning current subjects in the world. One example was on March 31, if the fans of Marabou were going to turn off the electricity as a statement in the event “Earth hour”. The observations showed that posts that posed questions to the customers gathered much response in form of comments and likes.

When Marabou posted messages on their Facebook place the post included a short text usually along with a picture. The pictures were displaying different Marabou products.

When customers posted comments to the company, Marabou sometimes answered the post indirectly by for example starting to produce flavors, which customers had been asked for. When customers had any specific questions to Marabou the company answered these questions within a short period of time. However there were many comments Marabou did not answer, and these comments were lost within the masses of other unanswered comments.

5.1.2 Customer Communication

The followers of Marabou often wrote comments on the posts made by Marabou, and also posted comments themselves. The customer posts were mostly concerned different flavor of chocolate, which they would have liked to be produced. Generally customers tended to comment on each other’s posts as well, and communicated with each other about different Marabou products.

The customers were mostly posting positive messages, about how much they loved the brand and all the varieties of flavors. However at times negative comments were posted by the customers, but this mostly occurred when a customer wanted a flavor that had been replaced by a new line of flavors which did not meet their demand or request.
5.1.3 Activity

Marabou joined Facebook in 2008, and the first page was created by one of their customers. The frequency of Marabou’s updates was differing. The observation showed that there was not a specific timespan that the company was following concerning the posting of the page. However the latest posts were updated with approximately one week in between.

The customers of Marabou were answering and asking question frequently. For example Marabou posted a picture with the text “It seems as summer is on its way”, this post had for the time being gotten 9785 likes and 844 comments, and had been shared on Facebook 364 times. The Marabou Facebook page showed to have an increasing number of followers each day with approximately 250 new customers. During the time span of the observations the most popular day was the 11th of March 2012 and the majority of the followers came from Stockholm, Sweden. The majority of the followers were in the age group 13 to 17.

5.2 Nelly.com

*Nelly.com is an online fashion store, and is regarded as one of the biggest in Northern Europe. Nelly.com is owned by CDON Group, that have about 100 employees.* (Nelly.com, 2012-05-04)  *Nelly.com’s (CDON Group) turnover for the period 2010-2012 was 2,211,82,000 SEK.* (Allabolag.se, 2012-05-16)

5.2.1 Company Communication

Nelly.com was posting different sorts of messages on the Facebook page. Posts were about different offers Nelly.com had in their web shop, special deals such as free shipping or discounts, new products, and fashion tips. According to Nelly.com, by being a follower of their page customers would gain benefits such as discounts
before other customers. Sometimes Nelly.com asked their followers to answer questions, by commenting the post. One example was “which clothing brand would you like us to sell in the web shop?”. Nelly.com sometimes provided contests for the customers to participate in, and prizes could be free merchandise for example.

Every post made by Nelly.com was in English with a short text, links to the web shop and one or multiple pictures. The pictures were related to the text, either by repeating the text or by displaying a product or fashion style. If the text was about new products in Nelly.com’s web shop, the pictures would show these products.

When Nelly.com answered a customer comment, the response was always constructed in the same way. They started by addressing the customer by name, then they often encouraged the customer to get in touch with customer services to solve specific issues, and the messages always ended with “<3 Nelly.com”. When Nelly.com answered customers they wrote in either Swedish or English. They answered customers especially if they were posing specific questions, and particularly if the customers were negative in their comments. However, one post made by Nelly.com stood out during the observations and was different from the rest. It was a post was about a specific fashion trend, which generated more than 100 almost exclusively negative comments. This time, Nelly.com did not answer any of the customer comments.

5.2.2 Customer Communication

Customers left comments on every post made by Nelly.com. They also made posts by their own. On Nelly.com’s Facebook page it was rare that customers communicated with one another. Most communication from the customers was directed towards the company. Although, an example that stood out was one very negative post from a customer that did not receive their order in time, this post
generated an answer from the company and in addition many other customers expressed their opinions, and both disagreed and agreed with the post.

Customers’ comments were both positive and negative during the observations. Positive comments focused mostly on specific products that the customers liked. Negative comments were in general about the customers own shopping experiences, with much focus on dissatisfaction with Nelly.com’s customer service. Some customers wrote that they had not received their orders yet, or that they received the wrong product. Customers posted comments on the Facebook page in different languages (Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, English, Dutch, and German).

5.2.3 Activity

Nelly.com joined Facebook in 2009. During the observations Nelly.com was updating the Facebook page at least once a day, and on some occasions more frequently than that. Whenever Nelly.com posted on the page, customers were liking and commenting on the post instantly. A post could get hundreds of likes within an hour. A post in average generated 200 to 500 likes, and in addition 20 to 100 comments. Not every post was shared, but some posts were shared up to 20 times. Customers also posted by themselves, several times a day. For example, the first day of observations there were 11 posts made by customers within 24 hours.

During the observations, the amount of likes of the page grew each day, increasing with around 700 likes daily. It grew totally from 276,161 likes to 281,222 likes.

The statistics that Facebook provided about Nelly.com's page showed that the most popular age group was 18-24 year olds. The most people talking about Nelly.com came from Stockholm, Sweden. The week when most people talked about Nelly.com in Facebook was in December 2012.
5.3 McDonald’s Sweden

*McDonald’s is an international chain of restaurants, with more than 200 restaurants in Sweden. McDonald’s Sweden currently has more than 12,000 employees. (McDonalds, 2012-05-04) McDonald’s Sweden’s turnover for period 2010-2012 was 1,622,074,000 SEK. (Allabolag.se, 2012-05-16)*

5.3.1 Company Communication

The observation of McDonald’s Sweden's Facebook page showed that many messages were posted by the company to the customers. Messages that were posted on the Facebook page concerned which products the company had in production or new products that were going to be launched. A post generally consisted of information in form of a text, along with one or several pictures that displayed products or current offers. Sometimes a video of a McDonald’s commercial was included in the posts.

Many posts asked questions directed to the customers, such as if they liked a certain product or what sort of flavor of a product was their favorite. There were times when the company posted special offers for the customers to take part of. One example being that McDonalds was during one specific day giving their customers the opportunity to receive a free coffee of their choice, by simply sharing that post with their friends on Facebook.

McDonald’s frequently answered customer comments and customer posts. They usually answered specific questions posed by the customers, but also answered to critique or compliments by customers. They sometimes addressed the customers by name or added “smileys” in their answers.
5.3.2 Customer Communication

As soon as a new post was posted by McDonalds on the page it did not take many minutes before the first comment was posted by a customer. The customers were in general posting comments every day, and this was mainly by commenting on the posts written by McDonalds. However the followers were also posting their own post directly on the Facebook page. The comments that were posted by the customers concerned the products that the company offered at the moment, as well as products which the customers would like McDonalds to produce once again.

The followers of McDonalds were communicating with each other by commenting on each other’s posts on the Facebook page. For the most part the posts were positive. There was however some customers that shared their disappointed with the company on the Facebook page. When observing the more recent posts, it was noted that if a customer posted a negative post on the McDonalds page other customers followed and started to write their own negative thoughts about the company.

5.3.3 Activity

McDonald’s Sweden’s Facebook page was launched in 2010. The observation showed that during the time span of two weeks the followers of the page increased with approximately 300 likes per day. Once a post was posted by McDonald’s it usually generated up to 600 likes. Moreover, a post got around 20 to 200 comments from its followers.

McDonald’s usually updated the page with a new post once a day. During the observation weeks the most popular day with most activity was 15th of April 2012. Most of the followers came from Stockholm Sweden and the largest group of followers was 13 to 17 year olds.
5.4 Liseberg

Liseberg is an amusement park situated in Göteborg, Sweden. Liseberg has 370 employees, and an additional 2,000 seasonal employees. (Liseberg, 2012-05-04) Liseberg’s turnover for the period 2010-2012 was 962,496,000 SEK. (Allabolag.se, 2012-05-16)

5.4.1 Company Communication

Liseberg was posting messages to their customers every day. Messages send out were often about different happenings that took place at Liseberg. Those events took place either at the moment or in the near future. Posts made by the company were also about everything from opening hours to road directions. There were also posts about new upgrades to the amusement park that customer could experience when Liseberg opened for the season. Every time Liseberg send out messages they did it by writing a short text description of the event and also included a picture that related to the message. The pictures were often from the amusement park or displayed a celebrity that would visit the park.

During the observation time, Liseberg had weekly contests where customers were able to win tickets to the amusement park as well as other prizes. During the time of the contest Liseberg posted at least one post every day on their Facebook page, with information about the contest, how to participate and what kind of prizes it was possible to win.

Liseberg took part in discussions that customer had on the Facebook page. In some cases the discussion was started by Liseberg, where the company asked their customer what they thought about new attractions, dining areas or entertainment places. However in some cases it was customers who started the discussion, often by
posting a comment on Lisebergs Facebook page where they proposed new attractions. This often developed into bigger discussions on Lisebergs Facebook page, where the company as well as other customers took part of the discussion. Often when this kind of discussions occurred on the Lisebergs Facebook page, the company took part by answering any question that customers put forward frequently.

5.4.2 Consumer Communication

Every time Liseberg posted a message on their Facebook page, customers commented on it, and liked the post. Customers discussed Liseberg’s different posts between each other. Customers discussed positive and negative aspects of the company’s message, and wrote proposals for new upgrades to the park and also had discussions about their own experiences of Liseberg.

On Liseberg’s Facebook page customers had the possibility to share every post to their own Facebook friends, and usually every post was shared. There were sometimes discussions between customers and Liseberg, where customers asked question or complained about different things. These discussions developed into communication back and forth and usually the customers got answers from the company. This type of communication could be noted often during the observation time, and the response time of comments by Liseberg was between 30 minutes to 2 hours at most.

5.4.3 Activity

Liseberg joined Facebook in 2010, and were online every weekday between 8 am and 4 pm to answers customers’ questions. During the observation time the activity on the page from Liseberg was in average three new posts every day.
When looking at customers' activity on the Facebook page, it was noted that every post Liseberg made got in average 100 customers who liked the post and about 10 who commented on it. In addition, there were about 10 followers who shared every post, and during the observation time more than 100 customers recommended Liseberg to their Facebook friends. When it comes to the overall activity on Liseberg’s page, during the observations around 8000 people talked about Liseberg on Facebook. Moreover 4500 people liked Liseberg’s Facebook page and there was more than 1500 who visited their page.

Facebook statistics about Liseberg showed that the most popular age group that visited the page were people between 13 and 17, the most popular city from where those customers came from was Göteborg, Sweden. Other statistics also showed that Liseberg had been tagged by customers in 35 168 photos, and the most popular week when most customers visited their site was 24th of July 2011.

5.5 ICA

*ICA is northern Europe’s largest chain of retail stores. ICA has more than 1300 stores in Sweden and about 6500 employees.* (ICA, 2012-05-04) *ICA’s turnover for the period 2010-2012 was 94,083,000,000 SEK.* (Allabolag.se, 2012-05-16)

5.5.1 Company Communication

ICA provided its followers with posts about tips, special deals, recipes, and links to their television commercials and to their website. Ica did not post about their specific products. Since the observations were carried out before and during Easter many posts had an Easter theme, such as recipes suitable for the festivities.

One post that stood out from the others was an application for customers to partake in ICA’s television commercials as an extra. The post was accompanied with a
humorous video. The post instructed customers to fill out an application via the Facebook page, and some of them would get the spot as an extra in the televised commercials.

In general, ICA’s posts included a text, a picture that related to the message, a video or a link to their website. There were no posts consisting of only text.

If the customers posted questions or critique towards the company, ICA answered their comments. In some cases ICA responded to positive comments as well, and thanked their customers for compliments and such. When ICA posted an answer, they always addressed the customer by name and if the answer was late, they apologized for this.

5.5.2 Customer Communication

Customers liked and commented on each post made by Ica, as well as created their own posts. Many customer posts were about environmental issues, for example encouraging ICA to stop sell an environmental dangerous product. Customers communicated both with the company and with other customers. Customers created answered each other’s questions, agreed with one another and sometimes debated. Some posts created more debate than others, such as posts about whether a grocery was healthy or not.

Comments posted by customers were both positive and negative towards ICA. Many posts were negative, and complained about products customers were dissatisfied with or debated about different groceries. Some customers just had practical questions, such as opening hours or how they could apply for a bonus card.

5.5.3 Activity

ICA launched their Facebook page in 2009. Employees responsible for the Facebook page were online weekdays between 8 and 16. ICA updated the page in
general every day, and sometimes more than once. During the Easter holiday, there was though a decrease in updates. During the observations, the likes of the Facebook page increased with around 300 likes daily, from 152,433 likes to 154,579.

Customers liked and commented on posts every day, and also created posts on their own. In general, customers posted own posts on the page 2 to 5 times per day. Posts made by ICA generated in average 50 to 200 likes, and in addition 20 to 70 comments. Some posts were also shared by the customers, up to 30 times.

Facebook’s statistics about ICA’s page showed that the most popular age group was 13-17 year olds. The most popular city was Stockholm, Sweden. The point in time when most people were talking about ICA on Facebook was in July, 2011.

5.6 Fotografiska

Fotografiska is a museum for photography and art in Stockholm, Sweden. Fotografiska has exhibitions with famous photographers. (Fotografiska, 2012-05-04) Fotografiska’s turnover for the period 2010-2012 was 39,012,000 SEK. (Allabolag.se, 2012-05-16)

5.6.1 Company Communication

Fotografiska send out messages to their customers frequently, sometimes a couple of times a day. The messages that Fotografiska send out to their customers varied from each other. In some cases Fotografiska described new exhibitions that would take place while other times it was information about a photographer that had some kind of a milestone at the moment. A frequent message was news about anniversaries and events that happened at the time and had to do with the art of photography in general.
Every time Fotografiska send out a message to their customers, a picture was included as well as a short and informative description of what they wanted to announce with that message. In some cases it was information about what is going to happen at Fotografiska in near future, in other cases it was information about the exhibitions that took place at the Fotografiska at the moment. In some posts made by Fotografiska instead of pictures, YouTube clips have been attached, often those clips were about famous photographers who would have an exhibition at Fotografiska. Video clips could be an interview with the photographer or a short movie describing who he/she was, and what kind of photography he/she was working with.

Every time when there was an exhibition opening at Fotografiska with many attendant guests, Fotografiska took photos of both the guest as well as the art exhibited during the event. Fotografiska then posted all of the photographs on their Facebook page for customers to watch.

5.6.2 Customer Communication

During the observation time on Fotografiska’s Facebook page, communication between customers was mostly found after Fotografiska published a new post. The customers commented on the posts made by Fotografiska, and discussed between each other about the exhibitions. The customers that had already visited one exhibition recommended and encouraged others to go and visit it.

During the time for the observations the amount of recommendations that customers has made to their own Facebook friends was visible. Customers recommended Fotografiska more than 400 times. Those recommendations focused mostly on positive experiences of Fotografiska, and in some cases recommended others to visit a specific exhibition. Except recommendations that customer made to other customers, they also shared the posts that Fotografiska made. Every time when a customers shared a post from Fotografiska all of his/hers Facebook friends were
able to see it. During the observation time Fotografiska posts has been shared in average 10 times per post.

5.6.3 Activity

Fotografiska joined Facebook in 2010, simultaneously with the opening of the museum. During the time for observation Fotografiska posted in average two to three posts a day. Every post got comments and likes from customers. The amount likes and comments per posts were in average 100 likes and 5 comments. Moreover Fotografiska’s Facebook page gained around 4000 new followers, more than 4 400 customers were talking about Fotografiska on Facebook, and around 8 000 people visited Fotografiska’s Facebook page.

Facebook’s statistics about Fotografiska showed that the most popular age group was people between 25-44 years old and the most popular city was Stockholm, Sweden. The statistics also showed that Fotografiska had been tagged in 8 339 photos and the most popular week when most customers visited Fotografiska’s Facebook page was the 9th of October 2011.

5.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the accumulated findings from the observations that were carried out. The empirical chapter put forward how and what the six observed companies communicated, as well as how the followers were communicating with each other and with the company. It also presented numerical information such as how many followers the companies gained and how many likes and comments they usually generated. The empirical chapter is the basis for the following analysis chapter.
6. Analysis Chapter

The analysis chapter provides a critical assessment of the empirical data in relation to the theoretical framework presented in chapter 2. The analysis is structured with the subheadings used in the empirical chapter; company communication, customer communication and activity. Lastly in the chapter a pattern matching table is displayed, which will provide the reader with an overview of similarities and dissimilarities in the communication of the observed companies.

6.1 Company Communication

A Facebook page is a platform for companies to communicate, build and strengthen relationships with their customers. This relates to Duncan & Moriarty (1998), who state that communication helps companies to focus their efforts at better acquiring and retaining relationships with customers. Facebook communication is more personal than traditional marketing channels since it enables companies to be in direct contact with their customers, and customers receive the company’s messages within seconds and vice versa. The contact between company and customer is personal on Facebook since customers are able to participate in a direct dialogue with the company, where they can ask questions, propose suggestions or leave criticism and get an answer from the company quickly. Facebook is a tool for rapidly establishing relationships between the company and its customers. By interacting with customers on a personal level the company obtains marketing information about the customer’s preferences. (Harris & Dennis, 2011) By having a two-way communication with customers on Facebook the company gets to know them better, and by asking the customers questions and monitoring their comments and likes they learn about their preferences and dislikes. It is important to try to engage customers through communicating with them, since on the internet it is hard to hold on to visitors and create personal relationships. The observed companies in general
were successful in engaging the customers by sending out frequent posts that involved the customers. When customers are engaged and involved they seem more likely to re-visit the Facebook page. One of the most effective ways to engage customers seemed to be by having contests, which meant that customers would re-visit the page in order to find out the result of the contest or participate in new ones. Liseberg offered their followers contests on a weekly basis and posted reminders of the contests daily, in order to boost customer engagement before the season opening of the park. Facebook provide companies with many new opportunities to generate higher customer engagement with online communication. (Tripathi, 2009; Wang, 2006)

According to Ahuja & Medury (2010) the ability of engaging customers will determine whether customers will enter into a greater relationship with the company. Facebook pages attract followers that are already familiar with the company, and the followers actively choose themselves which companies they want to like. Basically, customers choose to enter this relationship with the company. Since it is evident who the followers of the page are (considering age and location for example), the messages that the company sends out are tailored to fit this specific target group. The company will get to know what sorts of posts will generate the most activity from the customers, and what sorts of messages are the most popular. The Facebook page enables companies to keep their current customers and nurture that relationship by engaging them in different activities on the page.

Nambisan & Baron (2007) state that companies must be involved within the virtual environment together with customers in order to co-create customer value, build and manage relationships. During the observations it was evident that the Facebook pages were not created only by the companies but also by the customers’ contributions. The company sends out messages however without the customer involvement the content of the page would be one dimensional. The combination of
company and customer communication in terms of posts, comments and likes is crucial in developing an efficient Facebook page.

The observations showed that in order to create an efficient and well-functioning Facebook page, the company must be prepared to control the page. Lee & Park (2007) mean that companies must send a clear and consistent message to their chosen target group about its offerings. On Facebook the company must be sending out messages that are in line with the company values, but alter these so that they fit into the social network environment and the group they are communicating with. This was evident during the observations since the companies tended to send out short but informative messages that communicated their offers. In order for the customers to benefit from the messages, or spread them further, they must feel involved in the company’s posts. The observations proved that the companies managed to engage the customers by involving them in their posts, where customers got the feeling of being important for the company and contributing both to the company and their own customer experience. It is important for companies to show their customers that they are irreplaceable in order to make them engaged, and deepen the relationship between the customer and the company.

The company is put in a position where they can regulate the environment and ambience of the Facebook page. If customers do not get responses from the company it can contribute to a negative atmosphere. By constantly communicating with the customers, that have both positive and negative feedback, the company can steer the Facebook page in a beneficial way and gain knowledge and deepen the relationship with the followers. This relates to by Duncan (2002) who expresses that through integrated marketing communication companies can strategically control all messages sent to customers and encourage a purposeful dialogue with them. The observations showed how companies should practically design their Facebook updates to generate customer engagement, in form of shares, likes and comments. A post should include a text with a clear message. Posts are usually short and
informative. The post becomes more attractive to the customers by including a picture or a viral video that visualizes the message. The posts that engaged the most customers were special offers and competitions. It is important for the company to show appreciation of the customers, and give them special deals for being loyal Facebook followers. It should be clear to the customer why it is a benefit to follow the company on Facebook. One way of reaching out to new followers is by encouraging the current ones to share posts made by the company. McDonald’s Sweden encouraged its followers to share a post to their Facebook friends and by doing that they would get a free coffee from one of their restaurants. The post instantly gained popularity among the followers, in form of shares, comments and likes.

The way the company answer customer comments is of importance. The observed companies seemed to have a pre-decided way of addressing the customers. Nelly.com always answered the customers in the same way, firstly by addressing them by their first name, using simple understandable language, and ending the comment with “<3 Nelly.com”, which is internet language for saying “with love, Nelly.com”. A personal contact is established by addressing the customer by their name, and the language used should not be so formal, instead more like a casual dialogue. Through establishing a personal contact with the customers, the observed companies manage to calm down even the most angry customers.

The data collected through the observations corresponded with Porter et al (2011) three-stage process of fostering engagement in online communities. The observed companies used this process by firstly getting to know their followers and their needs. By having contests and other activities that involved the customers the companies promoted customer participation. By continuously involving the customers and having a dialogue with them customers kept cooperating with the firm and also communicating with one another.
6.2 Customer Communication

Facebook pages are not only a platform for communication between the company and its customers, but a meeting place where customers can encounter their peers. Customers can take part of each other's experiences, learn from each other and communicate. The communication between customers takes place in the comments under the company’s posts or customers' posts. Liseberg’s customers used the comment field under the company’s posts to discuss the messages that were sent out, and the discussions focused on both positive and negative aspects.

Facebook pages are more than a marketing channel but a forum for fans to meet and spread the message of the company. Followers are able to spread the company's messages by sharing posts and recommending the page to their friends. This relates to word of mouth, as well as showing the company who their most engaged customers are. Ahuja & Medury (2010) put forward that in the digital context, consumer engagement is visible through the means of publishing, posting comments, subscribing, bookmarking, emailing, distributing and networking. When conducting the observations it was possible to detect the most engaged customers on Facebook as the ones willing to share their experiences with the company, comment and like posts, recommend the page to their friends and share the company’s posts so that more Facebook users can see them. These customers are not hesitant to display on their personal profile that they support their company and are willing to spread their opinions. By sharing the company's messages customers spread them out to their own network in the matter of seconds. As mentioned by Chu & Kim (2011), Goads & Mayzlin, (2004) & Kozinets et. al (2010) the speed in which customers can communicate with the masses is why Facebook is so powerful regarding word of mouth. Every time customers share a company message this leads to a possible increase in followers for the company. If the company succeeds in engaging these new followers as well, it could create a chain reaction where the
company has the ability to gain new followers continuously. It is important for companies to stimulate word of mouth on Facebook since according to Trusov et al (2009) the influence of word of mouth in decision making is for instance approximately twenty times higher than the influence of marketing events.

Engagement depends on the customer and varies from customer to customer. (Tripathi, 2009) Engaged customers in different forms will be drawn to the Facebook page, not only the very positive customers but also negative customers will comment and post on the page. Porter et al (2011) emphasize that engagement is a positive state of mind, characterized by high energy, commitment and loyalty toward a firm as well as actions towards a company that go further than transaction. However, it is important to recognize that negative customers are also engaged in the company. Negative customers are willing to make their voice heard by persistently leaving negative feedback and comments. However, customers that are in between these two extreme levels of engagement will not be as visible. These customers are less likely to leave comments, but might like posts made by the company instead.

Conflicts and debates can occur on the Facebook page when customers with different levels of engagement meet, some will defend the company while some will attack it. On Nelly.com’s Facebook page one customer expressed their dissatisfaction with the company due to a delayed delivery, this post generated comments that agreed with this customer but also comments that took the company’s side and defended Nelly.com. The post generated both likes, comments as well as comments from the company. Posts like this will create a dialogue between the customers, where the very positive and very negative customers will exaggerate their arguments in the heat of the moment, in order to win the discussion. These discussions are often not let alone, the company is also partaking in them and tries to steer the discussions so that a negative atmosphere is avoided. In these sorts of situations a trialogue occurs. Porter et al (2011) mention trialogue as when customers
engage in meaningful relationships with one another and with the firms at the same time. On Facebook the customers are communicating with each other simultaneously as communicating with the company. This is a prominent feature of Facebook pages.

6.3 Activity

In order to generate engaged customers and create a successful Facebook page, the company must frequently update the page. Most of the observed companies was updating with one or several posts each day, as well as answering customer comments daily. The company needs to constantly send out new messages in form of posts, videos or contests. These posts will generate comments and questions from the customers that should be answered quickly in order to maintain a dialogue on the page. Liseberg answered customer comments in 30 minutes to 2 hours, and ICA always apologized to the customer if the answer was late. Frequent updates will generate feedback and insight into the customers’ needs and wants, meaning that posts can constantly be customized to fit the customers’ needs even if they are changing. Speed is an important component in Facebook communication, both from the companies’ and the customers’ sides. In order for companies to be successful on Facebook they must be able to manage the speed, and stay updated. Porter et al (2011) put forward similar arguments, to nurture and sustain customer engagement on social networks requires considerable effort.

On Facebook, success is measured in the form of numbers of likes (of the company, posts and videos), comments and shares of posts. By keeping track of the amounts of likes and comments on posts, the company will gain knowledge about what the customers want and what sorts of messages they are willing to share to their friends. The observations showed that for every company there is an average of how many shares a post can get in general, and some posts generate no shares at all, entailing
that it was not engaging or interesting enough for customers to spread this message further. If the company is aware of how many likes, comments and shares a post generally get they will know if a post is successful or not, and essentially if the customers responds well to the message the company is sending out. Gaining this sort of market information is for the company time and money efficient.

Social networks can be used by companies to connect, listen, understand, and engage the customers in order to improve relationships with customers. (Harris & Dennis, 2011) By having a page on Facebook there are several applications that the company can use in understanding its customers better, more than just monitoring and participating in dialogue. Facebook provides companies with basic statistics about its followers; demographics such as age, where they come from and gender. It is also possible to see statistics over the activity on the page, how many people like the page per day and how many people are talking about the page. These simple statistics combined with the information that can be found in customer comments contributes to fast and accessible marketing research. This sort of information can help the company in creating a successful Facebook page, and above all, lead to more sales and a stronger relationship between the customer and company.

6.4 Pattern Matching Table

In order to create an overview of the observed companies and their similarities and disimilarities the authors constructed a pattern matching table. The table is based on the observation schedule and brings up several factors that have been compared among the companies. The results showed mostly similarities with few exeptions. Marabou is the only company not including videos in their posts. Fotografiska did not have any contests, and were the most frequent in updating. Marabou’s updates were much less frequent than the other companies, and only updated about once a week. Three of the companies; ICA, Nelly.com, and McDonald’s, got more negative
comments than the other three companies. Fotografiska was the single company that did not generate any negative comments at all.

Table 6.1: Pattern Matching Table

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<th>Marabou</th>
<th>ICA</th>
<th>Nelly.com</th>
<th>Fotografiska</th>
<th>McDonalds</th>
<th>Liseberg</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Amount of Followers</strong></td>
<td>361,051</td>
<td>154,579</td>
<td>281,222</td>
<td>140,082</td>
<td>195,621</td>
<td>157,592</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B2C Communication</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Posts</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pictures</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Videos</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contests</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency of posts</strong></td>
<td>1/week</td>
<td>1/day</td>
<td>1/day</td>
<td>4-5/day</td>
<td>1/day</td>
<td>3-4/day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Customer Comments</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Customer Likes</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Customers Shares</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C2C Communication</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive comments</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative Comments</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

That the chosen companies were the biggest Swedish companies on Facebook at the time was the reason for why they have many similarities even though they are in completely different businesses. The similarities showed that the observed companies are communicating on Facebook in a similar way, they post and comment in the same way. The reason for this might be that the companies are successful not only on Facebook, but also in reality.

6.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided connections and comparisons between the main findings in the empirical data and the theoretical framework. The analysis brought up aspects
such as how companies communicate with customers on Facebook and build relationships, how customers communicate with each other as well as which roll activity plays in engaging customers. The authors constructed a pattern matching table that showed mostly similarities among the observed companies, indicating that they communicated in similar ways. From the analysis chapter the final conclusions of the thesis will be drawn.
7. Conclusions and Implications

In this chapter the most important conclusions and results of the empirical investigation and the analysis are presented. The conclusion aims to answer the research question of the thesis. Further on, theoretical and managerial implications are provided as well as suggestions for future studies and limitations of the study.

7.1 Conclusion

The aim of the thesis was to answer the following research question;

- What factors are important when companies communicate on Facebook, in order to engage their customers?

The research showed that companies use integrated marketing communication as a tool to involve and engage customers on Facebook. The results imply that there are key factors that characterized the observed companies’ Facebook communication. These factors indicate how communication on Facebook is carried out by companies, and have proven to be essential in whether customers become engaged or not.

**Frequency:** Communication on Facebook is characterized by speed. Companies update their pages frequently in order to sustain customer interest and not be forgotten. The companies frequently communicate with its customers by answering their questions and comments, thus keeping up with the paste of the customers. In the digital world companies have to be alert in order to meet the competition and the demands of the customer.

**Clear information:** It has already been established that Facebook communication is fast and frequent. Therefore, the information that companies send out to customers is short, precise and clear. Customers are able to absorb the information instantly and
in order to avoid misunderstandings it must be accurate and understandable for all customers.

**Visualize the message:** Companies take use of all tools Facebook provide them with and when communicating to the customers the message is always visualized through pictures or videos. Posts with pictures or videos get more attention from the customers and stands out from messages with just text. By visualizing the message the company creates a depth and customers are able to read, see and hear and easier understand the update the company is sending out. When customers clearly understand the message of the company it is easier for the company to engage them.

**Customer involvement:** Companies include customers in their Facebook updates in order to make them involved and engaged in the company. There are several ways to involve customers, competitions of some sort was the most common way and other approaches included special offers and posing direct questions to the customers. In order to determine whether a post has been successful in engaging the customers the company has to evaluate the number of likes and shares and the information that can be extracted from customer comments.

The research showed that there were no significant differences in results from the theoretical framework. The research proposes that engaged customers comes in many different forms. The Facebook page becomes a meeting place for the very positively engaged customers, the neutrally engaged ones as well as the very negative ones. Negative customers are often as dedicated and engaged as their counterparts and are as willing to share their experiences and opinions of the company. Most companies that were observed were aware of how to deal with these sorts of customers in order to delimit negative word of mouth to spread. One difference from the research model was that the results did not establish that negative customers can be turned to positive ones through integrated marketing communication and engagement.
7.2 Theoretical Implications

Since the results of the research were mostly aligned with the research model presented in chapter 3, it can be concluded that the research have been confirming existing theory. This thesis has contributed with applying the theories of integrated marketing communication, engagement and word of mouth to a particular environment, Facebook. Several authors that were brought up in the literature review focused on the importance of social networks, Nambisan & Baron (2007), Ahuja & Medury (2010), Tripathi (2009) and Harris & Dennis (2011). Especially the authors focusing on word of mouth mention the importance of social networks, which have been a contributory factor to the current power of word of mouth, for example Chu & Kim (2011), Goads & Mayzlin, (2004) & Kozinets et. al (2010).

This thesis brought forward the importance of Facebook as a contemporary communication tool for companies and their customers. The research has contributed with a fundamental insight into how communication is carried out on Facebook and how existing theories can be applied to this setting.

7.3 Managerial Implications

This thesis has showed that being active on Facebook is today very common for companies, and it is a fast way to reach out to customers and establish a dialogue and a relationship. By being active on Facebook a company can learn much about its customers and their preferences and needs. While writing this thesis the authors gained knowledge about how a company Facebook page is managed. The results of the thesis could be used as a guideline that companies could follow when setting up a Facebook page or for improving an existing one. In order to facilitate the recommendations the authors have summarized some main points that a company can follow.
• Make one or several employees in the company (depending on the size of the company) responsible for the Facebook page. These employees should have knowledge about Facebook (and other social networks), or receive education about it.

• In order to promote the Facebook page, the company should make sure that their loyal customers are aware of its existents. This can be made by advertising it on the company homepage, in the store etc. Customers have to be willing to like the page, and for them to be active followers they should be able to see what sorts of benefits they can get (such as special discounts for Facebook followers).

• Make sure that the page is frequently updated, and be consistent in the way you update. Preferably once a day, or once every second day. Customers are unlikely to be active followers of a company page that never is updated.

• The posts should consist of short, informative and clear text accompanied with at least one picture that visualizes the message or a YouTube video for example. In order for the posts to evoke engagement among customers they should involve the customers in some way, by having competitions, asking the customers questions, or offer them deals and discounts (exclusive Facebook discounts).

• In order to make the page successful and in order to be able to steer the page in a beneficial way for the company, the company need to monitor and take part of the dialogue (and triologue) in the comments. The company should answer questions and handle criticism from the customers. When engaging in dialogue with the customers the company should use a language that is in level with the customers but still keep in line with the company values and believes.
• The company should keep in mind that these sorts of fan pages attract not only the very positive customers but also the very negative ones. More neutral customers will be more invisible, and less willing to make their voice heard. The company must be able to deal with negative comments and posts on the Facebook page, and keep in mind that bad word of mouth will spread quickly if it is posted on the page.

• By getting to know their Facebook followers, the company can generate time and money efficient market research.

7.4 Limitations

There are some limitations of the thesis that the authors want to enlighten. The method of observations had both advantages and disadvantages. It was fitting since it was possible to divide the workload among the authors and generated an insight into how Facebook communication works. It was however quite time consuming and in order to generate useful data the observation time had to be extended. Using another method might have provided more insight into the customers’ point of view, however that was not the purpose of the study. Due to the choice of method the authors might not have gained the most optimal deep information. The time aspect was one of the major limitations when writing the thesis, more time would have generated more depth in the results and the ability of taking use of more than one method. Using an additional method such as in-depth interviews or a quantitative method such as questionnaires might have been a good idea, if given more time.

After the observations were carried out it was evident that the results of the study might not be pioneering, it was more of a confirmation of the expectations of the study. This was a result which depended on the fact that the observed companies were already established and successful on Facebook. The study might have
generated more nuanced results if it had been a comparison of successful companies and smaller companies on Facebook.

It should be noted that another limitation is that the thesis focused only on Facebook, and no other social networks. The authors made this choice in order to generate a more delimited, narrow study. However, the results cannot be applied to other social networks that differ from Facebook.

7.5 Future Research

This study has in general been confirming existing theory, but applied it to the Facebook environment. Even though Facebook is a relatively new way for companies to communicate with customers it has proven to be a powerful tool. Today almost everyone is a Facebook user, and the potential for companies to take use of this network might seem endless. The popularity of Facebook has so far not been reduced, therefore it is important for students and researchers to keep investigating and evaluating Facebook in the future.

So far, companies have mostly enjoyed the benefits of being active on Facebook, thus drawbacks might not have been focused at yet. Drawbacks and negative aspect of companies active on Facebook could be a suggestion to focus on for future researchers, as well as to investigate whether it could have negative effects on the relationship between the company and the customers for example.

This research focused on the six of the biggest Swedish companies on Facebook today, these companies are evidently already quite successful in their Facebook activities (and are gaining more likes every day). A suggestion for future studies would be to investigate company pages that have not been successful or have failed on Facebook.
7.6 Chapter Summary

The final chapter concluded the results of the thesis and answered the research question. The research question was answered by bringing up four factors that are of importance when companies communicate on Facebook; frequency, clear information, visualize the message and customer involvement. The conclusion was drawn that the results were aligned with the proposed research model, constructed of the theoretical framework. The authors also brought up the theoretical implications of the thesis, i.e. the contributions of the research, and managerial implications, that were presented as a guideline for managers. The limitations of the research were presented, as well as suggestions for future research.
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Appendix 1

Overview of Facebook, Including Word List

An example of what a company Facebook page looks like in May 2012.
1. **Page**: Bands, businesses, restaurants, brands and celebrities can create pages in order to connect with their fans and customers on Facebook.

2. **Follower**: A follower is a Facebook user that likes a page. Users can be followers of multiple pages.

3. **Post**: Companies update their pages with posts. A post can consist of both text and images. Followers can also make their own posts on companies’ pages.

4. **Like**: Like can refer to two things. Users can like a page, thus becoming a follower of that page. Users can click on the like button under a post, a way of showing positive feedback. Users can also like each other’s comments.

5. **Comment**: Facebook users can post comments on companies’ posts. Comments are visible to other users as well as the company.

6. **Share**: Users have the ability to share posts made by others on their own profile.

7. **Check-in**: Check-in is an application that enables users to let their friends know where they are by using a mobile device. Users can check-in to different venues such as restaurant or stores.
## Appendix 2

### Observation Schedule for Company Pages on Facebook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operationalized variables</th>
<th>Guidelines for observing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. B2C messages</td>
<td>1. Is the company sending out messages to the customers? What messages are they communicating?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Dialogue</td>
<td>2. Are the customers posting comments to the company? If so, is the company responding to the customers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Activity</td>
<td>3. With what frequency is the company updating their page?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Customer stimulation</td>
<td>4. Are the customers encouraged to participate and comment on the company’s page?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. C2C communication</td>
<td>5. Are the customers communicating with each other on the company’s page?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Positive or Negative</td>
<td>6. Are the customers posting positive and/or negative comments?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Customer comments</td>
<td>7. Are the customers posting comments on the page?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Customer activity</td>
<td>8. How often does the customers post comments or participate on the company’s page?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Subscribers</td>
<td>9. How many likes does the company have and is it increasing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Networking</td>
<td>10. Are the customers communicating with each other about the product?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Participation</td>
<td>11. Are the customers participating in the activities that the company offers on their Facebook page?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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On 1 January 2010 Växjö University and the University of Kalmar merged to form Linnaeus University. This new university is the product of a will to improve the quality, enhance the appeal and boost the development potential of teaching and research, at the same time as it plays a prominent role in working closely together with local society. Linnaeus University offers an attractive knowledge environment characterised by high quality and a competitive portfolio of skills.

Linnaeus University is a modern, international university with the emphasis on the desire for knowledge, creative thinking and practical innovations. For us, the focus is on proximity to our students, but also on the world around us and the future ahead.