



The utilization of social media in used car sales

Lappeenranta–Lahti University of Technology LUT

Master's Programme in International Business and Entrepreneurship

2023

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ABSTRACT

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The utilization of social media in used car sales

Master's thesis

2023

76 pages, 10 figures, 13 tables

Examiners: Professor Henri Hakala

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Keywords: car sales, social media, brand, brand building, used cars, car dealership, social media marketing

This master's thesis examines how used car dealers use social media as part of their business. The purpose is to consider how social media is utilized as part of the company's business, how it is used to create a brand, and how it is used to create leads. Three of the largest players in the field have been selected as target companies for the study; Kamux, Saka and Rinta-Jouppi. Today, social media is an integral part of companies' business, and in order to do effective marketing, companies must know how to use it correctly.

The study first conducts an extensive literature review of the already existing theory of social media marketing, integrated marketing communication and brand structure, after which this theory is combined with the context of the car trade industry. After that, the empirical part of the research is carried out, where it was moved on to examine the Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and TikTok channels of the selected companies and their content. In total, the study examined 727 social media posts between October 2022 and March 2023. These publications were divided into categories defined by the researcher based on their content type and vividness. In addition to these, the communication between selected companies and consumers was studied.

There were differences in the implementation of companies' social media, both in the types of content and in the amount of publications. All the companies had in common that all types of content were represented on social media, but there were differences in how much content of different categories was published. All of them also had in common that there was very

little communication with consumers. However, the biggest differences arose in the number of publications between different companies.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Lappeenrannan–Lahden teknillinen yliopisto LUT

LUT-kauppakorkeakoulu

Kauppätieteet

Jere Kurvi

Sosiaalisen median hyödyntäminen käytettyjen autojen kaupassa

Kauppätieteiden pro gradu -tutkielma

2023

76 sivua, 10 kuvaa, 13 taulukkoa

Tarkastajat: Professori Henri Hakala

Tutkija Gregory O'Shea

Avainsanat: sosiaalinen media, sosiaalisen median markkinointi, käytetyt autot, autokauppa, brändin luominen, brändi

Tässä pro gradu -tutkielmassa tutkitaan sitä, miten käytettyjen autojen kuapat hyödyntävät sosiaalista mediaa osana liiketoimintaansa. Tarkoitus on huomioida, miten sosiaalista mediaa hyödynnetään osana yrityksen liiketoimintaa, miten sitä käytetään brändin luomiseen sekä miten sen avulla pyritään luomaan liidejä. Tutkimuksen kohdeyrityksiksi on valittu kolme alan suurinta toimijaa; Kamux, Saka ja Rinta-Jouppi. Nykypäivänä sosiaalinen media on kiinteä osa yritysten liiketoimintaa, ja tehdäkseen tehokasta markkinointia, on yritysten osattava hyödyntää sitä oikein.

Tutkimuksessa ensiksi käydään laaja kirjallisuuskatsaus jo olemassa olevaan sosiaalisen median markkinoinnin, integroidun markkinointiviestinnän ja brändin rakentamisen teoriaan, jonka jälkeen tämä teoria yhdistetään autokaupan alan kontekstiin. Sen jälkeen suoritetaan tutkimuksen empirinen osio, jossa siirryttiin tutkimaan valittujen yritysten Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn ja TikTok kanavia ja niiden sisältöä. Kaiken kaikkiaan tutkimuksessa tutkittiin 727 sosiaalisen median julkaisua lokakuun 2022 ja maaliskuun 2023 välisenä aikana. Nämä julkaisut jaettiin tutkijan määrittelemiin kategorioihin niiden sisältötyypin ja eloisuuden perusteella. Näiden lisäksi tutkittiin valittujen yritysten ja kuluttajien välistä kommunikaatiota.

Yritysten sosiaalisen median toteutuksessa oli eroja niin sisältötyypeissä, kuin myös julkaisumäärissä. Yhteistä kaikille yrityksille oli se, että kaikki sisältötyypit oli edustettuna sosiaalisessa mediassa, mutta eroja kuitenkin oli siinä, miten paljon eri kategorioiden sisältöä

julkaistiin. Kaikille yhteistä oli myös se, että kommunikointi kuluttajien kanssa oli hyvin vähäistä. Suurimmat erot syntyi kuitenkin julkaisumäärissä eri yritysten välillä.

AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

After five years of studies, I have come to this moment where it all is coming to an end. It is rather difficult to find words to describe the emotions going through at the moment. I feel happy, relieved and thankful. The years here in Lappeenranta have given me knowledge, many memories and most importantly friends for life. I could not be more thankful for all the people I have had the honor of meeting and getting to my life.

Firstly I would like to thank my family. You were always there for me, when the times were difficult and also gave me advice and strength to complete my studies. Then I would like to give a special thank you for all my friends, which have been there beside me from the beginning all the way until this moment. Thank you Eveliina, Essi, Anton, Teemu, Jussi and Laura. Without you this time here in Lappeenranta would not have been this fun and joyful. As said, without you this time here would not have been the same. All the moments from studying in school, late night drives, kebabs from Maan and lunches at LUT hiding from Jussi will be remembered as long as I live.

A big thank you also to my supervisors Henri Hakala and Gregory O'Shea, for guiding me through the process of making this thesis. Your comments and guiding were very helpful and I am very thankful for helping me and understanding my situation.

In Lappeenranta, 8th of April 2023

Jere Kurvi

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1 Introduction

This master's thesis investigates the utilization of social media in used car sales. Most of us scroll through social media every day and know what it is like to see adverts and posts from different companies. In this thesis, the aim is to take a closer look at those publications and see the theory behind them. This thesis takes a look, especially at the publications made by used car dealers. Nowadays publications on social media play a big role in how companies are seen by consumers. However, social media has made it possible for consumers to also shape the look of a company in the eyes of other consumers. Although companies themselves often create most of the content for social media channels, consumers also play a part in creating content. When a company and a consumer interact with each other on social media, content for the social media channel is created as a byproduct (Pöyry, Parvinen & Malmivaara, 2013, 226). Previously social media was only a place for people to interact with friends, family, and other people, but nowadays it's a cost-effective marketing playground for companies. The growth of small companies in social media has been very rapid in the last few years, as more and more companies follow bigger brands in utilizing social media in their marketing efforts.

When compared to traditional media, social media offers many advantages. Social media for example makes it easier for companies to interact with their customers. At the same time, it is easier for consumers to interact with the company, as social media enables two-way communication between the company and the consumers. More responsive communication makes it possible for companies to react quickly to problem situations which can improve customer service. One of the biggest advantages which social media offers for companies is more cost-effective marketing. (Nadaraja & Yazdanifard, 2013, 4-5)

Many companies are not able to utilize these advantages provided by social media, because they are lacking in the planning of effective social media marketing. According to studies, 97 percent of marketers are using social media in their marketing and 85 percent of them were unsure of what social media tools to use (Husain, Ghufraan & Chaubey, 2016, 21). Effective social media marketing enables more interaction with consumers which is important because higher interaction creates stronger relationships between the company and consumers. Relationship building and interaction with consumers is an important factor in

social media marketing, as it is said to have a positive effect on companies' revenue. (Hudson, Huang, Roth & Madden, 2016, 29)

The importance of social media has grown significantly in recent years, when global crises have restricted people's movement, so many more people have resorted to social media to maintain relationships. That's why it is also profitable for companies to invest their resources into social media, as it makes it possible to reach more people. Marketing is only effective when it can be seen by consumers, so that's why companies should invest in effective social media marketing.

Social media has been studied many times before, but there are not many studies on how used car dealers are utilizing the possibilities offered by it. In the competitive field of used cars, it is important to utilize every possibility, which can offer advantages over competitors. The brand and presence created in social media can be the final factor that makes one company stand out from the others. Therefore the aim is to investigate how social media is being utilized in the field of used car dealers. More precisely, by investigating social media publications, categorizing them based on their content, and then analyzing the publications overall based on their vividness, content, and quantity, this thesis aims to answer how used car dealers utilize social media in brand building and sales lead creation.

1.1 Background

The purpose of this thesis is to find information about how used car dealers use social media as part of the company's marketing. In particular, how social media is used to build one's brand and how it is used for commercial purposes, such as generating sales leads, is studied. Previous studies made by Duan, Gu & Whinston (2008) and Stephen & Galak (2012) suggest that social media has strongly influenced consumers' purchasing decisions, especially in the form of word-of-mouth (WOM) or user-generated content (UGC), and that companies should design their social media content like so that it creates WOM and UGC. (Duan, Gu & Whinston, 2008, 241; Stephen & Galak, 2012, 636) However, those previous studies focused on non-durable goods, and according to the latest studies conducted by Wang et al (2021), the situation is different when examining durable goods. For durable goods, consumers are more interested in marketers' information. This information is called firm-

generated content (FGC) and, together with traditional media, it is a more important source of information and influencer of the purchase decision than user-generated content when the subject of marketing is durable goods. Therefore the research by Wang et al (2021) suggests that companies offering durable goods, (such as used cars) should be focusing on their FGC and traditional media first before leveraging the UGC to their advantage. Also, it becomes crucial to make sure that the integration of marketing content is taken care of properly. (Wang, Guo, Susarla & Sambamurthy, 2021, 600)

1.2 Objectives of the research and the research questions

The main objective of this study is to find out the ways to use social media in the sales of used cars. The information provided with this study could then be used to help used car dealers to create a universal social media strategy which then can be edited to fit changing market environments. The main research question which will aim to provide an answer to the objective of this study is;

Q1: How is social media utilized in sales of used cars?

To provide an answer to this research question, two sub questions are formed which will help to give information for the main research question. The two sub questions are the following:

Q2: How companies are building their brand image through social media?

Q3: How can companies utilize social media to create leads?

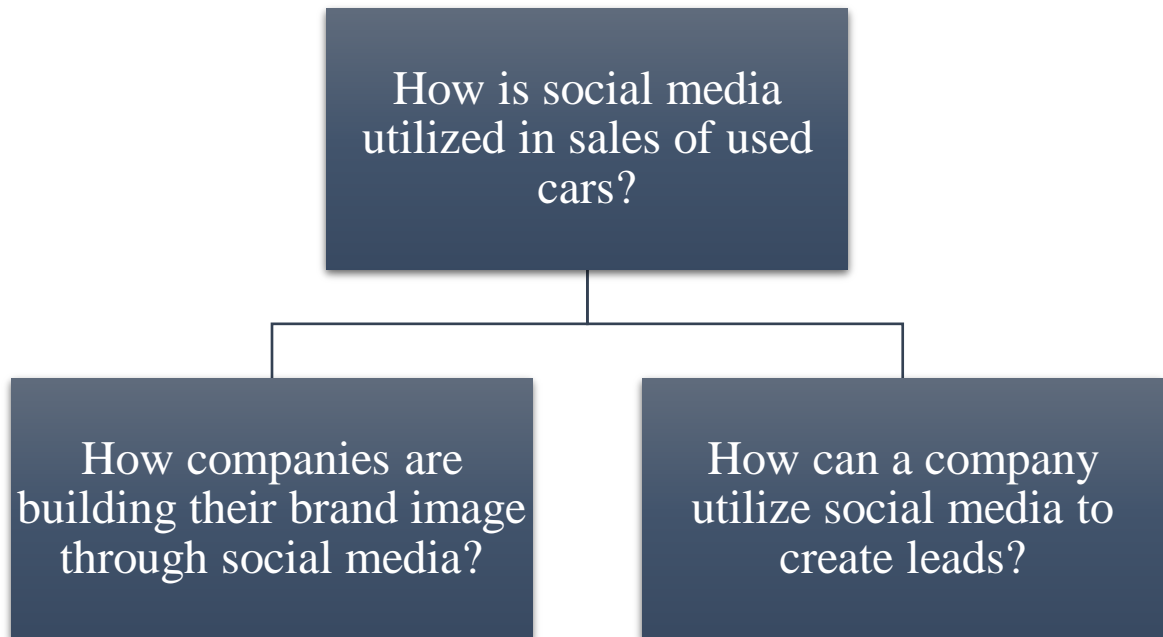


Figure 1 The research questions of the study

By answering these sub questions, there would be enough information gathered to answer the main research question, and also to provide some information on how to create a solid base for social media strategy on used car sales. In order to be able to give answers to the research questions, they are first studied at the level of theory in order to gain an understanding of the phenomenon under study, after which it is studied by means of empirical research.

A few limitations have been made to the scope of the study, such as the number of social media channels to be studied. The channels to be investigated in this study are Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok and LinkedIn. Also, not every car dealer can be investigated, so the main focus of the research will be on the largest known players in the field of car sales. However, the research can also take into account other companies operating in the field, which are encountered while doing the research.

1.3 Research design

This study is conducted using qualitative research methods. The research method used in the work is a case study, where the current phenomenon is studied with versatile information

obtained in many ways. The case study is perfectly suited as the method of the research in question because the case study aims to collect diverse information and with the help of the acquired information, the aim is to understand the phenomenon even better. (Metsämuuronen, 2003, 169-170) As said previously, this study aims to find out the most effective ways car dealers can utilize social media in their operations.

1.4 Theoretical framework

The figure below show the theoretical framework of this study. The theoretical framework summarizes the purpose of the research in one picture. First, social media will be studied, and then it will be studied in the context of the car sales. Thus, it is possible to study how car shops utilize social media as part of the used car sales. In detail, brand building and sales lead creation are researched in the context of this research.

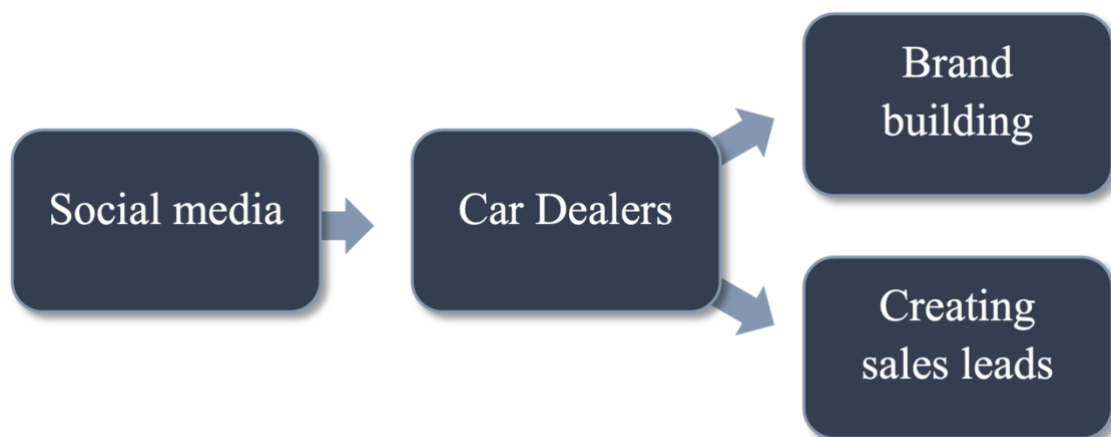


Figure 2 Theoretical framework of the study

1.5 Methodology

The research method used in the work was a case study, where the current phenomenon is studied with versatile information obtained in many ways. The case study is perfectly suited as the method of the research in question, because the case study aims to collect diverse information and with the help of the acquired information, the aim is to understand the

phenomenon even better. (Metsämuuronen, 2003, p.169-170) As said previously, this study aims to find out the ways used car dealers can utilize the social media in their operations.

The material for research was gathered by investigating the social media channels of different used car dealers, and aiming to find noticeable patterns. It was noted how frequently social media was updated and also how many channels are being used in social media, and was the content coherent across all platforms. Also in addition to the data gathered, a company from used cars industry provided their own data to be used in the study. Together this data was used to create valuable on insight on what works on social media and what does not.

The analysis of the research was carried out by means of content analysis. The analysis of the content can be divided into seven stages, the first of which is the so-called "sensitization" of the researcher. This refers to the fact that the researcher of the material needs to know his own material thoroughly and understand its key concepts. The next step is the inclusion and theorization of the material. This phase includes the thinking work of the research, after which we move on to the rough classification of the material. After that, the research task is specified, the frequency of occurrence of the phenomena is investigated and determined, deviations are found and new classifications are made. After that, cross-validation is performed, where new categories are supported and undermined with the help of the material. Finally, the conclusions and interpretation of the analysis are drawn up, in which the result is transferred to a wider review framework. (Metsämuuronen, 2003, p. 198) So, the aim of this study is not to create new theories, but to study a current phenomenon. In this study the phenomenon is social media which is being taken a look from the perspective of used car sales. That's why content analysis fits the methodology of analysis of this study.

1.6 Main concepts of the study

This chapter introduces the central concepts of the study. These descriptions help the reader to understand the concepts relevant to the research, which makes it possible to read and analyze the research. The concepts defined are social media, integrated marketing communication, brand, brand equity, firm-generated marketing communication, user-generated marketing communication, word-of-mouth.

1.6.1 Social media

When social media is studied from a marketing perspective, it means platforms where people can create connections and share information and feelings. (Li, Larimo & Leonidou, 2020, 52) Social media can also be defined in many different ways, which are often similar, but slightly different from each other. For example, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, 61) define social media as a group of internet-based applications that are built on top of Web 2.0 and enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content. According to another similar description, social media are Internet-based channels that allow users to interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously. This interaction can be done with large or smaller audiences, who get their value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others (Carr & Hayes, 2015, 8). Social media platforms studied in this study are Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and LinkedIn.

1.6.2 Integrated marketing communication

Integrated marketing communication (IMC) was born at the end of the 20th century when big changes took place in the field of marketing communication. The emergence of new marketing methods, the demassification of the consumer market, and the rise in the value of the Internet put marketers in a difficult situation where they had to respond to consumers' wants and needs while trying to create long-term relationships with them. It was important that the communication was consistent for all stakeholders, and that the marketing created the same image for everyone, regardless of the media through which the marketing was done. Integrated marketing communication aims to help ensure that communication is coordinated and consistent across various channels (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2010).

The growth of social media has forced companies to incorporate social media into their marketing communications because nowadays it determines the company's brand identity, brand image, and success in the marketing competition. Social media allows consumers to create their own content for the company's channels in the form of comments and discussions and enables two-way communication between the company and consumers. The strategies of integrated marketing communication have therefore experienced a big change because the previous strategies must now take into account two-way communication instead of one-way (Rehman, Gulzar & Aslam, 2022).

1.6.3 Brand

The brand has existed since the beginning of the formal trade and in the mid-1980s it began to be used more effectively. There is no unequivocal explanation for the brand, as it is a very complex concept. Many explanations have been given for it, and many of them correspond to each other, but each has its own slight differences (Maurya & Mishra, 2012). Next, below is one example of how the brand has been explained.

The brand reflects the image that the product or service means to the consumer. It is not just a name or a logo, it is a key element in the relationship between the company and the consumer. The brand represents the consumer's assumptions and feelings about the company's products or their quality (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, 264). It is useful for a company to create a strong brand because if a branded product is more attractive to the consumer than an unbranded similar product, the consumer is willing to pay more to get a product or service from that particular brand (Srivastava & Thomas, 2015, 69).

As in the explanation above, according to research, the main themes in most brand explanations are image, identity, value, and personality. A brand is stated to be a conditional, intangible, and legal asset of the firm which is seen as perceived value for the stakeholders. Experiencing this perceived value is both subjective and individual and it is shaped by the interaction between the individual and the company in accordance with the company's vision (Maurya & Mishra, 2012).

1.6.4 Brand equity

As is the case with the description of the brand, the same goes with brand equity as there are many said explanations for it that correspond to each other, but have their own slight differences. However, the most widely accepted explanation is said to be that brand equity is “the different preference and response to marketing effort that a product obtains because of its brand identification compared with the preference and response that same product would obtain if it did not have the brand identification.” (Datta, Ailawadi & van Heerde, 2017, 1) Brand equity forms from different assets, and according to Aaker (2011, 19) the most dominant assets are brand name awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand associations.

1.6.5 Word-of-mouth

Word-of-mouth, or WOM, means oral informal communication between people, where the parties are the noncommercial communicator and the receiver. Word-of-mouth applies to a brand, product, organization, or service (Eisingerich, Chun, Liu, Jia & Bell, 2015, 121). According to research, word-of-mouth is very essential for the success of a brand and is an important factor in influencing consumer behavior, as information obtained through WOM is considered reliable (Barreda, Bilgihan, Nusair & Okumus, 2015, 603). With development, word-of-mouth has taken on new forms, and communication nowadays takes place more and more frequently on the internet on social media platforms (Eelen, Özturan & Verlegh, 2017, 873). This so-called electronic word-of-mouth allows the author to share information at the time and place he wants, as it is not an event tied to a specific moment (Eisingerich et al. 2015, 121). EWOM thus enables the writer to have time to think about how to structure his communication, while in-person word-of-mouth is often more impulsive and thoughtless (Eelen et al. 2017, 873).

1.7 The structure of the study

The first chapter of the study is the introductory chapter of the study. This chapter presents the starting points, topic, and goals of the research in question. The introduction chapter also presents the methods with which the research is going to be carried out, as well as the research questions that are intended to be answered. At the end of the introduction, key definitions and concepts are explained in terms of understanding the research.

The second chapter of the study, i.e. the theoretical part of the study, deals with the theory of the research topic, which consists of the theory of social media, social media marketing communications, and branding. In the theory part, existing studies on the topics of this research are reviewed, with the aim of creating a solid foundation and knowledge for conducting one's own research.

The third chapter is the empirical part of the study. In this chapter, previous research is applied to the topic of this research, i.e. the use of social media in car sales. The information to be researched is obtained by examining the different social media accounts of car dealerships, where the aim is to find patterns, and how social media is used in different ways

as part of car sales. Researchable information is also obtained from the market leader in the industry.

After the empirical chapter, we move on to the last chapters of the study, where the results observed in the study are reviewed. In the conclusions, we go over what was found in common between different actors, how social media was utilized in different ways, and what kind of differences were found between different actors. Finally, we will review the issues that should be taken into account in future research.

2 Brand building in social media

In the theory part of the study, previous studies related to the topics of this study were reviewed in depth. The purpose of the theory part was to create a strong theoretical basis for conducting this research, which enabled empirical analysis and which connected this research with previous research. The theoretical part of this study examined the theory of social media marketing communication, brand and brand building, different social media channels, word-of-mouth, the car trade industry and the trade industry in general. There is not much previous research on the subject of this study, i.e. the use of social media in car sales.

2.1 Social media marketing communication

With new marketing communication methods and tools, marketing has changed a lot, but the definition of marketing communication has mostly remained the same. Previous marketing methods such as newspapers and brochures have been replaced and paralleled by television and the internet, and they have changed marketing communication greatly. Marketing communication therefore develops alongside development. This has led to the fact that companies and organizations must also change their operating methods in line with development. (Mutum, Roy & Kipnis, 2014, 141)

For most people, social media is a part of every day. We spend more and more time on social media all the time, which is why companies have also moved there. Social media has changed corporate marketing and brand building considerably from what it used to be. In the past, social media was referred to as Web 2.0, as it referred to how today the internet is a two-way platform where people can connect and communicate with content producers. In the past, the internet was just a static platform where users could only explore the content uploaded there (Shiffman, 2018, 124.)

The popularization of social media among the people has also caused companies to increasingly utilize mobile marketing and social media. With new marketing methods, companies and organizations strive to gain a competitive advantage over their competitors. The proliferation of social media has modified the theories of traditional integrated

marketing communication and expanded them to new digital marketing communication options. (Valos, Maplestone, Polonsky & Ewing, 2017, 1522) Organizations invest in integrated marketing communication, as it is considered a significant source of competitive advantage in marketing (Kitchen, Brignell, Li & Spicket, 2004, 20).

With the help of integrated marketing communication decision-making models, uniform and regular material production in all different media is enabled and strategic and tactical marketing communication is combined (Valos et al. 2017, 1523). Without careful planning, it can happen that the contents of organizations' social media, websites and mass media give different, even contradictory, messages. They can cause confusion among consumers and give a confused image of the company. To avoid this, organizations and companies should utilize the theories of integrated marketing communication. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, 427) Integrated marketing communications is presented in figure 3.

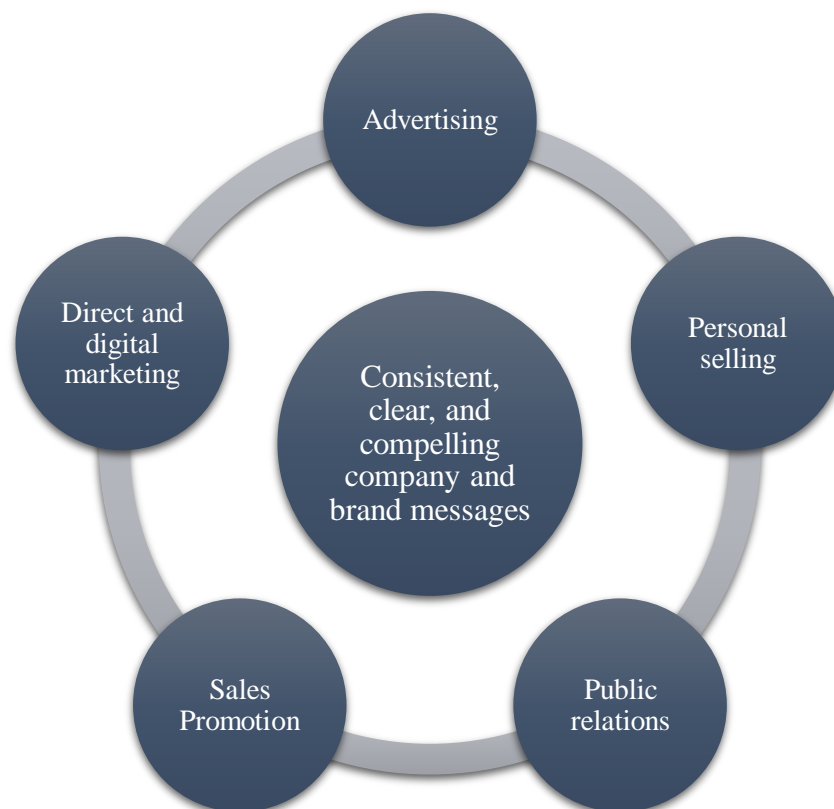


Figure 3 Integrated Marketing Communications (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, 429)

The problem with corporate marketing communication is often that it is not planned for the long term, but instead focuses on the immediate attention of the target audience. It would be more important for communication to be viewed as maintaining customer relations and

commitment between the customer and the brand. However, it must be remembered that companies' customers are each individual, so communication sometimes needs to be personalized even down to the level of the individual. In the past, companies had to focus only on what kind of advertising and communication they produce outwardly, but nowadays you have to remember that consumers want two-way communication, so you have to think about how to make it possible for consumers to communicate back. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, 430)

The purpose of integrated marketing communication is therefore to create positive value by communicating with consumers. According to Keller (2009, 141), marketing communications are ways in which a company tries to inform, persuade and remind customers about the products and brands they sell. The impact is either direct or indirect. So you can say that marketing communication is the company's voice, which it uses to create conversation and relationships with consumers.

In order for a company to communicate effectively, they need to understand how the communication process works. The communication process includes nine areas, which are shown in Figure 4. The first part of the process is the sender of the message, i.e. most often the company itself or the entity that designed the message or advertisement. The second stage of the communication process is the coding of the message, i.e. changing it into words and images that together form the desired message. This coded message is the advertisement itself, which you want to convey to the target audience. Next, the message is sent to the selected media, i.e. depending on the target audience, either television, social media or radio, or even all at the same time. When this advertisement becomes available to the receiver, he decodes it, that is, forms his own understanding of the images, sounds and words of the message. Decoding thus forms the response experienced by the recipient of the message. The answer can either be that he is more likely to buy a product or service that the sender of the message advertises, or that the recipient recommends the sender to their friends. However, some of the answers end up back to the sender, in which case we talk about feedback. Feedback can be negative or positive. However, sometimes the message may contain unwanted effects, i.e. noise. Noise refers to effects that may modify the desired content of the message to be different for the recipient. This may be due, for example, to the fact that the recipient experiences the content differently than the sender, or the recipient

does not see or hear the entire message, in which case he may not notice the central content. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, 431) However, it is important in the communication process to take the feedback of the recipients into account, and to modify the current or next message based on the feedback received.

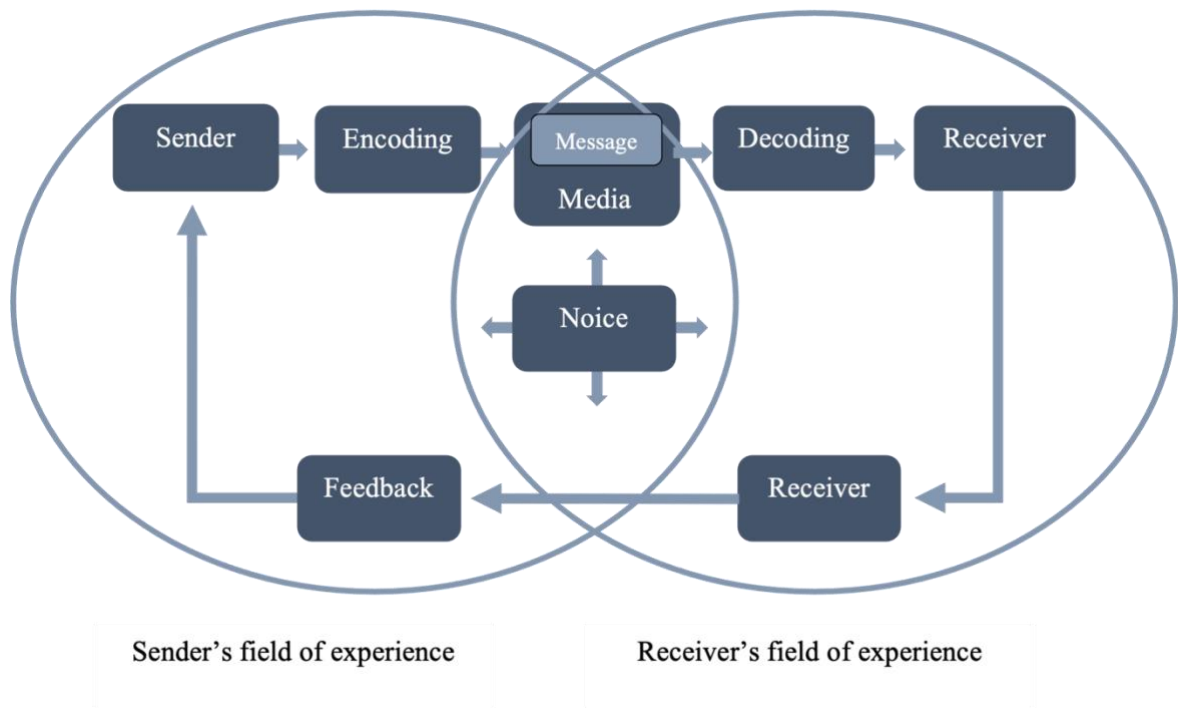


Figure 4 Elements in the communication process (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, 431)

The content and meaning of the message are therefore of primary importance when a company or organization interacts with consumers. Companies should therefore primarily invest in effective and consistent communication on all platforms. In order to improve the effectiveness of communication, Kotler and Keller (2016, 586) has created an eight-part model that develops the effectiveness of communication. The path of improving communication efficiency can be seen in Figure 5.

The first step is to identify the target audience. In order to achieve effective communication, it is important to define whether the communication aims to acquire new customers, or whether the intention is to target the message to the company's current customers. Defining the target is important, because the target determines how, where, when and to whom the message is sent. (Kotler & Keller, 2016, 586) It is not only important to define whether the target is current or new customers, but also to define the target groups within new and current

customers. It is unrealistic to assume that one type of strategy will work in the same way for all consumers. It is good to test first with a smaller target group how they will receive a message designed according to their assumed preferences. Only after testing can we move on to carry out marketing communications on a larger scale. In this way, unnecessary costs can be avoided if the target group does not respond to marketing communications in the desired way. (Potter & Stapleton, 2011, 801)

The next step is to define the goals of the communication. Is the purpose of marketing communication to create a need for a change between the current state of being and the desired state of being, or is the purpose of creating awareness of the brand. A significant influence in defining communication is the product to be sold. Is the marketed product created to increase well-being or to eliminate problems. (Kotler & Keller, 2016, 587) Dudo and Besley (2016, 1) are also of the opinion that setting goals is important, because achieving different goals requires different means of communication to be successful, and goals can essentially affect how effectively they are reached. Most often, however, the goal is to create a purchase decision. This is facilitated by offers and discount coupons, because they make the consumer unconsciously choose the marketer's products before the actual purchase decision. (Kotler & Keller, 587)

The third step is planning the message. When planning communication, you have to answer the questions of what to say, how to say it and who should say it. With these questions, we achieve the kind of communication that achieves the intended reaction in the recipients. When thinking about what to say, you have to think about themes and ideas that are suitable for positioning the brand in the market. They aim to find similarities that are expected from the product in that category, as well as features that distinguish one's own product or service from others. This is important because it directly affects consumers' opinions about the quality of a product, service or brand. (Kotler & Keller, 2016, 587)

When you have decided what to say, you have to think about how to say it. The way message is said affects the consumer's image of what kind of need the product or service is being marketed for or what its acquisition enables. Creative strategies can be classified into two different groups, informational and transformational. (Kotler & Keller, 2016, 587)

As the name suggests, informational messages inform and tell about the benefits and advantages of a product or service. In advertising, these are used, for example, by telling

how the marketed product or service can solve a problem or by telling what kind of features the product or service has. Transformational messages, on the other hand, tell how a product or service can change your life or state of being. The messages aim to influence in such a way that the motivation to make a purchase decision increases. Transformational messages can be negative or positive. Negative messages are used when trying to increase motivation to quit something harmful, such as smoking. Then statistics, facts and experiences are used to help, which cause fear. Positive messages, on the other hand, are used when trying to motivate the creation of something positive. Then animals and music are used as help. You have to remember to use the means of influence wisely, because they easily cover up the product being marketed. (Kotler & Keller, 2016, 588)

The next step is to define the communication channels. When choosing marketing channels, it would be worthwhile for the company to remember to influence in many different channels. According to research, if a company uses a brick-and-mortar channel and the PC channel, they can increase sales by also including the mobile channel. However, companies should remember to invest in consistency in their communication across all marketing channels. If the experience in different channels is not the same, the customer will not have a uniform experience of the company's marketing. Consistency is important, as many consumers often do research on products in advance on a computer or mobile, and then go to a physical store to test and buy the product. Some consumers do the opposite, first going to test and examine the product in a brick-and-mortar store and then buy it via the internet. If the experience is not the same, i.e. for example the prices are different, the consumer does not get a uniform experience of the company. (Li, Swaminathan & Kim, 2021, 315)

The fifth step in increasing the effectiveness of the communication process is determining the marketing budget. There is no unequivocal right answer for determining the marketing budget, as the size of the marketing budget varies from 5 percent to 45 percent in different companies and industries. (Kotler & Keller, 2016, 594) Previously, budgeting was done according to the so-called rule of thumb. The first of these was budgeting according to sales. In those cases, the marketing budget was a percentage of sales. Another option was to determine the marketing goals and the measures required for it, and determine the budget accordingly. The last option was to determine the budget according to where the company definitely has money and tried to get by with it. However, research shows that it is more efficient to determine the budget according to the size of the company, which takes into

account sales and profit. Also, researching and evaluating marketing efforts and changing the budget according to their results gave better results. Those who took into account the growth potential of products or services also had better results. (Fischer, Albers, Wagner & Frie, 2012, 59)

After the marketing budget, the right marketing communication mix must be chosen. The marketing communication mix consists of eight areas, from which the company should choose the options that suit the situation and budget. The marketing communication mix consists of advertising, sales promotion, events and experiences, public relations and publicity, online and social media marketing, mobile marketing, direct and database marketing and personal selling. Based on the product being marketed, the purpose of the message and the budget, the company must choose the right marketing methods, because each method has its own strengths. (Kotler & Keller, 2016, 596-597) The necessity of the marketing communication mix has been studied and how it affects the company's operations, and according to the research, every company should think about how it could best utilize it in its own case. The marketing communication mix is particularly important for manufacturers and retailers, as it greatly affects the success of sales, the awareness of the company's products and customer retention. All companies should take into account the different areas of the marketing communication mix, because by using them, the company communicates effectively to external and internal stakeholders, with them the company can study in which direction the company should develop, and the company can also measure the success of its actions with the help of the marketing communication mix. (Todorova & Zhelyazkov, 2021, 10)



Figure 5 Marketing communication mix (Kotler & Keller, 2016, 596)

After publishing a marketing message, it is important to measure how well it has achieved the goals set for it. It is important to measure how the marketing message has been received by consumers. Measuring can be done by contacting consumers and asking them if they remember seeing the message published by the company, how often they have seen it, what they remember about it and what feelings it caused in them. It is also important to ask what consumers thought of the message publisher before and after seeing the message. (Kotler & Keller, 2016, 599) According to research, companies often do not measure the effectiveness of their marketing communications, even though it is an important part behind successful business operations. There are many reasons for not measuring. Some of the companies are satisfied with the current situation, while others say that research requires too many resources and is difficult. Those companies that measure the effectiveness of their communication have noticed many benefits. With the help of the results, for example, companies can better create relationships with new customers and deepen existing relationships, with the help of measurement, marketing plans and business plans stay in line,

and it is also easier for companies to predict and react to market problems. (Krizanova et al. 2019, 10-11)

The last step in developing the effectiveness of communication is integrated marketing communication administration. It means that when effective means of marketing communication have been achieved in one channel, it must be ensured that the line of communication remains consistent in all channels. Companies should remember that the consumer should have the same image of the company regardless of the time, place or the channel from which the information is obtained. (Kotler & Keller, 2016, 599) When a company manages integrated marketing communications, the consumer gets a more professional image of the company.

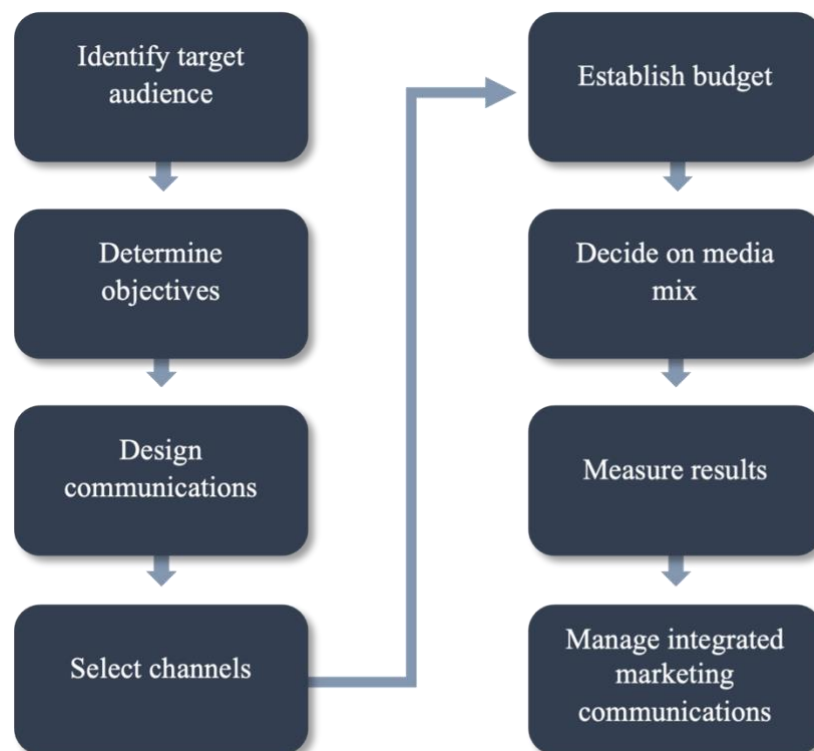


Figure 6 Developing effective communications (Kotler & Keller, 2016)

As mentioned earlier, social media has greatly changed the marketing of companies, and marketing communication theories created before social media are no longer up-to-date. In place of outdated theories, new theories have had to be created that take into account the new features and opportunities brought by social media. The weakness of the old marketing mix has been said to be its focus on short-term sales and transactions and the underestimation

of strategic long-term relationships and brand equity. The biggest criticism of the old marketing mix is its focus on the seller instead of the buyer. When in the era of social media the most important marketing components are the interaction between the company and the consumer and therefore the theories focusing on the seller is a completely wrong course of action. Efforts have been made to update the marketing mix to match modern times, and it has been modified in a format that takes into account social media and new marketing methods. The social marketing mix consists of circumstances, organization and competition, cost, process, channels and strategies and the consumer, who is at the center of these five. (Gordon, 2012)

2.2 Brand

The brand is really important for the success of the company. Brands are said to be valuable assets, and if the brand is planned, built and maintained well, it guarantees cash flows in the future. Companies have three assets, which are tangible assets, intangible assets and brand. Depending on the market, a strong brand can account for up to 70 percent of the company's revenue. The share of brands is so big, because a good brand affects the way consumers think about the company and their products. A well-managed brand creates a good reputation for a company, and a good reputation brings higher financial returns. A strong brand is also useful in those situations when something goes wrong. If the company has the trust of consumers and investors, then in the face of problems, customers will not stop purchasing the company's products or services, because they still trust it. (De Chernatony, 2006, 4)

Today, brand management is a little different than before, because social media has brought with it the fact that consumers can influence the company's brand in the same way as the company's marketing communications. Nowadays, a company alone cannot decide what kind of image it creates for consumers, but companies must also take into account the stories of other consumers in their own. Today, consumers are part of the brand's story, and they tell it based on their own experiences. This makes it difficult to coordinate the company's own narrative, as they have to take into account what is being said about them on social media. Nowadays, companies have to learn how to create consumer-generated brand stories that benefit the company. That is, they should learn how to direct consumer stories on social media in a positive direction. They should also learn how to react and respond to negative narratives on social media. (Gensler, Völckner, Liu-Thompkins & Wiertz, 2013, 242-243)

Social media, and especially mobile devices, make it possible to participate in the conversation anywhere and anytime. This lowers the threshold to share one's own experiences and stories with others almost in real time. (Davis, Piven & Breazale, 2014, 469) The real-time sharing of narratives and experiences makes it difficult for companies to monitor and control the social media conversation that concerns them.

Today's brand has been called open-source branding, which reflects the nature of how branding is done in social media today. Branding is participatory, collaborative and socially-linked behaviors where consumers create and spread brand stories. Nowadays, controlling the brand is strongly the responsibility of the consumers, it remains for the company to protect the brand's reputation and to make brand management an activity similar to public relations. There are three different strategies for brand management. According to the first strategy, the company gives up, so to speak, that is, it only listens and responds to claims, stories and demands created by consumers. This strategy is the strategy of least resistance where the power is given almost entirely to the consumers. Secondly, the company can strive to be involved in the "game" created by consumers and strive to acquire cultural resonance by understanding the online cultural environment in which the company operates and fitting in. Or lastly, the company can try to take advantage of social media's communality and connectedness and get consumers to play the "game" created by the company by creating branded artifacts, social rituals and cultural icons. In this way, consumers would work towards creating and growing the brand. (Gensler et al. 2013, 253)

The success of social media branding can be measured in different ways. One option for measurement is the number of followers. However, this does not tell the whole truth, because even if the company has a lot of followers on social media, it does not tell how many people actually interact with the company. The number of followers also does not indicate a company's good or bad reputation, as it is rarely possible to measure it numerically. If the company's goal is to get followers to participate in social media, in that case you can analyze the reputation by looking at the number of social media publications. If the goal is to measure the quality of individuals contribution, then the rating system would be a good choice for that. (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011, 247) As mentioned earlier in this study, it is good for companies to plan what goals they have when doing social media. Although it is said that a company's social media is more successful when it has more followers, it does not tell the whole truth. Followers should also be active, and companies

should acquire as many active followers as possible instead of quantity. Companies should use their actions to get followers to engage, i.e. comment and like publications, because that way they get content on social media. At the same time, however, companies should encourage consumers so that it has a positive effect on their purchasing behavior, and not just aim for followers to comment and like publications. (Gummerus, Liljander, Weman, Pihlström & Coulter, 2012, 870)

Many studies have shown that there is a positive correlation between social media interaction and consumer purchase intentions. Social media also has a positive effect on brand evaluations and net promotion score (NPS). Studies have also shown that positive reviews of a company's social media posts are positively correlated with brand attitudes and purchase intentions. When investigating how social media publications affect different target groups, it was proven that social media has a positive effect on purchasing behavior. The study tested how following social media affects already existing followers, new followers, and those who do not follow the company on social media. In the study, it was noticed that the participants who started following the company on social media during the study had the most change in behavior. After following the company for a month, these new followers had a more positive attitude towards the company than before following. (Beukeboom, Kerkhof & de Vries, 2015, 33) Based on research, it can therefore be concluded that following social media is positively correlated with consumer purchasing behavior when social media is done correctly.

2.2.1 Brand identity

The brand identity is often seen as the starting point of a good brand-building program. It doesn't matter what kind of strategy one intends to use to build the brand, be it mass media or other unusual ways, the company must have a clear picture of its own brand identity. The company's brand identity must be clear and unequivocal, so that everyone who designs, for example, marketing material around it, understands what kind of content they want to produce. If the brand identity is not clear, different actors create different and sometimes even conflicting content with each other. The brand identity should be connected to the company's vision and company culture and values. (Joachimsthaler & Aaker, 1997, 40) In terms of the formation of the brand identity, the significant points are those where the company is in contact with the public. The brand identity can be seen in the company logo,

stationery, marketing collaterals, products and packaging, signage, apparel design and messages and actions. By changing these aspects, a company can modify its own brand identity to be slightly different. At the same time, the company's brand image changes in the eyes of the public. However, you should remember to be moderate with changes, because if the brand identity and with it the brand image changes in the eyes of consumers, it can create confusion, because then the brand identity created by the company is very different from how consumers are used to experiencing it. In this case, the brand identity strategy has failed. In a successful brand identity strategy, the brand identity experienced by consumers is close to the brand identity the company wants to create. (Mindrut, Manolica & Roman, 2015, 395)



Figure 7 Building blocks of brand identity. (Mindrut, Manolica & Roman, 2015, 395)

When designing a brand identity, companies should take into account different brand elements that can help them clarify, enrich and differentiate the brand identity. The first of these elements is "brand-as-product". Although it is often reminded that when designing a brand one should avoid fixation around the product alone, it is nevertheless undeniable that

it is one of the most important elements when designing a brand identity. The product is important because it is directly linked to brand choice decisions and the use experience. The most important thing to remember when planning the brand identity related to the product is not to create too limited images. For example, if you think about what products the brand Honda brings to mind, many people think of cars and motorcycles first. It is important that Honda has not created too limited branding around cars only, because then another important product for them, i.e. motorcycles, would be neglected. So a wide enough, yet limited brand identity must be created around the product so that it takes into account all the products that the company wants to sell with its brand. (Aaker, 2011, 74)

The next element is "brand-as-organization". This element focuses on the characteristics that the organization has, and not on those that the product has. However, it is worth noting that the characteristics of the product or service and the organization can be very close to each other. For example, if the organization aims to create innovative or high-quality products, then the characteristics of the organization are the same as the products. However, the characteristics of the organization arise from the company's people, culture, values and the company's own programs, which take the company and the organization towards the desired image. However, it is much easier for competitors to copy the company's products and make them of the same quality, but it is difficult to copy the organization's brand, because it is made up of a company's unique combination of people, values and programs. It is also easy to compare products and their performance between different companies, but it is difficult to compare characteristics between organizations, such as innovation or environmental friendliness. (Aaker, 2011, 75-76)

The third element is the "brand-as-person". The "brand-as-person" perspective suggests that a brand's identity can be seen as a person with a distinct personality that can create a stronger brand in a number of ways. First, it can give the customer the self-expression benefit of expressing their own personality. Second, it can form the basis of the relationship between the customer and the brand. Third, it can help communicate product features and promote functional benefits. Different brand personalities, such as upscale, knowledgeable, fun, and youthful, can be combined with different brands and created with purpose. (Aaker, 2011, 76-77)

The fourth element is the "brand-as-symbol". The text emphasizes the importance of strong symbols in branding, which can provide cohesion, structure and recognition. Three types of

symbols are highlighted: visual image, metaphor and brand heritage. Strong visual images, such as the Nike Swoosh or McDonald's golden arches, capture the brand's identity and make it easier to remember. Symbols with metaphors can represent functional, emotional, or self-expressive interests. A vibrant brand heritage can also represent the brand's essence, as seen in Starbucks, for example. The absence of a certain visual image can be a significant disadvantage, as it does not cause recognition or perception, such as the Mercedes-Benz logo, for example. A strong symbol can be the cornerstone of a brand strategy that guides everything from product design to communication. (Aaker, 2011, 77)

Although brand identity is created in the company's internal activities and reflects the vision of its owner (Joachimsthaler & Aaker, 1997), social media can still influence it. Social media can have an especially big impact when the company uses an outside-in approach. Then the needs and desires of the customers are held in particularly high value, and the market orientation is determined according to them. (Urde, Baumgarth & Merrilees, 2013, 16) The company can therefore use the two-way communication enabled by social media to its advantage, and modify its brand identity based on feedback and comments from customers. (Gensler et al, 2013, 246)

Creating and maintaining a strong brand identity is a significant source of competitive advantage. With a strong brand identity, consumers can create the image of the company that the company itself strives for. (Mindrut et al. 2015, 401) A strong brand identity is also important, as it directly and indirectly affects perceived value, customer satisfaction and brand trust. And because it affects perceived value, it also affects brand loyalty, customer satisfaction and consumers' trust in the brand. (He, Li & Harris, 2012, 653)

2.2.2 Personal branding

Today, traditional marketing is no longer enough, but the highly competitive retail sector requires more measures from sellers so that they can get the deal done. So you have to find ways to stand out from the crowd and acquire new customers. Personal branding is one of those ways. Personal branding is a process in which a unique personal identity is created to create active communication with a specific target market in order to achieve personal and professional goals (Khedher, 2014, 33) In sales, it is important to create a relationship with the customer, personal branding is a way to do it through social media. Personal branding in social media enables a person to present his own identity via the internet and thereby create

a personal image. If a person works under a company and uses personal branding, they interpret and discuss according to the company's brand and adjust their own personal brand under it. (Waller, 2020, 20)

2.3 Social media experience

As mentioned earlier, there is no single clear guideline for doing social media. The way social media should be done is to explore new possibilities, find out how they can be useful and how to use them. Social media tools should only be tried, doing it should be experimental and playful. Experimenting and playing helps to understand different social media tools. When you always only test new tools, you should also regularly remember to go back and test old ones that didn't work so well before, because they may have changed since the first test. (Brown, 2012, 294) And as stated earlier in this study, social media should not only be the company's communication to its customers, but they should involve consumers in creating their own content. Companies should encourage consumers to make videos about their products and comment on them. (Helme-Guizon & Magnoni, 2019, 719) When consumers create their own content on social media about a company, it increases awareness of that brand among other consumers. (Dedeoglu et al, 2020, 45) It is also important for companies to listen to what consumers write about them and what they think about their company, because reading these writings, feedback and experiences can help the company a lot in building and improving the brand. (Sharp, 2011, 30) According to research, it has also been noticed that emotional brand attachment has a positive correlation with brand knowledge. This means that when the consumer's emotional attachment to the brand increases, the consumer's brand knowledge also increases. Together, these influence the fact that the consumer trusts the brand and is more loyal to it. Emotional brand attachment has also been found to have a positive effect on customer satisfaction. (Dwivedi et al, 2019, 1194)

Smartphones and social media play a really important part in creating brand awareness. Almost every one of us today has instant access to the internet and social media through our phones, so their importance has only grown bigger and bigger over the years. However, it must be remembered that modern technology is constantly changing, and therefore marketers must be alert and keep up with the change so that marketing and the tools used remain up to date. (Ahmed, Vveinhardt & Streimikiene, 2017, 1130) Social media is used

for communication with consumers and as a word-of-mouth amplifier. Social media is also used as a direct trading channel. It is important to remember that the purpose of use can be any, but companies must be on social media. Without a social media presence, companies can miss out on comments and improvement suggestions from thousands and even millions of people. Without a presence on the internet in the age of social media, companies cannot keep up with what is being said about them and who is talking about them. (Gamboa & Gonçalves, 2014, 711) Today's changes in social media are indeed short videos, because according to studies, social media users watch videos for an average of 3-8 seconds, after which they switch to the next one. Many corporate videos are still up to two minutes long, so the majority of social media users will not come to watch the videos. It is important to adopt this planning of short videos as part of your own social media plan, because with them you can create brand awareness more effectively than with long videos. (Rrustemi & Baca, 2021, 303) The popularity of short videos explains why TikTok, which is based on making these short videos, is so popular today.

2.4 Seven blocks of social media

The use of social media and the internet has changed over the years. In the past, social media was only used to pass the time and only read and watch content there, and buy goods and services. Over time, the internet and social media have started to be used to share, edit, create and discuss content. As it was said earlier in this study, the changes make it difficult for companies to use social media, because they have to keep up with the change. That's why a framework has been created that opens up the use of social media with the help of seven blocks. These blocks are: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups. (Kietzmann et al, 2011, 241) The honeycomb framework and its implications are showcased in figures 8 and 9. Next, the different blocks and their meaning is presented in detail.

2.4.1 Identity

Identity means that you often have to create an account on social media, which means that users often have to share very personal and precise information about themselves, such as name, age, gender, place of residence and occupation. Often, personal information can also be provided without the user being aware of it, for example by liking certain sites or

programs or sharing their emotional states. Most people use their own name on accounts, but some use made-up names to protect their privacy. However, most give their information when logging in, regardless of privacy and where the information might end up. (Kietzmann et al, 2011, 244) Companies should therefore be careful with protecting privacy and understand and create a balance between sharing profile information and privacy.

Social media identity can be used for many different purposes, such as for example self promotion on Facebook or self-branding on LinkedIn. Self-branding is also possible on other social media platforms such as Flickr or Instagram, which are popular among photographers, for example. With their own pictures, they create a conversation and create their own community around them. (Kietzmann et al, 2011, 244)

2.4.2 Conversations

Conversations block shows how much users communicate with each other on social media. Indeed, many social media channels are designed to create conversation between individuals and groups. Some of the conversation is created to find similar people, to improve self-confidence or to be on top of trends, while some want to create conversation and influence bigger issues such as the climate crisis or humanitarian problems. Different social media channels have slightly different content, and for example the number and length of posts affect how companies can use them. On sites where the posts are often short but there are a lot of them, such as Twitter, companies should create tools to combine many messages so that they are helpful to the company. On Twitter, messages are like pieces of a puzzle that should be connected. Longer blog texts, on the other hand, can contain a lot of information at once, but in them the interaction with people is smaller. (Kietzmann et al, 2011, 244)

2.4.3 Sharing

Sharing means the extent to which users share, distribute and receive content. In these contexts, the term social means that interaction between people is necessary. Often, however, in social media, there is an object or reason between the interaction between people, around which people gather together to talk with each other. The target can be images, videos, texts, sounds or even a location. (Kietzmann et al, 2011, 245) Often the target can also be many of the above. For example, on Facebook, users can share, among other things, pictures, videos,

location, plain text or music. You can also do the same on Instagram. TikTok, on the other hand, is based on short videos and nowadays users can also upload pictures to the application.

When thinking about social media platforms, the platform owners should first of all think about what is the factor that unites people and brings users together. In other words, what unites all users of the social platform in that particular application. Secondly, companies should think about the extent to which objects can and should be shared. For example, YouTube, which was originally designed to allow users to share their own home videos with others, was criticized because some users started sharing videos made by others. That's why YouTube had to make changes to prevent the sharing of harmful content or content made by others. (Kietzmann et al, 2011, 245)

2.4.4 Presence

Presence refers to how much users can know about the availability of other users. That is, for example, whether another user is present or absent or busy. The extent of presence can change from knowing whether the other users are online in the social media, to the extent of knowing where these other users are in the real world. The presence aspect therefore connects the real world and the virtual world together. There are different applications that work with location sharing but with different purposes. Some applications can tell others where they are at the current moment, while another tells how many other users are nearby. For the operation of some applications, such as LinkedIn, it is not essential to know if other users are there or where they are at any given moment. It is good for companies to be aware of and study the extent to which users want to share their presence. Often users who want to chat in real time want to know if the other person is there or not. Sometimes some people also want to hide their presence completely or only from certain people. (Kietzmann et al, 2011, 246)

2.4.5 Relationships

Relationships means how deeply users can relate to each other. In other words, it means how deep the two users interact with each other. Is it just about adding another person as a friend, talking with the other person, sharing pictures, maybe even physical objects or meeting face

to face. The relationship between users often also determines what is the connecting factor between users and how and what is shared. The purpose of some applications is to create new relationships, while the purpose of some is to deepen existing relationships. There are differences between the platforms in the kind of relationships between users. In some they are formal, regulated and structured, while in some platforms they are informal and unstructured. As a general rule of thumb, if the platform does not value identity highly, it also does not value relationships highly. (Kietzmann et al, 2011, 246)

The importance of different relationship traits are divided into two properties; structure and flow. The structure tells how many connections they have and where they place themselves in this relationship network. According to research, the tighter and larger a user's network of relationships is and the more central a position he has in this network, the more likely this user is an influential member in this network. The flow, on the other hand, tells what kind of relationships there are in this user's network and what kind of resources are associated with them. Flow also tells how strong these relationships are. (Kietzmann et al, 2011, 246)

It is also important to remember to create a social media platform according to the kind of relationships you want to create. If you want to grow relationships and your own network, then you should demand more information from users, on the basis of which other users can grow their own network. If the purpose is to maintain current relationships, then it is important that in order to join the network, you have to go through the so-called "selection process", i.e. you have to request access to another user's network and the other user has to accept you to it. (Kietzmann et al, 2011, 247)

2.4.6 Reputation

Reputation means that users can evaluate their own position compared to other people. Reputation is in most cases linked to how reliable another is, but information technology is not so advanced that it can determine reliability. Instead, reliability is based on different metrics on different platforms. For example, a high number of followers on Twitter speaks of reputation. On LinkedIn, on the other hand, reputation is told by the number of endorsements given by others. In applications where pictures and videos are shared, likes and views are a merit of reputation. When companies use social media, they should choose the metrics they use to measure their reputation. For example, Twitter followers mean nothing unless they engage with the company. If the community's time and activity is the

metric that is monitored, then the reputation metric is the number of posts in a certain period of time. If, on the other hand, the quality of the individual's contribution is important, then the rating system is the right option. (Kietzmann et al, 2011, 247)

2.4.7 Groups

Groups means how many communities and sub-communities a user of a social media platform can form. The more social the network is, the greater the number of friends, followers and contacts. According to research, people have a cognitive limit on how many stable relationships they can have. When the number grows larger, users on many platforms can divide the network into smaller groups. There are roughly two types of groups. First, users can divide people into different groups, buddies, friends and followers. Secondly, groups can be groups that anyone can join, request access to and possibly be selected, or groups can be groups that can only be accessed by invitation. The possibilities of different groups can be linked to the other aforementioned areas. For example, you can share different things about yourself to different groups, and you can give different groups access to see your presence, while you can prevent others from seeing it. Defining groups becomes difficult when someone belongs to two different groups, for example depending on whether it is a work week or a weekend. However, many social media platforms allow the creation of many different groups, which helps with this problem. (Kietzmann et al, 2011, 248)

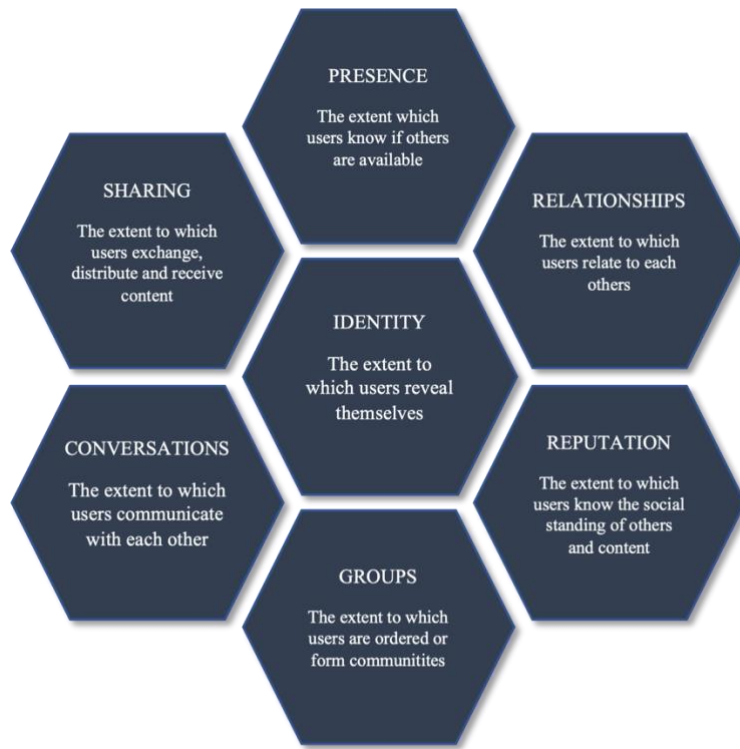


Figure 8 The honeycomb of social media (Kietzmann et al, 2011, 243)



Figure 9 The implications of social media functionality

2.5 Word-of-mouth

Word-of-mouth, or WOM, is a process of personal influence, where communication between the recipient of information and the distributor of information can change the behavior and attitudes of the recipient of information (Sweeney, Soutar & Mazzarol, 2008, 345) Or, in simpler terms, WOM is consumer communication about a product, service, brand or about the company with other consumers (Rosario, Sotgiu, De Valck & Bijmolt, 2016, 297) Today, WOM is in a big sense, because when consumers no longer trust organizations and their marketing, the opinions and experiences of other consumers are of great value. Therefore, positive WOM is a significant source of competitive advantage today. However, it must be remembered that creating positive word-of-mouth alone is not enough, the recipients must also react positively to it. (Sweeney et al, 2008, 345)

Nowadays, consumers use WOM in their own decision-making when making purchases. The importance of WOM is so great that consumers may replace their own opinions and thoughts about the product or service and instead follow the evaluations given by others. When everyone replaces their own opinion with actions based on other people's experiences, it leads to so-called herding, where everyone chooses the same course of action, which is not necessarily the most optimal. The influence of WOM is so great that it makes everything work in this suboptimal way. (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004, 546) The effect of WOM is so great on consumer behavior, because the source of WOM, i.e. the consumer who shares his experiences, does not have his own interest in mind when he shares his experiences. In other words, the source of WOM does not benefit from the fact that someone else would also buy a product or service and share their experience. The marketing campaigns of companies are therefore not considered as reliable, because the company benefits from it if the marketing works. (Bansar & Voyer, 2000, 166) The significance of WOM is also influenced by the relationship between sender and recipient. Recipients trust WOM the most if the sender is their friend. Friends in real life are also trusted more than friends on the internet, but internet friends are still trusted more than blog posts or review websites. Most of all, we trust a friend who has knowledge of the subject at hand, because then he is considered a professional on the subject. (Harris & Dennis, 2011, 442) The same result has also been reached by other researchers who noticed that marketing is most effective when it comes from a socially close source (van Noort, Antheunis & van Reijmersdal, 2012, 50). It is important for companies

to know in which way WOM is most effective, because with that information they can try to create marketing that would have the most effective effect. Consumers' brand trust and brand loyalty develop best in the mutual interaction of consumers, and not in the interaction between the brand and the consumer (Laroche, Habibi & Richard, 2013, 159). According to research data, companies should therefore try to create content that will get consumers on their side and speak on their behalf to other consumers. In this way, the company would benefit from WOM in the most effective way.

Today, word-of-mouth has changed a lot, as the internet and social media make it possible to share experiences and feelings anywhere and anytime. The sharing of experiences and feelings on the Internet is called electronic-word-of-mouth, i.e. eWOM. eWOM can be divided into two categories. The first category includes consumer review forum websites and product feedback sites. The second category includes internet discussion platforms, online communities and online social networking platforms. These categories differ slightly in terms of their content, as sites belonging to the first category focus more on sharing information, while those belonging to the second category are often about sharing knowledge and experiences. Therefore, these two categories have their own place in the marketing communication mix of companies. (Rodgers & Wang, 2010)

In order to create eWOM, brands try to interact with users on their social media platforms, because in addition to eWOM, it increases brand awareness among consumers. However, it must be remembered that even if the company acts in the same way with each social media post, the posts will not achieve the same amount of eWOM. Some posts may garner a lot of attention, while some posts don't at all. Many different things affect the amount of eWOM. (Erkan, 2015, 1441) The biggest reasons for consumers to share social media content by companies are attachment to the content, connecting with the brand, entertaining friends, warning friends about bad experiences, and receiving incentives or rewards. More than half of the target persons of the study answered this way. (Pereira, de Fátima Salgueiro, Mateus, 2014, 700) However, it must be remembered that even though these methods get the most shares from the brand's followers, it is important to think about whether simply sharing the content published by the company is the kind of attention that will benefit the brand in the future.

If the purpose of marketing is to get likes, social media posts should be less product-oriented. Product images alone do not arouse the interest of followers, and do not encourage sharing

the publications. Companies should come up with other ways to communicate with their followers. (Erkan, 2015, 1441) The means by which the company communicates with its consumers and followers determine the kind of eWOM about the company that is passed on. Neutral eWOM does not arouse feelings in one direction or the other, and therefore pursuing it is not profitable. Instead, consumers focus on positive and negative eWOM, so companies should come up with ways to focus on them. Negative eWOM has been found to have a particularly strong impact on consumers, which has a greater impact on decision-making than positive eWOM. (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014, 87)

To create positive eWOM, companies can try so-called viral marketing. Viral marketing means that a company makes such a good video, website, e-mail message or other marketing strategy that many people who see or receive it share it (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, 519).

Companies can also use the company's external actors to their advantage to promote their own products or brand. Companies can use either buzz marketing or seeded marketing campaigns. Buzz marketing means that the company chooses an influencer, who is a so-called opinion leader, and asks him or her to co-market the brand or the company's product to their own, often large public who are interested in the topic. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, 435) Seeded marketing campaigns (SMC's), on the other hand, work so that companies send products to selected customers, and encourage them to spread the word about the products and the company. According to research, this tactic increases WOM about the posted products, but decreases WOM about the company's other products or services. However, SMC's also reduces WOM from competitors' similar products during the campaign. (Chae, Stephen, Bart & Yao, 2017, 2) It is good for the company to be aware of these options as well, because in the case of buzz marketing, for example, the company benefits greatly if it succeeds, because the selected opinion leader already has a ready-made following, which is also a potential buyer base for the company.

2.6 Sales leads

It has been researched that almost every seller and company has their own idea of what sales lead means. Due to the differences, it is sometimes difficult for different traders and marketers to discuss the topic, because even if they are talking about the same thing, the

meaning of the topic is different for the parties. This matter should be clarified so that the discussion around the topic would be smoother, and so that it would be easier to develop the theory of the topic. (Buehrer, 2004, 496)

However, based on previous research on the topic, a theory has been made, and according to this theory, there are different sources from which sales leads are generated. The first source is prospect initiated leads. Prospect initiated leads refer to existing customers who repeatedly order or buy products or services from a business. In addition, businesses or households can learn about a company's products or services through positive feedback from friends, business associates, or current buyers. These individuals may serve as third-party sources by providing product or service ratings, critiques, or consulting services. Consequently, this information flow can generate new inquiries from potential clients who may become prospects for the company. (Jolson & Wotruba, 1992, 61)

The next lead source is the company initiated leads. Company initiated leads refer to business leads that are created through marketing activities, such as advertising or mail campaigns sent directly to customers. These leads can come from individuals or companies that are interested in learning more about the company's services or products, or who simply want to be contacted by a sales representative. (Jolson & Wotruba, 1992, 60) Nowadays, company initiated leads can be publications on social media where consumers are attracted or urged to contact the company.

The third lead source is the salesperson initiated leads. Salesperson initiated leads, also known as effort leads, are generated through a salesperson's personal efforts and search processes. These efforts can include cold calls, idea-initiated engagement, or other methods of contacting potential clients. At first, effort leads are considered "suspects" until the salesperson studies and researches the potential client to determine if they have the necessary qualifications, such as a recognized need, buying power, authority, and timing. In contrast, if leads are provided to sales through company promotions or voluntary inquiries, they are classified as non-effort leads. (Jolson & Wotruba, 1992, 61)

3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

As mentioned earlier in the study, the purpose of this study was to find out how car dealers use social media as part of their operations. In this study, the social media channels of pre-selected car shops were monitored, and what kind of content was created on these channels. The car dealerships selected for this study were the largest players in the car dealership sector in Finland, i.e. Kamux, SAKA and Rinta-Jouppi. The social media channels that were monitored for these dealers were Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and LinkedIn.

First, in the empirical section of the research, the background of the research is reviewed, as well as the materials used for the research and the means by which the materials were reviewed. Also, it is explained how the research materials were divided and categorized to suit the researched topic. The investigated companies and social media channels are also briefly introduced.

3.1 Background of the analysis

This study was conducted as a qualitative study, the material of which was collected by means of a case study. A case study was a suitable method when the goal was to gain information and deepen the understanding of a certain phenomenon in a specific context (Farquhar, 2012, 6). The purpose of this research was to create information about how social media is utilized as part of the business of car dealerships. In order to be able to answer these questions, it was necessary to collect data from different social media channels and analyse it. This collected data was analysed by means of content analysis. The collected data was divided into categories that aimed to create boundaries between which the differences and similarities between different actors and different social media platforms could be studied. However, the purpose of content analysis is not to create new theories, but rather to understand more about the topic and phenomenon under study (Metsämuuronen, 2006).

When analyzing data using content analysis, it is useful to divide the data into categories, making it easier to compare data between different operators and social media channels. Content analysis was originally intended for examining text, but today it is also used for analyzing images and videos. When content analysis is done from images or videos, the

analysis can be rough and very broad, or it can be used to examine even small significances such as symbolism. (Sloan, Quan-Haase & Augus, 2007, 236-237) Content analysis is also a suitable analysis model for this study, as the study examined communication of companies and consumers. Content analysis enables the study of communication objectively and systematically. (Hua & Tripathi, 2016, 3840) The challenge of content analysis is that there is no directly predetermined approach, but the researcher himself decides how to divide the data into categories. The data to be analyzed can be individual questions, entire interviews, open questions in a questionnaire or images and videos. However, the data to be analyzed is of great importance in terms of how deep the analysis is possible. When examining pictures and videos, for example, the researcher must interpret their meanings and purposes. (Bengtsson, 2016, 10) Since the researcher himself determines the categories and makes interpretations of how the analyzed data is divided, the importance of the researcher in terms of the results is great.

There are three different ways to do content analysis, conventional, directed or summative. However, all of these have the same goal, i.e. to interpret the meaning of the researched data. However, the main differences between them are the approach to how the data is divided into categories. In conventional content analysis, categories are formed while examining the data. In directed content analysis, the categories are formed before data research based on theory. Summative content analysis usually calculates and often compares certain keywords and content on the basis of which the categorization is made. (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, 1277) Content analysis can also be divided into inductive, deductive and abductive approaches. The inductive approach looks for patterns. When analyzing the data, similarities and differences are searched for, which are then divided into categories or themes. The risk of this approach has been said to be that it is often easy to get stuck studying very broad issues, and not to go deep enough in the analysis and breakdown. In the deductive approach, existing theories and explanatory models are tested and compared against the collected data. The risk of this approach is said to be that the researcher forms the categories only based on existing theories, which means that they do not necessarily fit the data being studied. Challenges can also arise in how to classify excess data that does not fit into the specified categories. The latest approach is abductive approach, which is also called complementary, combined, retroductive approach and fuzzy logic. This approach combines both previous approaches, because in it the data is studied using alternately inductive and deductive approaches. (Graneheim, Lindfgren & Lundman, 2017, 30-31)

Depending on the data to be analyzed, the researcher has the option to choose whether to analyze the data inductively or deductively. As mentioned earlier, deductive is often used when the researched subject and data have been studied before and a ready-made theory exists. Inductive, on the other hand, is used when the topic has not been so extensively researched, and the categorization of the data cannot be done in advance, but the categorization is done while the data is being analyzed. We are talking about so-called open coding. Although the analysis of the content cannot be done in only one specific way, rough frames have been formed according to which the analysis often proceeds. (Rimmel & Cordazzo, 2021, 115) In figure 10, the progress of both methods is described, from which the differences between the two can be clearly seen.

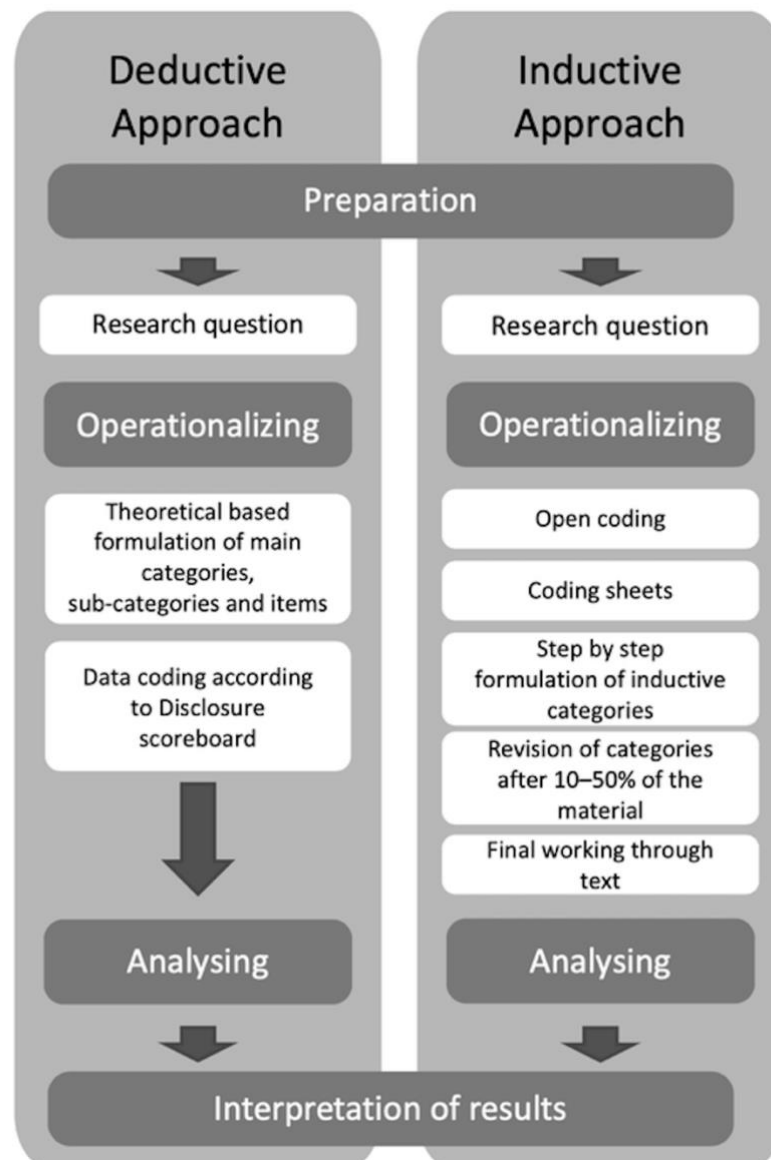


Figure 10 Content analysis process by deductive and inductive approach (Rimmel & Cordazzo, 2021, 114)

This research was carried out using an inductive approach and conventional and directed content analysis. Some of the categories has been created on the basis of previous theories, but the social media of car dealers has been studied relatively little, so there is no ready-made theory and categories for it, so they were formed during the analysis.

In this study, the content was divided into entertaining, informative, commercial and recruitment categories. The content of the entertaining was defined in such a way that it contained content that does not contain factual information about the company, the products

sold by the company or the industry. The main point of entertaining content was to entertain and bring a smile to your face, and its purpose was not to share information. The main point of informative content was to share information, and their purpose was not to arouse great emotions. Informative contents were fact-based and often did not contain humour. Commercial content, on the other hand, was content that aimed to get the customers to connect with the company. Such content could be, for example, offers, information about extended opening hours or otherwise asking the customer to visit the company's premises or website. The recruitment content was unequivocally intended for recruiting new employees. Its purpose was to attract new employees to fill a need at the company's offices. However, during the research, there were material that could be read into two categories, but in order to make the research clearer, one category was chosen for one publication, depending on which one it corresponded more.

In addition to categorization, the study examined the vividness of the content. According to research, social media posts always have a certain amount of vividness. The levels are defined to be; no vividness, low vividness medium / moderate vividness and high vividness. (Soares, Sarquis, Cohen & Soares, 2019, 251) Publications with no vividness are those with only text, without images, links or video. Low vividness posts are those with a picture or pictures. Medium / moderate vividness posts have a link. Publications containing links have greater vividness than text and images, because by opening the link you get more text to read and images to view, so the links contain both previous types of content. Publications containing videos, on the other hand, are high vividness, because in them the media is richer and they usually also have sound. It is important to define these vividness categories, because according to research, the vividness of a publication affects how much interaction it creates between the consumer and the companies. (Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013, 849) In this study, social media publications were divided according to the same division into different vividness levels.

The research also examined the amount of social media publications, and how many publications there were in each social media channel. Each post was counted as a separate publication, even if the same publication was shared in a different channel. In this way, the differences between different operators could be better compared.

3.2 Research data

The research data was collected by studying the social media channels of pre-selected car dealers. As mentioned earlier, the study mainly focused on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and LinkedIn. The research mainly focused on the so-called official profiles of the selected companies, which the company has made itself, but in order to increase the information, additional considerations could also be made about other company profiles, such as, for example, the profiles made by sellers where they advertised the company's services and products. The research data was collected and examined between October 1, 2022 and March 16, 2023, and during that time the social media channels were monitored and the kind of content created on them was taken into account. During this time period, the data for this study was collected which in the end consisted of 727 publications from all three companies across all four platforms. In table 1 can be seen how the publications were divided between different companies and the different social media channels. Although the amount of data collected was not so large that universally valid conclusions could be drawn from it, it was nevertheless sufficient for the purposes of this study, when the purpose was to create an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, i.e. how social media is utilized as part of the operation of car dealerships.

Table 1 Amount of publications during research period by companies

Amount of posts	Kamux	SAKA	Rinta-Jouppi
Facebook	84	37	146
Instagram	71	30	146
LinkedIn	66	35	61
TikTok	28	7	16
Sum	249	109	369

Collected data was categorized in four different categories based on their content. These categories were informative, entertainment, commercial and recruitment. Content was considered informative, if its purpose was to share tips and information, and it did not arouse feelings in the researcher one way or another. Such publications included information like tips on how to make driving easier in the winter or information on most purchased car models. Entertainment content was such publications that were entertaining and did not contain much information, or if it did, it was presented in humorous way. Such content aroused some kind of emotions in the researcher. Example of entertaining content were for example holiday wishes or shared customer experiences. Content was considered commercial, if the main goal of the publication was to get a flow of customers into the webpage of the company and if the main goal was clearly to create sales leads. Examples of such content were publications where a single car was presented and the publication had direct link to the sales ad of the car. Also offers on financing and additional services were considered commercial content. Last category is recruitment content, which was unequivocally the kind of content that aims to acquire workers for the company. The categories and typical examples for each category can be seen in table 2. The share of each content category will be presented later in the study.

Table 2 Examples of categories

Categories	Examples from each company
Informative	<p>Kamux: "You should prepare for the test drive in order to get the most out of the experience. So what things should you pay special attention to? Read the checklist for a car test drive on the blog"</p> <p>Saka: " The top three most chosen brands were 1. Volvo 2. Volkswagen 3. Mercedes-Benz"</p> <p>Rinta-Jouppi: " Crack or crack in the windshield? Did you know that both repairs and replacements are possible at our service points."</p>
Entertainment	<p>Kamux: " Thank you to all our customers and partners for the past year and happy new year 2023!"</p> <p>Saka: "Which would you like as a Valentine's Day gift, a car or a box of chocolates?"</p> <p>Rinta-Jouppi: "70th anniversary cake coffees available on Sunday!"</p>

Commercial	<p>Kamux: ” You will probably get a better price for your car when you sell directly to us without intermediaries”</p> <p>Saka: “You can explore our selection of over 3,500 cars in 24 stores and at saka.fi”</p> <p>Rinta-Jouppi: “Advantages for the buyer of a new Kia!”</p>
Recruitment	<p>Kamux: ” Watch the video and come to summer work as part of Kamux's wonderful team”</p> <p>Saka: Take a look at the experiences of our summer employees in the story and fill out the application”</p> <p>Rinta-Jouppi: ” We are looking for a purchasing manager in Helsinki”</p>

Addition to categorizing the data into previously mentioned categories, the vividness of the publications was analyzed and the data was categorized also by their vividness. The categories were based on previous literature of Soares et al. (2019), where categories are as follow; no vividness for content which contains only text, low vividness for content which has pictures, medium vividness for content which includes links and high vividness for content which contain videos. (Soares et al. 2019, 251)

3.3 Reliability and validity of the research

All research should consider the reliability and validity of the research. The weakness of qualitative studies is often low reliability and validity, because these studies are often prone to subjectivity and often lack generalisation. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, 278) Reliability and validity are also reduced by the fact that qualitative research guidelines are not so strict when compared to quantitative research. Qualitative studies are often also hard to replicate, as they are prone to subjectivity, and the impact of the researcher and their opinion is quite big. Qualitative studies often also lack transparency of the studies. (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2011, 409) The researcher's subjectivity can also be seen as bias, where the researcher only considers the points of view that make certain participants look good (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, 278)

Validity tells how well the research is based on facts and evidence, and how well it measures what it is intended to measure. How well the research measures what it is intended to do tells

how suitable the research methodology has been for examining and interpreting the research material. (Litwin, 1995, 33) In order to improve both reliability and validity, it is important to avoid subjectivity when analyzing data or conducting research. When the purpose of research is to find repeated patterns, it is also important for validity to identify the factors that create that pattern. It is also important to document and preserve the information on the basis of which the research and conclusions are made, because, for example, memorizing interview answers may change the research results greatly. (Riege, 2003, 83)

The biggest risks of this study in terms of validity are the subjectivity of the researcher and how much influence the researcher has, for example, in categorizing the data. Also, the fact that the researcher was working in one of the investigated companies at the time of the research can be perceived as reducing the objectivity of the research and thus affecting the reliability of the research. However, the research was based on the researched material, and the purpose was not to rank the company's actions, so there was no problem with the researcher's subjectivity. In terms of the reliability of the research, the small amount of data can also be considered a risk, because it is not possible to draw universally valid conclusions based on it. Reasons independent of the researcher in terms of reliability are also the fact that social media posts and comments can be edited afterwards, so their content may be different at the time of the research than later after the research.

3.4 Used car sales as an industry

In 2019, the turnover of the retail and wholesale trade of cars was 11.6 billion euros, which means that it is the second largest retail sector after grocery trade. Between 2006 and 2008, an average of 147,000 – 167,000 new cars were registered, while in the 2010s the number has dropped by around 30,000 per year. This has also meant a decline in car retail and wholesale, as its turnover follows the development of first registrations (Autoalan Tiedotuskeskus, 2022.) You can already see from the turnover that the car retail industry is really big, so even small fluctuations in a positive or negative direction can mean fluctuations in turnover of hundreds of thousands or even millions. That is why it is important that the operations of a company operating in the field of car sales are planned on the basis of correct and proven theories. This also applies to marketing, because as mentioned earlier, social media has great power in making a consumer's purchase decision.

3.5 Social media channels in this study

This study monitored how different car dealerships used social media in their business. It was not possible to examine all social media platforms in this study, so the social media platforms were limited to the following; Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and LinkedIn. Next, these platforms and their purposes are introduced in a little more detail.

3.5.1 Facebook

Facebook was founded in 2004, when its purpose was to act as a network for Harvard University students. In 2006, however, it was opened to all people, and it quickly grew into the largest social network. Facebook enables easy sharing of images, texts and videos among Facebook friends and it makes it easy to stay in touch with current and old friends. Facebook is also popular because it is attractive to companies and private users due to its ease and versatility. (Nations, 2019) Facebook has long been the most popular social media channel, and it still is today. According to a study conducted in January 2023, Facebook has almost 3 billion monthly active users. (Statista, 2023a)

3.5.2 Instagram

Instagram is the third largest social media in terms of number of users, with approximately 2 billion monthly active users (Statista, 2023a). Instagram is an application made for sharing pictures and videos, where you can share pictures and videos with your own followers or a group of friends of your choice. In the application, you can also search for content shared by others and share or comment on it. (Instagram, 2023a) Instagram's large number of users includes ordinary people, companies as well as public figures. Many people use Instagram because they can follow public figures and companies in the same place, and interact with them. (Delfino & Antonelli, 2022)

3.5.3 TikTok

TikTok's operation is based on the fact that users can share short videos to followers, or to all TikTok users. TikTok's content has changed from lip-sync videos to informative and funny videos where users can improve themselves, find tips or just relax and watch. TikTok is one

of the fastest growing social media platforms, and the popularity of the application is illustrated by the fact that in five years it has succeeded in multiplying its number of users from 133 million to more than a billion monthly active users. TikTok's popularity is based on the app's ease of use, the popularity of public figures in the app, and viral trends which circulate in the app to name a few. (Geysler, 2022) TikTok users are mainly women, who make up 56 percent of users, and the largest age group is 18-24 years old, who make up 40 percent of users. When you take into account the kind of users TikTok has, companies can be successful in their marketing if they plan their content correctly. Marketing on TikTok is still in its infancy, but many successful marketing campaigns have already been done. (D'Souza, 2023) TikTok's growth can be seen, for example, in the fact that government agencies, such as the Finnish Tax Administration and many police users, are also sharing content on TikTok.

3.5.4 LinkedIn

The main purpose of LinkedIn is to network with employers, employees and colleagues and to deepen and grow your own professional relationship network (LinkedIn, 2022). LinkedIn differs from other social media applications in that it is meant to be used for networking and sharing content with business networking in mind (Hanna, 2022) LinkedIn is the largest professional network in social media, which also serves as the main employee recruitment channel for many companies. In 2013, more than 90 percent of recruiters used LinkedIn. There are more than 800 million LinkedIn users, and more than 2.6 million companies use LinkedIn in their business. Among other things, every Fortune 500 company is involved in LinkedIn. (Brooke, 2014; Statista 2023b) Many car salesmen use LinkedIn to market themselves and their own store.

3.6 Car dealerships in this research

For this study, three predetermined players in the car trade industry had been selected, which are the largest players in Finland. This paragraph introduces these three car trade operators in more detail, whose social media was examined in the study. These three operators to be presented are Kamux, SAKA and Rinta-Jouppi.

3.6.1 Kamux

Kamux defines itself as an expert in used cars, and says that it is an expert in used cars and related services. In addition to 49 stores in Finland, Kamux also operates 20 stores in Sweden and 8 stores in Germany. Kamux was founded in 2003 in Hämeenlinna and since its foundation, Kamux has sold more than 400 thousand cars. Kamux says its selling points are professional staff, low fixed costs and fast stock turnover, which enables low prices for cars and a good selection of cars. Kamux also often emphasizes that it is the 3rd largest used car dealer in Europe. (Kamux, 2023) Follower numbers of the social media investigated in this study on Kamux:

- Facebook – 50 039 followers (Facebook, 2023a)
- Instagram – 3 391 followers (Instagram, 2023b)
- TikTok – 802 followers (TikTok, 2023a)
- LinkedIn – 2 231 followers (LinkedIn, 2023a)

3.6.2 SAKA

Saka is Finland's second largest used car dealer and currently the fastest growing player in the used car industry. According to company's own words, Saka stands out from other operators with its customer service and recognizable concept. In its operations, Saka strives to take into account the needs of its customers and shape its operations to suit these needs, so that they stand out from the competition. (Saka, 2021) Saka emphasizes on its own pages that by choosing them, a person makes "the best choices in life". They also emphasize that by choosing them it is easy and hassle-free to do business, and that they only have the best and inspected trade-in cars in their selection. Saka also brings up researched customer satisfaction as proof of their words. In its entire class, Saka is not up to the level of Kamux, but since its establishment, Saka has sold more than 140 thousand cars and there are already offices in 24 cities around Finland. (Saka, 2023) Follower numbers of the social media investigated in this study on Saka:

- Facebook – 11 698 followers (Facebook, 2023b)
- Instagram – 4 056 followers (Instagram, 2023c)

- TikTok – 7 300 followers (TikTok, 2023b)
- LinkedIn – 1 315 followers (LinkedIn, 2023b)

3.6.3 Rinta-Jouppi

Rinta-Jouppi does not emphasize the size of the company, but long traditions from 70 years ago. Long traditions are used as justification for many strengths that Rinta-Jouppi advertises, i.e. customer knowledge and professionalism in both new and old cars. The company says that it is "the whole nation's car shop" for which the customer is the most important. This is how Rinta-Jouppi has operated since the beginning. In addition to professionalism, Rinta-Jouppi emphasizes the comprehensiveness of the service, when used cars, financial services and maintenance services are available under the same roof. Flexible payment options provide peace of mind for the buyer. (Rinta-Jouppi, 2023a) Rinta-Jouppi has already been in three generations since 1950 and today the operation is large-scale and there are already offices in 30 cities. The operating methods have also changed from the small car sales on the farm, when nowadays you can buy a car via phone and internet without visiting the place at all. (Rinta-Jouppi, 2019; Rinta-Jouppi, 2023b) Follower numbers of the social media investigated in this study on Rinta-Jouppi:

- Facebook – 2 200 followers (Facebook, 2023c)
- Instagram – 3 938 followers (Instagram, 2023d)
- TikTok – 642 followers (TikTok, 2023c)
- LinkedIn – 1 793 followers (LinkedIn, 2023c)

4 Findings

This paragraph reviews the findings that were observed by studying the social media channels of the companies. As mentioned earlier in the study, the purpose was to investigate what kind of content is created on social media and how it is utilized as part of the car trade. The study also examined the vividness of the publications, because according to studies, it affects how much the publication creates interaction between the consumer and the company (Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013, 849). In addition to the nature and vividness of the content, the study examined how active companies are in different social media channels. Activity is important because it creates eWOM among consumers, which is beneficial to the company when consumers share positive experiences about the company. EWOM also creates visibility for the company, and the more they post, the better the chances are that a post will go viral, allowing the company to reach a really large audience. (Erkan, 2015, 1441; Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, 519)

4.1 Content type and vividness

First, let's go through what kind of content each company had published on different social media channels. As stated earlier the publications were divided according to the researcher's own experience into four different categories, which are informative, entertainment, commercial and recruitment. This categorization of the data was done based on the content of the publications. The data was also categorized based on their vividness into four additional categories, which were no vividness, low vividness, medium vividness and high vividness. Next the content and vividness of the companies' social media will be reviewed one social media channel at a time.

4.1.1 Facebook

Table 3 shows how Facebook content was distributed between different companies. During the study period, each company published such content that each category was used. All companies had in common that recruitment content was published the least on Facebook. Only 1 percent of Kamux's publications were recruitment-related, and 11 percent of Saka's content was recruitment-related. Based on the number of publications, most of Kamux's and

Saka's publications were informative, while Rinta-Jouppi had by far the most commercial content, which was 76 percent of their publications. As seen on the table 3, for example Rinta-Jouppi made 146 publications on Facebook, out of which 76 percent was considered as commercial by the researcher. Based on the share of each category, most of Saka's publications were entertainment content. From analyzing the content of each company from Facebook, it could be noticed, that Rinta-Jouppi used Facebook mainly to gain traffic to their website and gain sales leads. This could be seen in that most of the publications were about presenting a car and its features, and linking the sales ad into the publication. Kamux's and Saka's content was evenly distributed among all categories, with the exception of recruitment category, which was the least presented. Kamux and Saka used Facebook to spread information and entertaining content. According to data given by marketing specialist from Kamux, informative content is used to helping brand building. Therefore I suggest that Kamux and Saka uses Facebook for brand building and Rinta-Jouppi for commercial purposes.

Table 3 Content types on Facebook

Facebook	Kamux	SAKA	Rinta-Jouppi
Informative	38%	43%	12%
Entertainment	24%	35%	8%
Commercial	37%	11%	76%
Recruitment	1%	11%	4%

When taking a look at the vividness of companies Facebook content, it was noticeable that not one of the companies has no vividness posts with only text. Most companies had publications with links, either to the company's website or to news articles from research. 55-59 percent of Kamux's and Saka's Facebook content was medium vividness content. Rinta-Jouppi stands out from these two, as 75 percent of Rinta-Jouppi's publications were high vividness content, i.e. videos. Rinta-Jouppi used videos when presenting specific

products or talking about offers. Rinta-Jouppi also did not publish any content that only contained text or images, so all Facebook content was medium or high vividness content.

Table 4 Vividness of content on Facebook

Facebook	Kamux	SAKA	Rinta-Jouppi
No vividness	0%	0%	0%
Low vividness	37%	19%	0%
Medium vividness	55%	59%	23%
High vividness	7%	22%	75%

4.1.2 Instagram

Next, let's look at companies' social media posts on Instagram. The distribution of publication types can be seen in table 5. A similar distribution between publication types could be observed as on Facebook, but there were also differences. For example, Saka had no recruitment content on Instagram at all, while on Facebook it was 11 percent of the posts. On Rinta-Jouppi, a similar theme continues, as on Facebook, that the main part of the publications was commercial content. Rinta-Jouppi published a lot of video presentations of its cars with direct links to the car's sales announcement. A lot of Rinta-Jouppi's content also includes various financing offers or accessory offers. Unlike on Facebook, Rinta-Jouppi had much more entertainment content on Instagram. On Facebook, there was only 8 percent of such content, while on Instagram the corresponding figure was 33 percent.

Table 5 Content types on Instagram

Instagram	Kamux	SAKA	Rinta-Jouppi
Informative	31%	50%	4%

Entertainment	28%	37%	33%
Commercial	40%	13%	62%
Recruitment	1%	0%	1%

The vividness of company posts on Instagram differs from Facebook posts for all merchants. Instagram as a service is based on sharing pictures and videos, where you cannot publish just text. Therefore, no one's content on Instagram was no vividness content. Most of Saka's and Kamux's content were just pictures, so they count as low vividness content. Low vividness content was 62-73 percent for these two companies. Instead, Rinta-Jouppi also used videos on Instagram, which accounted for 58 percent of Rinta-Jouppi's Instagram content. It was remarkable that only Rinta-Jouppi knew how to use direct links in their Instagram posts. Internet addresses were added to the captions of Kamux's publications, but you cannot add direct links to Instagram captions, they must be embedded separately in the image. At Rinta-Jouppi, links were used in 14 percent of the publications.

Table 6 Vividness of content on Instagram

Instagram	Kamux	SAKA	Rinta-Jouppi
No vividness	0%	0%	0%
Low vividness	62%	73%	28%
Medium vividness	0%	0%	14%
High vividness	38%	27%	58%

4.1.3 LinkedIn

Big changes in the publications of all traders is noticeable when we move to examine LinkedIn publications. As mentioned earlier, LinkedIn is mainly intended for growing and deepening the professional network (LinkedIn, 2022). So it is not surprising that the amount of recruitment content in the publications of all companies increased. The biggest change was in Kamux's publications, because on Facebook and Instagram these publications were both only 1 percent, while on LinkedIn they were 89 percent of the publications. Kamux had no commercial content on LinkedIn at all, and only 11 percent of informative and entertainment content split in half. Recruitment content also increased at Saka and Rinta-Jouppi, but unlike Kamux, neither of them used LinkedIn primarily for recruitment. 60 percent of Saka's publications on LinkedIn were informative. Saka shared research results and third-party studies on issues related to driving. The main part of Rinta-Jouppi's publications was entertainment content. However, Rinta-Jouppi's content was relatively evenly distributed among all content types. It was surprising, however, that considering LinkedIn's general purpose of use, the least of Rinta-Jouppi's content was recruitment content.

Table 7 Content types on LinkedIn

LinkedIn	Kamux	SAKA	Rinta-Jouppi
Informative	5%	60%	23%
Entertainment	6%	20%	36%
Commercial	0%	0%	28%
Recruitment	89%	20%	13%

On LinkedIn, most of the companies' publications contained links, so the content could be read in the medium vividness category. Kamux's links led directly to recruitment announcements, while Saka published research results and news articles in addition to

recruitment content. Rinta-Jouppi also used LinkedIn for commercial purposes, i.e. the links led to car sales announcements. Rinta-Jouppi also published the most videos on LinkedIn compared to other companies.

Table 8 Vividness of content on LinkedIn

LinkedIn	Kamux	SAKA	Rinta-Jouppi
No vividness	0%	0%	0%
Low vividness	5%	15%	0%
Medium vividness	92%	79%	80%
High vividness	3%	6%	20%

4.1.4 TikTok

As a platform, TikTok is mainly designed for entertainment, so it is not surprising that the main content of every company there was entertainment content. 71-75 percent of Saka and Rinta-Jouppi's content on TikTok was entertainment content, while the corresponding figure on Kamux was 43 percent. Kamux's content was mainly divided into entertaining and commercial content, but there was also 18 percent informative content. Saka, on the other hand, had no informative content at all, but in addition to entertaining content, commercial content was published on TikTok, where cars were presented or consumers were urged to sell their own cars to the company, just like Kamux. During the review period, no merchant used TikTok for recruitment purposes.

Table 9 Content type on TikTok

TikTok	Kamux	SAKA	Rinta-Jouppi
Informative	18%	0%	13%

Entertainment	43%	71%	75%
Commercial	39%	29%	12%
Recruitment	0%	0%	0%

TikTok is all about sharing short videos, so it's not surprising that all the companies' content on TikTok was high vividness content. As mentioned about the content, the videos were entertaining and the information was presented in a humorous way.

Table 10 Vividness of content on TikTok

TikTok	Kamux	SAKA	Rinta-Jouppi
No vividness	0%	0%	0%
Low vividness	0%	0%	0%
Medium vividness	0%	0%	0%
High vividness	100%	100%	100%

4.1.5 Content type overall

When we examine the contents of all platforms in total, we notice that Kamux's contents were evenly distributed among all four categories. This was not the case with Saka and Rinta-Jouppi, but informative content was the most represented on Saka, which was almost half of the content among all platforms. Saka had the least amount of commercial content, which was only 9 percent of the total content. Rinta-Jouppi, on the other hand, invested in commercial content in their marketing, which was more than half of their publications. Rinta-Jouppi published recruitment content and informative content the least, but entertainment content made up a quarter of the publications.

When examining the combined percentages of all companies, it was noticed that commercial content was the most published among these three companies, which was an average of 42 percent of all social media publications. Rinta-Jouppi published clearly more commercial content than average, while Saka published 33 percent less than average. Instead, the least amount of recruitment content was published, which was not surprising when you consider the purpose of social media, i.e. conversation and brand creation. Therefore based on the amount of content overall, it can be seen that Rinta-Jouppi used social media mainly to create sales leads and to acquire customers. Rinta-Jouppi used social media least to recruit new workers. Kamux's used social media evenly to acquire new employees, to create sales leads and to build their brand with the informative and entertaining content. Saka however used social media mainly to spread informative and entertaining content. So Saka used social media mainly as a brand building platform.

Table 11 Content type across all platforms

Overall	Kamux	SAKA	Rinta-Jouppi	Average
Informative	25%	48%	11%	21%
Entertainment	23%	33%	25%	25%
Commercial	28%	9%	60%	42%
Recruitment	24%	10%	4%	12%

When summing up the vividness of all the companies' channels, it can be noticed that not a single company had publications containing only text. On the other hand, the other vividness categories were evenly represented by both Saka and Kamux, where the content was fairly evenly distributed among the other three categories. Kamux and Saka had the least videos, so there was little high vividness content. Instead, Rinta-Jouppi had videos, and with that, high vividness content was the most, which was 60 percent of the company's content.

Table 12 Vividness of content across all platforms

Overall	Kamux	SAKA	Rinta-Jouppi	Average
No vividness	0%	0%	0%	0%
Low vividness	32%	32%	12%	21%
Medium vividness	43%	45%	28%	36%
High vividness	25%	23%	60%	43%

The study examined the number of companies' publications in percentages, so that it would be easier to compare different companies and social media channels. However, it must be taken into account that the percentages do not tell the whole story, as the companies' publication volumes at the time of the study varied a lot. This means that the weight of a single publication affects a company with fewer publications much more, than a company with more publications. The number of publications is discussed more in depth next.

4.2 Frequency of posting

As mentioned earlier in the study, there were quite large differences between companies in how often they updated to social media. Therefore, when the percentage differences were examined, one publication of a company that made fewer publications could have a greater percentage impact than a company that made more publications. In table 13, you can see how the number of publications was distributed among the different social media channels between the three companies. Table 13 shows that all three companies were the most active on Facebook. This was no surprise, because Facebook has long been the world's most popular social media with more than 3 billion users. It is therefore clear that companies should invest in the channel that is the most popular if the aim is to reach the largest possible audience. Next, the most publications were made on Instagram and LinkedIn. Kamux was slightly more active on Instagram than on LinkedIn, while the activity on Saka was the other

way around. However, it was remarkable for Rinta-Jouppi that the activity on Facebook and Instagram was equally high, while on LinkedIn the company published almost 14 publications less per month than on Facebook or Instagram. Of all the companies, the activity was the least in TikTok, which was not surprising because TikTok as an application is relatively new and, especially in the field of car sales, it has not been used very much. When examining the differences between the companies, it was noticed that Saka's activity was the lowest, followed by Kamux and Rinta-Jouppi had the most active advertising. Rinta-Jouppi published about 24 publications on Facebook and Instagram during the month, which was almost 20 publications more than Saka. However, Kamux was the most active on TikTok during the review period.

Table 13 Frequency of social media posts

Amount of posts / month	Kamux	SAKA	Rinta-Jouppi
Facebook	14	6,2	24,3
Instagram	11,8	5	24,3
LinkedIn	11	5,8	10,2
TikTok	4,7	1,2	2,7

Precisely because of these differences in publications, it must be remembered that when examining percentage differences, for example, the impact of one publication by Saka was more noticeable than the impact of one publication by Rinta-Jouppi. When, for example, the effects of different categories were studied, 1.1 publications were enough to change Saka's results by one percent, while the corresponding number for Rinta-Jouppi was 3.7. Rinta-Jouppi made more than three times as many publications as Saka in the review period.

4.3 Branding on social media

When studying the social media of different companies, differences can be noticed in ways in which they created their own brand. Rinta-Jouppi emphasized its long, already 70-year

roots in the car trade on social media and on its website. They also called themselves the car store of the whole nation, where there is a selection for everyone. They justified their superiority precisely by the fact that their roots go back many decades, so they have accumulated expertise over a long period of time. Much longer than other car dealers. They also tried to get closer to the customer with their videos, where they presented the selection of their cars.. They often used different people in the videos, so that only one person does not become the so-called advertising face. Rinta-Jouppi also published surveys, which were encouraged to be answered by commenting. The comments were used to create a dialogue with consumers.

Saka, on the other hand, used the advertising slogan "lite bättre", i.e. a little better, which aims to create an image that Saka is better than its other competitors. The improvement was also emphasized on social media, where high-quality, inspected and best-equipped trade-in cars on the market were advertised. Research results where Saka had fared better than other competitors in terms of customer satisfaction were also highlighted on social media. In this way, the aim was to create an image for consumers that when you buy a car from Saka, you get a better product than elsewhere. As their slogans "lite bättre" and "better car trade" suggest. Saka uses humorous characters in its marketing that stand out from other car dealers, as Kamux and Rinta-Jouppi use ordinary people in their marketing. With the help of these characters, Saka tries to stay in the minds of consumers.

Kamux, on the other hand, emphasized its large size. They are already the market leader in Finland, but have decided to emphasize in their advertising that they are the 3rd largest used car dealer in Europe. Like Rinta-Jouppi, they want to show that they are the right choice for all customers, and they show it by modifying their own slogan according to the situation. After the 3rd largest in Europe prefix, a word suitable for the situation was added, which could describe transporting children or putting a baby to sleep or a hobby activity. According to information provided by Kamux's marketing specialist, they edit the slogan to attract the potential customer groups with it, like families with babies or small children. Kamux also wants to show its leadership by sharing information about various motoring-related issues, because it creates an image for consumers that by sharing information they are professionals in motoring-related matters. The marketing specialist of Kamux confirms this statement, and adds that the informative content is a way of strengthening the brand, and also making it

easier for customers to come and buy from Kamux as they provide content to showcase the steps needed to buy a car.

4.4 Personal branding

By following social media accounts, especially on LinkedIn, it could be noticed that some people used social media publications to reach customers. By browsing the accounts of company employees, you could find people who shared company publications and added their own captions to them. Some of the sellers also made their own publications, where they encouraged discussion and encouraged them to get in touch regarding car sales matters. At the end of the posts, there were often the person's own contact information and links to the presented car or the company's car selection. In this way, sellers get more customers, and not just wait for them to come to them. Often, the sellers also emphasized their own professionalism by telling about their own merits. Examples of these are the number of cars sold, positive customer feedback or a long history in the automotive industry.

Individual car sellers had also followed companies into new social media channels used in the industry, such as TikTok. On TikTok, sellers often advertised cars for sale and answered the questions asked by viewers in a video. Like companies, the content of individual sellers on TikTok was often more entertaining and relaxed, and the main purpose was not just to sell cars, but rather to create your own personal brand. If the personal brand grows into widespread awareness, it is possible that many customers will then be in contact with this person, whom they already know through social media. Personal branding via social media is not new, but, for example, sellers of grocery stores make extensive use of it in their own operations.

4.5 Creating sales leads

Creating sales leads often requires commercial content that the customer is interested in and is connected to the company. As previously noticed when examining the content of social media, Rinta-Jouppi used the most commercial content in its social media. Rinta-Jouppi presented a lot of their products on social media, and always included a direct link to the presented car in these product presentations. With the help of these links, the aim was to create sales leads on the basis of which either the presented car or another car could be sold.

Kamux and Saka made fewer of those introductory videos. However, they also had publications that aimed to generate sales leads. Such publications included, for example, invitations to sell your car to a company. The companies also made publications in which it was said that a certain type of car was in high demand and that a good price was paid for them. In this way, the owners of the car concerned either sell the car to the company so that it can be sold to another customer due to high demand, or in an ideal situation, the customer exchanges their own car for another..

All companies also had sponsored content, especially on Instagram, where the user of the application received a sponsored publication that contained pictures and links directly to the cars in the publication. The purpose of these sponsored ads was to get consumers to the company's website and create sales leads. However, it was difficult to monitor these sponsored publications from a research point of view, because they came across randomly when browsing the application. During the research period, however, such sponsored advertisements was received from every company in this study.

Kamux's marketing specialist said that the sponsored posts are one of the main sources to create sales leads. They add that the aim is not only to create sales leads from those specific cars in the sponsored posts, but also to get traffic to the website and chat also. Kamux also emphasizes that the lead creation relies on their strong brand in which they believe at Kamux. The marketing specialist says, that they have built the brand strong, because it makes consumers trust in the brand, which makes them come to Kamux when in need of a new car. The strong brand creates trust and affection, which makes consumers like Kamux over the others.

4.6 Comments

During the research period, the conversation between the companies and consumers was investigated, and during the research it was noticed that the commenting was minimal. What all three companies had in common was that there were often very few, if any, comments. In addition, when there were comments, they were often negative, where the customer shared his bad experience with the company in question. It was also noticeable that even though the comments were few, the consumers did not get any answers to them. Kamux and Saka usually only responded to comments if the comment was negative and the same commenter had commented on the same issue in several different publications. Instead, Rinta-Jouppi

also responded to positive comments, and was generally more active in talking with consumers than Kamux and Saka. But as mentioned, there were not very much comments on also in Rinta-Jouppi's social media channels.

5 Discussion

In this chapter, we go through the results of the study, and examine how they answer the research questions of the study. The chapter also examines the findings of this study a little, comparing them to previous research. After that, suggestions are given for further research on the topic and critical comments are made on this research and its results.

5.1 Answers to research questions

In order to be able to answer the main research question of the study, we first go through the answers to the two sub-research questions of the study. By first going through the answers to the sub-research questions, a justified basis for answering the main research question is created.

How companies are building their brand image through social media?

When examining how companies utilized social media for brand building, clear differences could be noticed, especially in how companies strived to position themselves in the market. For example, in its social media marketing, Rinta-Jouppi strived to emphasize itself as "the car dealer of the whole nation" and at the same time emphasized its long roots in the car sales field. By emphasizing long roots, the aim was to bring out the store's knowledge and experience compared to other operators that have been on the market for less time. By emphasizing the long roots Rinta-Jouppi was making sure that they are seen as the reliable and stable operator in the field of used cars, which then creates trust in consumers. Trust is a big factor in brand building because trust is a major factor in creating a strong brand, which then helps in times where problems occur. The trust of consumers is important, because problems occur with the company, consumers wont stop buying from said brand as it has been trustworthy previously (De Chernatory, 2006, 4). Professionalism was also highlighted in social media publications, where cars for sale were presented in a video. Facts about the cars were often added to the captions of these videos, and also in the video the seller told information about the car for sale. With the help of videos, the company also tried to get closer to the customer, as the presentation experience shown on the video corresponds more closely to the actual car presentation situation, than if the customer just read the sales

announcement himself. Rinta-Jouppi shared regularly customer experiences in their social media, which also makes consumers feel like they are closer to the company as they are basically part of content creation of the company. Such content encourages customers to share more of their own experiences, as it could be shared in the brands page. This is so called open-source branding where customers are highly involved in the content creation and therefore branding. That kind of content creation can be seen as a “game” where consumers are lured to take part and create more content. (Gensler et al. 2013, 253) This kind of content creation is wisely planned, as it makes consumers feel closer with the brand which at the same time benefits the company as consumers create WOM at the same time. WOM is beneficial for the company as it can alter consumers own opinions and it is seen as trustworthy source of information as the sender of the WOM has nothing to gain from spreading the information (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004, 546; Bansar & Voyer, 2000, 166).

Kamux also strived with its own marketing to show that it is a car shop for everyone. In their advertisements and marketing, they tried to use different people from different age groups and genders, so that the advertisements were not limited to, for example, only young men and thus limit other groups in people's images. Kamux also modifies its advertising slogan according to what it advertises, and also takes all groups into account in that way. For example, the advertising slogan could state that Kamux sells cars that are suitable for putting children to sleep, transporting the youngest members of the family for hobbies, or only for the buyer of a used car. It is important to make sure that your marketing does not create too strict image of the company and its customer base. If the image is created too limited it can cut off some people as they think that they are not welcomed customers for the company. It is however also important not to create too wide image of the company as then it can create false impressions of the company. (Aaker, 2011, 74) For example Kamux should not include professional road workers, as they don't sell excavators. In addition to the fact that Kamux wants to show that it is a car shop for everyone, it emphasized its size in its marketing. Kamux is the 3rd largest used car dealer in Europe, and they also emphasized that in their marketing. Often publications or their captions had added a mention that Kamux is not only the largest used car dealer in Finland, but also the 3rd largest in Europe. By emphasizing the large size, Kamux tells consumers that they have done things right, because they have done so well that it has enabled growth even on the European side. With the large size Kamux is on the same boat as Rinta-Jouppi, as with their content they aimed to be seen as big and trustworthy player in the field. As stated, trustworthiness is a major factor in brand building.

Strong brand is also important, as it directly affects also perceived value and customer satisfaction (He, Li & Harris, 2012, 653). They demonstrated professionalism by also sharing research results and facts about cars and the automotive industry on social media.

Saka differs from Kamux and Rinta-Jouppi in that they do marketing on social media with a slightly more relaxed approach. Their marketing uses humorous characters, which creates a more relaxed impression of the company. Kamux and Rinta-Jouppi only use "normal" people in their advertising, which does not create a relaxed image like Saka's advertising. The humorous characters are used to build a certain brand identity. Saka utilizes the brand-as-person approach presented by Aaker (2011) where company uses distinct characters to express the company's values. The distinct characters enables consumers to also relax and to express their personality. It can create stronger bond with the brand and stronger brand overall in the eyes of the consumers. (Aaker, 2011, 76-77) However, also Kamux had recently started to use a slightly more humorous approach, with a funny scene or funny music in the background which shows that Kamux was trying different approaches and being experimental in social media. That is important in social media brand building as it should be experimental and playful because of the rapidly changing environment (Brown, 2012, 294). However, the content was mostly normal content, so to speak. In addition to funny characters, Saka also used more entertaining content in their videos. For example, they published a Christmas carol sung by their employees at Christmas. With the relaxed characters and content Saka aims to be relaxed and welcoming player in the field of used car dealers.

In summary, the companies had first decided what kind of image they wanted to create for consumers, and appropriate content was created based on that image. As mentioned, Rinta-Jouppi tried to create a professional image by emphasizing the company's long traditions and decades of professionalism. Saka strived to be a more relaxed operator who does a better car trade than others. Kamux, on the other hand, proves to be a professional in the field of used cars, which has grown outside of Finland thanks to its successful business model.

How can companies utilize social media to create leads?

When researching how social media was used to generate leads, it was noticed that companies had similar methods. The most common way to generate leads was sponsored advertising posts, where the Facebook or Instagram browser received publications paid for

by companies with their own content, with several cars to quickly browse, and direct links to these cars in question. These sponsored advertising posts were used to attract customers to the companies' own pages using the cars in question. According to the researcher's personal sampling, interesting cars were selected for these sponsored publications, which arouse the interest of the social media browser, and make them open the sale advertisement of the car in question, even if there is no such car to buy. In this way, customers are brought to the company's website, and the chances of the customer becoming interested in another of the company's products and sending a contact request are increased. This way, where company acquires the sales leads for the salespersons, is called company initiated leads. Company initiated leads are created by the marketing efforts of the company. Few years back such efforts meant email marketing campaigns and advertising on TV and traditional media, but nowadays its usually social media marketing and sponsored posts. (Jolson & Wotruba, 1992, 60)

Of the three companies under investigation, Rinta-Jouppi stood out, as it often used presentation videos of individual cars on social media. With videos, Rinta-Jouppi aims to utilize the media which is more vivid than pictures and text only. Higher vividness is considered better, because vividness of the publication has a positive correlation with the interaction it creates. (Pletikosa et al. 2013, 849) In the videos, a single car and its features were presented, so the consumer got additional information about it that he could not get just by browsing the sales announcement. These introductory videos also had a direct link to the car sales announcement, which again brings customers to the company's website and increases the chances that the customer will become a lead for the company. Rinta-Jouppi often also advertised on social media if they had offers for financing. Neither Kamux nor Saka had publications like this. However it should be noted, that the introductory videos were quite lengthy, as many of them lasted around a minute. Today, short videos are more popular and average watch time in social media is 3-8 seconds, so the majority of social media users won't watch Rinta-Jouppi's videos until the end (Rrustemi & Baca, 2021, 303).

In summary, it can be stated that the efforts were made to create leads with sponsored advertising publications, especially using Facebook and Instagram. Interesting cars were chosen for these posts, which arouse the consumer's interest and make the customer click on the sales ad, and thus the customer is on the company's website. This increases the chances that the customer will get to know the store's other selection as well, and make a contact

request. Car demonstration videos and direct links associated with the videos were also used to generate leads. However, only Rinta-Jouppi used these video advertisements, so it was not so popular method as sponsored posts.

Now that we have answered the sub-questions of this study, we have a solid basis on answering the main research question which is;

How is social media utilized in sales of used cars?

Based on the research, social media was used in many ways to build a brand, as well as to generate leads. All three companies were active on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and TikTok at the time of the study. The most common social media channel was Facebook, and the least used was TikTok. As a result, this was not surprising, as Facebook has long been the most popular social media platform, and TikTok is just emerging as a business support for companies, so it is logical that resources are invested in utilizing Facebook. The testing of new social media platforms is however important, as social media is constantly changing and marketers must stay alert and keep up to date with the changing ways (Ahmed et al. (2017, 1130)

Every company used social media to build a brand image. What was remarkable about each company was that social media was utilized to reinforce the image that the company had previously predetermined. Kamux emphasized its large size and professionalism, Rinta-Jouppi emphasized its long traditions and that it is open to all customers, while Saka wanted to create a more relaxed image of itself where the customer will feel good. Most of Saka's social media content was entertainment content, the purpose of which was to arouse emotions in the consumer. As stated previously Kamux and Rinta-Jouppi aimed to create trust in consumers, as trust is considered to have an effect on brand loyalty and customers tend to buy from trustworthy brands (De Chernatory, 2006, 4). Saka however had taken a different approach and did not emphasize trust in their marketing efforts. They aimed to create joyful and fun content as positive content creates positive image of the company in the eyes of the consumers (de Vries, Gensler & Leeflang, 2012, 83). The trust seeking and positive content creation of the companies could be also seen in the slogans which were repeated in several publications. Saka's slogan was casual and suggestive "lite bättre" and "better car trade" together with the humorous characters are clearly aimed to be joyful and fun, whereas Rinta-Jouppi and their slogan "The whole nation's car shop" emphasized the

fact that they have a car for everyone. Often the publications also had a text emphasizing long traditions. Kamux's slogan "Europe's 3rd largest used car store" reflected its large size and the fact that the same operation could also be used outside Finland's borders. It was therefore clearly seen that all the companies had understood the importance of a clear and strong brand. They emphasized their slogans and brand aspects, but some also altered them just a little. Like Kamux for example altered the slogan to include different consumers. It is important to alter the branding aspects to fit customer needs, but Kamux had kept it so that the same slogan was still recognizable. If Kamux changed the slogan too much, it would fail the branding completely as it could make consumers experience the brand differently as branding has planned. (Mindrut et al. 2015, 395)

When investigating how social media was used for personal branding, it could be concluded that the employees of each company to some extent used social media for self-branding. However, this was relatively unpopular, as only a few people were found in each company who used social media for customer acquisition and personal branding. The most popular channel for this was LinkedIn, where people shared sales announcements about cars, and told more about the cars in sale. At the end of each publication, there was also the person's own contact information and a reminder that if you need a new car, they should be contacted. Because of asking for consumers to contact you and not the company overall, the aim is to create personal benefit which is precisely the aim of personal branding. According to Khedher (2014) the aim of personal branding is to create yourself a unique identity in order to achieve personal and professional goals (Khedher, 2014, 33). Here, car salespersons are trying to achieve their own sales goals and benefit financially from it, but also to meet the professional goals set by the company. Because these people were trying to acquire the trust of the consumers, these profiles often also emphasized their own professionalism and reported their own results either from sales volumes or customer feedback. Although the main social media channel for personal branding in the car trade was LinkedIn, it was noticeable that some profiles were also found on TikTok. On the TikTok side, the content focused more on creating your own brand and talking with consumers.

Companies used similar methods to generate leads, the most popular of which was sponsored ads on Facebook and Instagram. In these sponsored posts, companies' cars were selected that, according to the researcher's own experience, were interesting. The advertising publications had direct links to the company's website, so the customer was more likely to

get to know the rest of the car dealership's selection when on the company's website. Thus, the opportunity for a lead increases. Rinta-Jouppi also made use of individual car presentation videos, which contained direct links to the car for sale. Rinta-Jouppi was the only company that did this during the research period. Introductory videos were made of various cars, and they told about the car's features and the most important information such as mileage, model year and price. With the help of these videos, an effort was made to create leads about the cars being presented. Rinta-Jouppi was also the only operator that made offers for financing or accessories during the time period under investigation.

5.2 Implications

To create a strong brand on social media, companies should acquire as many followers as possible who interact with the company. It doesn't make sense to only acquire followers who don't participate in anything with the company or community, but it would be important to get active followers for the company. (Gummerus et al, 2012, 870) During the research, it was noticeable that although the number of followers of companies is at best up to 40 thousand, there is still very little interaction between followers and companies. Although the number of followers is one measure of brand success, it is even more important to measure active followers. The number of followers doesn't tell the whole truth, because it doesn't tell, for example, what kind of reputation the company has. (Kietzmann et al, 2011, 247) However it has to be noted, that all followers, even if they are not active are good followers, as based on studies people following a brand in social media has a positive correlation towards buying intentions from that company (Beukeboom et al, 2015, 33).

When trying to create interaction with followers and consumers, what kind of content is created on social media is of great importance. Content can consist of, for example, images, videos, messages and polls, and can be informative or entertaining. Brand publications can be considered informative when they share information about the company or its products. The purpose of entertainment content, on the other hand, is to get the consumer interested and explore the brand's social media and its content in more detail. Publications that are fun and exciting create positive images of the publications and the brand. (de Vries, Gensler & Leeflang, 2012, 83) In this study, the content was divided into informative and entertainment content, and the publications were categorized into these categories based on previous research. However, by examining the data of the study, it was noticed that dividing it into

only these two categories would be a bit narrow from the point of view of the study, so two categories, commercial and recruitment, were added. In this way, the separated content was obtained a little more precisely, in which case the analysis was richer and the research achieved more precise results.

By examining social media publications, it was noticed that no company made publications that contained only text. Most of the publications consisted of pictures and captions, but especially Rinta-Jouppi also used a lot of videos on their social media channels. When studying the vividness theory of social media, it was found that how much vividness there is has an effect on how much interaction it creates between consumers and the author of the publication. As vividness increased, interaction also increased, so there is a positive correlation between the two. (Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013, 849) However, previous studies show that this is true up to a certain point, because images, i.e. low vividness content, create more interaction than text alone, i.e. content with no vividness. But videos that are high vividness content do not create more interactions than images, even though their vividness is higher. According to research, images create the most interaction between the publisher and the consumer. (Trefzger, Baccarella & Voigt, 2016, 6) In this study, it was remarkable that only Rinta-Jouppi regularly used high vividness content, i.e. videos. In Rinta-Jouppi's videos, there was no noticeable increase in interaction compared to pictures, so this study corresponds to previous research on the subject. Most of the companies used images with captions in their social media publications.

All the content that is published on social media and how you comment and talk with consumers there affects how consumers perceive the company's brand. The way in which consumers perceive the company's brand is important, because without careful planning, the company's brand image can be different in different social media channels, which causes different social media channels to give a different and even contradictory image of the company. Therefore, companies should utilize the theories of integrated marketing communication as part of marketing planning. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018, 427) When examining the social media content on the different social media platforms of Saka, Kamux and Rinta-Jouppi, it can be positively noted that the content of each company was consistent and did not provide conflicting information about the companies. It can therefore be stated that from the point of view of integrated marketing communication, all companies have succeeded well.

In addition to brand, the way companies acquired sales leads was researched. As stated in the theory part of the study, there are a few ways in which sales leads are acquired. These were prospect initiated, company initiated and salesperson initiated leads. (Jolson & Wotruba, 1992, 61) When researching companies' social media channels, it was noticed that the most common ways in terms of this research were salesperson initiated and company initiated leads. Salesperson initiated leads were seen when individual employees utilized their own personal social media channels for customer acquisition, while company initiated leads were seen when the company made sponsored publications on social media with the purpose of generating leads. In addition, Rinta-Jouppi made presentation videos of individual cars, the purpose of which was to get customers interested in their selection.

5.2.1 Implications for theory

When examining the theories of the research, it was noticeable that social media marketing emphasizes the importance of WOM, i.e. word-of-mouth, in building a social media brand. WOM was found to be an important source of unbiased information when consumers make purchase decisions (Bansar & Voyer, 2000, 166). However, few studies take into account how the significance of the source of information changes when the product is different. Most studies examine the marketing of consumer goods and the importance of WOM to them, but the latest studies have also taken into account the fact that WOM is less important when it comes to durable goods. Although the importance of WOM is great in how consumers choose their place of purchase, according to research, the company's own information is more important in the situation when you are buying durable goods (Wang et al, 2021, 600).

When studying vividness, it was also worth noting that, according to theories, the vividness of social media content has a positive correlation with consumer interaction. According to the theory, the company that makes the most high vividness content gets the most comments, followers and likes. (Pletikosa et al, 2013, 849) However, this was not the case in the study, because even though Rinta-Jouppi made the most videos, i.e. high vividness content, their number of followers was the smallest of all three companies. There were also no more comments or likes than other companies. Therefore it should be noted that the theories are not universal, but rather act as a guide and companies should find through trial and error the ways which work for the company and industry.

5.2.2 Implications for practice

The research found that social media can be done in many ways. It was remarkable that even though it was stated in theory that the vividness of the content and consumer interaction has a positive correlation, it was not noticeable in the research results. Although Rinta-Jouppi published the most high vividness content, i.e. videos, on social media, it had no effect on consumer activity on the company's social media platforms. Rinta-Jouppi's long videos can have an effect, because as stated in theory, nowadays the average viewing time is very short, so there is a high probability that long videos will not be watched.

What is important in terms of doing social media, however, is unity between platforms, diversity of content and trying out new ways. It's important to stay up-to-date, whether it's about products for sale or social media marketing. If a particular car is more desirable than another in a certain market situation, it makes sense to invest in selling and buying the desired cars. The same style applies to social media marketing. Situations change in social media, there are new platforms or styles that work best at that moment, so it is useful for the company to follow the trends there as well. A positive note was that every company under study took advantage of new social media platforms such as TikTok. It was noticeable from the number of publications that TikTok was not invested in the same way as other platforms, but it would be important to try to find what works there as well, because it can enable you to gain a competitive advantage.

In social media marketing and brand building, it is also often emphasized that interacting with consumers and WOM is very important, because consumers trust other consumers rather than companies' marketing. However, according to the most recent studies, the situation is different if the product being sold is a durable good, such as a car. Then companies should invest in their own marketing, because in a durable goods situation, consumers rely on information provided by companies rather than on WOM. (Wang et al, 2021, 600)

It is also noteworthy that social media works well for generating leads because it is possible to reach many people relatively cheaply. If a company creates a strong brand, grows its own following and gains the trust of followers and consumers, social media works as a cheap marketing channel. Sponsored posts reach car seekers and make customers interested in the company's selection. In sponsored posts, it's good to use "attractors" that will get even a

social media browser interested who isn't necessarily changing a car. However, interesting cars attract consumers to the company's website, and one of these people may also be connected to the company.

In short, social media has a lot of potential and there are a lot of theories about it. However, it is worth taking a critical approach to universal theories, because the product being sold can greatly influence the kind of content consumers are interested in. It is worthwhile to test existing theories and modify them according to what works at any given moment. It is also important to try new things and not just get stuck on what works at one moment. Social media and the market environment are changing all the time, and so should companies along with them.

5.2.3 Limitations of this study

When examining the reliability of this study, a few things can be seen to reduce it. First, the amount of data to be examined in the study was only 727 publications on social media. This amount is relatively small in terms of reliable research. Also, the research period, which was only about half a year long, is relatively short, so that universal conclusions could be made based on it. In addition to a small sample and a short research period, only three companies operating in the industry's social media publications were examined in this study. The companies were also very similar in terms of their operating model, so it cannot be assumed that the same results would be produced if, for example, smaller used car dealers were studied. In order to improve the reliability of this study, the investigated period should be longer, and companies of different sizes and operating models should be included in the study.

The validity of the study is also reduced by the large influence of the researcher's experiences and opinions on the researched data. When the research is done as a content analysis, the role of the researcher is very large. If another researcher were to study the same data, he might categorize the data in a different way, which would have a great effect on the results. A different categorization of the data would be particularly significant due to the fact that the research sample is relatively small, in which case change in one direction or the other causes already a large change.

5.2.4 Further research

If the same subject is investigated in the future, it would be appropriate to change the sample so that it includes used car companies of different sizes and operating models. A dealer selling new cars could also be taken as a new perspective, in which case it would be possible to compare how the marketing of new cars differs from the marketing of used cars. A comparison of different car categories could also give a new perspective. How, for example, does social media marketing of used or new luxury cars differ from marketing of "regular" used cars. In terms of the reliability of future studies, it would also be good if there were more car dealerships involved in the comparison that are studied over a longer period of time, so the results of the study would be a little more reliable. Reliability could also be improved in such a way that the analysis and categorization of the content would be performed by more than one researcher, in which case the analysis of the research would not rely entirely on the experiences and opinions of just one researcher.

6 Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to investigate social media marketing and how it is utilized as part of the used car trade. Three companies operating in the field of used cars, which are the largest players in the field, were selected for the study. The topic of the research arose out of the researcher's own interest, as well as the researcher's employer's interest in the topic. What makes the research interesting is that, although social media as a topic has been studied a lot, there is not much research on it in the context of car sales.

The research was conducted as a qualitative case study. Since the purpose of the research was to collect a lot of information and analyze it in order to better understand the phenomenon, a case study was a suitable method for conducting the research. In addition, the research material was analyzed using content analysis. The flexibility in analysis and categorization of data provided by content analysis made it possible to modify the research to suit the data being studied. In the analysis of the study, categories were used based on the previous study, in addition to which the researcher added two categories of his own, which were deemed necessary based on the study of the data.

The amount of data for the study was 727 social media publications, which were collected between October 2022 and March 2023. On the basis of these publications, an analysis of the research was carried out, on the basis of which the questions set for the research were answered. The research can be considered successful, as the questions posed at the beginning of the research were answered.

As a result of the research, it was found that social media was utilized in many different ways as part of the used car trade. Social media was used in brand building in such a way that the company's already existing brand image was strengthened with the help of social media. In social media, there was no attempt to create a new or different image of the brand, but to strengthen the existing one. In addition to that, social media was used to generate sales leads by publishing pictures or videos of the dealers' selection on social media, and adding direct links to the cars on display. As a single difference, it could be noticed that Rinta-Jouppi was the only one of the researched companies that made video presentations of their cars.

In the study, it was noticed that there is room for improvement in how to get more consumers to interact with the company, because even though the companies included in this study have several tens of thousands of followers, the interaction is very little. There were also shortcomings in the regularity of social media publications, as well as in the correct utilization of various channels. The findings and limitations of this study leave opportunities for future further studies, and the study can be considered to serve as a good basis for future studies.

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