



USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING TO BUILD BRAND AWARENESS IN INDUSTRIAL B2B COMPANY

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Kauppätieteet

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Sosiaalisen median markkinoinnin käyttö bränditietoisuuden rakentamiseen teollisessa B2B-yrityksessä

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Tämä opinnäytetyö keskittyy sosiaalisen median markkinointistrategiaan teollisessa B2B-yrityksessä bränditietoisuuden kontekstissa. Sosiaalisen median vallankumous on vaikuttanut merkittävästi markkinointiin ja brändäysmaisemaan yleensä. Vaikka sosiaalisen median markkinointi (SMM) on ajankohtainen aihe akateemisessa kirjallisuudessa, yritysten välisillä (B2B) markkinoilla sen tutkimuksista on edelleen puutteita. Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on lisätä ymmärrystä sosiaalisen median markkinoinnin roolista ja hyödyntämisestä bränditietoisuuden kontekstissa. Tämän laadullisen tutkimuksen tavoitteena on analysoida case-yrityksen nykyistä sosiaalisen median markkinointistrategiaa, sen etuja ja haasteita sekä roolia bränditietoisuuden luomisen kontekstissa. Lisäksi tarkoituksena on selvittää, miten yritys B2B-markkinoilla voisi hyödyntää sosiaalisen median markkinointistrategiaa brändin tunnettuuden parantamiseksi.

Tämän opinnäytetyön teoreettinen osa koostuu kahdesta osasta: bränditietoisuus B2B:ssä ja B2B sosiaalisen median markkinointi bränditietoisuuden näkökulmasta. Empiirisessä osassa keskitytään työntekijöiden näkemykseen sosiaalisen median markkinoinnin roolista, eduista ja haasteista bränditietoisuuden kontekstissa ja miten sitä voidaan hyödyntää brändin tunnettuuden parantamiseksi.

Tämän tutkimuksen tärkeimmät havainnot osoittavat bränditietoisuuden ratkaisevan roolin B2B-markkinoilla ja sosiaalisen median markkinoinnin välttämättömän roolin sen rakentamisessa sekä puitteet bränditietoisuuden sosiaalisen median strategioiden toteuttamiselle. Sosiaalinen media tarjoaa yrityksille alustan brändiviestien jakamiseen ja siten brändin tunnettuuden laajentamiseen ja syventämiseen asiakkaiden keskuudessa.

ABSTRACT

Lappeenranta–Lahti University of Technology LUT

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Use of social media marketing to build brand awareness in industrial B2B company

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113 pages, 11 figures, 6 tables and 3 appendices

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This thesis focuses on social media marketing strategy in an industrial B2B company in the brand awareness context. The revolution of social media has significantly influenced marketing and the branding landscape in general. Although a hot topic in academic literature, research gaps regarding social media marketing (SMM) in business-to-business (B2B) markets still exists. The purpose of the study is to increase the understanding about the role and utilization of social media marketing in the brand awareness context. The objective of this qualitative research is to analyse case company's current social media marketing strategy, its benefits and challenges, and its role in the brand awareness creation context. Moreover, the purpose is to clarify that how could a company in B2B markets utilize social media marketing strategy for improving its brand awareness.

The theoretical part of this thesis consists of two parts: brand awareness in B2B and B2B social media marketing from the perspective of brand awareness. The empirical part focuses to the employees' perspective on the role and the benefits and challenges of social media marketing in brand awareness context, and how to utilize it to improve the brand awareness.

The main findings of this study show the crucial role of brand awareness in the B2B markets and the indispensable role of social media marketing to build it, and a framework on how to implement social media marketing strategies for brand awareness. The social media offers a platform for the companies to share their brand messages and thus to expand and deepen its brand recognition among customers.

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“Kaikkea muuta, kunhan ei vaan nukkuvaa, puolikuollutta elämää.”

-Minna Canth

Järvenpää, 5.3.2024

Ronja Holmila

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1. Introduction

This master's thesis has been made as assigned research for a large international Finnish company working in B2B sector. The company is a manufacturer and seller of both industrial machines and services for industrial usage. In general, the main objective of this research is to investigate how the case company has been handling its specific product line's brand awareness in social media marketing management point of view and clarify how it could utilize the different social media marketing strategies to improve its brand awareness and give suggestions on managerial level on how to effectively build and manage social media marketing strategy for the B2B product brand and give concrete suggestions on the actions that should be implemented to the strategy.

Moreover, on theoretical level this thesis is concentrating on how to build social media marketing strategy to increase the brand awareness of a B2B brand. This thesis combines theories from B2B social media marketing management and branding theories as focusing on brand awareness. Academic research on the different social media marketing and brand awareness strategies is embedded in this thesis to be able to compare the case company's operations to the existing theory.

The next sections will introduce the motives and background of this research as well as the research targets, questions, and problems. Also, the structure, research targets, theoretical framework, definitions, delimitations, and methodology of this research are clarified and induced.

1.1 Background

Marketing is in a continuous change and its domain is crucial for every business area, with multiple efforts concentrating on developing its performance and effectiveness in terms of interactions with direct and indirect customers (Pardo, Ivens, & Wilson, 2013). Over the past few years, digital platforms, especially social media (SM), have offered businesses the chance to collaboratively generate value for themselves and their diverse stakeholders via activities such as customer engagement, idea exchange, networking, and similar approaches

(Pardo et al. 2013; Algharabat et al., 2020, Kapoor et al., 2018, Tamilmani et al., 2018; Tiwary, Kumar, Sarraf, Kumar & Rana 2021, 121). Since SM is unconventional concept affecting to businesses all sizes and forms (Kärkkäinen, Jussila, & Väisänen, 2013) also in B2B firms, operating within markets characterized by stringent product requirements, transaction intricacies, negotiation protocols, and complex organizational structures, are increasingly embracing social media for diverse business purposes and the volume of research is growing (Bernard 2016; Kärkkäinen et al. 2013; Tiwary et al 2021). The way brands are managed has also altered because of social media (Davis, Piven & Breazeale 2014; Kohli, Suri & Kapoor 2015), and it has fundamentally modified the branding landscape from the days when spending extensively on creating dominating brands meant ensuring customer loyalty and driving sales. (Kohli et al. 2015)

B2B companies are showing a growing interest also in gaining a competitive edge through branding as the business landscape has grown more competitive due to factors such as commoditization, globalization, and the increasing influence of customers (Mudambi et al., 1997; Walley et al., 2007; Keränen et al. 2012). Yet, in business-to-business landscape the companies frequently place a lower strategic priority on branding than in B2C (Bendixen, Bukasa, & Abratt, 2004) even though the best-known and strongest leading brands in B2B and B2C have been the market leaders for decades in their own market categories (Keller 2020, 41). In addition, there have been historically very few B2B brands among the top 100 most valuable brands worldwide (Homburg et al. 2010), given the far greater economic significance of B2B transactions compared to B2C ones (Hutt & Speh, 2006). And the situation does not seem to have changed when looking the most recent list from Forbes (2023).

Numerous earlier research studies have demonstrated the significance of brands for industrial buyers since they are prone to them (Shipley and Howard, 1993; Hutton, 1997; Walley et al., 2007) As said, a strong brand can be the only actually sustainable competitive advantage in the competitive B2B (Kotler and Pfoertsch 2007; Keller 2020, 50). Brands built on immaterial, emotional qualities like assurance, fame, image, and adaptability are more resilient and less susceptible to erosion from competition. (Lynch and Chernetony 2004, 1)

Building brand awareness is one part of branding, and it is implying to the consumer understanding and knowledge of the brand (Keller 2020, 426). It is crucial for a brand, since it aids the brand to be in the consideration of the buyers (Aaker 1991, 63). It is historically seen as one part of brand equity (Keller 1998; Aaker 1991) and that they involve two major

features; brand recognition and brand recall. In 2008 Keller added ‘‘top of mind’’ as a third part of brand awareness. In addition, while B2B transactions hold considerably higher economic significance than consumer transactions (Hutt & Speh 2010, 4), it should be considered that most of the research in the field of branding has traditionally been carried out within the realm of consumer products (Lynch and De Chernatony, 2004; Webster and Keller, 2004; Keränen et al. 2012, 404).

Social media marketing is a rather new activity for B2B companies (Cawsey & Rowley 2016). Traditionally, B2B companies have shown caution in adopting social media for several reasons, including: 1) perceiving it as unrelated to their clients' purchasing decisions, 2) concerns about their control over employee communications, 3) a desire to mitigate the risk of advocacy or pressure campaigns, 4) lacking the in-house expertise to leverage social media, 5) viewing it as a non-essential distraction for employees, and 6) considering it primarily as a tool for business-to-consumer (B2C) marketing. (Bernard 2016, 955). In addition, there are many existing researches that are proving that B2B enterprises do not use SM as comprehensively as they could, for market research and sales for example (Iankova et al., 2019, Mehmet and Clarke, 2016, Sivarajah et al., 2020) and the research regarding social media marketing strategy in the business-to-business (B2B) context has been notably scarce, giving rise to that there is a clear demand for deeper insights on how social media can be exploited within B2B settings to help businesses address their reservations about embracing social media. (Jussila et al., 2014; Michaelidou et al., 2011; Swani et al., 2014; Cawsey & Rowley 2016).

Literature connected to brand awareness and brand building in SM context is even more limited and companies still appear to be having difficulty locating branding strategies that are effective in social media (Holt 2016). Marketing communication externally is vital in a B2B setting to manufacture leads for B2B salespeople and raising brand awareness has been noted to be one of the most essential marketing issues that industrial B2B organisations have, especially when bidding for contracts (Anees-ur-Rehman, Wong, Sultan & Merrilees 2018, 304). The research gap exists to develop enhanced SM marketing strategies to provide an effective way for B2B firms to implement brand awareness creation in their marketing actions, since using social media as a tool for marketing and branding is necessary to meet businesses' strategic objectives (Wang & Kim 2017). It is crucial to conduct research on brand related issues in the social media era since brands have a high worth to businesses and

social media is changing how brands are created and handled (Gensler et al. 2013). Researching and comprehending the implications of this issue can be beneficial for businesses as well as branding and marketing experts.

1.2 Literature review

It has been remarked that although marketers' utilization of social media is beneficial to industrial marketing practice, research and existing literature in that field is still considered to be in very early stage (Siamagka, Christodoulides, Michaelidou, & Valvi, 2015; Jussila et al., 2014; Michaelidou et al., 2011; Swani et al., 2014; Cawsey & Rowley 2016; Keränen et al. 2012).), and more research concerning the topic is needed (Siamagka, Christodoulides, Michaelidou, & Valvi, 2015). Research on social media and its efficacy often concentrates on examples within the business-to-consumer (B2C) context, highlighting instances where social media contributes to heightened brand awareness, engagement, loyalty, and increased sales (e.g., Kumar & Mirchandani, 2012; Rapp, Beitelspacher, Grewal, & Hughes, 2013; Taylor, Lewin, & Strutton, 2011; Wiersema, 2013).

Over the years, scholarly surveys on social media marketing in business-to-consumer (B2C) settings has mostly examined social media platforms and produced informative data regarding the influence of these forums on consumer purchasing decisions and brand (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010; Wang, Yu & Wei 2012; Dwivedi et al., 2018; Ramadan et al., 2018). The problem is that B2C and B2B businesses have different customer bases and different branding, communication, and relationship-building strategies. As a result, knowledge and best practices established in the B2C environment cannot be presumed to be applicable to B2B businesses (Swani et al., 2014; Keränen et al. 2012) The B2B market is thought to be primarily more complicated than the B2C market because it encompasses more decision-makers, more channels of communication, and longer-term customer relationships, which has an effect how the findings of B2C literature can be utilized in B2B context (Keränen et al. 2012).

Studies related to social media use are particularly lacking in the business-to-business (B2B) context, and marketing scholars provide limited guidance due to their delayed exploration of research on social media phenomena within B2B markets (Wiersema, 2013). Research on the use of social media by businesses mostly focuses on the causal links that are linked to

people's behaviors; more needs to be learned about the usage of social media in organizational settings (Ngai et al., 2015). Additionally, research on social media sites (SMS) has focused on the advantages and difficulties of their utilization in business-to-business (B2B) settings, such as Michelangelou et al. (2011) study of the usage, barriers and measurement of social media marketing in B2B, as well as the motivations behind their adoption (Karampela et al. 2015) and social media has noted to have the potential to help organizations develop competitive benefits and enhanced performance (Lau, 2011; Leonidou, Paliawadana, & Theodosiou, 2011). In addition, Huotari et al. (2015) emphasize the potency of social media as a means to foster B2B customer relationships. However, there exists a pervasive gap in comprehending the rationale and methods for companies to effectively employ these platforms within a B2B context. Pascucci, Ancillai, and Cardinali (2018) have investigated SM adoption in the B2B markets to identify the precursors and effects of this phenomenon. Moreover, there are even more scarce existing literature on SMS use in B2B industrial setting; there are only couple of significant existing literatures on mentioned settings, such as Järvinen, Tollinen, Karjaluo, and Jayawardhena's (2012) article, and Keinänen's and Kuivalainen's (2015) research, but in greater proportion it is still lacking more recent study and current studies.

Research on the effects of SMS use by B2B brands has just lately come to light, recognizing SMS as useful instrument for supporting supplier-customer relationships (Quinton and Wilson, 2016; Agnihotri et al., 2016; Foltean et al., 2018) Even older academic study expresses that social media compared to more traditional digital media, can create better brand attitudes and purchase purposes (Colliander & Dahlen, 2011). In brand awareness related literature, the focus has been mainly in small-medium enterprises (SMEs), which have noted that SMS can be cost-effective communication mediums (Broekemier et al., 2015; Henninger et al., 2017) and there is a big research gap in how the large industrial companies have been using the SMS for brand use. Studies already conducted show that only the most creative B2B companies use SMS to attract new clients and grow customer interest while simultaneously establishing their brand's reputation (Broekemier et al., 2015).

There is little empirical study on B2B branding, in spite of the increasing usage of brands. (Mudambi, 2002; Roper & Davies, 2010). One reason behind this can be the fact that branding has been traditionally thought even impractical in B2B because of the vast amount of products involved, making it challenging for organisational buyers and marketplaces to

recognise the importance of a brand clearly (Bendixen et al., 2004; Leek and Christodoulides, 2011). Previous research on B2B branding has often concentrated on a single industry, which reduces the degree of confidence that can be placed in the findings when applied to different industrial contexts (Keränen et al., 2012) and multi-industry B2B branding research is lacking (Homburg et al. 2010; Keränen et al., 2012). Yet more recently there have been studies researching the branding in B2B, and how it positively affects the B2B buyers' attitudes in a buying situation (Shipley and Howard, 1993; Hutton, 1997; Walley et al., 2007; Mudambi et al., 1997), how it minimises the degree of risk and uncertainty perceived by buyers in professional sphere (Bengtsson and Servais, 2005), and the brand loyalty (Kool, 1994; McQuiston, 2004).

Multiple studies have shown that industrial purchasers are influenced by brands (Shipley and Howard, 1993; Hutton, 1997; Walley et al., 2007), and even more sensitive in a complex buying situation with a high degree of technical uncertainty (Mudambi et al., 1997). As said, brands can be the only durable way to gain competitive edge in B2B markets (Kotler & Pfoertch 2007; Keller 2020, 50). Expressly, brand loyalty can be an important factor regarding purchasing habits and re-purchasing intentions (Kool, 1994; McQuiston, 2004). In addition, brands can diminish the level of risk and uncertainty absorbed by professional buyers at the purchasing situation according to Bengtsson and Servais (2005).

In case of brand awareness, the existing literature is leaning strongly in the research by Aaker (1991) and Keller (1998, 2008, 2020). Older research, such as that by Keller (1998, 67), examined more theoretical reasoning behind brand equity to exist and how it can be built. However, brand awareness and branding theory have generated a great deal of academic interest in recent years. Throughout academic history, brand awareness has been created and understood in different ways (Landa 2005). Also, as noted even though business-to-business (B2B) trades have a much higher economic value than transactions among consumers (Hutt and Speh, 2010, 4), in the research area of brand awareness and branding, many studies have historically been focusing on business-to-consumer (B2C) setting (Lynch and De Chernatony, 2004; Webster and Keller, 2004; Keränen et al. 2012; Schivinski et al. 2016) The studies by Nhu & hien (2022, 18) and by Kim (2018) are arguing about the role of brand awareness in the relationship between customer's approach towards digital marketing and purchase intent, and with marketing strategies. They debated that the role is only moderate in that area, but other research has proven the importance of brand awareness on consumer

choices in professional B2B markets (Buil et al. 2008; Hoyer & Brown, 1990; Lin, 2013; Viardot 2017). Numerous studies that have looked into the B2B market have shown that differentiation and the development of a significant competitive advantage can be based on a powerful and rich brand image and awareness that is reflected in brand associations. (Mudambi et al., 1997; Lynch and de Chertanony, 2004; Davis et al., 2008 ; Viardot 2017).

Drawing from the existing brand awareness, social media and B2B related literature, this paper examines the influence of SMS use by B2B industrial companies on brand awareness strength and creation. This study specifically aims to evaluate the impact of SMS usage on the strength and development of brand awareness for B2B companies, particularly in industrial settings.

1.3 Research questions and objectives

The theoretical goal of this master's thesis is to understand what the key factors and strategies are for developing a successful social media marketing strategy for brand awareness creation for the industrial product family in the evolving business to business (B2B) branding landscape. More in detail, the target is to find out the role of B2B social media marketing strategy in brand awareness building and analysing its benefits and challenges for B2B firms and to find out the possible delimitations. Because branding and social media marketing are strongly linked to each other in business environment, it is necessary to research both social media marketing and brand awareness strategies on the theoretical part of the study.

The case company's challenge is how to manage social media marketing strategy to build brand awareness for the specific product family, how to differentiate through social media marketing from other brands and how to implement the strategy better in the company. As a result, the target is to 1) clarify the case company's social media marketing strategy in the brand awareness context, 2) find out the benefits and challenges of social media marketing strategy for the case company's brand, 3) make theoretical implications of the study regarding the social media marketing strategy and brand awareness and how to utilize it better and 4) provide managerial implication for case company.

The managerial goal of the research is to help the case company to create an effective social media marketing strategy for its master brand's specific product category to improve its

recognition among customers and support its brand awareness in the highly competitive markets. This is done by comparative analysis based on analysing the case company's operations, strategies and data and comparing them to similar companies existing marketing information and data and existing literature on the subject to build up a comprehensive analysis of the current state of case company's social media marketing strategy efficiency. Finally based on the theoretical and empirical research and by exploring social media marketing approaches, and assessing their impact on brand awareness, this research will develop a forward-looking social media marketing strategy for the case company's product brand.

The main question:

“How to build social media marketing strategy to enhance brand awareness in the industrial B2B markets?”

The main research question is summarizing the key target and purpose of this study in one question. This study is researching how to build effective and successful social media marketing strategy for industrial B2B product line to build its brand awareness. The aim is to provide theoretical model for the case B2B company on how to create and how to maximize the utility of the social media marketing strategy in the context of brand awareness creation grounded on the theoretical framework and empirical study implemented in this paper. The scientific goal is to increase the knowledge on how industrial B2B firms can utilize social media marketing in brand awareness and what are the challenges and possibilities involved. In addition, the managerial goal of the main research question is to be able to propose a social media marketing strategy for the case company's product line.

Four additional sub-questions are created to support the main research question and to be able to answer it comprehensively.

Sub questions:

– *“What is the role and position of brand awareness in B2B industrial markets?”*

To be able to investigate the main research question, it is necessary to understand the underlying motivational factors when aiming to build brand awareness. This question is aiming to answer to explanation of why to build the brand awareness in B2B before we can look information on to answering to the role of social media marketing in its creation.

- *“What are the key factors in social media marketing strategy for brand awareness creation?”*

The target of this question is to clarify that what are the essential key factors to build social media marketing strategy in the context of brand awareness creation in industrial B2B sector. More specifically, its objectives are to: (1) explore the adoption of social media for brand awareness purposes by companies in B2B industrial markets; (2) identify B2B companies' social media objectives; (3) generate insights into the components of a B2B social media marketing strategy; and (5) propose a framework of the components of an effective B2B social media marketing strategy for brand awareness building.

– *“What is the role of social media marketing strategy in brand awareness creation?”*

The purpose of this second sub-question is to clarify shortly that which kind of social media marketing strategies exist and what are their characteristics. The question is trying to find out what differences there are between social media and other marketing strategies when increasing brand awareness, and what is the justification for creating social media marketing strategy to increase brand awareness in B2B. Moreover, the target is to clarify what is the role of social media marketing strategy in the context of brand awareness.

– *“What are the main benefits and challenges when utilizing social media as a marketing strategy to build B2B brand awareness?”*

Clarifying the benefits and challenges of using social media as a marketing channel in the context of brand awareness building is necessary for the purpose of producing theoretical outcomes and managerial implications for more effective and profitable use of social media marketing for brand awareness creation. They also help to understand what are the main pain points that can affect the adaptation of social media in brand awareness context in B2B company. It is essential to determine the benefits as it is to determine the challenges and risks that this approach entails. To determine where to focus in a B2B company's social media marketing plan without identifying these factors would be challenging.

1.4 Theoretical framework

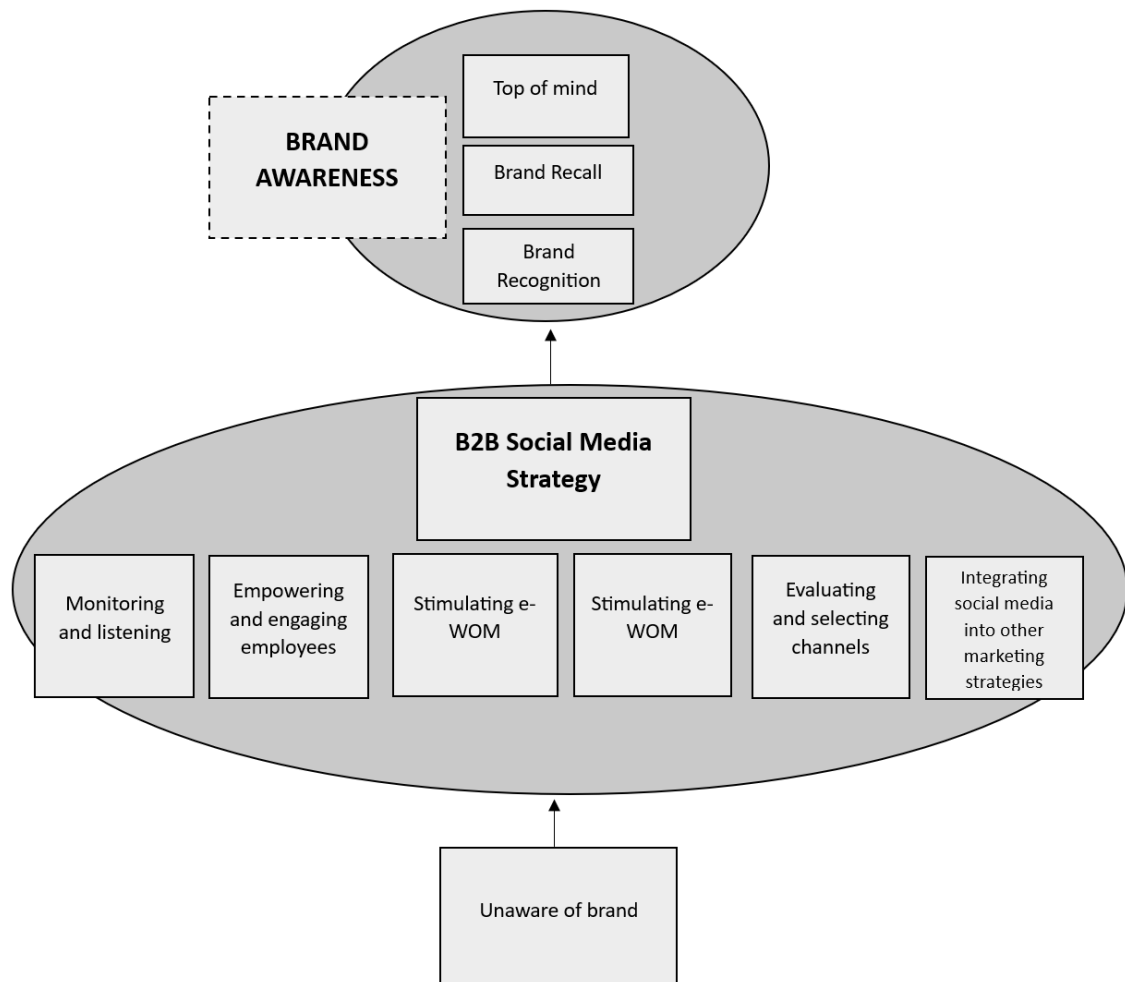
The theoretical framework of the work is based on literature related to the core elements of this research, which are brand awareness and social media marketing in the B2B markets, constituting the foundational framework. The theoretical framework outlines the key elements of the research and their interconnections. To effectively examine the application of a social media to build brand awareness in the case company, a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical factors affecting social media usage of B2B companies and facets of brand awareness is essential.

The framework is composed from the basis of the stages of brand awareness by Aaker (1991) and social media marketing is contextualized within the framework of the B2B Social Media Strategy framework by Cawsey & Rowley (2016), which is incorporating key components of a social media marketing strategy for B2B companies. Within this framework, the social media strategy encompasses six different phases, which are relevant for the social media marketing:

1. Monitoring and actively listening across social platforms.
2. Empowering and engaging employees, extending the strategy beyond marketing.
3. Crafting engaging content, infusing a "personal" touch into the brand.
4. Cultivating e-WOM by targeting influential figures.
5. Evaluating and choosing channels based on their unique characteristics and audience demographics.
6. Integrating social media marketing seamlessly into broader web and marketing strategies.

The characteristics of the industrial B2B sector are relevant and are implemented in the theoretical framework as well. The theoretical framework of the work is compounded based on the research questions and the use of social media marketing as a marketing tool for the brand awareness creation of a B2B industrial company. The theoretical framework of this thesis is presented in below.

Figure 1. Theoretical framework



The theoretical section serves as the foundation for the empirical segment. Towards the conclusion of the thesis, an examination and analysis of the parallels between established theoretical outcomes and empirical discoveries are conducted. Conversely, the theoretical insights derived from empirical materials are integrated into the study's results. As articulated previously, the primary objective of this study is to appraise the efficacy of social media marketing within the brand awareness creation context, exploring its usage in B2B. The theoretical framework of this investigation proposes an exploration of the advantages and challenges associated with a social media marketing strategy to build brand awareness, aiming to discern how companies can enhance the efficiency and profitability of implementing such a strategy. Social media marketing is a broad topic, which is why the thesis is limited to only deal with it in brand awareness context. Following a careful analysis of the findings,

recommendations for future performance through the establishment of clear objectives and selection of social media marketing strategies will be provided.

1.5 Definitions

Social media, as defined by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, 61), encompasses collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds. They state that it is “-a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0--”. Within the realm of social networking sites, users have the ability to construct profiles, post content, and share information while engaging in communication with other users on the platform (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, 61).

Social media marketing (SMM) is defined by Yadav and Rahman (2017, 1296) as a process by which businesses evolve, communicate, and submit online marketing offerings via social media platforms to establish and keeping stakeholder relationships that increase stakeholders' value by furthering interaction, information sharing, providing individualized purchase counsels, and word-of-mouth marketing among stakeholders about topical and popular goods and services.

A brand encompasses a name, phrase, logo, symbol, or composition thereof, with the purpose of distinguishing the products or services of a particular seller or a group of sellers from those offered by competitors. (Keller 2008; Kotler 2006, 274-278)

Brand equity means the concept when a product or service is marketed, different results occur as a result of its brand than they would have if the identical product or service were not associated with that brand (Keller 2009, 140). It is made up of four key components: perceived quality, brand associations, brand loyalty, and brand awareness. (Aaker 2010).

Brand awareness, according to Keller (2008), is part of the brand equity and it is the ability of customers to recall or recognise a brand or simply the knowledge of a brand among consumers. It is described as "the strength of the brand node or trace in memory as reflected by consumers' ability to recall or recognise the brand under different situations" (Keller 2009, 143). Brand awareness is defined in the context of social networking sites and digital marketing as the level to which consumers are familiar with the distinguishing characteristics or

image of a specific brand there. Brand recall, top of mind, and brand recognition are the three components of brand awareness. Brand familiarity is essentially the result of consistent impressions of a product or service. The theory behind this is that the more customers interact with a brand in all of its forms, the more probable it is that they will remember and recognise it in the future. (Keller 2008)

Brand identity is a collection of brand associations that characterize what the brand stands for (Aaker 2010). From the brand owner's perspective, the brand is presented in the brand identity (Joachimsthaler & Aaker 1997).

Brand image refers to how consumers feel about and favor a product or service as shown by the various brand associations they have in their minds, according to Keller (2020, 143), brand image refers to. The brand's perceptions as held by consumers and other stakeholders are being presented (Aaker 2010).

Branding strategy refers to making decisions about the brand elements to use in the process of establishing a brand. These brand elements could be made up of wholly original ones, ones that are lifted from already existing sources, or a mix of both. A company may decide to create a unique sub-brand, family brand, corporate brand, corporate umbrella brand, or individual brand. (Kotler & Keller 2012)

Word-of-mouth (WOM) is described as an unofficial communication between people that can involve discussions about a particular brand, company, organisation, or product, as well as positive recommendations (Sweeney, Soutar, & Mazzarol 2012).

Electronical word-of-mouth (eWOM) is defined in a similar way to word-of-mouth, but eWOM is distinguished by its appearance on electronic platforms. These days, eWOM primarily occurs on various social media platforms, but it can also occur in emails, blogs, and instant messages. (Ahrens, Coyle & Strahilevitz 2013).

1.6 Delimitations

In this study there are some delimitations that should be considered when assessing the provided research outcomes and debate.

Firstly, this research focuses only on investigating social media marketing strategies in specific industrial B2B markets. Thus, the study may not directly apply to other B2B marketing context. In industrial markets the marketing and branding operations, strategies, and means can differ from the other markets. In addition, the results of this research cannot be applied to business-to-customer (B2C) environment, since the study is not focusing in that field of business. Furthermore, this study has been made as assigned research to a real-life company with existing industry specific products, so the findings can depict facets which are not competent in other B2B markets.

Secondly, due to the fact that this study is focusing in only B2B specific social media marketing strategies and brand awareness, the other possible marketing strategies are excluded from this study. In addition, this study focuses only on large international B2B company, so the results may not be directly implemented in other B2B companies.

Thirdly, this study is focusing one specific business segment of the case company, and the other business segments and products are excluded due to separate customer and marketing operations. Anyhow, due the marketing efforts are inclined within the company brand and the product families the study is investigating it as an ensemble.

Fourthly, this study is limited to EMEA markets and focusing on three different countries specifically: Germany, France, and UK, which represent large markets for the company in the region. The outcomes of this research may not be applicable in other market areas. Countries outside EMEA region have also been left out of the review, even though the case company is working on a global level. The operations of the company differ between different regions, due to different market attributes, which is why it is necessary to view the operations of only one target region at a time. The research area is limited also to make it possible to have relevant and precise outcomes.

Lastly, the data for this study exclusively originates from internal sources within the industrial company and its external stakeholders, including potential customers who were engaged and incorporated into the study. Consequently, the data utilized in this study was acquired both internally and externally, primarily through interviews.

1.7 Research methodology and approach

This research methodology is based on the exploratory research since the nature of this study is case study where the aim is to answer to question “how” and “what” in investigating social media marketing strategy building for a case company in a brand awareness context. A qualitative research method is chosen since the research methodology is chosen based on the nature of the research and theoretical framework. According to Gibbs (2007, 94), qualitative research aims to comprehend, characterise, and explain. In addition, according to Patton & Cochran (2022), rather than focusing on numbers, qualitative research seeks to comprehend and analyse words. Numerous research techniques, such as interviews, observation, and the use of the literature, could be employed in a qualitative study. (Metsämuuronen 2005, 198; 222).

Since the study is investigating a real-life company and its operations to get better understanding on the brand awareness creation in social media marketing strategy in industrial B2B company, the single-case research method is the basis of this study. Case study uses real world data to reveal complex information about different factors’ relations and contacts (Gummesson 2005). The case study method has a significant capacity to answer the "how" and "what" questions (Robson 1993, 44). On the other hand, single-case research methods concentrate on a particular case, and data collection techniques could include questionnaires, interviews, observation, and utilisation of existing archival materials (Järvinen & Järvinen 2004, 75).

This research comprises of two central parts: theoretical and empirical part. Theoretical part is building a background for the study, and it is consisting of overview of relevant previous academic research. Empirical part of the study is consisting of the investigation of internal corporation material and analysing the open-ended interviews and semi-structured online surveys. The empirical part of this study is focusing on gaining understanding on the current social media marketing means and operations the company is doing to create brand awareness and to learn what kind of expectations the company’s representatives have on the social media marketing to support brand awareness creation and how the social media marketing could be used in this context more effectively. Empirical results were gained by interviewing in total of 11 different marketing, brand, sales, and product manager from the target countries of the case company by using open-ended questions. To get detailed information and

understand other people's perspectives, this study interview was chosen as the data collection approach (Qu & Dumay 2011).

Additionally, to these conducted interviews, the in-house knowledge from the past year and the on-going daily considerations have been applied in this study in the empirical part. At the conclusion of the empirical part, the results of the online survey and interview data are analysed and summarised. As a result, the information gathered through interviews is used to corroborate the observations and conclusions drawn from the entire study.

The research methodology is explained more in depth in the chapter four, where an overview of the traits of exploratory research, those of qualitative research, their limitations, and how this study's data were collected is provided.

1.8 Structure of the thesis

Figure 2. is introducing the core structure of the thesis. In the figure there can be seen that the research is composing of five main parts: introduction, theoretical background, research methodology, the empirical part and finally conclusions and suggestions. In the first part the research background is presented, and the goal is to introduce the topic and the objectives of the study to point out the importance of this research. The first part introduces the case company, literature review, research objectives, theoretical framework, key definitions, delimitations of the study, used methodology shortly and approach to the study.

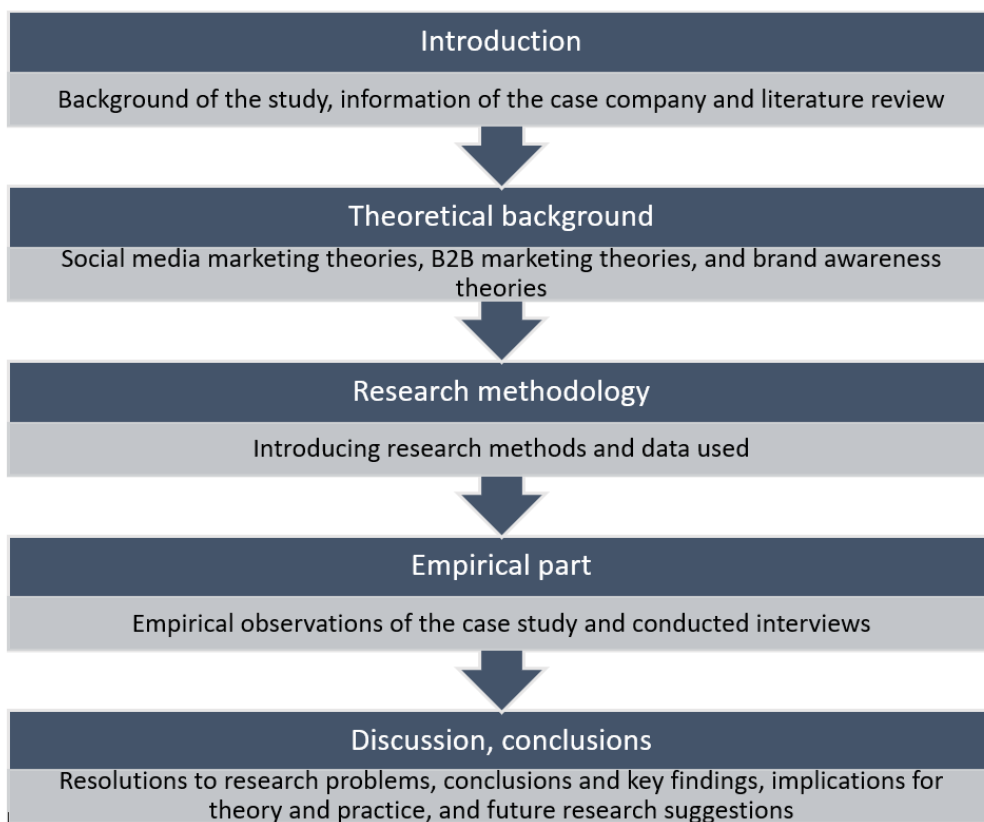
The following part composes of the theoretical background and introduces the different B2B social media marketing strategies and social media brand awareness marketing strategies, the advantages and threats of them and to introduce the main conditions to selecting the social media marketing strategies to build B2B brand awareness in chapters 2 and 3. These chapter's function is to give context and support the empirical findings.

The third part of the study is exposing and explaining the chosen research methodology in detail and explains the kind of data that were gathered for the study and why in the fourth chapter. The chapter also describes the data analysis process used to determine the quality and trustworthiness of the data. In general, the research method for collecting the empirical data is presented and explained.

The study's and empirical analysis's findings are presented in this thesis' fourth part and fifth chapter. The fourth part goes through the data collected and prevails the case company's current social media marketing strategy and brand awareness management model in social media. The key outcomes are displayed in the table forms from the company employee's interviews to bring the results into perspective.

Finally, the empirical research findings are thoroughly analysed and detailed in the last part in sixth chapter. This section encompasses responses to the research inquiries, conclusions derived from both the theoretical foundation and empirical evidence, theoretical and managerial implications, assessment of result quality, and recommendations for future studies. Essentially the sixth and concluding chapter serves as a comprehensive summary of the entire study.

Figure 2. Structure of the thesis



2 Brand awareness in B2B

Traditionally it has been believed that branding has little impact on the promotion of business-to-business goods and services (e.g., Robinson et al., 1967; Bendixen et al., 2004), because individual customers buy based on their mood and occasionally make impulsive purchases, whereas professionals make reasonable decisions according to early viewpoints (Viardot 2017, 338). Even though from B2C literature we know that with branding customers are prepared to pay extra for their favourite brand; a strong brand can assist an enterprise in differentiating itself from competitors; it can also reduce obstacles to entry (Mitchell et al., 2001); it can increase customer loyalty (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001); and it can increase profits (Ailawadi et al., 2003). In addition, due to the intense competitiveness within the business-to-business (B2B) markets, it is necessary for marketers to ensure that consumers have a comprehensive understanding of the unique qualities that set their brands products apart from those of their competitors. (Keller 2020, 41)

Building brand awareness is a key component of branding strategy for many B2B companies (Munoz & Kumar, 2004; Celi & Eagle, 2008). Moreover, long-term marketing strategies for B2B companies should take raising brand recognition into account. Additionally, B2B purchases require extensive study and multiple phases of due diligence. Having a powerful and trustworthy brand that has a favourable effect on clients can set you apart from competitors in the same industry. (Hien & Nhu 2022, 19) Businesses can get the ideal brand identity by developing brand visibility with consumers (Keller 2001). Building great brand awareness is therefore one of a marketer's most crucial objectives since it establishes the framework to which other brand elements can be built (Barreda et al. 2015).

2.1 Brand awareness

Brand awareness is implying to the consumer understanding and knowledge of the brand and communicating the similarities and differences between individual products and services. (Keller 2020, 426) Brand awareness measures the probability that consumers will recognise and remember a brand in a variety of circumstances as well as the intensity of the brand's memory in their thoughts (Aaker 1996, 61; Pappu et al., 2005, 145; Keller 2020, 72)

and acts as “a bridge between the brand and the product class” (Aaker 1991, 61). It is “the ability for a buyer to recognize or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category” (Aaker, 1991, 61). According to Homburg et al. (2010, 202), brand awareness in the B2B market is "the ability of the decision-makers in organisational buying centres to recognise or recall a brand."

Brand awareness is multi-dimensional (Keller 1993), and it is one source of brand equity, according to prior research like Keller (2020) and Aaker (1991). The authors Keller (2009) and Aaker (2010) discussed awareness as a crucial component of managing brand equity. Brand equity, according to Keller (2009, 140), refers to the fact that a product or service's brand affects marketing decisions differently than if the same product or service were not associated with that brand. It is made up of four key components: perceived quality, brand associations, brand loyalty, and brand awareness. (Aaker 2010).

The end-goal of brand awareness is to be the primary brand to be named with top-of-mind awareness in your customer's mind (Aaker 1991) Moreover, a dominant brand image is equal to a strong competitive advantage as Aaker (1991, 63) explains that. He claims that a well-known brand makes it more likely that it will be chosen and that other brands won't even be considered. According to earlier research by Gustafson and Chabot (2007), consumer memory plays a major role in brand awareness. Tuominen (1999) and Keller (2008) on the other hand inform that brand awareness is built of brand recognition, brand recall and top of mind. Picture 1. illustrates the three levels of Aaker's (1991, 62) brand awareness pyramid.

Within the realm of digital marketing and social networking sites, brand awareness is characterized by the degree to which consumers are acquainted with the unique attributes or image associated with a specific brand on social platforms and the most potent manifestation of brand awareness in the digital domain is acknowledged as word of mouth (Keller, 1993; Barreda et al., 2015). Compared to a brand that we recognise only when we see it, one that we can easily recall has a higher level of brand awareness. (Keller 2020)

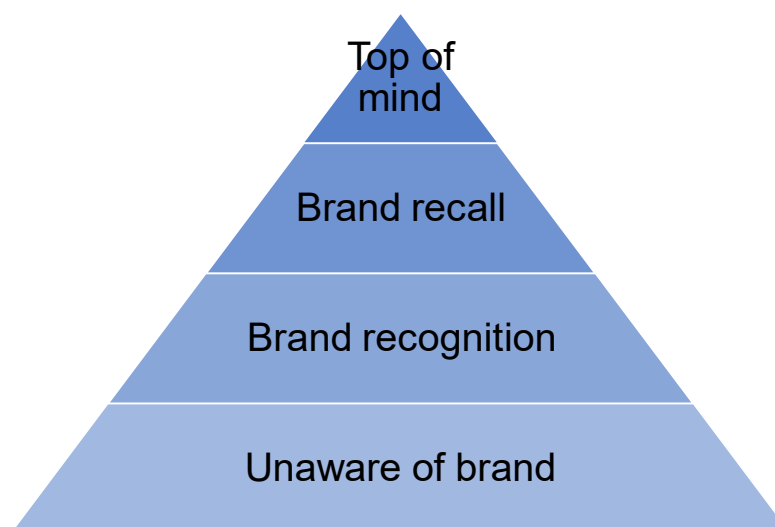


Figure 3. The awareness Pyramid (Aaker 1991, 63)

Brand recognition can be explained as consumers' ability to confirm previous exposure to a brand when given the brand as a signal (Keller 2020, 72). A customer can recognise a brand if they have heard of or seen it previously, to put it more precisely. Brand recognition, which is the fundamental level of brand awareness, is the first and lowest level of the awareness pyramid after the state where the customer is unaware of the brand. (Aaker 1991, 62) According to Keller (1998, 68) when a potential customer picks up the brand during the buying process, brand recognition is more urgent than brand recall because it is dependent on seeing or hearing something that is relevant to the brand. Anything that results in a consumer to pay attention to a brand can improve brand recognition (Keller 2009). Positive sentiments towards a brand may emerge simply through recognition, as naturally, familiar brands are often preferred (Aaker 2010).

Brand recall, which has a more robust brand position than brand recognition, is the second level of brand awareness. It is the capacity of a consumer to recall a brand from memory when given a product category, a need that the category fulfils, a purchase or usage event, or any combination of these as a cue. (Aaker 2010) The distinction between recognising and recalling a brand is that recognising a brand is typically simpler than recalling it. The purpose of the recall is to encourage consumers to recall a product's name while considering its context, such as the product category. Research reveals that brand recognition is relevant due to the fact that many consumer decisions are made at the moment of sale, where the brand

name, logo, etc., would be physically there and visible. (Keller 2020, 72-73) Brand memory (recall) can be more important if the majority of consumer decisions are made in other frames than the place of purchase (Keller 2020, 72) which is the case mostly in B2B purchase scenarios.

Top-of-mind awareness has been also referred to be part of brand recall (TOMA) (Viardot 2017, 339; Buil et al. 2008) but in this context it is own dimension of brand awareness as determined by Aaker (1991) and Keller (2008). "Top of Mind," represents a scenario in which a customer firmly links the brand with the product category in their memory, representing the most advanced level of brand awareness (Keller, 2008). It indicates that a particular brand is prioritized by the customer over other brand options. In an unaided recall test, a brand that is "the first named brand" is said to have "top of mind awareness." (Aaker 1991, 62) A heightened level of TOMA has been demonstrated to be an indication of a strong preference for and loyalty towards a brand, even though TOMA alone does not predict the intention to purchase a brand (Woodside and Wilson, 1985; Buil et al., 2008). As a result, TOMA plays a significant role in brand equity. Consumers' awareness towards the company or brand can occur as one of the treads in the customer purchasing process. Consumers' chance to purchase a product or services can be improved by higher degree of awareness. This way, durable, sustainable competitive advantage can be made. (Foroudi et al., 2014)

2.2 Role of brand awareness in B2B

According to Aaker (1991, 63), a dominant brand image generates a significant competitive advantage. He claims that a well-known brand makes it more likely that it would be chosen and that other brands won't even be considered. One of the first steps in the customer purchasing process can be consumers' awareness of the business or brand. A higher level of awareness can affect positively on consumers' chance of purchasing a good or service. (Foroudi et al. 2014) Brand knowledge, according to Aaker (1996), is crucial because it influences consumer attitudes toward brands by acting as a source of association and belief as well as strengthening brands and making them more effective. It may give the business a stable, long-lasting competitive advantage. (Foroudi et al., 2014).

In general, branding gives B2B companies many benefits that are similar in B2C. Business-to-business branding enhances the company's overall reputation and image (Keller 2020.

41). The perceived quality of a professional product or service can be affected by a strong brand (Cretu and Brodie, 2007). This means it is an effective way for a firm to differentiate itself from competitors, demand superior price and improve its bargaining power toward distribution channels (Low and Blois, 2002; Ohnemus, 2009). Moreover, brands play a part in reducing the perceived levels of risk and uncertainty among professional buyers during the purchase process, as observed by Bengtsson and Servais (2005). Building such trust with corporate clients is supposed to result in more profitable partnerships and increased selling prospects. Business clients who might be risking their company's future and possibly their own jobs can benefit greatly from the clarity and assurance that a strong brand can offer. (Keller 2020, 41) Reliable B2B brands have a higher probability of obtaining recommendations (Hutton, 1997; Bendixen, Bukasa, & Abratt, 2004; Leek & Christodoulides 2011)

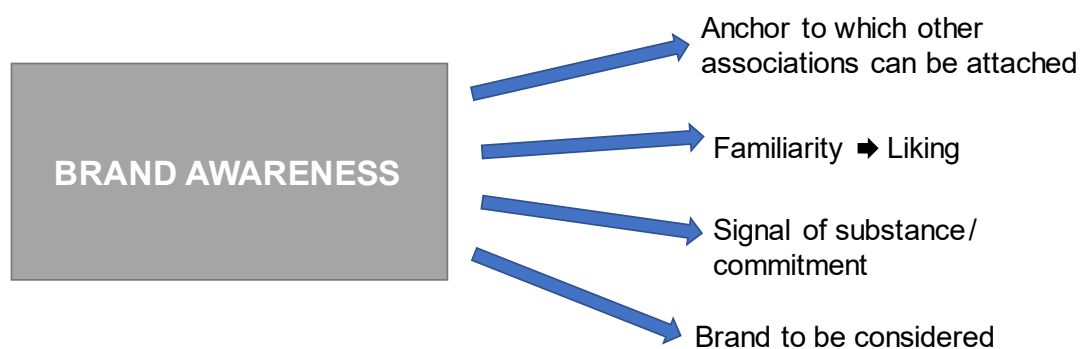
According to Mitchell et al. (2001), brand awareness is one of the core parts of professional brands' brand equity. According to van Riel et al. (2005), the main components of professional brand equity that directly influence favourable brand liaisons are brand quality and brand awareness. Additionally, brand awareness has an affect on the purchase decision process in B2B as well (Keller, 1993). The significance of brand awareness in B2B markets lies in its ability to cultivate brand equity and elevate engagement prospects within B2B relationships (Wang et al., 2016). It is said that only 5% of B2B buyers are in-market, which implies that leveraging long-standing marketing strategies to influence future buyers (i.e., 95% of potential buyers) in the upper-funnel is a necessity, according to the "95-5 rule" (Browning 2022). Executing brand awareness efforts is a must for companies to keep the brand name top of mind for future buyers to achieve it (Browning 2022).

Building brand awareness aids also the customers comprehend the product or service category in which the brand operates alongside what goods or services are sold under the brand name. (Aaker 1991) This is because brand awareness is implying to customers' ability to recall and recognise the brand under different states and to affiliate the brand name, logo, symbol, and so forth to certain associations in memory. Additionally, it guarantees that consumers are aware of the "needs" that the business hopes to fulfil with these products. Stated differently, it is beneficial for the consumer to understand what essential services the brand offers. (Keller 2020, 108)

The study by Homburg et al. (2010) confirms the expanding body of research on B2B branding, which indicates that building brand awareness is in fact related to performance in B2B

settings. There are multiple benefits when creating a high level of brand awareness. According to Keller (2020) these are so-called learning advantages, consideration advantages, and choice advantages. In contrast, according to Aaker (1991, 63), brand awareness boosts value in a minimum of four different ways: 1) Anchor to which other associations can be attached; 2) Familiarity and liking; 3) Signal of substance or commitment; 4) Brand to be considered. These are presented in the figure below.

Figure 4. The value of brand awareness (Aaker 1991, 63)



In addition, according to Aaker and McLoughlin (2007, 174) since the brand awareness is the degree to which a brand is remembered strongly by a consumer, the brand recognition can serve as the foundation for both a customer relationship and a reason to purchase. Brand awareness is a key brand extent (Aaker, 1996) and has been described to possess an impact on word-of-mouth (WOM) (Weber 2010). Lemmink et al. (2003) assert that brand awareness positively affects people's opinions of companies. Consequently, familiarity affects how a business builds its reputation by being dependable and giving (Foroudi 2019, 273). The choice of a brand has been demonstrated to be influenced by brand awareness, even in if there are no additional brand connections (Hoyer & Brown, 1990), which is a crucial aspect of branding (Aaker, 1996). It has also been observed that one factor favourably affecting the brand narrative and making it simpler for consumers to comprehend and spread is brand awareness. which ultimately gives the B2B enterprises more advantages over their competitors. (Gustafson & Pomirleanu 2021, 29).

2.2.1 Word-of-mouth

Word-of-mouth (WOM) refers to human-to-human oral, written, or electronic discussions about the advantages or experiences of purchasing or using products or services. (Kotler & Keller 2012, 500). Brand awareness has a positive effect on word of mouth (WOM) because it encourages customers to try the brand more when they hear about it from others. The more well-known brand is, the more WOM a brand generates. (Barreda et al. 2015)

Word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing is important for a brand's popularity and has a big impact on consumer behaviour since WOM communication generates information that is perceived as trustworthy (Barreda et al. 2015). It has been reported that 91% of B2B purchasers include word-of-mouth into their corporate purchasing choices (Duffy, 2020). The eWOM, electronic-word-of-mouth, is when people connect online in conversations (Eelen et al. 2017). The speed with which information (news, ideas, and rumours) may spread among audiences is why electronic word-of-mouth (WOM) is growing its importance according to Berger (2014). This makes it crucial for business-to-business (B2B) marketers as well (Marder et al. 2022).

Additionally, WOM is particularly significant in B2B contexts since business clients want knowledge and information based on experience when dealing with difficult issues or trying to get improved benefits in a market that is very competitive (Nath et al., 2010). Knowledge is the primary factor in buyer-seller connections and favourably influences word-of-mouth (WOM) efficacy. (Cowan et al. 2023, 1625) Furthermore, because positive word-of-mouth and brand loyalty are strongly associated (Eelen, Özturan & Verlegh 2017), the brand awareness builds brand loyalty through creating WOM.

2.2.2 Brand credibility and identity

In a business-to-business setting, brand awareness is primarily determined by promotional activities and word-of-mouth; however, brand credibility is frequently determined by the efficacy of corporate marketing communications in generating brand recognition within the market. Therefore, when B2B consumers believe a brand is well-known in the industry, they are more likely to view it as reliable. (Rehman, Anees-ur- 2018) 307) Customers must think a brand is capable and dependable in order for it to be seen as trustworthy (Erdem and Swait,

2004; Theurer et al., 2016; Wang and Yang, 2010). Theurer et al. (2016) state that companies are more credible when they demonstrate superior consistency in their marketing mix across time. In a business-to-business context, word-of-mouth and promotional efforts are the main factors that influence brand awareness. On the other hand, the effectiveness of corporate marketing communications in creating awareness of the brand in the market is often what determines brand credibility. Consequently, B2B customers are more prone to consider a brand trustworthy if they think it is well-known in the sector. (Muhammed et al. 2018, 307) Due to these factors, the study by Theurer et al. (2016) found out that brand awareness affects profitably on brand trust.

Roberts and Merrilees (2007) have noted that the reputation of a brand has traditionally played a major role in B2B purchasing decisions, typically ranking among the top four criteria when choosing suppliers. Customers tend to view companies with a favorable reputation as more credible, trustworthy, and as providers of enhanced value (Roberts and Merrilees, 2007). This positive perception also extends to their confidence in suppliers who have established good reputations as noted by Leek and Christodoulides, (2011).

Within the realm of B2B, buyers tend to place greater emphasis on the overall reputation of a company in contrary to the reputation of its individual products (Brown, 2007; Gomes et al. 2016). A company boasting a strong reputation is particularly effective in reducing the perceived risks associated with technologically complex offerings as highlighted by McQuiston (2004). Furthermore, a high level of brand awareness conveys to the consumer the impression that the company has been around for a while, that its products are extensively available, and that many other consumers buy the products linked to the brand. Brand awareness can signal supplier commitment and product quality (Hoyer & Brown 1990; Homburg et al. 2010).

Because a brand that is widely recognised is seen as reliable in B2B markets, brand awareness further strengthens the company's reputable image (Anees-ur-Rehman et al. 2018). By associating brand ingredients to a product category and related buying, consumption, or usage scenarios, brand awareness boosts the product identity (Keller 2020, 108). B2B customers will have a positive impression of the qualities the business wants to be identified with because of a powerful corporate brand. (Leek & Christodoulides 2011, 832). The goal is to establish a trustworthy impression in the minds of potential customers in the context of supplier's quality, dependability, integrity, etc. (Bengtsson & Servais, 2005). In the study by

Anees-ur-Rehman et al. (2018, 309) the brand awareness contributes to brand credibility, which in turn minimises the risk of repurchase and referrals for industrial purchasers and improves financial results. This is because the brand credibility can lower the risk and information cost of industrial buyers, which can have a favourable impact on firm performance (Seyedghorban et al., 2016; Backhaus et al., 2011). In the study it was discovered the relationship between brand awareness and credibility, as well as the relationship between credibility and financial performance (Anees-ur-Rehman et al. 2018, 309).

2.2.3 Market performance

The theoretical framework of Erdem, Swait, & Valenzuela, (2006) supports the concept of brand awareness, stating that a high level of brand awareness lowers the personal risk and information cost of industrial buyers, thereby improving a B2B supplier's market performance (Homburg et al., 2010). So simply put, the correlation between brand awareness and market performance can be observed in the decrease in purchasers' perceived risk and information expenses. (Erdem et al., 2006). As determined by Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006), it is evident that risk reduction holds paramount significance as a brand function in business markets. Similarly, Homburg, et al. (2010) underscores the robust correlation between brand awareness and firm performance under specific B2B purchasing conditions. This viewpoint suggests that a member of a buying center may assign greater weight to brand information based on their prior experiences with a brand, emotional concerns regarding the purchase, or the reputation of a vendor. Given this perspective, Brown et al. (2011, 196) raises the point that then it becomes apparent that brands can exert a substantial influence on decision-making processes, particularly in high-risk situations.

Both the personal and organisational perceived risks of the decision-makers in the buying centre and the uncertainty related to B2B buying situations are reduced by brand awareness (Mitchell, 1995; Mudambi, 2002; Bengtsson & Servais, 2005; Ohnemus, 2009). Decision-makers likely prefer to buy from brands that are well-known since it reduces the likelihood that they will be held responsible if the purchase turns out to be a bad one. (Homburg et al. 2010) Additionally, a popular brand may reduce perceived organisational risk (Dawar & Parker, 1994; Mitchell, 1995). Businesses may especially think that a lot of other companies will most likely purchase the well-known brands (Aaker, 1991). They have strong reason to

think they won't be at a competitive disadvantage if they acquire a well-known brand. Furthermore, as noted before, brand awareness is a good indicator of excellent quality products. Because of this purchasing high awareness brands is associated with a lower functional risk for the business, which is this way influencing the choice of brand. (Homburg et al. 2010)

In markets with high levels of technological disruption, brand awareness is more closely linked to performance and there's evidence suggesting that brand awareness has a pivotal role in enhancing how the B2B firms perform in the markets (Homburg et al., 2010). Organisational customers perceive a higher level of risk when there is significant technological turbulence because of the uncertainty around technology innovation (Aldrich, 1979) since professional customers can believe that there is a greater chance of losing an innovation or concentrating on the incorrect innovation or product (Homburg et al. 2010) Under these circumstances, decision-makers might prioritise lowering the risk involved in a purchase and as an evaluation criterion, branding may become more significant (McDowell Mudambi et al., 1997).

It should be noted that the impact of branding in a B2B purchasing decision may vary depending on the circumstances surrounding the transaction according to Leek & Christodoules (2011, 832). The value of branding may also vary depending on how important a product is. If a branded product is an essential component, then it might be favoured (Leek & Christodoules 2011, 832) But in conclusion, if the buyer risk increases for an individual or an organisation, branding can become more important feature in the decision-making process (Bengtsson & Servais, 2005). In addition, in markets depicted by a high degree of product uniformity, distinguishing between product offerings and assessing their quality becomes a formidable challenge for buying organizations. Consequently, the acquisition of information in such contexts can be a resource-intensive act, demanding extensive research and in-depth analysis to uncover potential disparities in product quality. Because consumers do not have the time to research every single option available, brand awareness becomes an even more important consideration when making a purchase (Homburg et al. 2010, 204).

2.2.4 Learning and consideration advantages

In business-to-business setting branding is especially helpful to purchasers during the preliminary phases of the decision-making process (Webster & Keller, 2004). According to

Keller (2020), brand awareness has an impact on the strength and evolution of the relationships that make up the brand image. Additionally, in order to develop a brand image, marketers must create a brand node in the minds of consumers in the first place, the attributes of which determine how quickly the target audience recognises and retains new brand associations. The first step in building brand equity is to establish the brand in consumers' thoughts by applying the proper brand elements, which Keller (2020) calls as learning advantages of brand awareness creation. (Keller 2020, 73)

When identifying the qualities and quantity of a required item, searching for and screening possible suppliers, obtaining and evaluating supplier proposals, and evaluating the purchase decision-making process, brand awareness can be helpful. Only in the early stages of a relationship, when the buyer is assessing providers and separating offers, can branding be employed. Given the circumstances, the brand might be especially significant if the buyer is unfamiliar with the supplier because it could be considered as lowering risk and boosting trust in the purchase choice. (Leek & Christodoulides 2011, 833) Findings of Brown et al. (2011, 202) propose that in B2B branding, managers can make the decision-making process of a customer simpler by strengthening brand awareness via communication to determine that their brands are taken into consideration by buyers, especially in situations that involve low-risk purchases.

When a buying centre member or an industrial customer is told about a brand, those details are normally rooted in their mind (Biedenbach and Marell, 2010). Industrial purchasers refer to this kind of brand expertise and the benefits that come with it, which is output of brand awareness, when estimating and making resolutions about purchases (Anees-ur-Rehman et al. 2018, 305). Industrial buyers tend to project outcomes by drawing on assumptions about a supplier's brand and former experiences, or by learning from peer experiences. (Davis et al., 2008). When making judgements about what to buy to fulfil or satisfy a need, consumers always need to take the brand into consideration. (Keller 2020, 73) Brands that consumers know and are aware of are more probably to be encompassed in consumers' consideration set when making buying resolutions (MacDonald and Sharp 2000). Increasing brand awareness makes it more probable that the company will be amongst the one's that are given careful consideration before being purchased (Keller 2020, 73). From the standpoint of the provider, the objective is to showcase the brand's capacity to provide industrial value propositions to tilt the balances in the company's favour, as well as to enhance perceptions of, or

eliminate any misconceptions about, the meaning and values of the brand via increasing brand awareness (Anees-ur-Rehman et al. 2018).

2.2.5 Consumer choices

In B2B settings, a well-known brand can also boost consumers' trust in their selection because it is essentially a summary of related values. (Michell et al., 2001; Low & Blois, 2002). It raises the buyer's degree of contentment with the acquisition. (Low & Blois, 2002) In addition, McDowell Mudambi and colleagues (1997) propose that branding can play a heightened role in B2B transactions when dealing with intricate procurement situations. Brand awareness itself has proven to increase potential customer's likelihood of making a purchase if they are familiar with the brand (Hoyer & Brown, 1990; Lin, 2013). A well-known product may be included to the bid list more easily in a bidding situation. It may also foster consensus within the decision-making group and influence a bid choice. (Zednickova & Wisdom, 2009) The more recent findings of Keller (2020) where he has acknowledged the choice advantages, where there are three different aspects where brand awareness has effect on the consumer choices: 1) Consumer purchase motivation, 2) Consumer purchase ability and 3) Consumer purchase opportunity.

Keller (2020) asserts that even in cases when there aren't really any more connections between the brands in question and the consideration set, brand awareness can still influence decisions. Consumer purchase motivation is influenced by brand awareness because, if they fail to discern any differences between brands in a given category, consumers are likely to lose interest in the decision-making process (Keller 2020). When a buying centre member or an industrial customer hears about a brand, those characteristics are typically ingrained in their memory (Biedenbach and Marell, 2010). When evaluating and making decisions about purchases, industrial purchasers refer to this kind of brand expertise and the benefits that come with it. (Anees-ur-Rehman et al. 2018) According to Davis et al. (2008), industrial buyers tend to base their expectations about a supplier's brand on past experiences or insights from peers. Brand awareness minimizes the resources needed to gather information for making purchase decisions (Homburg et al., 2010).

Consumers might encounter constraints, such as time limitations or other limiting factors that impede them from engaging in a thorough decision-making process, even when

consumers are inclined to make informed brand choices and possess the requisite knowledge. In some instances, market conditions can introduce barriers that discourage in-depth evaluation of brand options. (Keller 2020, 72) Brands not only mitigate risk in B2B settings but also function as a signal for simplifying choices in low-risk scenarios where there might be little incentive for engaging in a thorough search process (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006).

2.2.6 Market share and pricing

Extensive brand awareness, encompassing both recall and recognition, holds substantial influence over a brand's market share. Additionally, it contributes to shaping various other brand characteristics like brand equity, brand image, and brand loyalty. (Bilgihan et al., 2014; Chang, 2013; Xie & Chen, 2014). Enhanced brand awareness instils buyers with increased confidence regarding product quality, resulting in a further readiness to pay a premium price (Bendixen et al., 2004). Moreover, it fosters confidence in suppliers' commitment to maintaining enduring customer relationships (Glynn, 2012).

2.3 Creating brand awareness

The significance of brand development has grown significantly within the realm of B2B enterprises, particularly among businesses operating in globalized, highly competitive technology markets where the brand serves as a symbol of trustworthiness as highlighted by Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006). Surveys have shown that a more favorable brand image instils greater confidence in buyers regarding the quality of products, resulting in a heightened readiness to pay a premium price (Bendixen et al., 2004). Additionally, it fosters trust that suppliers will maintain enduring relationships with their customers, as indicated by Glynn (2012). Aaker (1991, 72-76) suggested companies should concentrate on the following ideas: 1) Differentiate and be memorable, 2) Include a slogan or jingle, 3) Create symbol of exposure, 4) Build publicity, 5. Do event sponsorships, 6) Consider brand extensions, 7) Benefit cues, 8) Build recall with repetition and 9) Use recall bonus.

Any factor that captures the consumer's attention and engages them with a brand, such as sponsorship and out-of-home advertising, has the capability to improve brand awareness, particularly in the context of brand recognition, as emphasized by Keller (2009, 146).

According to Gustafson and Chabot (2007), a prominent brand image is one in which consumers can readily recognise the brand. In this sense, brand awareness can be raised by providing information to consumers, such as by showcasing the qualities of the product. The marketing messages should be easy to remember and have some reason to be noticed by the consumer, and here visuals can be very effective aid (Aaker 1991, 72).

As to Nathan's (2011) assertion, the initial stage of building brand awareness occurs when a customer believes they need the product or service. Once the customer has identified the requirement, they look for information and evaluate various brands and types of solutions. The consumer assesses the good or service from a financial and personal standpoint. And after the purchase the brand awareness comes from when the customers provide an evaluation of the item or service after it has been purchased, and this can happen also in WOM. In B2B context this process is of course more complex, but this can be implemented as a guideline for B2B companies as well. Utilizing social network sites can create considerable influence in establishing brand awareness. A noteworthy discovery by Langaro et al. (2018) revealed a substantial favorable correlation amongst users' engagement on social networking sites and the heightened awareness of the associated brand.

2.3.1 Repeated exposure and cues

The establishment of brand awareness often requires consistent communication of brand values and subsequent fulfilment of brand promises over time to impact the consumer's decision-making process (Anees-ur-Rehman et al., 2018). Broadly speaking, building brand awareness entails exposing consumers to the brand more frequently (Aaker 1991, 95-96; Keller 2020, 76). A consumer is more likely to firmly recall a brand if they encounter it more often through hearing, seeing or thinking about it. Therefore, anything that introduces a brand element to consumers, whether its name, symbol, logo, character, packaging, or slogan, can raise their familiarity and awareness of that brand element. Establishing brand awareness involves enhancing brand familiarity through exposure over and over again (for brand recognition) and establishing robust connections with the relevant product category or associated purchase or consumption cues for brand recall. This serves as a crucial initial phase in constructing brand equity (Keller, 2020, 76).

Recall can also be aided by other brand components including packaging, characters, symbols, and logos. The strength of the linkages between a brand and its product category can be ascertained by the practice marketers' match the brand with its category, for example, through an advertising tagline. While repetition enhances brand awareness, establishing robust associations in memory with pertinent product categories or other consumption-related cues is crucial for stronger brand recall. A creatively crafted catchphrase or theme tune aligns the brand with these cues and, ideally, with the brand's positioning, fostering the cultivation of a positive brand image. (Keller 2020, 77)

2.3.2 Brand communication and storytelling

Brand awareness creation requires brand communication. In a B2B setting, outbound marketing communication is crucial for producing leads for B2B salespeople and to improve cold calling (Anees-ur-Rehman et al. 2018, 304). Additionally, gaining brand awareness is among the most important marketing obstacles they encounter, especially when bidding for contracts (Anees-ur-Rehman et al. 2018). Brand awareness among stakeholders is improved successfully with brand communication via describing brand values and identity (Kang, 2016).

Enhancing the brand recall and recognition, and consequently, brand awareness, at the same time can be achieved through the utilization of brand narratives (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Employing storytelling as a tool can breathe life into a brand, offering significance to its existence and fostering stronger customer-brand connections (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Brand communication itself consists of two main components. In order to raise brand awareness, it first conveys brand values to external stakeholders including shareholders, consumers, and market mediators. Secondly, in an effort to improve brand comprehension, it uses written communications as well as verbal and nonverbal clues to interact with employees internally. As a result, brand communication is an internal and external brand communications strategy that is more unified and synchronised. Brand communication is fundamentally a process of communication between stakeholders, customers, and staff in which they co-create the brand experience. (Baek et al., 2010; Ballantyne and Aitken, 2007).

Consistency in external and internal brand communications is crucial for a company's communications with all important stakeholders, including customers and workers. As a result,

it is critical that a brand's message be understood by the appropriate parties in order to maintain and strengthen a long-term business-to-business connection. (Leek and Christodoulides, 2011) By keeping brand messaging and channels consistent, external constituencies can become more aware of the brand, which can then be used to shape the meaning of the brand. (Marquardt, Golicic & Davis 2011) In addition, consistent and lucid brand communication strategy, made with internal and external marketing activities, can raise brand awareness among industrial customers, reinforce associated values, and have a major impact on industrial purchasing decisions especially if the markets are homogenous (Homburg et al. 2010).

Because salespeople can leverage their organisational brand to boost marketing effectiveness during one-on-one negotiations and contracts, internal path is still significant in a business-to-business setting. (Elsäßer and Wirtz, 2017) The internal track mandates that all employees, including salespeople, need to be thoroughly informed about the key components of the corporate brand to assist them depict and strengthen brand credibility (Baumgarth and Schmidt, 2010).

Customers learn more quickly and retain more information about a product or brand when they communicate with one another (Sultan and Wong, 2014). Anees-ur-Rehman et al. (2018, 304) explained that it demonstrates how crucial brand communications are in developing brand imagery that, in the end, evokes emotions and ideas in customers and serves as the foundation for their brand attitudes (Grace & O'cass, 2005). Many times highly adaptive and enterprising brand communication is exploited to raise brand awareness and loyalty (Liu et al., 2016). Conducting a coherent and clear brand communication strategy through internal and external marketing activities, can make industrial customers conscious of a brand, strengthen its associated values and play a remarkable role in industrial buying decisions, especially in the markets which are homogenous (Homburg et al., 2010).

3 Social media marketing for brand awareness in B2B context

Presently, this time embodies Marketing 4.0, where online platforms progressively assert dominance on a global marketing scale. Consequently, digital marketing transcends conventional marketing paradigms, assuming a more strategic and expansive role within the global landscape. (Lopes and Oliveira, 2022) There are over 4.8 billion people globally using social media, using an average of 2.5 hours on the social media platforms each day (Chaffey, 2021). The swift expansion of information technologies has transformed interactions and transactions between B2B marketers and clients (Schultz et al., 2012). Social media significantly influences the conduct of marketers (Keinänen et al., 2020), emphasizing its pivotal role in achieving strategic objectives (Lopes and Oliveira, 2022). Companies leverage SMM to modify customer relationship management strategies, enhancing customer satisfaction (Lopes and Oliveira, 2022)

Social media marketing encompasses the practical utilization of social networks for promotional intents (Keinänen & Kuivalainen 2015). SMM includes digital platforms facilitating connectivity, information sharing, participatory dialogues, and content creation (Huotari et al. 2015). It provides a platform for electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) exchange (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2011). The role of marketers has shifted from broadcasting messages to active participation within virtual communities, expanding brands into the virtual realm (Weber 2009). Leveraging SMM significantly contributes to enhancing brand awareness (e.g., Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Alves et al., 2016; Barreda et al. (2015); Kim & Ko, 2012; Lim, Pham & Heinrichs, 2020) and B2B companies are increasingly adopting SMS communication tools to strengthen brand relationships, recognizing the value inherent in SMS. (Rapp et al., 2013; Huotari et al. 2015; Itani et al., 2017; Andersson and Wikström, 2017; Murphy and Sashi, 2018).

3.1 The characteristics of social media marketing in B2B

Utilizing mobile and web-based technologies, social media encompass content communities, collaborative projects, blogs and micro-blogs, social networking sites, and virtual worlds, which foster high interactivity among users, enabling them to share, co-create, discuss, and

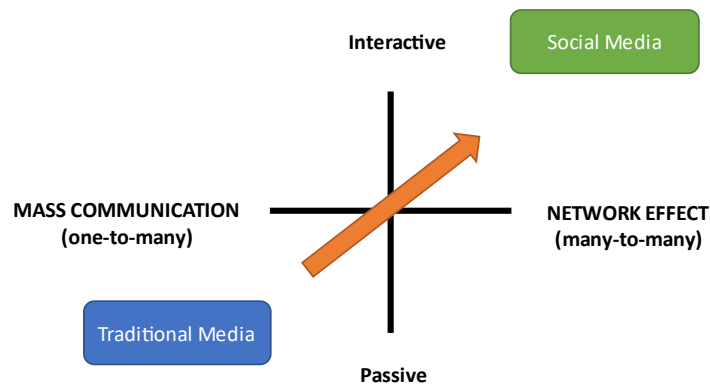
modify user-generated content. (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The majority of B2B marketers leverage social media platforms to obtain various goals, including enhancing brand loyalty, raising awareness and reputation, boosting buyer engagement, nurturing customer relationships, and driving sales and businesses profitability (Michaelidou et al., 2011; Rapp et al., 2013). As the media landscape evolves swiftly, it stands as one of the fundamental tools for all marketers (Cawsey & Rowley 2016). Therefore, organizations must proactively utilize social media as a pivotal tool in achieving their strategic objectives (Wang & Kim, 2017) and social media marketing should be an essential piece of companies marketing strategies (Hanna et al. 2011).

Existing research suggests that companies operating within a B2B context possess a distinct advantage when leveraging social media for relationship-building endeavours. This advantage extends beyond fortifying existing relationships, encompassing the ability to target and attract potential customers. (Andersson & Wikström 2017) Corporations have shown a growing trend of hiring dedicated social media managers to engage in full-time social media activities (Lanz, 2010). Moreover, the utilization of online communities can foster collaborations that pave the way for future business engagements between involved parties (Tsimonis and Dimitriadis, 2014). Through the case studies by Karjaluoto et al. (2015) it is found out that companies in B2B markets exploited social media as communication instrument to improve customer relationships and sales support, and to build their brand. Andersson & Wikström (2017) add there that B2B companies use it also as a recruitment mean to search for new customers and as a product information and service instrument.

Social media platforms, in addition to drive sales, also offer invaluable marketing intelligence and deep customer insights to companies (Hudson, Roth, & Madden 2015; Hudson et al. 2016). In essence, social media functions as a multifaceted passage for numerous marketing functions such as customer service, buyer research, customer relationship management, lead generation, sales promotion, branding and paid advertising (Ashley & Tuten 2015). According to Smith and Chaffey (2013), and Hao (2009), the internet operates as a pull-marketing space wherein companies strive to draw customers to their websites, a feat facilitated by search engine optimization and social media marketing plan of actions. As social media becomes increasingly interactive, marketers are embracing digital marketing tools to promote their products and services without constraints of time, place, or method. Unlike traditional marketing, which was restricted by location and temporal boundaries,

digital marketing has eliminated these limitations, emerging as a versatile and convenient marketing solution. (Heggde & Shaneish 2018, 11)

Figure 5. The future of marketing media (Adapted from Heggde & Shaneish 2018)



The findings from Keinänen and Kuivalainen's study in 2015 reveal a strong correlation between personal social media usage and its application in business contexts. Consequently, it suggests a common trend where individuals who engage with social media for personal reasons are inclined to utilize it similarly for business purposes. This aligns with the observation that individuals often exhibit comparable personalities and behavioral patterns whether acting in private, consumer, or professional roles (Rieck, 2010). Through these professional digital avenues, there exists a significant potential to cultivate deeper personal connections, serving as a robust mechanism for initiating and nurturing relationships (Hollebeek, 2017). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) qualify social media as a cluster of Internet-based applications rooted in the principles and technology of Web 2.0. These platforms enable the manufacturing and trade of user-generated content. They also indicate to social media as applications primarily driven by user-created content or where such content significantly enhances the value of the application or service.

The ways we conceptualize and manage brands and construct consumer and brand identities has been challenged because of the emerge of social media and digital technologies (Davis et al. 2014; Rokka & Canniford 2016). This digital change has posed new abilities for

individuals and companies (Ramaswamy & Ozcan 2016). Social media offers a versatile toolset for B2B enterprises, facilitating seamless communication within the organization and fostering connections with customers and suppliers. It aids in nurturing relationships, fostering trust, providing sales assistance, comprehending customer requirements, enabling collaborative learning, generating leads, and catalyzing innovation (Jussila et al., 2014). Companies have more capabilities to raise brand awareness, heighten brand popularity, excite consumers with the brand engagement, improve cooperation and loyalty, foster word-of-mouth communication and get targeted traffic and conversions with the use of social media (Ashley & Tuten 2015; Barreda et al. 2015; Momany & Alshboul 2016; Phua et al. 2017).

Huotari et al. (2015) present a framework indicating that social media users within a B2B context encompass internal and external users both. According to Huotari et al. (2015), external users of social media encompass distinct groups not directly employed by the company. These groups are categorized as “corporate, customer, professional, and civilian users”. Corporate users represent companies utilizing their voice to create content. Customer users, considered the most crucial within B2B contexts, are individuals employed by potential or existing customers. Professional users encompass various business-related stakeholders. Lastly, civilian users are spectators interested in the company but lack any professional affiliation with it.

One characteristics of the utilization of social media in B2B is that it interconnects various stakeholders within companies (Adersson & Wikström 2017) and that B2B marketers usually are more prone to concentrate on advancing their corporate brands versus their product brands. (Swani et al. 2014) Any actor or group possessing an eligible interest in a firm's activities qualifies as potential stakeholders in B2B social media context. This can encompass a wide array of entities, including buyers, suppliers, investors, prospective employees, media representatives, and others. (Huotari et al. 2015) In a B2B environment, marketers must acknowledge the diverse array of stakeholders actively generating content across social media platforms. Discussions pertaining to B2B market endorsements occurring on social media typically stem from trusted sources. (Andersson & Wikström 2017) This stands in contrast to consumer markets, where content often originates from unfamiliar individuals, evoking less trust (Brennan and Croft, 2012).

3.2 Role of SMS in B2B brand awareness

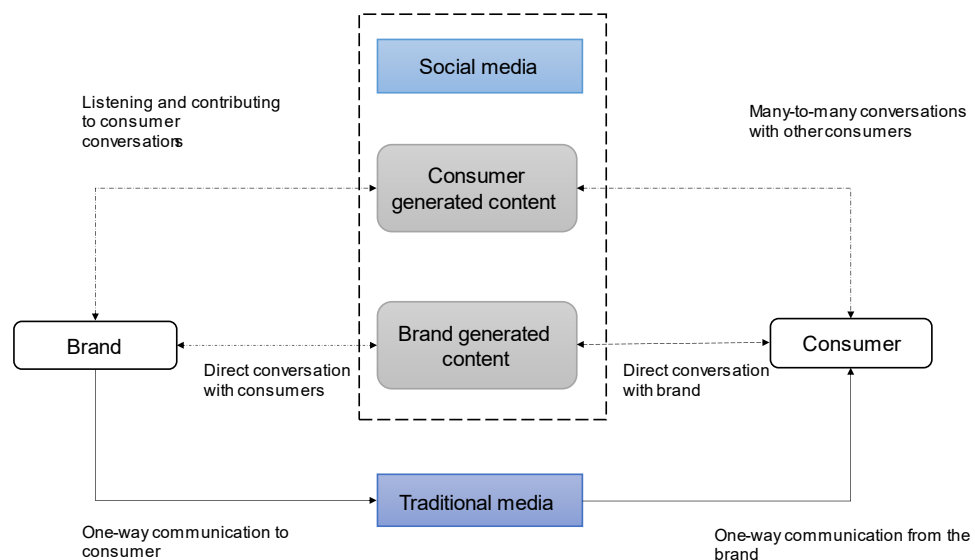
The prevailing perspective in earlier literature suggests that advertising and other forms of marketing communication hold diminished significance within B2B firms due to the prevalence of one-on-one negotiations (Williams, 1998). However, recent research, (e.g. Lynch and De Chernatony (2004); Lipiäinen and Karjaluoto (2015); Holliman & Rowley 2014), contends that an external approach is equally advantageous in augmenting B2B brand awareness. Already in 2010 Harvard Business Review observed from one of its studies that the significant benefit of using social media for businesses was enhanced brand awareness (Harvard Business Review, 2010) and also more recent surveys have noted the efficiency of utilizing social media as a means to enhance brand awareness (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Barreda et al., 2015; Momany & Alshboul 2016;, and Phua et al. 2017). According to Bernard (2016), in the era of social media and engagement, the “Marketing is the company”.

Social media functions as a multifaceted platform accommodating various marketing functions such as customer service, customer relationship management, lead generation, buyer research, sales promotion, branding and paid advertising (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Irrespective of the objective, brand information need to align with consumer interests to encourage meaningful engagement in ways that are personally relevant to the consumer (Schmitt, 2012). In the evolving landscape where traditional "push" advertising loses relevance with customers, companies need to extend their efforts beyond conventional marketing structures to genuinely engage their audience. Today, customers seamlessly integrate marketing into the product itself—it embodies the product. Similarly, they merge marketing into their in-store or online encounters, shaping the overall experience. At this time, which is defined with engagement, marketing essentially becomes synonymous with the company. Social media platforms further emphasize and augments this demand for cohesive, immersive brand experiences. (French et al., 2011) This stresses the importance of the social media role in the brand awareness building as well.

A common approach to elevate brand awareness and foster loyalty is to use highly adaptive and entrepreneurial brand communication (Liu et al., 2016). Brand communication is in short, a communicative interaction system between employees, customers, and stakeholders in the co-creation of brand experience (Baek et al., 2010; Ballantyne and Aitken, 2007) Brand communication has a significant part in internal branding process as well because it

instruct and influence employees to keep brand promises (Kang, 2016; Heggde & Shaneish 2018). Since in B2B purchasing tend to have more deep direct relationships and more extensive pre-purchase information (Jussila et al., 2014). This type of relationship allows more chances to gather information than the similar ones in B2C markets. Thus, according to Jussila et al. (2014) social media can execute some of the acts previously done by B2B sales-people, who usually provide individualised information based on different customer contexts.

Figure 6. Communication model for marketing through social media (Adopted from Heggde & Shainesh 2018, 26)



One of the key objectives for marketers in these days is to ensure consumer awareness of the brand (Bacik et al., 2018) and the social media goals include the improvement of brand equity (Moore et al. 2013). Consequently, enhancing brand awareness stands as a crucial undertaking achievable through social media platforms (Basri & Siam, 2017). The effectiveness of any social media platform relies on a considerable volume of individuals disseminating and exchanging content; marketers, in turn, leverage this content to bolster the brand's image (Berger & Milkman, 2012). Social media can be used to improve client connections, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and favourable brand connotations once the company has established high brand awareness (Aaker 2010). Establishing brand awareness through social media involves fostering effective communication and interaction in between of a brand and its consumers (Bacik et al. 2018).

Businesses aiming to boost their visibility among potential customers can leverage social media channels effectively. These platforms and the tools that social media provides serve as a powerful tool for increasing brand awareness and engaging with followers. (Virtanen et al. 2017) Through social media channels, brands can also establish a distinct voice, enhancing their approachability and creating a more engaging experience for consumers (Bacik et al., 2018). Establishing direct conversations via social media can foster more intimate consumer-brand relationships, contributing to the development of increased rapport with consumers (Davis et al., 2014; Gao & Feng, 2016). In addition, B2B products and learning to utilize products in a B2B context are often intricate processes. That is why B2B companies can employ social media to showcase their products and demonstrate the configuration and usage of various products. (Andersson & Wikström 2017)

Using branded social media initiatives serves multiple purposes: it elevates brand awareness and affinity, drives customer engagement and loyalty, encourages organic word-of-mouth promotion, and potentially directs traffic to both online and offline brand locations. These activities hinge on social networks and encompass ongoing dialogues between businesses and consumers, the publication of branded content across social platforms, interactive engagement experiences, and the active social presence of a brand persona. (Ashley & Tuten 2015) According to Momany et al. (2016)'s study, a business could not increase online sales or brand awareness from those sources if it did not practise social media marketing. As a result, having a passive social media attendance hinders businesses' ability to grow. This suggested that those who participate in online marketing more often also have higher levels of brand awareness and online sales via social media than those who did not. Social media marketing should not be a “set it and forget it” answer; rather, business owners that invest more time and money in these endeavours will see greater returns. (Momany et al. 2016)

3.3 Successful B2B social media marketing strategies for brand awareness creation

B2B marketers must consider the intricacies of the organizational buying context while devising their social media marketing strategies (Swani et al., 2014). Organizations possessing well-known brands can utilize their brand image effectively via social media. This is due to the inclination of customers who favor associating themselves with reputable brands, often engaging in activities like sharing positive word-of-mouth endorsements. (Rapp et al., 2013)

In a study by Davis (2010), it was highlighted that B2B companies have an opportunity to leverage social media platforms for fostering brand connections and establishing customer trust. Additionally, Cartwright et al. (2021) emphasized the significance of encouraging influential actions like timely online interactions and sharing between businesses and their clientele.

It is anticipated that social networks will aid B2B enterprises in reaching out to customers, playing a pivotal role in shaping attitudes towards marketing strategies and influencing purchase intentions. (Hien & Nhu 2022) Positive interactions with a brand on social media significantly enhance customer satisfaction, thereby fostering a heightened inclination to purchase the brand (Martín-Consuegra et al., 2019). For branded products, customers tend to place greater trust in digital marketing information, positively influencing their purchase intentions (Hien & Nhu 2022). Furthermore, brand awareness plays a crucial role in shaping future choices regarding brand products (Dabbous & Barakat, 2020).

In the realm of social media branding, distinguishing a brand necessitates an emphasis on authenticity and transparency. Companies must ensure that their brand embodies these traits. Particularly in B2B branding on social media, the approach revolves around persuading groups rather than individuals. This demands an authentic style where consistency prevails in demeanour, traits, and opinions across various conversations and interactions. (Leake et al. 2012, 118)

Long-term marketing strategies should prioritize the raising of brand awareness. Studies reveal a direct correlation between brand awareness, attitudes toward digital marketing, and purchase intent. In B2B purchases, extensive research stages are customary, making a strong, trustworthy brand crucial for positively influencing customers. Such a brand can significantly differentiate a business from its competitors within the industry. (Hien & Nhu 2022, 19) To effectively leverage the elements of social media, B2B firms should experiment to identify social media's contribution to strategic and marketing objectives. They need to evaluate performance and return on investment, integrate social media into all relevant organizational departments and activities, and engage users in line with these key components. (Cawsey & Rowley 2016) It should be noted that creating effective social media campaigns to achieve certain goals (e.g., brand awareness) it requires cautious consideration, since when companies want the consumers to recognize the brands and become loyal to them, they

need to consider carefully what the campaign offers to the consumers to make the social media campaigns effective (Erdogmus & Cicek 2014).

3.3.1 B2B influencer marketing

Traditionally primary objectives of brands' influencer marketing campaigns encompass broadening brand recognition, obtaining novel, targeted audiences, and enhancing sales conversions (Esseveld 2017). In B2C contexts, influencer marketing is frequently characterized as the strategy involving the identification and compensation of influencers to endorse a company's products or services to their social media followers (De Veirman et al., 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019). The definition of B2B influencer marketing is defined by Mero, Vanninen, & Keränen (2023) as a strategic communication method wherein a company utilizes the perceived expertise of internal or external opinion leaders. Its aim is to curate and distribute pertinent, valuable content across various channels, aiming to cultivate favorable brand-related results and, ultimately, drive revenue growth. Brands engaging in influencer marketing seek endorsements from influencers to elevate brand awareness among their intended consumer base as influencers consistently provide their followers with engaging and informative content (Lou & Yan 2019).

The benefits of using influencers are that content generated by influencers is often perceived to possess a more natural, genuine, and direct connection with potential consumers compared to advertisements created directly by brands (Talavera 2015). At the same time when 74% of B2B marketers acknowledge the potential of influencer marketing to yield business advantages, merely 19% have implemented structured influencer marketing programs (Hyder, 2019) Online research conducted independently heavily relies on digital content, and in B2B contexts, the trust placed in content generated by third-party experts and peers is substantial (Shea, 2018). Considering the pivotal role of trust in shaping B2B relationships, influencer marketing emerges as a credible avenue to impact the self-guided B2B purchasing processes (Mero et al. 2023). B2B influencer marketing can be used as a part of the company's social media marketing in a way that different content types (e.g., podcasts, webinars, videos) can be shared via social media, but also through various communications channels (website, email, offline) (Mero et al. 2023).

Firms have the option to partner with celebrities, leveraging their influence to amplify marketing campaigns, thus increasing brand visibility (Bianchi & Andrews, 2015). But in B2B setting, collaboration with external influencers usually stems from shared interests and reciprocal advantages rather than solely financial compensation according to the study by Mero et al. (2023). Additionally, they noted that it was common for both internal and external influencers to collaborate on content creation. B2B influencer marketing goes beyond pure product endorsements and when content revolves around industry-relevant topics, external industry experts can gain visibility that is equally beneficial to the company commissioning the content. (Mero et al. 2023) In addition, in B2B influencer marketing the role of expert opinion leadership is more crucial, which emphasizes the role of expertism in the choice of influencers (Chrisafulli, Quamina & Singh 2022).

Within the realm of B2B, individuals—whether internal or external—recognized as opinion leaders may function as influencers despite not actively positioning themselves as professional influencers, which differs from B2C influencer marketing where it is focused solely using external influencers. These figures possess knowledge, expertise, or industry authority cultivated through their extensive industry experience. The B2B influencers can be for example high-profile employees and technical experts, experienced business leaders, entrepreneurs, public figures or third-party experts, like academics and consultants. (Mero et al. 2023). When organizations are able to communicate their brands to customers via different channels, salespeople who are at the front row of B2B sales interactions can also work as brand ambassadors and influencers (Rouziou et al., 2018) and convey important brand-related outcomes for firms and customers (Gammoh et al., 2014a).

Salesperson social media utilization is considered to enhance the firm's brand awareness from the perspective of customers (Kalra, Itani & Rostami 2022) The potency of social media for salespeople lies in its capacity to broaden networks, foster frequent customer interactions, disseminate brand information, and engage with customers (Agnihotri et al., 2016; Drummond et al., 2020; Itani et al., 2020; Ogilvie et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2016). Sales professionals should effectually and creatively leverage social media to craft and share brand-focused content, gather insights, articulate innovative ideas, while adeptly cultivating professional networks and engaging audiences to amplify brand visibility (Kalra, Itani & Rostami, 2022). As per Merisavo et al. (2006, 36), customers value information that aids

their decision-making process, such as personalized recommendations or unique search systems, which in turn benefits the positive brand image.

3.3.2 Engagement

The role of the social media platform isn't well-aligned with direct selling purposes; rather, its strength lies in fostering and nurturing customer relationships (Rapp et al., 2013). Scholars argue that SMS presents notable prospects for attracting prospective customers while fostering the growth and nurturing of business relationships (Quinton and Wilson, 2016; Pal 2019; Järvinen et al., 2012). Social media platforms have provided companies with a novel avenue to cultivate brand-consumer relationships, fostering a genuine dialogue between businesses and consumers through innovative connectivity channels. (De Vries, Gensler & Leeflang 2012; Gao & Feng 2016; Simon & Tossan 2018). Fostering customer relationships through social media, it can enhance brand awareness and customer loyalty (Sashi 2012, Bapna et al. 2019) In addition, actively engaging with other users on social media platforms contributes to enhancing brand awareness (Virtanen et al., 2017).

Recent studies offer support for the idea that the physical presence of B2B brands can be successfully mirrored through their online and SMS entity (Quinton and Wilson, 2016; Itani et al., 2017; Ogilvie et al., 2018), contrary to a widespread assumption that because of the essence the B2B operations are, suppliers must be physically available to establish and sustain connexion with customers (Swani and Brown, 2011). To optimize the impact of social media, companies should not solely react to customer feedback but should also take proactive steps to leverage the social media platforms for expanding their customer reach (Leung, Law, van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013) and this way enhance the spread of brand awareness as well. Through the upkeep of an SM presence, B2B brands have the capacity to disseminate information to specific customer segments (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016; Itani et al., 2017) and they can also access customers who might have been overlooked due to limitations based on physical location or geographical constraints (Ogilvie et al., 2018), which makes the SM more effective way to reach customers than traditional environment (Quinton and Wilson, 2016; Itani et al., 2017).

Research by (Lopes and Oliveira, 2022) indicates that consumers that engage more with the company in social media show greater brand loyalty. Advantages for brand awareness can

be made by acknowledging consumer feedback via social media and implementing realisable alterations without compromising the brand's essence. This approach may foster a sense of belonging among consumers when they perceive their input as essential in shaping the brand's evolution (Geurin & Burch, 2017). Holliman & Rowley (2016) acknowledged that B2B firms employ various strategies utilizing SMS for the purpose of nurturing and expanding relationships, and the broadening brand awareness is one key goal in the SMS strategies, since it thereby fosters increased trust and confidence in the brand's expertise.

Stimulating consumer engagement to boost word-of-mouth communication offers an additional approach for increasing brand awareness (Ashley & Tuten 2015). Engaging customers promptly and directly, at a lower cost and with increased efficiency compared to traditional communication tools, is made possible through social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Because of the influence of social media, the dynamics of brand communication have shifted from abstract forms to intimate and personal interactions. This transformation allows consumers to genuinely connect with the individuals behind the brand. (Davis et al., 2014) In this context, emotional cues hold significance in B2B marketing as well (Jensen & Jepsen, 2007; Lynch & De Chernatony, 2004), and their potential effectiveness might be particularly pronounced in social media interactions (Swani et al., 2013b). To establish a distinctive identity and forge robust brand connections with their intended audience, Swani et al. (2014) suggest that B2B marketers need to incorporate sentimental attraction towards their tweets and other communication channels. Successful B2B brand communications prioritize both emotional and functional brand values, aiming to secure lasting, distinctive benefits over their competitors (Lynch & De Chernatony, 2004).

Businesses have the capability to send customised messages that can engage different segments of consumers by showing their special interests and behaviour in the online sphere. (Keller 2009, 148) In the pursuit of constructing or shaping brand identity, significance, responses, and connections, marketers diversify their communication strategies with the aim of identifying those most likely to inspire audience engagement with the brand (Keller, 2009). When executed effectively, engaging in real-time, personal communication with customers has the potential to evoke genuine emotions and prompt user actions (Bacik et al., 2018). Enhancing the personal nature of brand communication allows the brand to become more concrete from the consumer's perspective (Davis et al., 2014).

A brand communication strategy that is both consistent and clear, implemented across internal and external marketing initiatives, has the potential to raise awareness of a brand among industrial customers. Furthermore, it serves to strengthen the association with the brand's values and plays a substantial role in influencing industrial buying decisions, particularly in the homogeneous markets (Homburg et al., 2010). In addition, organizations have the opportunity to enhance their customer relationships by furnishing audiences with valuable brand-related information (Swani et al., 2014). Utilizing casual and personalized bidirectional communication serves as a means to establish rapport with consumers and cultivate enduring relationships between consumers and brands. (Davis et al. 2014; Gao & Feng 2016). Various social media instruments ease the development of long-term relationships via conversation-type of exchanges of data and information. Those instruments are referred to as relationship-oriented social media within the study by Moore et al. (2013). Consumers are absorbing relationship-oriented social media instruments to exchange information about products, brands, and companies. In the same way organizations are adopting social media tools to communicate with different internal and external components. (Moore et al. 2013)

3.3.3 Employee advocacy

Online and off, discussions about brands are taking place without the exact consent or even knowledge of the people in charge of maintaining the brands (Dabirian, Kietzmann, & Diba, 2017). The evolution of social media has significantly transformed brand engagement, offering novel avenues for brand interaction, and has broadened the scope of engagement strategies (Pitt, Botha, Ferreira & Kietzmann, 2018). Employee advocacy can be determined as the promotion of a company's brand by its employees (Hinge Research Institute 2023). With employee advocacy programs companies can even double their reach in social media (Hootsuite 2023) and content that is spreaded by employees receives much more engagement than content shared by brand channels (Sarah 2022). Utilizing the influence that exists in your employees' personal and social networks presents an organic way to enhance your brand awareness. When your content is shared by your employees who serve as advocates, it introduces your brand, product, or service to potentially new audiences within their networks. (Sagar 2022)

A successful employee advocacy program can be a good base for social selling for sales or recruitment teams since employees can also improve the credibility of the brands and position themselves as industry experts (Hinge Research Institute 2023). This is especially beneficial for B2B brand awareness, due to great emphasis in brands on the trust and credibility. To facilitate your employees' brand advocacy, you can produce content that is easily shared across social media platforms with the aid of a strong employee advocacy programme. Additionally, you can enhance the experience by rewarding participants with credentials, points, and awards to encourage their participation. When a reliable source shares high-quality brand content, it increases the likelihood that the reader will believe it and become curious to learn more. (Sagar 2022) Lamberton and Stephen (2016) point out that social media platforms enable individual expression, empowering an organization's stakeholders to create and share their content. This content dissemination can span from a limited audience, including friends and family, to a vast network encompassing thousands of existing and prospective employees and customers within a sizable organization.

3.3.4 Branded content and SM content strategy

New consumers actively search for diverse brands that offer compelling and valuable content tailored to fulfilling their requirements (Halligan & Shah 2014). Content stands as a pivotal element within inbound marketing strategies, and customers' intentions to purchase are greatly influenced by content marketing, which includes useful product/service evaluations and relevant information (Sudarsono et al., 2020). Promoting and marketing a brand via social media involves leveraging content generated by the firm or by users (Alam & Khan, 2019). Additionally, disseminating branded content offers consumers shareable material, thereby boosting the establishment of brand awareness (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Establishing trust and cultivating robust customer relationships within B2B industries can be achieved by offering valuable content, forming a cornerstone for sustained competitiveness (Kiráľová & Pavlíčka, 2015). This not only draws potential customers but also impacts their attitudes and purchasing objectives, even without immediate product usage (Silbert & Markose 2021), thus it builds their knowledge of brand.

Davis (2012) presents the concept of the "virtues of valuable content," emphasizing the confluence of frequency, quality, and relevance. Meanwhile, Jefferson and Tanton (2013)

emphasize the need for adaptable content based on the platform; for instance, they propose that Facebook content might prioritize humour, aesthetics, or inspiration, while newsletter content should focus on delivering newsworthy information. Yet, Holliman & Rowley (2015) comment that many B2B brands fail to heed these principles. Instead, they continue to perceive content marketing solely as another channel to convey product-centric sales pitches rather than addressing the genuine problems faced by their audience (Pulizzi and Barrett, 2008; Handley and Chapman, 2011).

Social media facilitates interactive communication amongst marketers and both current and prospective customers (Hudson et al., 2016). B2B and B2C marketers utilize social media to convey messages, engaging audiences. Marketers face the strategic decision of selecting message elements that will effectively prompt their audience to communicate with their brand posts. Consumers receive, interpret, and potentially share or act on these messages, forming a dynamic interaction loop. Marketers monitor actions, respond to comments, perpetuating dialogue for continuous feedback. (Swani, Brown and Milne 2014, 874) This is beneficial when you want to develop your brand and brand awareness further, since effective communication furthers customers' learning processes and enriches their understanding of a product or brand (Sultan and Wong, 2014). Crafting a B2B brand narrative primarily aims to set it apart from competitors as highlighted by Rose and Pulizzi (2011, 76): differentiation involves sharing a distinct story, not simply enhancing an existing one. Social media content serves not only as a means for advertising on social platforms to influence brand attitudes but also as a source of shareable material for consumers (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Various authors and commentators recommend that the main objective of content marketing is to tell the "story" of the brand rather than plainly broadcast product-based messages to customers and prospects (Halligan and Shah, 2010; Pulizzi and Barrett, 2008; Pulizzi, 2012). Yet many of B2B brands' digital content is still addressing only company, product or services (Holliman & Rowley 2014).

Several experts have pointed out that content marketing signifies a transformation in the role of B2B marketers, linking it with inbound marketing, publishing, and storytelling. They argue that content marketing, as part of inbound strategies, necessitates a shift away from the traditional "broadcast" mentality. Instead of brands inundating recipients with one-way product-focused messages, organizations should assimilate an "inbound" approach (Halligan and Shah, 2010; Odden, 2012). This approach involves customers actively seeking out brands

that offer relevant, compelling content capable of educating or entertaining them. (Holliman & Rowley 2014). Odden (2012) emphasizes that customers now expect brands to invest in relationships before attempting to sell. Jefferson and Tanton (2013) concur, highlighting the need for a philosophical shift in marketing from selling to assisting. This transformation can only occur if organizations fully commit to it and develop the necessary skill sets (Holliman & Rowley 2014).

As engagement in social media continues to surge, brand reputations become increasingly susceptible. Some argue that the more elevated the level of engagement and interest is within a brand's customer community, the more likely it is that the proprietorship of the brand identity becomes contested (McCarthy et al., 2013). In the contemporary landscape, brand proprietors might find themselves compelled to approve the reality of relinquishing govern over their brands. (Holliman & Rowley 2015) Brand owners may find it necessary to reframe their approach to brand development, recognizing it as an interactive process within an environment conducive to conversations (Vallaster and Lindgreen, 2011). Encouraging customer participation in the joint creation of brand significance (Christodoulides, 2009) and value (Iglesias et al., 2013) becomes crucial within this evolving paradigm. The joint creation of the content on the brand's website or social media presence has been widely implemented in B2C social media contexts successfully, but a more cooperative way to content creation could benefit B2B marketers as well since their brand reputation is necessary to long-term relationships (Holliman & Rowley 2015).

Recent research on organizational buying emphasize the significance of engagement and emotional connections with brands in decision-making processes (Lynch & De Chernatony, 2004). Integrating emotional content into B2B communications holds the potential to nurture customer relationships, add valuable dimension to products or services, and establish a durable competitive advantage (Lynch & De Chernatony, 2004; Swani et al., 2013b). Moreover, leveraging corporate brand names infused with sentimental content has emerged as a highly influential social media marketing strategy for B2B companies (Swani et al., 2013b). Messages containing brand names might serve as motivation for customers to engage, contributing to the construction of their social identity (Rapp et al., 2013). Additionally, through interaction with emotional, functional content, or brand-related information, customers might find a medium to express their emotions, enhance their self-perception, and satisfy their inclination to share data (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Lovett et al., 2013).

The social media content that a brand publishes to its channels need to be interesting, relevant and offer an added value for the target audience. Releasing visual content in a consistent and timely manner gives consumers a better perspective of the brand they are following. (Bacik et al. 2018) Loyal consumers can react to the content and share it to their contacts, which might result in positive word of mouth, which makes relevant content publishing regularly beneficial to the company (Lindsey-Mullikin & Borin 2017). Social media marketing is most effective with advantageous campaigns to boost brand loyalty with (Erdogmus & Cicek 2014). In addition, if marketers' goal is to enhance brand loyalty, they need to offer relevant content that is popular also among the consumers' friends, provide content on multiple social media platforms and offer other applications to the content (Erdogmus & Cicek 2014).

Crafting engaging and valuable content for customers is crucial, yet finding or developing employees capable of creating such content poses a challenge. (Andersson & Wikström 2017) Holliman & Rowley (2014) suggest that companies should embrace a long-term approach to digital content marketing to cultivate their reputation and foster strategic partnerships. Social media marketing content can be categorised into two categories: owned social media, primarily comprising content created by the firm, and earned social media, which mainly consists of user-generated content (Colicev, Malshe, Pauwels & O'Connor, 2018; Alam & Khan, 2019).

Utilizing branded content not only serves as a form of advertising but also offers shareable material for consumers, thereby bolstering brand awareness (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Promoting consumers to share branded content within their social networks is a powerful means to organically expand brand awareness (Barreda et al., 2015). According to Colicev et al. (2018, 39) owned social media is defined as the communication of a brand that is generated and disseminated through its own network assets, such as a social media page.

For an effective boost in brand awareness, it's crucial that companies publish high-quality, engaging, informative, and enjoyable content, ensuring it resonates with potential customers (Barreda et al., 2015; Godey et al., 2016; Basri & Siam, 2017). Additionally, defining specific metrics for social media marketing is advantageous, considering the platform variations, aiding marketers in their strategies (Virtanen et al., 2017). Regular analysis of online social media activities and interactions is vital for a comprehensive understanding (Basri & Siam, 2017). This word-of-mouth exchange often fosters increased brand visibility and can

significantly impact consumers' inclination to consider trying the brand (Barreda et al., 2015). The studies show that the most impactful way to use Social Networking sites (SNS) is on authenticity and integration of authentic elements. Emotional connections among business individuals are likely to occur within social media platforms when content intentionally aligns with the extended self, shared values, authenticity, and encourages participatory culture (Sundström et al., 2021, p. 461), and this fosters the trust and strengthens the brand image in a positive way.

3.3.5 User-generated content

In the realm of marketing, user-generated content on social media has occurred as a valuable resource for brand promotion (Geurin & Burch 2017). It is also a part of earned social media, which is according to Colicev et al. (2018, 39) “the brand-related content that entities other than the brand – typically the consumers – create, consume, and disseminate through online social networks”. This approach, known as user-generated branding (UGB), proves to be a cost-efficient marketing strategy, particularly popular amid the surge in customer-to-customer marketing trends. For companies, especially startups or those aiming to optimize profits while minimizing costs, UGC presents an intriguing marketing avenue. (Geurin & Burch 2017) Through the utilization of user-generated content, the company can amplify the development of branded content produced by users, consequently augmenting brand awareness (Geurin & Burch, 2017).

Through earned social media, there exists the potential for broad brand awareness, particularly if the content attains virality (Colicev et al., 2018). To effectively harness UGB's potential, marketers should engage consumers or brand advocates to generate and publish content about products or services across their personal social media profiles or the brand's online platforms. Collaborating with individuals passionate about the offerings encourages the dissemination of content among like-minded audiences, thereby amplifying brand awareness among potential customers. (Geurin & Burch 2017)

The impact of user-generated content extends to shaping the hedonic brand image (Bruhn et al., 2012; Alam & Khan, 2019). Additionally, user-generated communication is perceived as a genuinely objective and believable assessment of a brand's authenticity (Bruhn et al., 2012). Consequently, attentiveness to consumer feedback serves as a valuable tool for

companies, offering insights into the market's perception of the brand and its products (Kim et al., 2015; Hajli et al., 2017; Yadav & Rahman, 2017).

Businesses may inspire customers to participate and improve word-of-mouth advertising, which is a useful tool for brand promotion and awareness (Ashley & Tuten 2015). Since millions of consumers can be accessed in a matter of seconds through social media platforms, companies can leverage increasingly powerful word-of-mouth marketing by encouraging consumers to post brand-related material (Basri & Siam 2017). Encouraging user-generated communication involves establishing a platform where individuals can freely share their sentiments and information related to the brand (Bruhn et al., 2012).

User-generated content represents a type of consumer engagement directly involved with the brand, capable of significantly influencing consumer perceptions, often presenting a challenge for marketers (Smith, Fisher & Yongjian, 2012; Enginkaya & Yilmsz, 2014). User-generated content empowers consumers to articulate their perspectives, give the feeling that their voices are heard, craft brand-related content, and concurrently shape and engage with brand narratives originally developed by marketers (Enginkaya & Yilmsz, 2014; Lund et al., 2018; Geurin & Burch 2017).

3.3.6 Brand communities

Creating a brand community is one way to increase brand awareness (Basri & Siam 2017). Developing brand communities on social networking platforms represents a natural extension of a brand's online presence (Barreda et al. 2015). Establishing an online community with target consumers and brand ambassadors to increase exposure and brand recognition is advantageous (Basri & Siam 2017). Given that social media's social components are well-supported and cultivating relationships with consumers comes naturally, it provides an ideal platform for creating brand communities (De Vries et al. 2012; Habibi et al. 2014; Moro & Rita 2018). When the goal is to obtain economic value, community building is viewed as a crucial component of social media implementation (Culnan et al. 2010). The primary objectives in establishing such communities include fortifying connections with existing clientele and reaching out to potential customers (Luo et al. 2015).

By actively involving consumers in these brand communities, their associations with the company, its products, and fellow consumers are enriched, ultimately resulting in heightened levels of brand trust and loyalty (Laroche, Habibi, Richard & Sankaranarayanan 2012; Laroche, Habibi & Richard 2013; Habibi et al. 2014). These effects come also from the fact that brand communities based on social media can foster improved community spirit among members (Laroche, Habibi, Richard & Sankaranarayanan 2012). This, in turn, can foster positive brand trust (Habibi et al. 2014). It's worth noting that customer-to-customer interactions within these communities can empower consumers, leading to increased expectations and more substantial demands (Habibi et al. 2014).

Businesses enable customers to participate in community activities, such as producing and sharing user-generated content, holding competitions, and obtaining special offers, by offering brand pages (Phua et al. 2017). Customers can more effectively share their opinions, experiences, assessments, and feelings about the brand with other users thanks to this improved interactivity, which may result in real changes to the brand's offering and affect how consumers perceive it (Davis et al. 2014; Barreda et al. 2015). One low-cost strategy for companies is to increase their audience and brand exposure on social media is to start by following other users. This is known as community building (Virtanen et al. 2017). It is important to remember that this is not universally applicable due to variations in primary social behaviours and user interfaces between platforms (Virtanen et al. 2017). Moreover, through endorsing or following diverse companies, consumers also shape their social identities (Phua et al., 2017).

People can more easily join online brand communities on social media since they have less admission and exit barriers than traditional groups (Luo, Zhang & Liu 2015). The removal of all temporal and physical restrictions raises the possibility that customers will participate (Davis et al. 2014). Users of social networking sites can follow brands on their brand pages by connecting with other members and liking, commenting on, clicking, or sharing content that marketers post (De Vries et al. 2012; Kumar, Ande, Kumar & Singh 2018). According to De Vries et al. (2012), comments are a type of word-of-mouth communication since they are accessible to other members of the brand community when customers interact with the posts.

People's perceptions of brands, brand preferences, and purchasing behaviour are naturally impacted by the fact that most people on the planet are connected through social media

networking sites and share their brand experiences and tales (Kohli et al. 2015; Lund et al. 2018). In the era of social media, cultivating brand communities to increase customer involvement is crucial since consumers are depending more and more on social networks to make decisions (Habibi et al. 2014; Barreda et al. 2015), and this applies also in B2B. Before completing a purchase, today's typical B2B buyer often engages in online activities such as browsing through digital contents and searches. They seek product specifications, compare brands, and actively search for the best deals or promotions. Subsequently, they transition offline to finalize their purchase. (Google 2018)

3.3.7 Paid social media marketing

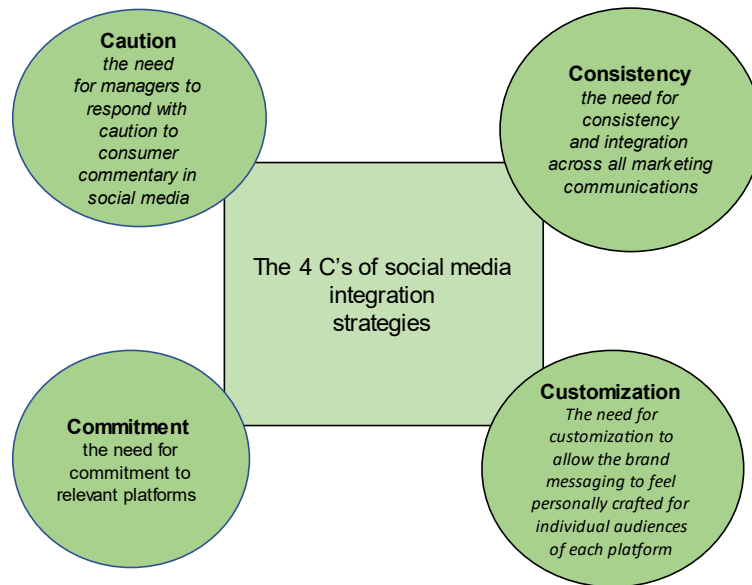
Paid media in social media reflects to sponsored advertising or sponsored messages on social media platforms (Hanna et al. 2011) Examples of paid social media are for example pay-per-click advertising, display ads, and branded or influencer-generated content. The paid social media is often essential part of building brand awareness in social media marketing strategy since organic visibility is often hard to reach due to the algorithms used by the social media platforms. Paid media is used to achieve goals such as awareness, consideration, or conversions. (Hubspot 2023b) Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn offer platforms for paid social media marketing. Paid social media marketing is a tool to get the content shared with specific new targeted audiences, either through “boosting” their organic content, or designing specific advertisements. Paid posts are efficient mean for brands to target new audiences on social media and gain brand awareness, and to attract new followers, promote new products, generate leads, and drive conversations. (Hootsuite 2021)

In paid social media marketing, setting the goal, defining target audiences, identifying key performance indicators, reviewing competitors' campaigns and testing the ads and campaigns is essential for successful paid campaigns (Bozzon, Domínguez, Francisco & Filipe 2020). The used channels chosen for the advertising is also critical, since the advertisements are liable to the media they are displayed, and the consumer opinions towards the channel affects attitudes towards individual advertisements on this channel (Madlberger & Kraemer 2019).

3.4 Social media channels for B2B brand awareness

Through different social media platforms companies can broaden their network and gain new followers and customers (Andersson & Wikström 2017) which naturally furthers the brand awareness. Utilizing social media channels allows businesses to instantly disseminate marketing content to broad audiences, presenting social media marketing as a cost-effective alternative to traditional media marketing methods (Dobele, Toleman, & Beverland, 2005). Various social media platforms are commonly employed in B2B, including Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter (*currently X*), YouTube, blogs, and Instagram (Broekemier et al., 2015; Huotari et al., 2015; Cawsey & Rowley 2016; Keller 2020, 42). This study focuses on these platforms which possess distinct characteristics compared to traditional one-way communication channels such as television, radio, billboards, magazines, and newsletters (Hasan, 2011). TikTok is one of the newer social media channels that has been found to be effective channel to boost brand awareness in B2C context (Sheaka & Abdulrazak 2023), but the studies in B2B context are still lacking which is why in this research it has been left out from the B2B social media platforms. Because social platforms separate in purpose, a cohesive brand recognition is created across each platform by following the four C's of integration created by Killian & McManus (2015): consistency, customization, commitment, and caution.

Figure 7. The 4 C's of social media integration strategies (Adopted from Killian & McManus 2015).



For optimal engagement, social media posts ought to be customized to suit the current requirements of the customer, their affiliation with the company (whether they're a customer, potential client, or follower), and align with the unique features of the specific platform being utilized. To get authenticity, consumer's or buyers' interactions with a brand in social media need to be consistent with other brand-related interactions. Brand managers need to comprehend the characteristics of users and conversations that are being made within the platform before committing to a social platform. Commitment in this sense means the urge to commit to the platform and also to the public engaging with the brand on the platform. It does not mean that a firm should be present on a platform just because a platform is novel or compelling, since infrequent upkeep of content does more harm on the firm brand image than being not present at all. Additionally, caution is required upon social media actions since the possibility of negative comments harming the brand image. (Killian & McManus 2015)

Unlike traditional marketing methods, social media enables two-way interaction and is technologically more advanced. It allows diverse forms of content creation and sharing among various stakeholders. (Andersson & Wikström 2017). Impressions created by videos or pictures that are posted on content sharing communities such as Instagram and YouTube will promote peer-to-peer interactions that affect brand awareness and brand image (Lim et al. 2020). In a business-to-business setting, the possibility to target current and potential customers in an effective way is important role of digital marketing. Incorporating different channels into the total marketing endeavour can help optimize a promotional mix. (Keller

2020, 42) A study by Keinänen et al. (2020) demonstrates the effectiveness of a multi-channel social media marketing strategy in securing visibility on the initial page of organic search outcomes. The research also highlighted how social media engagement directed customers to other online platforms of the businesses. Moreover, the study emphasized that social media actions complement existing marketing efforts, such as email marketing, rather than replacing them.

3.4.1 Relevant social networks and content sharing communities

Because LinkedIn is a B2B professional network, it is not a surprise that it is the most popular and appreciated social media platform for B2B marketers (Keinanen & Kuivalainen, 2015; Mora Cortez & Ghosh Dastibar 2022; Siamagka et al., 2015), offering a way for firms to link their corporate identity with their corporate audiences (Prodromou, 2015). After it was established in 2003, LinkedIn has built to have now about 950 million users with strong penetration globally and it is the most widely used professional platform (LinkedIn 2023a). In B2B company managers, especially SME's, on LinkedIn connect, interact and build relationships with each other, and they collaborate with industry-relevant brands to learn, develop together, and to exchange professional content (Diba, Vella, & Abratt, 2019). In LinkedIn there exists specific groups for different interests, discussion groups, and industry forums which can be operated to create customer groups for support or even product co-creation (Diba, Vella, & Abratt, 2019).

LinkedIn serves as a platform facilitating social interaction and liaison, providing suppliers with diverse opportunities to promote customer engagement and awareness (Agnihotri, 2020). The most worthy marketing objective on LinkedIn is building the firm's number of followers according to Prodromou (2015), which itself builds brand awareness. For example, LinkedIn followers can also be brand advocates. When individuals and businesses with substantial followings engage with a brand's content, it elevates its credibility and impact. Positive word-of-mouth created by these followers can improve brand awareness, and in addition attract new customers, and create revenue growth. The organic promotion facilitated by devoted LinkedIn followers holds significant potential to yield substantial returns for a business. (LinkedIn 2023b) One of the main benefits of using LinkedIn is to take part into discussion and in different forums to gain awareness and showcase the products of the brands

(Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Also, a study by Mora Cortez & Ghosh Dastidar (2022) suggests that the suggested brand personality of a post (via its content and graphic design) is an important principle in LinkedIn communication and that in LinkedIn there is a cyclical engagement effect starting with exposure and leading to expression of perceptions, which, controversially, leads to actions. and a growing social media reach. One thing the marketers need to consider, is the amount of released posts per week. The LinkedIn algorithm rewards firms that post more often than those posting more rarely, and the frequency of posts has a positive effect on the number of impressions, likes, clicks, shares, and comments (Mora Cortez & Ghosh Dastibar 2022) and thus has an indirect effect on reach and awareness.

Twitter is a microblog platform (Lim et al. 2020) and it is seen as a good way of spreading e-WOM (Rudat, Buder & Hesse 2014), which is beneficial for brand awareness. In B2B marketers use Twitter as a platform for information-sharing and sharing content (Swani et al. 2014). Twitter enables segmented communication for targeted customer support and direct engagement (Cawsey & Rowley 2016). Cawsey & Rowley (2016, 769) noted in their study that the case companies had found out that Twitter particularly has been good channel at raising brand awareness. Through tweets, marketers can boost brand awareness, drive leads and revenue, nurture relationships, and build brand loyalty (Kumar & Mirchandani, 2012; Rapp et al., 2013). Re-tweeting is noted to be a fast and convenient way to share and spread information, including brand information (Rudat et al., 2014). The comprehension which content is most probably to be tweeted and shared among customers is crucial (Swani et al. 2014) since the content of the tweet in B2B setting is a main determinant of engagement (e.g., retweet or responds) customer relationships, and other brand and financial outcomes (Kumar & Mirchandani, 2012; Rapp et al., 2013). For example, the use of corporate brand names with emotional content has shown to be as a very effective social media marketing strategy for B2B companies (Swani et al., 2013b). Therefore, the use of sentimental content in tweets can make customers to engage more with the content and affirm brand relationships (Swani et al. 2014).

Facebook belongs to social networking sites (Lim et al. 2020) and the purpose of Facebook in B2B purposes is often an informal (Andersson & Wikström 2017; Cawsey & Rowley 2016, 769) Research by Swani et al. (2013) suggests that B2B Facebook account posts should involve corporate brand names and avoid directly commercial statements and “hard sell” strategies to be effective. Moreover, it is also noted that adding emotional sentiments

in Facebook posts is a specifically efficient social media marketing strategy for B2B and service marketers to create emotional connections to the brand (Swani et al. 2013; Nhedzi, Pritchard, and Fabian 2023). Visual elements (videos, pictures, and typography) are crucial components of B2B storytelling on Facebook (Nhedzi et al. 2023). In Facebook B2B companies have a chance also to engage in cooperative B2B endorsement partnerships, usually involving the use of social media influencers, which are a good tool to gain more exposure and reach. (Nhedzi et al. 2023). Lutkenhaus et al. (2019) remarked that this is the latest and rapidest rising collaborative trend on social media, and a way to raise awareness. Additionally, Nhedzi et al. (2023) founded in their study that some B2B companies collaborate with other brands to submit advertising campaigns together. This involves creating combined adverts and other promotional activities shared on the Facebook pages of all participating companies, which creates increased exposure built by the campaign buzz. These companies anyhow involved only SME's, so this approach may not be efficient for large corporations.

Instagram is a content community channel which is based on visual content: images, videos, and stories (Virtanen et al. 2017), which makes it a good tool for companies in B2B as well to leverage their brand with consistent visual content. Neher (2013) suggests that the use of images and visual content can significantly contribute to raising awareness, boosting website traffic, stimulating discussions, encouraging sharing, and creating interest, especially for visually oriented products or services. It's crucial for companies to recognize and integrate this trend into their social media marketing approaches if they aim for their message to achieve widespread viral reach (Virtanen et al. 2017). Instagram offers an alternative way to reach out B2B buyers with personalized brand messages, since most of the B2B buyers use social media to discover new products and services, and more and more of B2B buyers today are part of younger millennial population, who are more likely to use Instagram. (Pick 2021) Instagram is a platform which is made for to be noticed by others (Sheldon and Bryant, 2016), so the whole platform is built for raising awareness and reach of a brand. It is crucial to identify the correct target population and choose the right content and message, to channel a joint interest of the target population in Instagram (Lee et al., 2015). Instagram is also a good channel to get more reach for your brand: beyond company's own followers, Virtanen et al. (2017) noted that usually many of the likes company gets comes from other than the existing users of the company. Instagram is also an excellent platform to humanize B2B brand with content about employees, staff and offer for example industry tips (Pick 2021).

YouTube is the number one content community platform for video sharing, and B2B enterprises are progressively turning to video content to actively engage their audiences (Keller 2020, 42). Through YouTube videos, companies can produce specific videos to instruct and guide customers and use specialized and knowledgeable people of the organization in the videos to push image as competence and reliability to B2B customers. Customers that need help with a specific product usage or installation can watch the video and follow tutorial. (Andersson & Wikström 2017) These videos express a more concrete and visual approach to the complex offerings that characterize the B2B marketplace (Jussila et al., 2014), and companies may also highlight their brand values to improve brand image via these videos (Andersson & Wikström 2017)

3.5 Risks and challenges in utilizing SM for B2B brand awareness

Being not always well received on social media is one of the disadvantages of social media marketing that companies can face (Fournier & Avery 2011; Virtanen et al. 2017). Brands can appear inauthentic on a platform that was made to connect people together and not to sell branded products (Fournier & Avery 2011). Additionally, the viral spread companies often are looking for is not always good for the brand if a disappointed customer is disseminating a word of their bad experience with the brand and has all the means to showcase it to millions of people (Killian & McManus, 2015; Virtanen et al. 2017). Anyhow, the positive side is that a happy customer has the same means to disseminate a word of their positive experience and increase positive word-of-mouth (Virtanen et al. 2017) and it is more common (Kimmel & Kitchen 2014).

Using social media carries inherent risks. In general, B2B buyers tend to possess higher knowledge levels compared to B2C buyers, partly because of the elevated risk in high-value purchases and the complexity of products or services involved. (Habibi, Hamilton, Valos & Callaghan 2015) The downsides encompass external negativity directed at the company, alongside internal negative comments. Additionally, inappropriate personal use of social media that conflicts with company values poses a risk, because of immediacy of social media. (Bernard 2012, 958) By searching online communities, blogs, user forums, etc. it allows customer access to even greater knowledge. This way it makes B2B purchasers more prone to become aware of negative word of mouth from dissatisfied customers. The difficulty for

B2B marketers is to show their products authentically and at the same time managing consumer-generated content and opinion-sharing. (Habibi, Hamilton, Valos & Callaghan 2015) The prevalent and permanent nature of social media requires a specific emphasis on caution and thorough education. (Bernard 2012, 958)

There are difficulties with interactive marketing messaging also. Consumers set the terms of interaction and, if they so want, can protect themselves with the aid of representatives and intermediaries. Consumers specify the offerings, information needs, and price ranges they are willing to accept. It's possible for marketers to have less control over what their online communications and activity will result in from customers. Customers could post videos in inappropriate or unsightly locations. Because the message is more clearly stated and expressed, traditional media can provide greater control in this area. (Keller 2009, 148). In addition, according to Zhu & Chen (2015) social media marketing campaigns frequently yield unsatisfactory results and unmet objectives due to challenges stemming from inadequate knowledge. They note that success requires on precise understanding of the product, targeted social media platforms, and audience. Some social media channels may be more effective for specific products or audiences than others.

Barreda et al. (2015) suggest that providing awards and exclusive materials within the brand community proves advantageous in enhancing brand awareness. This could involve offering incentives like gift cards or discount codes, potentially fostering word-of-mouth engagement (Basri & Siam, 2017). However, in the B2B context, small incentives, like a coffee voucher which can be effective in B2C settings, does not impact decisions in B2B settings, due to the much more complex buying journey and larger values involved in it. Kim and Lee (2017) found that encouraging natural customer peer-to-peer communications is more effective than monetary incentives. Conversely, larger rewards in B2B settings could pose compliance or legal challenges (Aras & Xu, 2020, p. 291). Bodnar and Cohen (2012) pinpoint two scenarios where social media practices might not align with the preferences of B2B companies in general. Firstly, it is evident that a crucial factor for successful social media utilization within organizations is having an internal advocate. This entails an employee responsible for generating content that is in part controlled and beneficial to the firm (Kietzmann et al., 2011). When a company lacks an internal department or a central employee dedicated to navigating the social media landscape, the recommendation is to designate someone for this role to enhance success on social media platforms (Andersson & Wikström 2017).

Another issue is if the company does not have the needed resources to be successful. A common misconception is viewing social media endorsement as cost-free. Social media usage involves costs in terms of company resources since it demands a significant time and effort from employees to comprehend customer businesses. Often, companies engaging in social media treat it as an experimental endeavor, neglecting its actual potential benefits. (Andersson & Wikström 2017) Comprehending the required resources and employing them efficiently are crucial for success (Bodnar and Cohen, 2012).

4 Methodology

This chapter demonstrates the research design and how the empirical part of the study is carried out, including how the data are collected and analysed. The reliability and validity of this study will also be discussed. The aim of this study is to understand the case company's current social media marketing strategy for their specific product line and how its brand awareness could be improved. In a bigger picture this empirical research aims to give implications on how to build successful social media marketing strategy to improve brand image in specific industrial B2B context. The empirical part is focusing on understanding thoroughly the whole process of social media marketing strategy for brand awareness building and which are the pain points, value creation and strategies used by the case company. Thus, several company representatives and customers are interviewed. To build conceptual framework and theoretical contribution by analysing meanings and relationships between different participants, the qualitative research model is applicable and exploratory approach for this research (Saunders et al. 2016, 168). The research design is case study research (Saunders et al. 2016, 169) that use an inductive methodology to examine the hypotheses that have already been proposed (Saunders et al. 2016, 569).

4.1 Research methodology

Two primary categories of research can be identified: theoretical-based research and empirical-based research as Uusitalo (1991) have noted. Theoretical studies primarily revolve around the examination of viewpoints and theories pertaining to diverse challenges and issues, while empirical studies concentrate on exploring real-world phenomena (Uusitalo, 1991). The research strategy of this study is a case study since it is focusing on understanding specific phenomenon of a real-life company, so the limits of the examined case are determined by the company (Puusa, Juuti & Aaltio 2020) thus this study can be considered as empirical-based research (Uusitalo 1991).

Qualitative research is data-driven research that aims to understand the phenomenon and the relationships between the factors of the phenomenon, as well as to explain what the phenomenon is made of. Qualitative research is based on induction, where the aim is to create a

generalization, or theory, from practical individual cases and it is coexistent interested in multiple causes affecting on the outcome and is context specific including theories and patterns (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2015, 25; Kananen 2017, 42–44) When using a qualitative technique, it is customary that research hypothesis are led from the single-case analyses, so in other words the hypotheses are set based on the research material: the data collection and analysing phase, and they are not set before based on any theory or literature. (Puusa, Juuti & Aaltio 2020) This study's qualitative character lends itself to interpretive analysis, which is a good strategy for examining the links and meanings among many attendants in order to develop a conceptual framework and theoretical contribution (Saunders et al. 2016, 168).

The two main components of qualitative analysis are usually simplification of the observations and problem-solving, according to Alasuutari (2011). This means that the observations are blended after data collection because similarities usually exist among the data. To put it another way, the same themes and phenomenon keep coming up. Analysing the simplified themes is the first step towards solving the issue. This means that the goal is to identify themes that make the study problem clear after merging the observations. With this approach, the meaningful and irrelevant themes can be inferred from the data, leading to the identification of the proper answers to research-related issues. This approach helps to present the information broadly, clearly, and interestingly while also separating the important ideas from the unimportant ones. (Alasuutari 2011)

4.2 Data collection and analysis method

This study consists of both a theoretical and empirical part as mentioned. The used data in the theoretical part is gathered mostly from articles, journals, and books and existing literature related to the research topics. The data of the empirical part of the study consists of interviews, continuous observations of the case company and a case study practice. In qualitative research, one characteristic feature of the data collected is that the qualitative data is multi-level, complex and information rich (Alasuutari 2011), as it is in this qualitative research.

The research interview is one of the most important qualitative data collection methods and it has been widely used in the past (Qu & Dumay 2011, 244). Interviews were chosen as the research method for this study because they make it possible to understand the underlying

motivations for respondents' responses (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2015, 34). There is multiple different possible qualitative research interview methods (Puusa et al. 2020) but the semi-structured interview method was chosen for this research, and it is also the most often used technique for gathering data for qualitative research (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000, 194). Due to the complexity, quantity, and degree of open-endedness of the research's questions, semi-structured interviews are the most suitable data collection method. (Saunders et al. 2015, 394). In a semi-structured interview, there are prepared questions that are consistent and methodical and are guided by qualified themes which are betwixed with statements meant to gain more in-depth responses. (Qu & Dumay 2011, 246)

Saunders et al. (2009, 320) have proposed three different phases for the semi-structured interview to be complete and comprehensive. The following phases were all completed in all the semi-structured interviews: 1.) By being aware of the interview's theme and the calibre of the questions beforehand, the interviewer can prepare for the interview. 2.) Depending on the interviewer's knowledge or the interview's flow, the substance and flow of individual interviews may vary. 3.) Interviews could contain extra questions to ensure that all the necessary data is collected. (Saunders et al. 2009, 320)

In addition to ongoing observation and internal knowledge beginning in 2022, the data for this study was collected from interviews inside the organisation and from the on-going analysis of the researcher. Separate interviews were conducted with brand and marketing managers, product line managers and product line sales managers. All the respondents have a long experience of corporate expertise with the product line and its brand. These in-person interviews ranged in length from 40 to 50 minutes and were conducted via Teams, since most of the interviewees live in another countries. These interviews were conducted in order to obtain thorough responses to the questions that were posed and are listed in Appendice 1. The questions slightly varied between different interviews based on the interviewee's job position to get relevant answers and deep insight on the issue.

The interviews were carried out as mentioned as a semi-structured interview. All the interviewees were eager to answer to the questions and were willing to discuss all the topics presented. Table 1, 2 and 3 displays the profiles of each interviewee. Tables are separated into three interviewee categories: Marketing and Brand managers, Sales managers, and Product managers. Overall, 11 employees from the case company were interviewed.

Table 1. Marketing and brand managers' interviewee profiles

Job title	Marketing & Communications Manager	Head of brand marketing	Director, Marketing & Communications operation	Corporate social media manager	Marketing & Communications Manager	Marketing Manager	Marketing & Communications Manager
Career (years)	12	11	17	3	4	4	10
Country / Region	UK / EMEA North	Global	Global	Global	Germany/ EMEA Central	Germany	France / EMEA South

Table 2. Product managers' interviewee profiles.

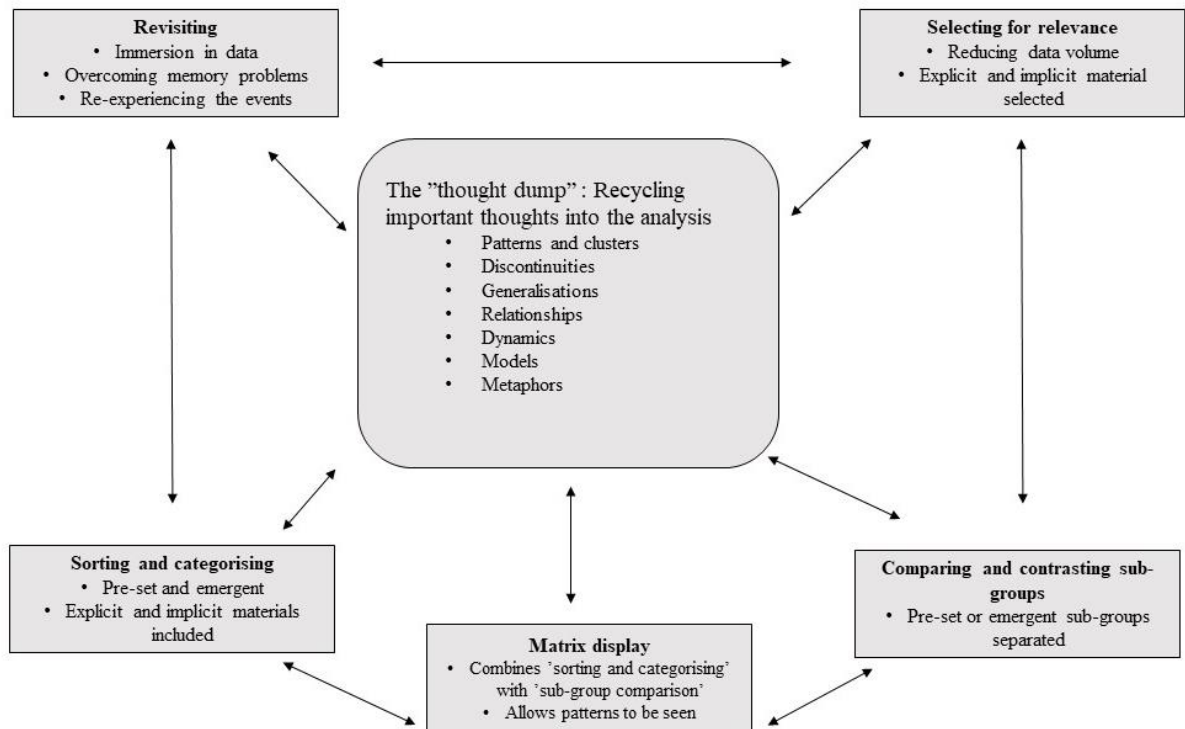
Job title	Product Manager	Manager, Sales Support Product Line	Product Line Director
Career (years)	32	15	12
Country / Region	France	EMEA	Global

Table 3. Sales managers' interviewee profiles.

Job title	Customer Experience Manager	Senior Sales Manager
Career (years)	21	24
Country / Region	UK	Germany

With the help of analysis methods, it is intended to modify the collected research material into answers to research questions or a solution to a research problem (Kananen 2017, 131–133). The material obtained from the interviews was first unpacked by transcribing the interviews into written form on a separate data sheet. This was done so that it is possible to process the results with the selected analysis method (Kananen 2017, 134). Content analysis was selected as the analysis method of the work because it examines sources other than text and it enables a versatile examination of the material. With the help of content analysis, the material already collected is reduced, classified into different categories, and analyzed. (Puusa & Juuti 2020, 144.)

Figure 8. The process of qualitative analysis (Ereaut 2002, 67)



Content analysis is strongly based on logical interpretation and reasoning, and the aim of the analysis is to help organize the material into a concise and clear form from which reliable conclusions can be drawn (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 122). The results of the empirical part are first examined based on the data, then moving on to the classification and thematization of the findings. The theory works in the analysis as a background against which the results obtained in the material can be examined and the phenomenon can be analyzed through the reference framework of the existing explanatory theory. (Kananen 2017, 142–143). The classification of observations was carried out by theming, i.e., by grouping the analysis units into categories according to similarity and predefined research categories, the research material obtained to clarify the analysis, and according to the research questions (Puusa & Juuti 2020, 148–149). This thematization resulted in four themes for the analysis: 1) Brand awareness, 2) Social media, 3) Benefits & Role, 4) Challenges & Obstacles, which are shown in Appendice 2. The table clarifies the connection between research questions, interview questions and research themes.

4.3 Reliability and validity

In a qualitative research, where the research issue is often based on single cases, where the organizations, companies, or some groups, are investigated based on some phenomena that is tried to be understood with the research, the reliability and validity of the research are not easy to analyse or in some cases it can be even irrelevant (Puusa et al. 2020). Generally, the reliability and validity refer to the degree of consistency and generalizability of the research findings (Saunders et al. 2016, 202). If the study is focusing on providing relevant, useful and apposite information on the issue that is under the examination, the reliability and validity can be considered proper for qualitative research (Puusa et al. 2020). It is crucial that the researcher presents the data and findings as clearly as possible, even in the absence of formal tests to assess the validity and reliability of the qualitative research (Patton 2002). To improve these issues, the interviewees were chosen to have specific knowledge on the investigated issue, and to provide as extensive information on the issue as possible in the limits of the research. Furthermore, the interviewed customer companies were chosen based on their comprehensive knowledge of the case company and its brands to provide relevant information for the research.

The reliability itself refers on how replicable the finding is or how dependably it will be repeated on another occasion or by another researcher (Ereaut 2002, 149). Riege explains the reliability as “the demonstration that the operations and procedures of the research inquiry can be repeated by other researchers which then achieve similar findings” (Riege 2003, 81). In qualitative research it is common that the researcher itself has very close relations on the examined issue and has an interactive relation with the investigated phenomenon, and it is accepted in the nature of the qualitative research (Puusa et al. 2020). The reliability of the study is in this sense improved through triangulation (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 141-142), which simply implies to the act when the researcher is considering many aspects throughout the research journey or using multiple different methods or multiple researchers in the same study (Ereaut 2022, 149; Puusa et al. 2020) In this study the triangulation has been implemented by using material triangulation, which means using several different materials or different objects of information in the same study (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 141-142), which means in this case using both interview data, previous literature and observations in the source of analysis. In addition, the reliability has been improved in this sense by choosing

different objects of information, since the interviewees are representing different job positions within the company and not representing heterogeneous group. According to Yin (2014), the reliability issue can be also improved by adopting the mentality to design the investigation so that, in theory, an auditor might replicate the steps and, ideally, reach the same conclusions (Yin 2014, 49), and this mentality was followed in the study procedure.

Since in this study the researcher is working in the case company, it increases the risk of not having enough triangulation in the study. In addition, objectivity in the analysis and throughout the research is one general aspect of research reliability, but in the qualitative analysis it is nearly impossible (Puusa et al. 2020) as previously mentioned due to the nature of the qualitative research and the fact that findings cannot be free from prospectus of the researcher (Puusa et al. 2020). The research is aiming as much objectivity as possible by reflecting the acts in every step taken throughout the research in the data collection and analysis processes to knowledge the own subjectivity to avoid the researcher's personal biases, expectations, or prejudices to affect the research as less as possible and to avoid anything being left for interpretation, which is a way to improve the reliability of this qualitative research (Puusa et al. 2020).

In qualitative research, only as much material is needed as is necessary in terms of the topic and the set research task and when gathering qualitative data, it becomes essential for a researcher to decide regarding the suitability of the collected data (Mwita 2022). One way to solve the question of the suitability of the material is its saturation, as highlighted by Fusch et al. (2018), which plays a crucial role in achieving the research objectives as intended. The validity of findings in qualitative studies is often closely tied to the sufficiency of the collected data in addressing the research questions (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). It is reasonable in all respects to consider that the material is enough, when new cases does not bring new information in terms of the research problem anymore, i.e., the material begins to repeat itself (Eskola & Suoranta 2022) and this point refers to saturation (Fusch 2018). Even comparatively minor data can be used to make more general conclusions than just the data in question, when the data starts to repeat itself (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 90). The saturation of the empirical study has been addressed in the Appendix 3., which shows that the chosen sample size can be considered appropriate and representative sample of the case company for achieving the study's objectives. Within analysing this saturation of the empirical data, it should be considered that due to the various job positions of the interviewees, all the

interviewees did not answer to all the questions, which has an effect to the saturation point of some of the questions (regarding questions 7,9, and 10) which were more focused to marketing and brand managers.

Validity can be translated simply on how well the study is testing the actual measures it has set out to measure and how well it reflects the reality it is trying to represent (Ereaut 2002, 149) The validity of the research can be improved through proper and thorough analyse and data collection methods. By understanding of the nature of the context is vital for high quality B2B research (Lilien 2016), so in this sense the fact that the researcher is familiar with the subject that is under examination and the organization is participating in the academic research is improving the validity of it. Riege (2003) also recommends an evaluating concept, internal, and external validity to enhance the case study's quality. When it comes to research design and data collecting, it is crucial to strive to avoid making subjective judgments to improve construct validity (Riege 2003).

This thesis' internal validity has been strengthened by using cross-case comparison and within-case analysis. To increase the external validity of the thesis, constant comparison between current research findings and empirical findings has been done in the research findings. Participants were sent the interview questions in advance so they could become familiar with the issues and learn about the study's goals, which also increases the research's validity (Saunders et al. 2015, 429). The potential for biases and inaccuracies is inherent in the interview process, and one such factor involves the potential for a misunderstanding of the questions. This concern was mitigated by actively promoting interviewees to seek clarifications when needed. It was crucial that new questions be constructed without the researcher leading the respondent to a predetermined response because semi-structured interviews enabled for greater conversational flexibility. In addition, interviews were taped to guarantee the validity of the empirical data gathered.

5 Empirical analysis and findings

This section presents discussion and findings from the empirical part of the research based on study's research questions and research themes. The empirical part of the study consists of 11 interviews, and continuous observation of the company's social media actions. All the empirical findings based on the topics of brand awareness and B2B social media marketing. More specifically this chapter first introduces the case company's internal motivation and opinions for brand awareness building as well as for the use of the social media. Results from the study will be presented sequally divided into five different chapters based on thematization of the analysis results.

5.1 The case company

The case company is a Finnish large multinational company, that sells and produces industrial machines for B2B markets and markets them under a corporate brand. The case company's business operations are separated into different business segments. These product segments entail different product lines which have its own target customer segments and markets. The company's business operations are similarly shared across different operations levels: global, region, and country level operations. The target of this study is in the brand awareness of this company brand in specific product line, since the company brand's offering is wide, and it is necessary to have targeted focus in the marketing context. In addition, this product line has been expressed to be under a great competition between different brands in EMEA region, which is posing a request to investigate the company's current brand awareness level and how the social media could be employed to improve it in this region.

5.2 The role and position of brand awareness

In the empirical survey it was relevant to find out what does the brand awareness in general mean for the case company and what is its role for their business. In addition, based on this it was essential to study what is the current level of the case company's brand awareness in this studied business product line to be able to give concrete suggestions for its improvement.

The brand awareness was considered as crucial for B2B company since it offers prominent competitive edge into sales negotiations and supports the salespeople. All the interviewees consider important to have a strong brand awareness which aims the buyers to search their products easily on the internet and social media– and this way the customers know who to contact to. So, it has a relevant role in B2B lead generation. One employee from the product line even noted that a strong brand allows the sales team to demand higher prices because of the strong brand. Strong brand was associated to reduced competition as well.

“– Selling these complex and expensive products requires a lot of technical information from the seller side, but brand awareness can support here that the customer already know where to get the products they are looking for and they know the brand already which eases the work of the salespeople since they do not need to start from the scratch.”

- Customer Experience Manager, UK

Other point of view mentioned was that the products and services are starting to be on very similar level in between similar companies, which means that you can do very little to differentiate yourself in the product differentiation and technology level. The role of brand becomes more vital and allows a role to stand out from the competitors. Since the company brand is positioned itself as a premium brand, and it is not able to compete either with pricing, comes the role of strong brand and brand awareness even more important according to the sales and marketing team.

Challenges in the brand awareness lies currently in the strong competition in the markets and the existing brands in the markets that are more well-known in this product area. Currently in many cases the company’s frontline sales personnel confirm that the specific product category is not attached to the case company brand in the minds of customers. There is currently a gap between the company brand and this product category – the potential customers seem not to associate the brand with this product line. This is considered to partly be because the company has had a stronger history and market share in the other product segments in EMEA markets. There is also dissenting opinions between the interviewers about the overall company brand awareness: most of the marketing personnel consider that the company has a strong brand and brand awareness in general, but the product line representatives and sales managers think that even in the company brand there is room for improvement to gain more brand awareness in the minds of both existing and potential customers.

Salespeople comment that in many cases the customer company the salespeople are reaching out to have considered some competitor company first. Anyhow most of the salespeople would rank the case company as a 3rd brand in the markets they are operating, but not a single employee interviewed would rank the company as first or second.

“As said, there is room for improvement. Many competitors are much stronger than our company brand in this product category in UK – their brand has a bigger market share and stronger brand. Lack of brand awareness in this product category is obvious and a thing to improve in the future.”

- *Customer experience manager, UK*

The strongness of the brand awareness varies by the countries, but even in the strong markets such as Germany, France, and UK where the company has a big market share, the frontline salespeople confront many times that the customers are unfamiliar with the brand, or they do know the brand but not the offering. The challenges are especially within this product category, since it is mentioned that even the existing customers from other product segments do not know that the company also has these products in their offering. So, it could be said that the brand awareness is widely ragged currently across EMEA region, and the customers are not familiar with the company offering.

5.3 Key features in social media marketing strategy for brand awareness creation

The key features in social media use for brand awareness were assessed through the existing actions in the company currently and the key points they consider as important features for brand awareness building. Here are the key features compressed for industrial B2B brand awareness creation in social media mentioned in the interviews:

- 1) Content strategy.
- 2) Page optimization.
- 3) Engagement.
- 4) Employee engagement.
- 5) Paid social media marketing.
- 6) Consistency.
- 7) Regularity.

8) Repetition.

Focusing on content strategy was mentioned as a key factor in social media marketing strategy for brand awareness building. The most effective content for brand awareness building was experienced to be targeted content, content that has some “catch” to get the viewers’ attention, short videos, distinguishable content by being fun or informative, authentic and easy to approach content, employee content, local content, and content with striking visuals. The goal in the content strategy was mentioned to publish high-quality, consistent, and appealing content in a distinctive brand language that offers the consumer added value and reflects the brand values of the product line. This includes varying the shared content formats, such as blog posts, articles, videos, images, and infographics in social media, which are all tailored to the target audience. The company’s Germany’s marketing manager commented that also social media contests or games related to the brand could be ideal to encourage participation and sharing in social media, which could in turn increase brand visibility and create more awareness to the brand. This content idea was not anyhow suggested by any other company employee.

Almost all the respondents thought there is a lack of more human and easier to approach content in the company social media which they consider as important feature for brand awareness building. All the respondents considered that there is a need for more emotionally compelling content which attracts the people, rather than “pure selling” content or generic corporation brand content. Most of the respondents considered their current social media content somewhat deficient and unilateral.

“I follow couple of our competitors in Instagram and LinkedIn. It is obvious that we lack behind them: they post regularly, and they use variable content and are constantly visible at my feed for example. From us I don’t see this.”

- *Product line Director*

The need for more local content was mentioned by the country marketing and sales personnel. In UK and in France there weren’t almost any local regular social media posting currently, in Germany there were some. Local content was considered more appealing to the customers, and in countries like France and Germany, it was mentioned that in most cases people want to consume content in their own language. Hence the global English based corporation content is not alone enough to build brand awareness locally. Real-life based

content that builds emotional appeal from the customers towards the brand is something that usually has provoked most engagement in social media.

“Sometimes it is that the less polished the content is, the more interesting it is and the more it spreads in the social media. We should exploit this more.”

- Customer experience Manager, UK

Local reference stories became a key feature that was accepted as a key player in social media brand awareness building, since they were considered to build eWOM and trust towards the company. Also, in specific product brand awareness messages it was mentioned to be necessary to offer some deeper knowledge than in the websites for example, and this way lure the potential buyers to click the link or read the post in social media. Sales managers and product line managers stressed this factor the most, since they consider it is relevant for the potential customers to see the benefits of the products in use, which builds their trust in the product and increases their awareness towards the brand before considering the brand options in their purchasing journey. Moreover, they consider that this way the potential customers can also move “up” in the awareness pyramid towards the desired top-of-mind level in this product category.

“The customers are usually networked with each other. The positive customer reference stories are the most effective since when the customer company sees the reference story of the other company they know, and then the other sees the reference story they shared in social media, this builds up the brand awareness and this becomes kind of a “snowball effect”. And social media is effective tool to convey this message.”

-Manager, Product Line Sales Support

Engagement was considered important among the employees and customers in social media marketing strategy for brand awareness since it builds the emotional connection and relationship towards the brand. With the social media marketing strategy, most of the employees consider important to actively engage with the audience through different social media features, such as comments, likes, shares, Q&A sessions, live videos, webinars, etc. Employee advocacy was commented as a powerful tool for this by all the interviewees.

“Building relationships through consistent and meaningful interaction fosters a sense of community and helps to better understand the target group, their needs, and preferences.”

- *Marketing Manager, Germany*

Paid social media marketing was considered as a necessity in B2B, since the organic visibility in social media is quite poor due to the vast amount of content in there. With effectively targeted paid campaigns the brand awareness can be boosted rather easily. Regularity and consistency in the social media posting and marketing was considered as also a key area in social media marketing strategy when building a brand awareness. It was pointed out that it is not sufficient for brand awareness building, if the brand campaigns are done then and there, since the brand awareness requires repetition.

Only marketing managers underlined the importance of page optimization also in social media, and country marketing managers commented to have started to optimize the SEO aspects of their social media profiles to increase visibility and reach. Yet this has not yet been widely implemented across the company's social media. For example, this can be done with the use of hashtags and strategically use the 'about us' section to convey their brand history.

5.4 Role of social media marketing in brand awareness creation

The role of social media was found out to have an important role in the minds of every respondent in the brand awareness creation context. All the respondents thought social media is a necessary tool for brand awareness building these days. There were multiple reasons why the social media was concerned to have a crucial role in this, and it varied a bit based on the job status of the respondent and by the country. One important factor mentioned by multiple of the company employees was the role of a “door opener” in a sense that social media can be the first touchpoint for the consumer to be in contact with the brand, and this way it eases the first step of the brand awareness pyramid from the unfamiliar towards the recognition of the brand, and then to recall.

“I feel that its role and its task is in a way to open the “first door” in a sales funnel by increasing the awareness, because it is the easiest channel through which we can reach an extremely large number of people, and we can easily target that message.”

- *Director, Marketing & Communications operations*

Most of the marketing personnel concerned that because social media increases brand visibility, it is relevant for brand awareness creation. As social media platforms offer a global reach and allows the engagement with potential partners or customers, it is ideal for brand awareness purposes. In conjunction with the strategic creation and adaptation of content, social media has the role to target the audience more efficiently and effectively. With the right strategies such as sponsored posts, hashtags, and engagement initiatives, the possibility to extend the connection to target groups and thereby promote relationships, trust, and ultimately loyalty in turn promotes brand awareness. Thus, social media proves to have a multifaceted role in the brand awareness building for an industrial B2B company like this case company.

“Furthermore, we can express our brand values, our identity, and our personality on social media, which is crucial for differentiation and brand awareness. In an environment where B2B buyers extensively research their options online before making a purchasing decision, a strong, interactive, and appealing presence on social media is of paramount importance to us.”

- *Marketing manager, Germany*

Many of the respondent also commented that the role of social media is that its channels allow brands to gain real-time insights and feedback from their audience and the market. This can help company to better understand the needs and desires of the customer base and thus refine the product/service offerings and strategies, thereby increasing brand value. Therefore, they saw social media marketing as an essential tool in the B2B markets to strengthen brand awareness and improve reputation. Sales team also highlighted the importance of a long-term commitment in brand awareness building, and that social media has a vital role in there since it offers easy channel for it alongside with the other functions that also need to be for brand building (e.g., mentioned traditional marketing, company websites, online marketing and sales and delivery functions, and operations that influence the brand image).

“When it comes to branding, I know that there is no “quick road” to boost the sales, but using social media as a tool is very important to build the brand awareness in a long run and in a long run become this way subconsciously remembered and hopefully even as a first choice in the minds of customers in this product line as well.”

- *Senior Sales Manager, Germany*

It was notable that the product line representatives and the sales personnel also experienced that the role of social media is important, but they pointed out more the concern of the existence of the potential customers and decision makers in this industry who do not necessary use social media that much, and that how could these people be inspired to start use it more. especially the concern was noted in Germany and in France, where the sales personnel considered the decision makers to be rather traditional. This linked to the concern on which it was pointed out how the content in the social media should be that interesting that it would have a relevance in the eyes of these potential decision makers also who do not use social media at all or that much.

“Anyway, we must be there also for the next generation. Even though nowadays maybe not all the decision makers use social media, I think it is the future marketing for the businesses, and a space where all the business managers are and base their decisions in the future.”

- *Product manager, France*

The role of social media was experienced to have grown in recent years, and that in B2B the use of social media has become more similar with B2C. The importance has grown also because of the social search, which was mentioned multiple times in the interviews both by the marketing personnel and the sales and product line representatives. They consider that their potential and existing B2B customers are looking for information on social media too, similar to consumer trade.

“The big marketing trend in 2023 was that the people have started to search more and more in social media. Google search is still important of course, but this highlights the importance that the relevant information about the products or services and the brand needs to be visible in social. “

- *Corporate Social Media Manager*

The role of social media marketing was considered somehow diminished towards aiming to the top-of-mind awareness with these types of industrial complex products, since the more the customers require trust and evidence to fix their opinions towards brands. They commented that being in the top-of-mind brand in the minds of customers among the many

large competitors also require other activities such as active salespeople and functioning delivery systems behind the brand awareness to become top-of-mind.

It is the positive overall image of the company that we can offer on social media when building brand awareness. In terms of product marketing, in my opinion, if I could decide, we should get a lot of those references, because maybe that's what we can market internally to our own sellers and people, as well as to the end customer to build the positive brand awareness.

- *Sales support manager*

Yet, the role is still vital, but in this type of complex product selling when it becomes to being the first brand that the customer thinks, other activities of the company become highlighted as well. The pure social media marketing can create a “buzz” around the brand, but without evidence from the company it is not as efficient as it may be in B2C when building top-of-mind awareness.

5.5 The benefits of utilizing social media in brand awareness

The main benefits according to the study were that the social media is agile to use. This was mentioned by all the respondents without exceptions. The agility comes from the fact that the platform is in the employee’s own hands, they get access to it easily and rather fast. Compared to more traditional marketing channels, social media can be used quickly if needed and it allows more quicker reactions for marketing purposes in brand awareness. Cost-efficiency was mentioned multiple times also, compared to other marketing activities.

Table 4. Arguments for each benefit mentioned by the interviewees.

	Argument	Number of interviewees answered
1.	Cost-efficient - Compared to traditional advertising media, social media paid marketing is more affordable and organic posting is free.	8
2.	Fast - Brand content can be spread quickly, which supports a faster way to build the brand awareness.	9
3.	Easy to use – Relatively easy to create brand awareness campaigns and content compared to other marketing channels	8
4.	Control – Company’s own social media channels are managed without 3 rd parties, so it allows complete control over the company generated brand messages.	5

5.	Wide reach - Social media platforms have billions of users and offer an unprecedented reach. This allows the brand messages to appeal to both existing customers and new customers.	11
6.	Two-way communication – Provides a platform for customer communication and conversation, also in more personal level which allows positive brand awareness building, stimulating brand interaction and discussion.	11
7.	eWOM –In social media the word about the brand spreads easily via electronic word-of-mouth.	3
8.	Increased engagement – Features such as "likes", "shares", and "comments" in social media posts facilitate interaction, visibility, and make it easier for the brand messages to spread.	7
9.	Precise targeting tools – Offers a more targeted and tailored tools to reaching potential and existing customers to target the brand message to.	5
10.	Real-time communication – Allows real-time feedback and communication with customers, which can have a positive effect on brand awareness.	10
11.	Building brand-customer relationships and loyalty – in social media messages and conversations a company can build trust and thereby increase the visibility and awareness of the brand.	7
12.	Flexibility - Social media marketing strategies can be easily adapted to changing market trends or consumer behaviour or internal changes, which supports that the brand content produced is in line with the existing strategies.	7
13.	Real time customer insight - Offers a channel to view and monitor customer behaviour and competitors to modify and improve own brand marketing	4

Also, the control over brand messages was mentioned by multiple respondents regardless of the job position. The respondents considered that social media allows a good control over the brand awareness marketing messages: both to organic messages and to the paid messages, since with using social media, the company does not depend on 3rd party in the content creation. This also creates agility to its use since if there are some things that needs changes in the social media marketing content, it is possible to change it easily without the need to for example discuss with external marketing agency about the changes and then pay them for the job.

“We can manage the messages ourselves. With social media we don’t depend on 3rd parties or external services, but we can manage and control everything by ourselves.”

- Corporate social media manager

Reaching the desired target audience was mentioned also widely as a positive benefit of the social media use. This ensures that the brand message can be targeted to the desired audience, which makes the communication more effective than in other more traditional channels such as newspapers or other marketing channels.

5.6 Challenges and disadvantages in social media use

One of the disadvantages of social media was concerned to be its fastness and overwhelming amount of content, which makes it difficult for the companies to get their brand messages to stand out. This was mentioned by most of the respondents. Also, the rapid spread of content was considered involving also risks, since as the positive brand awareness can be evolved through social media it can also change to negative easily. In the industry the case company is operating and in B2B in general, the trust is a major feature affecting in the customer relationships. The negative brand awareness can be easily spread through a negative comment or negative feedback in the company pages in social media. Also, the tone-of-voice used in social media messages by all the persons involved in the company requires extra attention, since it is assumed to have a strong correlation with the brand image in the potential and existing customers minds. The employee advocacy programs was mentioned to have also some risks in this sense, since there is a risk that they spread harmful message or a message that is not in line with the brand guidelines.

“You can look a bit foolish or a bit immature easily even with just one wrong comment or with wrong tone-of-voice used in the social media posts, which is a big deal for a big stock exchange corporation like us.”

- Customer Experience Manager, UK.

Other disadvantage was concerned to be the difficulties to measure the brand awareness in social media, even though it can be somehow equalized to reach and engagement measures. This also poses disadvantages for the resources used in social media, since there are also challenges to link the positive visibility in social media into direct leads or sales.

Also, the rapid evolvement of trends and algorithms was concerned a disadvantage, since it requires constant training and changing with the social media marketing strategies used, and

concerns brand awareness building in social media as well. This involves risks that the pre-planned brand awareness campaigns can become irrelevant or out-dated fast.

Table 5. Arguments for the disadvantages social media has presented as a channel to increase B2B brand awareness compared to other channels.

	Argument	Number of the interviewees answered
1.	The supposition that the potential customers are considered rather “old-fashioned” and there are decision makers who do not use social media.	3
2.	Increased competition for the recognition -The digital space is becoming increasingly crowded with brands vying for consumer attention. There is a chance for the brand message to get ignored due to the vast content amounts in social media.	8
3.	Resource intensive and time-consuming - Creating, planning, and monitoring social media content can take a lot of time and resources.	7
4.	Poor visibility of organic posts - Effective operation of social media marketing requires more paid social media marketing.	9
5.	Possibility for negative brand awareness - There is a risk of negative comments or reviews that can damage company's reputation in social media.	11
6.	Risks with the tone of voice in social media – The friendly tone of voice involves risks for a big corporation in brand messages to avoid negative brand image.	11
7.	Content overload – Due to so many other companies competing for attention on social media, it is difficult to stand out and convey the brand message.	10
8.	Difficult measure ROI – It is difficult to directly link social media efforts with sales or leads and prove its efficiency.	4
9.	Employee training - Constant learning is required to keep up with the latest best practices and tools in different social media platforms.	6
10.	Rapidly changing trends - The trends in social media are developing rapidly, so it is crucial to stay up to date and adapt. If this does not happen, campaigns can become irrelevant or outdated.	7
11.	Consistency – social media requires consistent posting to get visibility.	9

When the employees were interviewed on the challenges or obstacles they face with the social media use for the brand awareness building, the lack of resources and unified strategy seems to be the main obstacles in the company's social media use currently. The need for better marketing strategy was mentioned multiple times also, and the employees in the countries experienced the existing social media marketing strategy deficient.

“Currently we are doing the bare minimum with social media. We just need to just do something at least, but we don’t have a chance to do it in a way that would be desired due to lack of budgeting and resources,”

- *Marketing manager, UK/ EMEA North.*

Regarding the social media marketing strategy, the challenge according to the employees is that this type of large industrial company with multiple business areas, the management of marketing and social media marketing is challenging. When there are multiple opinions and multiple layers in the company’s operations, it is a challenge to get the communication efficient and the cooperation between the departments in a good level. Especially when it comes to product marketing, the need for cooperation with the sales department is highlighted. Also there has been lack of uniformity in brand messages in the social media content since there are multiple persons responsible of the social media content in the countries. The countries have had a lot of freedom to handle their own social medias, and this has been a challenge for the brand awareness building since mixed brand messages can make customers confused about the brand and be this way unfavourable for brand awareness, which requires a distinct and clear brand message. The freedom has somewhat led to the point where countries, BAs and corporation are doing their own separate social media marketing operations, and there are not a sufficient management on that side to efficiently support the brand awareness building and common goals.

“A challenge is in this type of big corporation with multiple business areas is that all the business areas have their own wishes and own ideas for the social media content, and they can have pretty much different tone-of-voices and vision how things should be done.”

- *Corporate social media manager*

Social media content creation was also an obstacle that came up in almost every interviewee’s answers. Content creation in the company is handled in a global, regional and a local level. Main role is in the countries to create local content. Content creation for brand awareness building was found to be a major challenge for multiple reasons: 1) many other job tasks are related to the marketing position, that the time left for content creation is minimal; 2) Challenges to create a content that stands out, 3) Challenges to plan the content; 4) No budget to outsource the content creation to a partner, 5) Lack of content strategy.

"I have to admit that there is a lot of work on how we can build the content in such a way that the first second the viewer glances at it is already such that it attracts the viewers' attention regardless of the content format. There must be some "trick" why does it attract the viewer's attention and why would the viewer spend the time to watch it through the video or other content. And it is not easy."

- Director, Marketing and Communications operations

The one obstacle considered that was mentioned by the employees in the country marketing level was the feeling of the challenges measuring the brand awareness quantitative results. In the countries the marketing employees are working usually under the sales department, which increases the need to be able to prove the results the resources that have been put into the marketing. The marketing managers that operate also in the country level highlighted the role of ROI, which would also need to be considered in the marketing actions. And related to that, they expressed the urgent need for more paid social media marketing, since the organic visibility is nowadays not enough to gain brand awareness in a broad sense. They expressed that currently they are doing a lot less paid marketing than many of their competitors, which is an issue for the brand visibility in social media. This requires monetary assets from their country managers, and if they are not willing to invest the assets in the social media paid marketing, it poses difficulties to build the brand awareness in social media as desired.

"It is not always clear how much brand awareness was created and how this translates into measurable business results. Tracking and measuring the ROI of social media campaigns can be difficult. Social media metrics like the number of followers and likes do provide some insight but are not necessarily equated with sales."

- Marketing manager, Germany

The need for improved cooperation with sales in the countries was considered as an issue also, since the usage of targeted marketing with customer lists (e.g., ABM campaigns) is crucial especially for this kind of products which are very niche, and which have very specific target customers. The marketing department highlighted that they need to know who we they are targeting the messages to. The sales personnel also pointed out that the challenge is to have the marketing messages in line with the other operations such as production and sales, and the communication with the sales is a key feature to successful product brand

building. The sales personnel noted that if the marketing department plans sales and brand awareness campaigns about a products or services to certain time, and then the factories cannot deliver the products to customers because of delivery issues, it is a bigger issue than not being visible in social media and having a lack of brand awareness. They considered it creates negative brand awareness immediately and damages the company brand reputation, which is afterwards difficult to repair since from their experience the trust from the customers is not easy to gain back.

Yet they also pointed out that this product category has not been prioritized in the company marketing efforts previously, and there have not been any social media campaigns or any regular marketing about the product category, which is an issue to the brand awareness. This was confirmed by the marketing and brand managers also since the company's focus areas have been in other product line's marketing and general brand marketing since this product has not been considered as lucrative business area as the others and this way there have not been efforts to market it in social media either.

"We have to every time prove ourselves to the customers when they decide to buy from us. The customer will remember the issues in the past, and the positive marketing messages alone are not enough to cover it."

- Manager, Product line Sales support

All the region and country level marketing managers on the other hand proposed whether the issue could be replaced with deeper communication between the sales and the marketing. In addition, the marketing personnel called for honest communication towards the customers in the problem situations as well. They considered that the issue is also in a lack of communication, which could be dealt with the use of social media as well. This could be beneficial for the brand also, and maybe would spare from some of the negative awareness.

"In other words, in marketing, the key is to balance with the fact that the marketing messages conveyed are true to the company's other functions, so that communication is reliable and open to support the brand awareness building."

- Director, Marketing & Communications operations

Table 6. Arguments for the challenges experienced in implementing social media marketing for brand awareness creation:

	Argument	Number of interviewees answered
1.	Lack of resources – There is no budgeting and no resources in a country level to do local content in a regular way and with strategy. Also, no budget to use external marketing agencies in countries.	9
2.	Lack of clear strategies and guidelines – There has not been a clear social media marketing strategy between the global, regional and country levels.	9
3.	Lack of uniformity in brand content - Challenges with brand consistency in social media marketing messages.	7
4.	Difficulties to build distinguishable brand messages - Challenges to create posts that stand out from the competitors.	5
5.	Measuring effectiveness for brand awareness - Challenge to link social media marketing efforts with quantifiable results. It is not always clear how much brand awareness was created and how this translates into measurable business results.	4
6.	Target audience segmentation - One of the biggest challenges is understanding and addressing the right target audience on different social media platforms. Each platform has a different user base with different demographic characteristics and interests.	4
7.	Adapting to algorithms - Social media platforms frequently update their algorithms. This can drastically affect the visibility of a brand and requires continuous adaptation and updating.	2
8.	Challenges to motivate colleagues to actively like, comment and share brand contributions in social media.	9
9.	Employee training – Social media employee training has been a challenge, especially during times of high workloads.	5
10.	Creating engaging content - It is a constant challenge to create high quality, engaging content that resonates with our target audience. This requires a high degree of creativity, research and empathy for the needs and preferences of our target audience.	9
11.	Compliance with laws - Challenge to ensure that the social media activities comply with various laws and regulations.	2
12.	Negative feedback management – Challenges on handling negative reviews or criticism	9

The interviewees were also questioned their current social media usage for brand awareness, and the areas they consider that need to be improved. The issues in content creation mentioned was concerned to need more local content, more regularity, more reference stories, and more educational content. The need for very specified targeted content was mentioned multiple times: to improve the current use of social media and increase the awareness of the brand in the product category, there is a need for specialized content that details the benefits of the products. These types of very niche products would need to have very targeted content

in social media, and general posts have proved to be not enough to improve these kinds of products brand awareness. Informative blog articles, illustrative infographics, and engaging videos to share on the social media channels were noted as a possibility to improve this.

“We need exclusivity in social media – web pages are for regular basic information. The content in social media need to be more specific and have a certain goal. Also, it should be more fun.”

- *Marketing Manager, France.*

The use of well-known customer companies as a reference story was one thing that was highlighted by the sales personnel as a major need when wanting to build brand awareness in this field of business. The customers want to trust the company and positive customer stories where there is some issue explained and then the resolution to their problem is displayed is concerned to be very effective to build the brand awareness. All the marketing personnel also pointed out the need for more reference stories in the future.

6 Discussion and conclusions

In conclusion, this master's thesis has delved into the strategic significance of leveraging social media marketing to enhance brand awareness within the context of an international industrial B2B company. The research aimed to uncover the effectiveness of social media platforms as tools for brand promotion and the unique challenges and opportunities they present in the B2B sphere. As businesses increasingly navigate the complexities of a globalized marketplace, the findings of this thesis provide valuable insights for managers, marketers, and decision-makers in industrial B2B companies.

The recommendations derived from this research offer actionable steps for optimizing social media marketing initiatives to not only build brand awareness but also to foster meaningful liaisons with the brand and the existing and potential customers. This research contributes to the existing research gap in the field of social media marketing within the industrial B2B context, providing a foundation for future studies and offering practical implications for industry practitioners. As social media continues to evolve, its role in shaping B2B brand narratives and fostering B2B relationships is likely to become even more pronounced. The study successfully achieved its objectives by uncovering strategies for leveraging social media in cultivating brand awareness within B2B contexts. Additionally, it also revealed on both the advantages and obstacles associated with employing social media for brand awareness in B2B markets.

Firstly, it is necessary to review the sub-questions to provide answers to the main research question chosen for this research.

What is the role and position of brand awareness in B2B industrial markets?

Brand awareness was found out to have a crucial role in B2B markets, since in the field of very high advanced and technological products where there are not much more room left for growing the differentiation between brands with product differentiation, the role of branding becomes more important. It allows the companies to differentiate from the competitors, demand higher price (premium brand) and offers prominent competitive edge into sales negotiations and supports the salespeople. The brand awareness was found out to have a role as a “guiding star” for the potential customers – recognition of the brand aims at internalize the

information when seeing ads or when a salesperson takes a contact to a potential lead, recalling the brand aims the potential customers to know there to search the information online for example when they know the company and its offering a bit more in depth, and being top-of-mind offers direct competitive edge between competitors and the company. In the core, it eases the salespeople work and generates leads. Strong brand was associated to reduced competition.

These findings were supported by earlier literature, which alleviated that brand awareness aids the B2B customers understand the product or service (Aaker 1991), that consumers are aware of the "needs" that the business hopes to fulfil with these products (Keller 2020, 108), increases likelihood of making a purchase of a good or service (Foroudi et al. 2014) increases the credibility of a brand (Rehman, Anees-ur- 2018) 307) builds the trust towards a brand (Erdem and Swait, 2004; Theurer et al., 2016; Wang and Yang, 2010). lowers the personal risk and information cost of industrial buyers, thereby improving a B2B supplier's market performance (Homburg et al., 2010) and allows greater readiness to pay a premium price (Bendixen et al., 2004). In B2B branding, managers can make the decision-making process of a customer simpler by strengthening brand awareness via communication to determine that their brands are taken into consideration by buyers (Keller 2020, 74; Davis et al., 2008).

What are the key factors in social media marketing strategy for brand awareness creation?

The key factors on social media marketing strategy for brand awareness in B2B should focus on building differentiation, trust, cohesion, and engagement. Interesting and versatile brand content became highlighted in the study, since both the earlier literature and the empirical findings of this research noted that the key element in the social media marketing for brand awareness is simply the content, which is leveraged by the company or the users. This allows promoting and marketing the brand in the social media (Alam & Khan, 2019) because disseminating branded content offers consumers shareable material, thereby boosting the establishment of brand awareness (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). In addition, this creates eWOM which itself promotes the brand awareness even further in the social media (Eelen et al. 2017).

In addition, focus on the content can establish trust and enhance the customer relationships with the B2B brand, and the so-called "valuable" content allows the customer to improve their knowledge of the brand when drawing potential customers and impacting their attitudes

and purchasing objectives without the need for them to even use the product (Silbert 2021). The content can build their awareness of the product and ease the complex B2B buying journey towards the decision of the brand. When the brand is already existing and defined, the focus in the social media should be in the repetition and regularity of the brand message in the social media marketing strategy.

It was noted that in social media marketing, it allows the B2B brands to have a more “friendlier” approach to communication, which allows more easier approachable style to the communication between customers. This means that companies need to focus to have a different tone-of-voice than in other marketing channels for example. They can have a more relaxed and friendlier tone-of-voice, without being unprofessional. In this sense, the local content and more authentic content was considered as a key factor in social media marketing strategy. As noted in the earlier literature, in B2B branding on social media, the approach revolves around persuading groups rather than individuals, which requires an authentic style (Leake et al. 2012, 118). Focus on long-term approach in brand awareness building is a key element based on this research. In addition, B2B firms need to identify social media's contribution to strategic and marketing objectives to utilize it efficiently for brand awareness building. They need to evaluate performance and return on investment, integrate social media into all relevant organizational departments and activities, and engage users in line with these key components. (Cawsey & Rowley 2016)

What is the role of social media marketing strategy in brand awareness creation?

As Davis found already in 2010, B2B enterprises can benefit from social media networks by communicating and inserting brand elements in there to build customer trust and raise brand awareness. Even though its debated role in the past in B2B marketing literature, in this study, social media was proven to be one of the most valuable marketing tools in increasing brand awareness these days and based on the empirical research even the most valuable. Social media can help B2B enterprises in reaching out to customers, playing a pivotal role in shaping attitudes towards brand and influencing purchase intentions. (Hien & Nhu 2022) Positive interactions with a brand on social media significantly enhance customer satisfaction (Martín-Consuegra et al., 2019) thereby fostering positive brand awareness.

In the empirical study social media was considered as the main channel to promote brand for the customers, and it is supported by other means such as websites and more traditional marketing actions in the case company. Social media increases brand visibility with offering global reach and allowing engagement with potential customers or partners, thus it is considered ideal for brand awareness creation. Because social media channels allow brands to gain real-time insights and feedback from their audience and the market, it also has a role for aiding the company to improve their offerings and strategies, which can improve the brand value promoted to consumers. When making alterations without compromising the brand's essence and taking the consumer's feedback into consideration, it can foster a sense of belonging among consumers when they perceive their input as essential in shaping the brand's evolution. (Geurin & Burch, 2017). Consumers receive, interpret, and potentially share or act on these messages, forming a dynamic interaction loop, and marketer's role is to monitor actions, respond to comments, keeping up a dialogue for continuous feedback. (Swani, Brown and Milne 2014, 874) This is beneficial when you want to develop your brand and brand awareness further, since effective communication furthers customers' learning processes and enriches their understanding of a product or brand (Sultan and Wong, 2014).

The role of social media in brand awareness was highlighted also in the first steps of brand awareness pyramid, since it was considered to have a pivotal role as a “door opener”, as a platform that introduces the brand also to consumers that have never heard of the brand. It also has a role in deepening the brand recall of the consumers with different strategies to bring the brand into their memory in different situations. Social media was also seen as a tool to build the brand awareness with a more human touch, since it allows the two-way communication with the consumers and customers. It allows the brand to have more emotional and more approachable side in B2B marketing. This was noted in the empirical survey to be crucial, since the decision-makers, potential customers and content consumers are all human who are needed to be attracted with the brand means in social media.

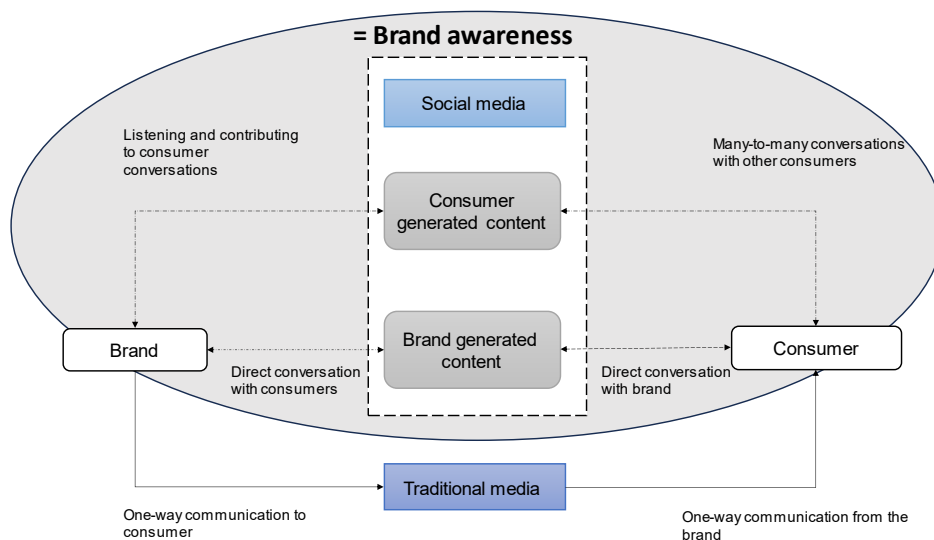
In conjunction with the strategic creation and adaptation of content, social media has the role to target the audience more efficiently and effectively. With the right strategies such as sponsored posts, hashtags, and engagement initiatives, the possibility to extend the connection to target groups and thereby promote relationships, trust, and ultimately loyalty in turn

promotes brand awareness. Thus, social media proves to have a multifaceted role in the brand awareness building for an industrial B2B company like the case company.

The one-way communication model has been replaced by the two-way interaction enabled by social media which allows diverse forms of content creation and sharing among various stakeholders (Andersson & Wikström 2017) the possibilities to brand awareness creations have multiplied, since besides the regular word-of-mouth the electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has become beside it through social media marketing (Eelen et al. 2017). The impressions created by the content shared in social media will promote peer-to-peer interactions that affect brand awareness and brand image (Lim et al. 2020).

The main role could be identified as it enables the execution of the parts necessary to increase brand awareness in one space with wide reach: establishing brand awareness involves enhancing brand familiarity through repeated exposure (for brand recognition) and establishing robust connections with the relevant product category or associated purchase/consumption cues (for brand recall) (Keller, 2020, 76). Social media offers a comprehensive and international platform as well as instruments for increasing brand awareness in business-to-business setting (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Barreda et al., 2015; Momany & Alshboul 2016; Phua et al. 2017). In the revised framework below, it is demonstrated how the social media communication builds this “space” for the brand awareness to grow.

Figure 9. Revised model for social media communication (from Heggde & Shaneish 2023) in B2B brand awareness context



Because in the evolving landscape where traditional "push" advertising loses relevance with customers, in B2B and in B2C, companies need to extend their efforts beyond conventional marketing structures to genuinely engage their audience (French et al., 2011) and raise the brand awareness, the role of social media marketing becomes more crucial (e.g., Virtanen et al. 2017 ; (Davis et al., 2014; Gao & Feng, 2016) Through social media channels, brands can also establish a distinct voice, enhancing their approachability and creating a more engaging experience for consumers (Bacik et al., 2018). and B2B companies can employ social media to illustrate their products and showcase the assembly and usage of different products with educational content (Andersson & Wikström 2017) and this way build their thought-leadership status and foster their brand awareness.

What are the main benefits and challenges when utilizing social media as a marketing strategy to build B2B brand awareness?

The main benefits according to the empirical study were that the social media is agile to use. Compared to more traditional marketing channels, social media can be used quickly if needed and it allows more quicker reactions for marketing purposes in brand awareness. In addition, the findings of empirical survey supported the supposition that social media offers a proper tool for easy targeting and reaching the desired target audiences, which makes the communication more effective than in other more traditional channels, where the brand messages cannot be targeted as well. This way social media networks benefit in shaping attitudes towards marketing strategies and influencing purchase intentions (Hien & Nhu 2022) and the positive interactions with a brand on social media significantly enhance customer satisfaction and purchasing desires (Martín-Consuegra et al., 2019) which is beneficial for brand awareness. The main benefit still can be considered in B2B that different social media platforms companies can broaden their network and gain new followers and customers (Andersson & Wikström 2017) which naturally furthers the brand awareness.

One of the disadvantages of social media marketing found in this research for B2B companies is that they may not be received well on social media (Fournier & Avery 2011; Virtanen et al. 2017) and a desired viral spread is not always working for the brand when a disappointed customer is spreading a word of their bad experience with the brand (Killian & McManus, 2015; Virtanen et al. 2017). Yet it is more common that the customers share their

positive experiences and increase positive word-of-mouth (Virtanen et al. 2017; Kimmel & Kitchen 2014).

The challenges are involved mainly within the negative brand image, which was a challenge for the case company as well with brand awareness building in social media. There are risks that the marketing message is not in line with the company's other operations, like sales, and then the mixed signals can decrease the customers trust towards the company and this way create negative brand awareness. Also, the two-way communication social media is allowing is considered challenging, since there anyone can "say anything" and this is risky area for B2B companies. Inappropriate personal use of social media that conflicts with company values poses a risk, because of immediacy of social media (Bernard 2012, 958).

The challenge for B2B marketers is to represent their products authentically while managing consumer-generated content and opinion-sharing. (Habibi, Hamilton, Valos & Callaghan 2015) The empirical survey proved that the lack of control with the consumer and employee generated messages in social media is a challenge, which has been noted in earlier literature also (e.g., Keller 2009) This requires a particular emphasis on caution and thorough education of company personnel using social media. (Bernard 2012, 958) In the empirical research the control over brand messages was also seen as a positive thing, since in social media it allows a good control over the brand awareness marketing messages created by the company because the company does not depend on 3rd party in the content creation. This also creates agility to its use.

Even though the social media marketing was found cost-efficient marketing strategy for brand awareness building in this research, the lack of time and resources was one challenge for the case company's marketing department. Yet in the social media context, it was noted that the resources are very limited, even in this type of large multinational industrial company, which creates some challenges into the brand awareness building process of a company. Viewing social media adoption as cost-free from the management point of view is a misconception: it requires a significant time and effort from employees to comprehend customer businesses and build social media marketing to reach set goals (Andersson & Wikström 2017) Understanding the required resources and employing them efficiently are crucial for success (Bodnar and Cohen, 2012).

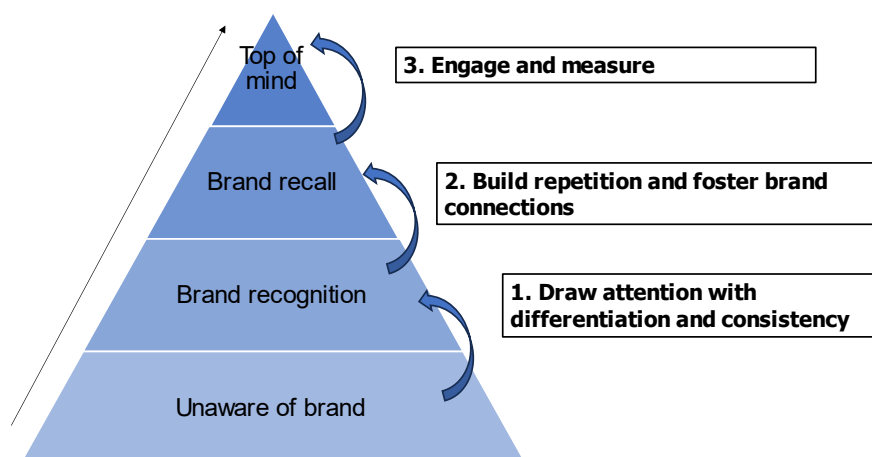
The fastness and vast amount of content were challenges in the intended social media use since the challenge was considered in standing out with the content. The coherent guidelines in the social media use to be able to use it beneficially for brand awareness building is required, and its absent can pose a challenge for the B2B companies brand awareness. This involves the use of tone-of-voice used in social media messages. since inappropriate personal use of social media that conflicts with company values poses a risk for negative brand awareness (Bernard 2012, 958).

Based on the answers on the sub-questions, the main research question can be answered.

How to build social media marketing strategy to enhance brand awareness in the industrial B2B markets?

The main research question of this study was to explicate that how could B2B companies utilize social media marketing strategy to enhance brand awareness in the industrial B2B markets. The main question of the study was answered based on the theoretical part and empirical findings. Within B2B contexts, social media serves as a complement to, rather than a replacement for, face-to-face interaction. It functions as a tool to facilitate and fortify personal relationships (Hollebeek, 2017). Existing research indicates that this facilitative role can be achieved through the improvement of brand awareness and the development of brand associations (Cawsey and Rowley, 2016; Michaelidou et al., 2011). This should be the main concentration in the brand awareness building process in B2B. Based on the theoretical and empirical research conducted in this study, a framework for social media marketing strategy to enhance brand awareness is suggested as below.

Figure 10. A suggested framework for B2B social media marketing strategy to enhance brand awareness.



The brand awareness itself conducts from three parts, and the social media marketing strategy can be separated into three different steps.

The first step of brand awareness building can be considered as introducing the brand for as many as possible, and for the right target group who may be unfamiliar with the brand previously. This involves choosing the right social media channels to reach the right audience, grow consistency with the use of brand visuals (brand logo, taglines, colors and visuals in the content) and exploiting paid marketing to enhance the visibility. The right channels should be chosen based on the target audiences, and as this study proved, LinkedIn can be considered as the main and most used B2B social media channel. Instagram and Facebook are yet also considerable platforms to use to extend the brand awareness and benefit from multi-channel social media marketing strategy in securing visibility on the initial page of organic search outcomes (Keinänen et al. 2020) Instagram offers channel for brand awareness building with especially visual content (Virtanen et al. 2017). The use of X platform (Ex Twitter) was somehow reduced in the case company's social media utilization due to its contradictory renovations. Yet it can be good channel to build e-WOM (Rudat, Buder & Hesse 2014), and thus brand awareness with tweets (Kumar & Mirchandani, 2012; Rapp et al., 2013) and via re-tweeting (Rudat et al., 2014). Youtube should be used for producing specific videos to instruct and guide customers and use specialized and knowledgeable people of the organization in the videos to push image as competence and reliability to B2B customers (Andersson & Wikström 2017).

Developing a content calendar to ensure a consistent and regular presence on chosen social media platforms grows the brand recognition when having a regular existence in the social media. Crafting informative, compelling material tailored to meet the needs and interests of potential customers within that specific segment. Effective use of social media for brand awareness building requires also quality content that is representing the brand, its special features and its offerings in an appealing and interesting way to intrigue the customers, which follows researchers' previous findings that marketing messages should be well-created and content should be high in quality (Barreda et al. 2015; Godey et al. 2016; Basri & Siam 2017). This also supports the consistency, when the brand features such as logos, colours, and visuals are used in the content to leverage the brand. The use of visuals also gives consumers a better view of the brand they are following. (Bacik et al. 2018) Sharing branded content offers consumers shareable material and this way fosters further the establishment of brand awareness (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). By aiming with some content to attain virality (Colicev et al., 2018) with some fun or interesting content, there exists the potential for broad brand awareness.

In the first part of social media marketing strategy building, differentiation and being memorable is also important in social media (Aaker 1991, 72-76). This is why it is necessary for the B2B companies to include competitor analysis to conduct a thorough analysis of competitors with strong brand awareness. This way they can identify strategies they employ on social media and learn from their successes and differentiate the company's approach by highlighting unique selling propositions and strengths. Social search-engine optimization (SEO) for the social media pages is also something that the case company's marketing managers considered important factor when building brand recognition in social media. Using hashtags, optimizing the social media pages and captions eases the accessibility to the social media pages from the users that are searching for the products or services that are wanted to promote with the brand. This was not widely adopted yet in earlier literature, but this could benefit the brand awareness building process first step's in B2B social media.

In the second step the goal of the strategy is growing the deeper knowledge of the brand with growing the recall by repetition. In this part of the brand awareness creation the focus in social media marketing strategy should be in repetition and creating cues to associated purchase or consumption situation and connections with the relevant product category. In this step, the strategy should involve building the brand consciously and with clear

objectives. The use of emotional and authentic content builds relationships and emotional connection with the brand. Using purposeful, creative, and interesting content, such as reference cases to build trust and offering content to provide information and usage scenarios for the products is important for growing the recall with the brand.

Paid social media marketing campaigns are relevant to achieve more visibility in social media platforms since the organic visibility can be poor. Efficiency of paid marketing on social media can be enhanced by targeting, optimization and finding the best methods considering the company's target audience. Monitoring analytics to refine the timing and frequency of postings for maximum impact in this step is one part of the social media marketing strategy. Using the insights to refine strategies, optimize content, and adapt approaches for better engagement and brand awareness.

In the last step of the social media marketing strategy, the focus is targeting to the top-of-mind brand awareness, where the goal is to be first in the mind of potential consumers. For optimal engagement, social media posts ought to be customized to suit the current requirements of the customer, their affiliation with the company and align with the unique features of the specific platform being utilized. (Killian & McManus 2015).

Engaging consumers to share branded content is a key for improved organic visibility. Leveraging social media as an interactive platform offers a means to augment brand awareness. By prompting consumers to share branded content, enabling them to introduce the brand within their social networks, organic enhancement of brand awareness becomes even more attainable. Actively engage with the audience by responding to inquiries, comments, and feedback promptly. Initiate discussions, share valuable insights, and participate in industry-related conversations to increase visibility and establish thought leadership (Agnihotri et al., 2017; Drummond et al., 2020; Itani et al., 2020; Ogilvie et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2016).

Moreover, employee advocacy and engaging employees to be active in the social media and share the brand content is an excellent strategy for the company to follow to gain more visibility for their content with the same amount of investments in the content production. This also creates the electronic word-of-mouth, which in turn is beneficial for brand awareness (Barreda et al. 2015; Eelen et al. 2017; Duffy, 2020; Marder et al. 2022). Empowering employees to participate in social media advocacy programs to share brand content, expertise, and achievements will build the brand's reach and credibility (Sagar 2022; Lamberton and

Stephen 2016) since content that is shared by employees receives much more engagement than content shared by brand channels (Sarah 2022). Utilizing the influence that exists in your employees' personal and social networks presents an organic way to enhance the brand awareness (Sagar 2022).

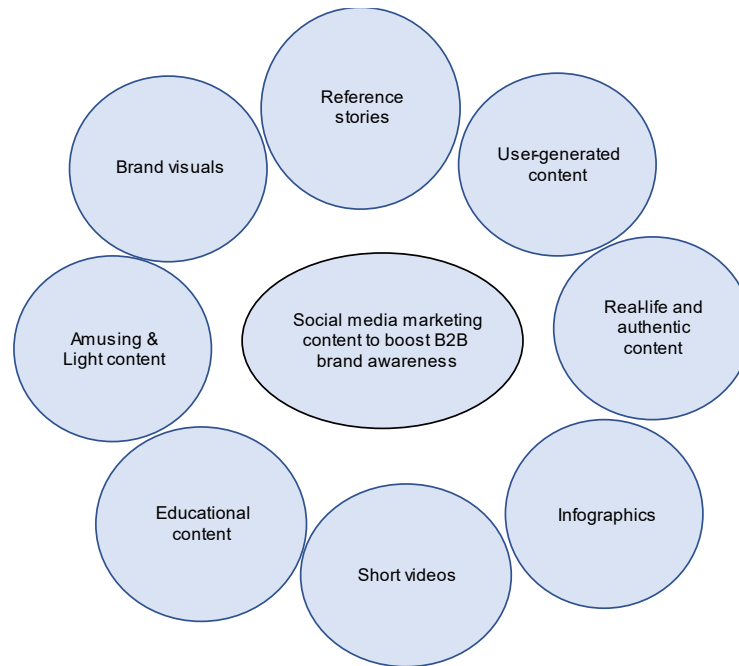
B2B companies could benefit from collaborations or partnerships with influencers, industry experts, or complementary businesses in the targeted product segment or area where they want to grow their brand. Collaborations help in sharing the content among like-minded audiences, which aids grow brand awareness among potential customers (Geurin & Burch 2017). B2B influencer marketing can be a powerful strategy to build brand awareness, since it can act as a strategic communication method wherein a company utilizes the perceived expertise of internal or external opinion leaders (Mero, Vanninen, & Keränen 2023). This can help the companies to create and distribute pertinent, valuable content across various channels to elevate brand awareness among their intended consumer base as influencers consistently provide their followers with engaging and informative content (Lou & Yan 2019). Since content generated by influencers is often perceived to possess a more natural, genuine, and direct connection with potential consumers compared to advertisements created directly by brands (Talavera 2015) it can easily expand brand's reach and credibility within the target market.

Moreover, social media can be leveraged to cultivate a brand community and expand the follower base on the brand page. Notably, research indicates that popular brands tend to attract more followers on social media compared to less well-known ones (Virtanen et al., 2017). Consequently, initiatives aimed at gaining followers and fostering a brand community can contribute to heightened brand awareness and increased exposure (Basri & Siam, 2017). A strategic approach to augmenting followers involves collaborating with another brand that shares similarities but reaches a broader or distinct audience, engaging in co-branding activities on social media.

When it comes to content strategy, it has a central role in the brand awareness building in general in social media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Huotari et al. 2015; Cawsey & Rowley 2016). The content should have a mix of the brand content (Holliman & Rowley (2015; Silbert & Markose 2021) and when wanting to promote specific products or product segments, there should be focused to generate customized content that showcases the company's proficiency and offerings within the product segment. In the figure below, the main content

formats that were found the most important for B2B brand awareness building in social media are represented.

Figure 11. Social media content formats for B2B brand awareness building.



User-generated branding (UGB) is one area where the B2B companies could do a cost-efficient marketing strategy in social media. Through the utilization of user-generated content, the company can amplify the development of branded content generated by users, consequently augmenting brand awareness (Geurin & Burch, 2017). This can be done by engaging consumers or brand advocates to generate and publish content about products or services across their personal social media profiles or the brand's online platforms. (Geurin & Burch 2017) For example, satisfied customers posting their experiences of the company would be an excellent way to boost awareness in social media.

Leveraging social media for the purpose of enhancing brand awareness can be approached through various methods (Cawsey & Rowley 2016), allowing for seamless testing to identify the most effective strategies tailored to the specific company and brand. In essence, the study concludes that a well-executed social media marketing strategy is an indispensable tool for international industrial B2B companies seeking to enhance brand awareness. By aligning digital efforts with overarching business objectives and staying attuned to the dynamic landscape of social media, organizations can position themselves competitively and proactively engage with their target audience on a global scale (Hien & Nhu 2022). Based on the

empirical findings, it can be said that social media has been proven to be an essential tool for the case company in their brand awareness building process and it has been used in multiple ways along the way.

6.1 Theoretical implications

The primary aim of this study was to contribute insights into how to use social media marketing strategies for brand awareness, and to find key attributes, the role and challenges and benefits of it, specifically within the industrial B2B marketing landscape. The theoretical implications suggests that social media marketing for brand awareness requires a strategy (e.g., Homburg et al., 2010; Erdogmus & Cicek 2014; Cawsey & Rowley 2016; Hien & Nhu 2022). The study contributed also to insights to the challenges that companies in large corporations in B2B can face when it comes to social media marketing, and how these could influence on their social media usage in brand awareness building.

The empirical research showed that the product related social media brand awareness strategies should be integrated into broader sales and marketing strategies, due to a direct link between sales and marketing actions (Heggde & Shaneish 2018, 11; Ashley & Tuten, 2015), even though the previous literature shows that B2B marketers usually are more prone to focus on promoting their corporate brands versus their product brands (Swani et al. 2014). Essentially, social media can be an effective channel to enhance brand awareness with potential customers or those seeking information about certain product categories (Andersson & Wikström 2017). Nevertheless, the empirical study reaffirms the previous literature that social media marketing practises have a valuable and even crucial role for increasing brand awareness in B2B when employed strategically and alongside other social media marketing activities (e.g. Aaker 2010; Basri & Siam, 2017; Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Barreda et al., 2015; Momany & Alshboul 2016;, and Phua et al. 2017).

Looking the theoretical implications from the research gap viewpoint, this study met its goals by addressing a gap in previous literature, which mainly concentrates on social media marketing and brand awareness in B2C context (Kumar & Mirchandani, 2012; Rapp, Beitel-spacher, Grewal, & Hughes, 2013; Taylor, Lewin, & Strutton, 2011; Wiersema, 2013). In addition, it offers support to earlier research which focuses on the role of brand awareness in B2B for certain purpose and the importance of the brand awareness in B2B market, rather

than examining how the social media marketing strategies could be utilized to build it. It goes into the specific benefits and challenges that companies in industrial B2B encounter in their social media marketing strategies and brand awareness building, an area which does not have direct previous literature. In addition, the outcomes of the study are also supporting the existing literature that has acknowledged that social media can be used to improve brand awareness in general but offers a more detailed theoretical implication from the B2B point of view.

6.2 Managerial implications

Looking through management lens, managerial insights highlight crucial areas for maintaining consistency, strategy and monitoring for improvement within a social media marketing for brand awareness operations.

Firstly, social media marketing strategy for brand awareness building was lacking in the product brand building, and additionally on country level. Due to the multilayer nature of the company's marketing actions (global, region and country) it would be necessary to combine the global, region and country level planning to have coherent brand awareness building strategies in social media. This way the company could benefit the global content and local content to have a combined goal, and this would reduce the unnecessary work from the countries. From the region level it would be suitable to have a strategy for the upcoming year for different product categories brand building in social media, and this could be leveraged by the countries and then countries could add their own local brand awareness strategies and content into it. It is also essential that from the company level there comes clear guidelines for suitable tone-of-voice and brand image for social media use. This way the brand awareness can be built efficiently, since it becomes an issue if every country has their own view of the product brands, and they would promote them as they see fit – this can at its worst only make harm for the brand and buyers trust towards the company if the same product brand is marketed in different countries different ways.

Especially when product brand awareness building, it should be clear to have a comprehensive strategy linked with the strategic planning for social media utilization. The brand awareness building should be integrated into overall social media marketing and branding strategy. This should include setting clear objectives, defining target audiences, and outlining key

performance indicators (KPIs) to measure success. Monitoring and actively listening across social platforms is a key part of successful social media marketing strategy for brand awareness building. Because product brand awareness building requires a strong company brand behind it, it is necessary that the company mixes the company and product related brand awareness content in social media. If the company is focusing only on one product segment content in their marketing, and this way positions itself without noticing as a seller of just these products, it is difficult for the countries to build the brand awareness among the potential customers as a company that is a reliable and quality seller of the desired product category since the buyers are then not aware of the specific product category. A strong brand image that potential buyers have about the company requires investment and focus on all the product lines that want to be presented and grown the market share. Brand awareness has direct links with the market share, which is a necessary factor to realize in the managerial level of the company.

A lack of resources was found to be a major challenge in the case company. Yet as the study found out, social media is a very cost-effective way to improve brand awareness. Through investing in planning and resource optimization, it could save time from the ad hoc- type of actions when it comes to brand awareness building. Streamlining resource allocation by identifying and focusing efforts on different social media platforms that align with the target market and offer the most significant potential for brand visibility. Each social media channel should be assessed in the terms of what is the goal for the usage. Since the company has also global and country level accounts in different social media platforms, it is relevant to audit the use of these channels. The local channels allow a local content and a local touch to the brand, which can be considerate necessary in terms of brand awareness building since the target customers preferences and culture have differences. The challenge here is also that this requires extra resources from the countries to upkeep these channels – pure existing of a local channel is not merely enough to build brand awareness.

As the literature of this study proves, use of marketing social media marketing for brand awareness requires a switch to changing the aim of the marketing process from one-way selling to two-way communication with the target audience, listening and helping. It could also be seen that the use of social media marketing tools enables marketers to have direct conversation with the audience and allows the B2B brand to become more familiar and have a personal touch with the audience to build the brand awareness and have also an emotional

appeal to decision makers. In addition, brand awareness requires a long-time effort, which means that if it is done only then and there without systematic approach, it can lead to a situation where the efforts are not efficient as they could be.

As mentioned, due to complex and multilayered business operations in B2B, as the case company has, the usage of social media marketing for brand promotion requires cooperation inside the company, to have the targets of the sales and the targets of the marketing in line with each other and to avoid any negative brand awareness. Providing trainings and resources to the team responsible for social media management is a key for ensuring the implementation of these suggested strategies in a company. The external partners should be used in situation where the company's inner resources are not enough, and these should be evaluated in co-operative way when building the strategies for different business operative levels. It should be remembered that even when some tasks are targeted to the countries, the countries could benefit from direct guidelines of the proportions from a budget that should be used in marketing, to ensure coherent and consistent marketing in general, and moreover in this case social media marketing for brand awareness building.

This study found out that the use of social media marketing tools can help brand awareness building in all the stages of the awareness pyramid by Aaker (1991, 63) by using different strategies for different stages. In this study it was noted that it is necessary to employ social media as a tool for brand awareness building for potential customers as well as existing ones. The targeting of the utilized strategies requires differentiation– which actions are meant for existing customers to improve the brand recall and to improve it to top-of-mind awareness and which for potential customer not aware of the brand yet to improve brand recognition. In this study it was found out that even among existing customers the brand awareness is important and social media can be a powerful tool to build it.

Finally, from the managerial point of view the ways of improving the social media marketing strategy can be condensed into following:

- Lack of social media marketing strategy > As a global player the company could concentrate more on having clear strategies to social media marketing in all the different operational and business area levels. At this moment there is unnecessary work being done in country and region levels due to unclear instructions and strategical objectives. Also, this combines the need for social media marketing budgeting and conducting an audit for example to assess

the current use of resources in social media campaigns. In addition, the use of external marketing agencies to help with the content fabrication to some extent is a recommended action to consider reaching the desired level of content in the social media.

- Internal cooperation > The brand should, for example, do more co-operation in terms of operational levels. Currently the different operational segments and corporation structure seem to be too siloed, which results in with ineffective and inconsistent branding and social media marketing strategies. With utilizing the know-how of company's different operations and their experience, this can create a successful social media brand awareness strategy. The objective to increase the product line brand awareness seems to be regional target, which requires regional cooperation and a common strategy and concentration into the issue and its problem areas. Yet this requires clear brand promises and brand values in the background, which also requires cooperation with the global marketing department.

Implementing these managerial implications can help the company leverage social media more strategically, effectively increasing brand awareness in the desired product segment and closing the gap with larger competitors.

6.3 Limitations and suggestions for further research

This study was performed in one large industrial company and the results are gathered from internal employees' answers. The outcomes of the study are partly supporting the researcher's assumptions of the phenomenon around the brand awareness building in SM. The results' assumption stems from continuous observations made over almost two years within the company. The potential customers were not interviewed or communicated in this study due to timeframe of this study. This could have given more profound information on the brand awareness issues and this could be suggested to do in further research. The sample size in this study can be considered as good, since in total 11 marketing, sales, and brand representatives were interviewed. The respondent profiles are representing the comprehensive sampling of the case company's employees, who are relevant to this research. Most of the respondents were from marketing department, due to the nature of the research questions and the goal of this study. In addition, in the case company there are only limited number of for example brand and product line managers that could have been interviewed, which limited the number of brand and product line manager interviews. However, the respondent

profile could have been added more sales personnel since people with different job positions have a different point of the view to answer to the interview questions. The results could have been more comprehensive and applicable to generalize if the study would have included multiple similar industrial companies. It is anyhow relevant to note that the study was focusing directly to investigate the issue in large industrial companies, which is why it would have not been relevant to involve other sized or other natured companies. Moreover, this would be excellent research are to investigate whether there are differences between large or small and medium sized businesses in this social media usage in brand awareness context. In addition, it could be interesting to focus on differences between for example different industries.

Limitations of this study needs to be addressed, since it should be noted that this study was concluded for one industrial case company. In the branding context, in the study the focus is on existing brand and brand image, which makes the focus of brand awareness building in this study to the businesses where the brand has already been existing and can delimit the application of the findings to new businesses who build their brand from the beginning. The findings can be considered relevant for equal industrial B2B companies to utilize directly. Anyhow wide generalizations of the topic of B2B social media marketing for brand awareness building cannot be made directly, since the empirical results are based on limited sample size: only one company and its internal employees. So, the findings are not directly applicable for all B2B companies, yet they give some guidelines and starting point for further investigation, and they do fill the existing research gap on this marketing issues. Yet, the comprehensive theoretical implications combined with the empirical ones do give a supposition that the findings can be applicable on other similar companies within the similar industry. In this sense, it should be also accepted that due to the nature of qualitative research, absolute truth, which can be generalized to wide sense is never existing (Puusa et al. 2020).

Also, the usage of interview as a data collecting method poses some limitations for the research as a nature of the interview. In an interview situation, trust is one effective factor (Puusa et al. 2020), and it can influence the answers of the interviewee's whether they consider the interviewer trustworthy or not. and which they consider proper to say or not. In addition, there are multiple biases that can affect an interview situation, for example how the answers are interpreted and how reactive additional questions the interviewer is posing for different interviewees. All the answers are interpreted via the interviewer's own chosen

analysis method and choice of thematization, which effects on the final outcomes of the research. Even though this was tried to avoid in this study, it is relevant to observe these questions in the limitations. Also, all the answers of the data

Because of the big research gap in existing literature in B2B brand awareness and social media marketing strategies, creates it multiple possibilities to further research on this area. The previous researchers in B2B context have been interested mainly on the position of social media in B2B marketing, or how to build a social media marketing strategy for a B2B company in general. More profound research of B2B social media use in the context of branding should be investigated in the future research to fulfil the existing research gap. Given this study focuses on the use of social media marketing for creating brand awareness in B2B, future researchers could examine how social media marketing could be used for fostering B2B brand engagement for the company long-term. In addition, future research could be done to research the brand awareness in wide sampling of different B2B companies and the effect of social media directly to it. Also, the link between social media and how social media could affect directly to the buying decision of B2B industrial buyers could be further investigated in future research.

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Appendix 1. Interview questions

Brand awareness

- 1) How important do you think is it to have a strong brand for B2B company?
- 2) What advantages do you associate with having widespread brand awareness in B2B?
- 3) Do you think the decision-makers of your potential customers have heard of your brand and can recognize it?
- 4) Do you think decision-makers in potential customer firms recall your brand and associate it with your product category?
- 5) Do you think your brand is often at the top of the minds of the decision-makers in potential customer firms when they think of your product category?
- 6) How would you evaluate the current level of your brand awareness in target markets in this product category, and what challenges do you face in terms of brand awareness?

Social media marketing strategy

- 7) Which social media channels do you use for brand communication, and do you consider them sufficient? Why/Why not?
- 8) In your experience, what types of content (e.g., articles, videos, infographics) have proven most successful in enhancing brand awareness within industrial B2B markets through social media?
- 9) Do you have a specific social media marketing strategy for brand awareness building? Do you have it for your product category?

10) In which ways do you raise brand awareness and brand values, (make your brand recognizable) amongst your target customers in the social media? (Content, influencers, engagement, page optimization etc.) Which ways do you raise it for your product category?

11) How would you improve the current utilization of social media for increasing your brand awareness in the product category?

Role and position of Social Media Marketing

12) What are the key advantages and disadvantages social media has presented as a channel to increase B2B brand awareness compared to other channels?

13) What do you think is the role of social media marketing for brand awareness creation in B2B landscape?

14) What challenges or obstacles have you encountered in implementing social media marketing for brand awareness creation?

Appendice 2. Thematization of the empirical data for the analysis

Main research question	Sub-research question	Interview question	Theme
“How to build social media marketing strategy to enhance brand awareness in the industrial B2B markets?”	– “What is the role and position of brand awareness in B2B landscape?”	How important do you think is it to have a strong brand for B2B company and in your business area?	Brand awareness
		What advantages do you associate with having widespread brand awareness in B2B?	Brand awareness
		Do you think the decision-makers of your potential customers have heard of your brand and can recognize it?	Brand awareness
		Do you think decision-makers in potential customer firms recall your brand and associate it with your product category?	Brand awareness
		Do you think your brand is often at the top of the minds of the decision-makers in potential customer firms when they think of your product category?	Brand awareness
		How would you evaluate the current level of your brand awareness in target markets in this product category, and what challenges do you face in terms of brand awareness?	Brand awareness
	“What are the key factors in social media marketing strategy for brand awareness creation in the industrial B2B sector?”	Which social media channels do you use for brand communication? Do you consider them sufficient?	Social media
		In your experience, what types of content (e.g., articles, videos, infographics) do you consider most successful in enhancing brand awareness within industrial B2B markets through social media?	Social media
		In which ways do you raise brand awareness and brand values, (make your brand recognizable) amongst your target customers in the social media? (Content, influencers, engagement, page optimization etc.) Which ways do you raise it for the product category?	Social media
		How would you improve the current utilization of social media for increasing your brand awareness in the product category?	Challenges & Obstacles
	“What is the role of social media marketing strategy in brand awareness creation in B2B landscape?”	Do you have a specific social media strategy for brand awareness building and do you have it for the product category? What is its role?	Benefits & Role
		What do you think is the role of social media marketing for brand awareness creation in B2B landscape?	Benefits & Role
	“What are the main benefits and challenges when utilizing social media as a marketing strategy to build B2B brand awareness?”	What are the key advantages and disadvantages social media has presented as a channel to increase B2B brand awareness compared to other channels?	Benefits & Role
		What challenges or obstacles have you encountered in implementing social media marketing for brand awareness creation?	Challenges & Obstacles

Appendice 3. Saturation of the empirical data addressed by answers to interview questions.

Interview question	Saturation point (point after no new information raises) from the whole sample group (11)
1) How important do you think is it to have a strong brand for B2B company?	5
2) What advantages do you associate with having widespread brand awareness in B2B?	7
3) Do you think the decision-makers of your potential customers have heard of your brand and can recognize it?	3
4) Do you think decision-makers in potential customer firms recall your brand and associate it with your product category?	4
5) Do you think your brand is often at the top of the minds of the decision-makers in potential customer firms when they think of your product category?	5
6) How would you evaluate the current level of your brand awareness in target markets in this product category, and what challenges do you face in terms of brand awareness?	6
7) Which social media channels do you use for brand communication, and do you consider them sufficient? Why/Why not?	4
8) In your experience, what types of content (e.g., articles, videos, infographics) have proven most successful in enhancing brand awareness within industrial B2B markets through social media?	6
9) Do you have a specific social media marketing strategy for brand awareness building? Do you have it for your product category?	4
10) In which ways do you raise brand awareness and brand values, (make your brand recognizable) amongst your target customers in the social media? (Content, influencers, engagement, page optimization etc.) Which ways do you raise it for your product category?	7
11) How would you improve the current utilization of social media for increasing your brand awareness in the product category?	10
12) What are the key advantages and disadvantages social media has presented as a channel to increase B2B brand awareness compared to other channels?	9
13) What do you think is the role of social media marketing for brand awareness creation in B2B landscape?	7
14) What challenges or obstacles have you encountered in implementing social media marketing for brand awareness creation?	9