

# Master's Thesis

## Audience drives on social media

“An investigation into the motivational factors behind customers involvement with SMEs’ on social media platforms in a B2B environment”

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## **Abstract**

During the last decades, rise of social media has influenced many aspects of humankind's life, and now, these online communities are considered as an undetachable part of modern life. Similar to many other aspects of our life, the world of business has experienced many impacts of this phenomenon, both positive and negative. Today, with over 2.6 billion social media users, companies are able to communicate with their brands' audience all around the world and outreach their potential customers. Possessing such capabilities has brought undeniable opportunities for businesses to excel their sales via creating a genuine and meaningful relationship with their audience online.

This thesis is aimed to understand how B2B SMEs' brand pages could contribute to an improved customer-brand relationship. This is done through multiple-case studies, Queue-it as the main case study, Intechnica and STACHPATH as the complementary ones. To achieve the purpose of this thesis two major areas are investigated. First and for most, the thesis is concentrated on understanding the customers' motivation behind being online and getting involved with brand pages. Secondly, different social media platforms are discussed and their role in enhancing the relationship is evaluated.

To achieve primary objective of this thesis, six motivational factors were presented based on the relevant literatures review. The factors are: information, entertainment, social integration, personal identity, empowerment, and remuneration. After the analysis of interviews and online observation data, three factors are found strongly relevant to this thesis context. The factors are information, personal identity, and social integration. Also, empowerment and entertainment showed some insignificant relevancy, which highlights the opportunity for further investigation. Finally, remuneration was labeled as not applicable, due to complexities posed by cultures and regulations within B2B environment.

As to the secondary objective, four social media platforms were taken into accounts, all based on literature reviews, industry statistics and case companies' use case. The findings of the two Europe-based companies showed that LinkedIn is the main platform to focus on, in their business context. However, the result and analysis of the US-based larger company showed a different pattern and emphasized on usage of Facebook and Twitter over LinkedIn.

In the end, it is important to note that audience are present on social media based on their needs. These needs can vary from one to another, and it is of dire importance for businesses to find the need of their customers. These needs which are the motivational factors for customers to be on the social media, can be the offered value of the companies to enhance the brand-customer relationship. Finally, as a result of this thesis, the proposed theoretical framework can be investigated in the further studies. The framework, after presenting the motivational factors, illustrates the possibility of changing customers' involvement to a deeper engagement and further on into brand loyalty.

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# 1 Introduction

During the last four decades, the Internet has evolved from a mysterious tool to most people, to an undeniable day-to-day necessity of contemporary life. After being used for military and scientific purposes, the Internet found its way into people's life and was utilized by companies as an authoritarian and static channel with the purpose of serving their one-way communication toward customers. During the course of this evolution, soon was the time for introduction of web 2.0 and its descendant, social media. When Six Degree was launched in 1997 as the first social media platform, it was beyond the most outrageous imaginations, that in thirty years more than 38 percent of the world's population will be engaged with different social media platforms either in their private or professional life (Statista, 2018h), (Appendix 1). Today, the sheer volume of users might have been one of the reasons behind recognition of brand pages on social media as "the key platform where consumers interact with brands" (Tsai & Men, 2013).

The emergence of social media has given customers the opportunity of being heard more than ever before and allowed them to interact about products and services with one another in the virtual world, without boundaries of place and time. According to Gao and Feng (2016, p. 868) the social media platforms provided the opportunity to develop brand-customer relationships, where companies had the ability to engage directly with customers creating a more intimate customer-brand relationship and fostering better rapport with customers. This opportunity of establishing, maintaining and developing relationship with customers, for many companies was perceived as their breakthrough in establishing their brand equity, and hence according to Keller (2013) acquiring more loyal customers. Therefore, "web 2.0 and social networks has been hailed as the next media for marketing" (Yan, 2011).

Keller's Customer Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model points out that "the power of a brand lies in what resides in the minds and hearts of customers" (Keller, 2013, p. 69) and endorses the important role of establishing a strong relationship with customers in order to help customers reach to the top desirable level of the Brand Resonance Pyramid, hence displaying behavioral loyalty and attitudinal attachment (Keller, 2013, p. 120).

Today, plenty of companies try to establish their relationship with their customers and lead them toward the resonance stage of the pyramid, using their brand pages on different social media channels. Among these platforms, companies try to choose the most relevant ones based on plenty

of factors and engage their customers with their posts and updates by creating desirable values. Some of these companies chose Facebook as their main medium of value creation, due to its position as the first popular social media platform and their product relevancy (Chaffey, 2018) (Appendix 2). On the contrary side, some would rather utilize Instagram to reach out to their target audience more effectively. Also, Twitter plays an important role for communicating a company's values and messages with customers in many countries. Finally, there are some other companies which may prefer LinkedIn as their primary social media channel due to the nature of their business environment. It should also be kept in mind that there are numerous other channels that are relevant for different businesses and are set to serve more niche communities.

Meanwhile, going through conducted researches and studies in the realm of social media, the need for more investigation about branding of companies which provide service is noticeable since most of the studies are based on products so far. It could be due to the fact that service branding is perceived to be more difficult than product branding as they are "less tangible than products and more likely to vary in quality" (Keller, 2013, p. 42). This need is even more recognizable when it comes to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) which need more effort to guide their customers to the resonance stage of CBBE pyramid, due to their weaker brand equity in their markets as well as less resources.

In addition to the importance of branding for B2B SMEs, which is already endorsed by plenty of studies (Michaelidou, Siamagka, & Christodoulides, 2011, p. 1154), limited resources and being highly dependent on others via networking Mäläskä, Saraniemi, and Tähtinen (2011, p. 1144) have urged companies to be more active on the social networking sites.

Given the above discussion, it seems quite natural for B2B SMEs to be active on social media platforms to lead their audience to reach to resonance level of CBBE pyramid. This also should be in parallel with expenditure of reasonable amount of resource, which can be, to some extent, achieved by understanding the motives behind their customers' interaction in the virtual world (Rodgers & Thorson, 2000, p. 46). By recognizing what drives their customers in the virtual world, B2B SMEs can adjust their messages with the demand of their audience, and offer a more to the target value, which is the right step toward their ultimate branding goal.

Despite the sheer amount of studies in different aspects of internet and social media, the given attention to customers' incentive behind interacting with a brand on social media is limited and calls for deeper researches (Rodgers, Wang, Rettie, & Alpert, 2007, p. 470).



## 1.1 Objectives

In the previous section, a great available opportunity is presented, which emerged from the fast growth of social media usage, the B2B SMEs branding need in the virtual world, and the gap in knowing audience motives. Therefore, the proposed framework of this thesis is set to seek the role of customers' different motivational factors in their involvement with B2B SaaS (Software as a Service) provider SMEs. Further on, this thesis will also attempt to recognize and discuss the relevancy of different social media platforms that are used and perceived to be valuable in the mentioned business environment.

The interest in the role and power of social media in today's business world and seeing the opportunity to improve the interaction between customers and businesses, created the foundation which this thesis was embarked upon. Additionally, Queue-it, a B2B SaaS provider SME, was chosen as the main case of this study. This is in response to my role in the company's digital marketing team, which has given me a deeper understanding of challenges that similar companies are facing with. Also, to guarantee an objective approach throughout the study, two more companies, Intechnica and SACHPATH were added to this research which have relatively the same business and resource characteristics, and in fact, they can be considered as the Queue-it's competitors. The three mentioned companies are all functioning in the same business environment but are located in different countries, have to some extent, similar audience, and are active on social media platforms. This makes the case studies particularly relevant and suitable for the master thesis conducted as part of Copenhagen Business School studies in International Business Communication – Intercultural Marketing MA programme.

Tatiana Krasnova, Queue-it digital marketing team lead, believes, considering the resource put into crafting content toward their audience, many companies will not receive a decent level of appreciation from the customers' side. Also, Camilla, the CCO, mentioned that the company does not really know what really motivates Queue-it audience to interact with the company on social media.

This study tries to contribute to the world of business in directing the resources to the right angles, by first, understanding the customers' motivation behind being present on social media and interacting with brand pages and content. And second, understanding the relevancy and importance of different social media platforms to B2B SaaS provider SMEs.

## **1.2 Research question**

This thesis focuses on the role of social media in creating brand-customer relationship, by investigating and developing an in-depth understanding of customers' motivations behind interacting with brand pages on social media. In particular, this thesis seeks to answer the following research questions:

How could SMEs' social media contribute to customer and brand relationship in a B2B environment?

And to answer this question, this study seeks to shed light on two sub-questions:

1. What drives the audience to be on social media and interact with brand pages and content?
2. Which platforms could contribute in creating customer and brand relationships for B2B SMEs?

## **1.3 Context**

This section aims to give an overview on this thesis topic context. It starts with explaining social media, and its role in modern life. Further on, it explains B2B SMEs business environment, which will be followed by an introduction to this thesis case studies and their relevancy.

### **1.3.1 Social media**

In this year alone, social media users are expected to raise to the number of 2.62 billion, which is a stark and significant rise in comparison to 0.97 billion users in 2010 (Statistac 2018h). Similarly, the number of social media platforms has also increased drastically in the last two decades and there are many different platforms available at the moment (Appendix 3). This explosion is a testament to the mass appeal of, and possible opportunities given, by social media to both customers and companies. Today, companies can reach their target groups more quickly and easily than ever before. This enables them to listen to their customers and address their needs, as well as follow their competitors. For customers, social media can mean an easier and faster way of finding what they need, talking to like-minded people, or knowing more about the topic of their interest at a cost of a click, and not even going through the trouble of a generic Google search. Unfortunately, it is not all about productivity and peace of mind, and there have been many challenges on the road for all the parties involved as well. A few examples of recent news headlines include platforms being criticized for their privacy policies, user's fearing that their personal data might be exposed, and companies facing reputational challenges (Panda, 2018). Partial solutions to similar risks have been developed such as General Data Regulation Protection (GDPR, 2018) in the EU, but there might not be sufficient.

Social media is a phenomenon which cannot be ignored anymore, it may take a new face every now and then, but it is certainly here to stay. Social media platforms have transformed the dynamics of customers' communication for companies, from a one-way broadcasting to engaging on a more personal level and being forced to seek new interactive ways of reaching and engaging with the customers, suggested by (Gallaugher & Ransbotham, 2010; Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki, & Wilner, 2010) in (Godey et al., 2016). In addition, it is believed that social media has provided a new paradigm for branding activities (Gao & Feng, 2016), it is no longer the means of only reaching out to the customers, but also known as an important and efficient tool for building an image and creating an emotional effect. Also, being present on social media is not perceived as

having an advantage anymore, and is a necessity which is expected from a brand (Godey et al., 2016).

In general, social media is divided into different types, of which six are considered the most influential ones. These six major types of social media are blogs such as Trip Advisor, social networking sites like Facebook, microblogging such as Twitter, photo sharing like Instagram, and video sharing like YouTube (Tsai & Men, 2013, p. 76).

Businesses, considering their needs, audience, strategies and many other internal and external factors tend to choose different combinations of these social media types and platforms to achieve their intended goals, which in case of this study, could be positioning the customers at the top level of CBBE pyramid, so that, customers show behaviors such as positive word of mouth or repurchasing. According to Michaelidou et al., (2011), the three most frequent social media channels used by companies are Facebook by 77%, LinkedIn by 46% and Twitter by 55% (Appendix 4). Therefore, to have an overview of the companies' utilized platforms, this study will go over the three aforementioned channels. Also, since the publication of the abovementioned study in 2011, Instagram was introduced and established its presence in social media users. Therefore, the functionality of this platform in relation to this thesis' case studies will also be taken into consideration. The four aforementioned channels will be separately discussed later on in the theoretical background chapter.

### **1.3.2 Brand pages on social media**

There are different types of pages on social media platforms (by social media in this thesis the author means the aforementioned platforms), personal profiles/channels, brand pages/channels, and applications. In this study, pages and channels which are created due to commercial purposes are considered as the subject of investigation and will be called brand pages throughout the paper.

These brand pages give the business owners an environment in which they can cultivate and maintain a relationship with stakeholders by different means of interaction. The type of interaction is dependent on the platform and will be discussed in the theoretical background chapter.

### **1.3.3 Case companies - B2B SMEs**

It seems beyond the bounds of possibility to keep all of the existing social media platforms in count, let alone the businesses which are active in using them. However, reports suggests that even in 2015 more than 96% of all businesses in the world were taking the advantage of social media marketing (Statista, 2018c). Going back to the basic definitions of social media in marketing, Bullock (2013) suggests that social media is a marketing tool to build relationships and hence trust and loyalty with the intended online target audience, by listening to their discussion and letting them drive it as well. The idea may sound challenging and scary at first, however as the study by Bullock (2013) pinpoints there are plenty of tempting benefits on the plus side, of which increased awareness of the brand, increased website traffic, and more favorable perception of the brand stands out (Appendix 5). This means although the ultimate goal of businesses' by being present on social media is achieving behavioral loyalty and attitudinal attachment (Keller, 2013), there are still other goals and intentions for each business, depending on its unique circumstance.

Considering the environments in which businesses are active, it is fairly challenging to find information about B2B brands, as research in this area has so far been significantly overlooked and most of the studies are concentrated on B2C business's (Michaelidou et al., 2011). Undoubtedly, this ignorance could negatively impact the critical role of creating brand equity and leveraging it to achieve strategic goals. Moreover, it is important to consider the role of SMEs on social media as they represent the majority of industrial businesses, and are a significant driver of economic growth (Michaelidou et al., 2011).

### **1.3.4 Queue-it**

In 2010 Niels Henrik Sodemann (CEO), Camilla Ley Valentin (CCO), and Martin Pronk (CTO), decided to co-found Queue-it, a technology startup, and launch their only product, which is a service provider software. The company is located in Ballerup, Denmark and was expanded to Minneapolis in the United States in 2017.

The Danish company, with over 100 employees of more than 20 nations, not only provides the service nationwide, but also serves customers from all seven continents. Today, the customer count for Queue-it is more than 700 including some of the world's top 500 companies, and they have already served more than 3.5 billion end users on their infrastructures.

Queue-it is now considered as the world's leading virtual waiting room solution. The core business is simple, "a waiting room platform developed to prevent website overload and protect online business, while providing a fair user experience"(Queue-it, 2018). The company offers a software-as-a-service (SaaS) product, with easy implementation. The product also has the capability of limiting Bots or DDOS (Distributed Denial of Service) attacks. For instance, when a high-demanded product is launched or a very popular discount such as Black Friday sale is offered on a website, many customers go online to purchase the product, and of course many programmed bots try to purchase as many products as possible. This can result in a traffic peak on the website creating issues for business owners. The trouble is often a technical bottleneck that may lead to a website crash, and thus a poor customer experience, and potential revenue lost.

Queue-it provides its customers with access to its software in a B2B market through the Internet and there is no need for installation and maintenance of the product from customer side. Additionally, the product can be integrated with numerous of E-commerce systems and CDNs (Content Delivery Network) and has 12 different features, which could be used separately or simultaneously. Also, the software consists of two separate parts, the end-user side, which is the environment which retail-customers' experience before entering a website, and the queue management platform, which gives the B2B customers the possibility of managing their queues and events.

Overall, by providing a positive user-experience during hyped events, Queue-it gives its customers the competitive advantage of keeping their online buyers and avoiding churn loses.

Queue-it has been utilizing different ways and methods to acquire and keep its customers. A major way of outreach for queue-it has been sending out cold emails. Moreover, partnerships with bigger players of the relevant industries have been on the company's agenda. Queue-it is also active in different fields of marketing the product, from participating in exhibitions and events, to crafting press releases and social media content.

The company has been present on Twitter and Facebook since 2010. This presence was expanded to LinkedIn, and Instagram later to serve different purposes. Company's primary target audience has been retail/e-commerce and ticketing professionals, and there has always been an eye on attracting the right talents to the company as Queue-it has been a fast-growing company ever since their product was launched.

Queue-it's "social media guidelines for employees" was prepared in 2011 to advance Queue-it brand and employees' personal brand on social networks and consist of do's and don'ts to achieve a successful branding outcome.

### **1.3.5 STACKPATH**

STACKPATH is a software with the purpose of making the internet a safer place. The company was founded in 2015 and has been experiencing rapid growth. As a demonstration of their growth, at the start point of this study, they had slightly more than 200 employees listed on LinkedIn, and after 9 months during the final stage of this thesis, the number of their employees is exceeding 300. This growth is mostly due to the fact that they have acquired a few companies, "including Highwinds, MaxCDN, Server Density, Fireblade, and Encrypt.me and integrated them into the industry's only unified, cloud-scale secure edge platform" (STACKPATH, 2018).

The company's main service is a CDN (Content Delivery Networks), and they claim to have the ability and intention to use their capabilities against the exponential growth of online crime, threats, and attacks. According to their website, more than one million customers, ranging from early-stage enterprises to Fortune 100 organizations, are using the company's services.

With their headquarters in Dallas, and their highlighted presence on social media, this company seems to have more resource than the other two case studies, and as a CDN provider is considered an indirect competitor to Queue-it.

### **1.3.6 Intechnica**

TrafficDefender is a software which can be considered as an extension of Intechnica, a company founded in 2006 by Jeremy Gidlow and Andy Still, and now has slightly less than 100 employees based in Manchester. As they mentioned on their website, following the implementation and optimization of the system that successfully sold the tickets for Glastonbury 2005, they sought to meet the modern world's demands for scalable technology" (Intechnica, 2018b), and therefore started the company. Later on, noticing the need for online queueing systems, they extended their line of business with TrafficDefender, which is an online traffic peak management system.

The company is also a B2B SME company, with similar resources and SaaS product to the two other mentioned companies. Additionally, they have similar audience in the similar industries. This makes Intechnica a direct competitor to Queue-it and an indirect one to STACHPATH.

Intechnica is also active on similar platforms on social media and actively attempts to reach out to their customers and stakeholders through their brand pages.

### 1.3.7 Progression

Figure one presents an overview on the thesis progress.

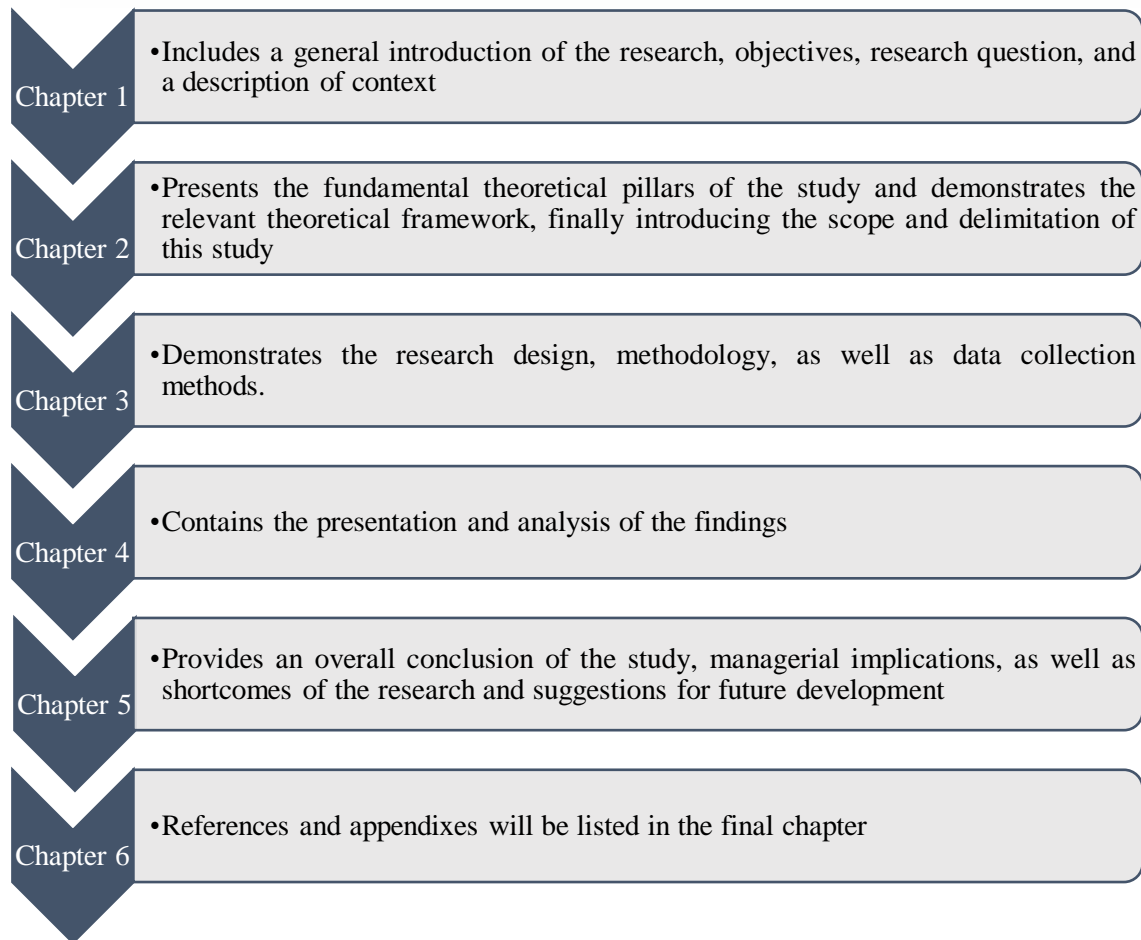


FIGURE 1



## **2 Literature review**

This chapter consists of two major sections, each focusing on one of the thesis sub-questions. The first section focuses on the social media platforms, which as discussed before, are relevant to this thesis. The platforms are Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Twitter.

The second part presents the theoretical foundation on which the framework of this thesis has been developed. The theoretical framework is developed to address the main objective of this thesis, which is understanding audience motivation behind their online interaction. The section initially explores the different stages of the brand resonance pyramid and how they are represented in the world of social media. Later on, the section clarifies some of people's motivation to be present on social media. The section moves further to a dynamic overview of brands' audience interaction in the virtual world, as well as framing the concept of brand sense of attachment. At the last stage, customer loyalty will be briefly described, and the scope of this project will be presented by corresponding delimitation.

## **2.1 Social media platforms**

This subsection presents the four previously mentioned social media platforms which initially looked relevant to the business environment and the case companies.

### **2.1.1 Facebook**

Facebook has ranked as the most popular social media platform for 11 years since the beginning of its Beta version in 2004. Today, with 2.07 Billion monthly active users (Statista, 2018f) Facebook plays an undisputable role in the world of online interaction. This giant became a public company by offering stock in Feb 2012, and still continues to grow and generate staggering sums by mainly providing its audience with advertisements on their homepage (Wikipedia, 2018a).

Apart from the sheer number of users who use Facebook for personal purposes, the latest statistics show that in 2017 there were more than 65 million companies that had their brand pages on this platform (Kaplan, 2017), of which 40 million were reported as small active businesses (Facebook Newsroom, 2018). These brand pages are of a high importance for the businesses with social media policy, as this is the place where the interaction between fans, those who “like” the pages, and the brand takes place.

Facebook users are geographically spread across the world. Leading countries ranked according to their registered users are India, the United States, and Brazil (Statista, 2018b). For an individual to be allowed to open a Facebook account, the minimum age is 13, whereas the oldest person ever reported was 114 years old (RIVERA, 2014). This basic information shows the diverse range of audience on Facebook, which provides businesses with the opportunity of finding and targeting their intended group.

Interaction on Facebook is mostly characterized as dyadic, where either private users or the brand pages post some content on the platform. These posts are sometimes welcomed by actions and reaction of the people in their brand-related community. In some cases, the posts may become more popular and go viral. Reactions to posts also vary from a simple like, to emotional reactions such as love or anger, etc. Also, it can go further by mentioning other “Friends” under the posts and bringing them into the scene. At the highest interactive level, these reactions can turn into a conversation with the one who initiated the content, or re-sharing the content, or even posting a new update as a response.

Posts on Facebook can be categorized into different boxes. In this project, they are divided into two categories of business-generated and user-generated posts. Business generated ones are considered as means of brands to interact and engage target customers. On the other hand, user generated posts are mostly private updates which are considered an interactive method among individuals. Additionally, these posts can sometimes present user reactions or their engagement with a brand. Moreover, these posts could be either text-based posts such as some information, or dynamic ones consisting of elements like pictures, gifs, videos etc.

Overall, it seems Facebook has room for each individual or business to tailor their interaction with others, following their set goals. This might be a reason behind plenty of researches about the role of Facebook in different business areas, as well as the demand for more investigation into specific or newly introduced realms.

### **2.1.2 Instagram**

Instagram is a photo-sharing service that is owned by Facebook and was launched just over 4 years ago in November 2012. Quickly, Instagram gained popularity and achieved 10 million registrations within the two first months and culminating in 800 million users as of September 2017. Interestingly, the popularity of Instagram led to widespread community engagement, including definite "trends", in which users post specific types of photos and stories on specific days of each week with hashtags representing a common theme (Wikipedia, 2018b).

According to Gauthier and Spence (2015), Instagram updates are shared as images and might be accompanied with a text of up to 2200 characters, including up to 30 hashtags. Similar to Twitter, Instagram does not need users to be mutually connected; users may view posts or share content and or users can like or save the posts. Yet, privacy settings might be modified to allow open access to posted content. Once a user opts to "follow" another account, the account's posts will appear in the user's feed, which raises the opportunities of user's engagement with the posts. Accounts on Instagram can be linked to other social media accounts such as Twitter or Facebook which enables simultaneous cross-publishing of Instagram posts, hence extending the reach of Instagram content to the other platforms of the users. Also, Instagram has introduced different filters, themes, and functions, through which users can edit and alter their photos before posting them. Lately, Instagram has initiated a new function by which users can share temporary and live posts, called Instagram Stories. This function have had over 400 million active daily users in June 2018 (Salinas, 2018).

Going through the posts on Instagram, one may notice that the posts have mostly a private life-related theme, yet there are direct posts from brands and sponsored advertisements that are recognizable sporadically.

Currently, there are pages on Instagram that have more than 135 million followers (Statista, 2018a) and they are believed to be playing an important role in the users' decision-making processes. Considering the latest user demographics, rising popularity as well as high-frequent user engagement, Instagram has great potential to be utilized by brands and businesses to reach target audience.

### **2.1.3 LinkedIn**

Launched in 2003, LinkedIn experienced very slow growth in its early stages, sometimes as low as 20 sign-ups a day. In 2004, by introducing a few features its growth accelerated to a stage where in 2006 LinkedIn began to “stake its claims as the professional profile record” (LinkedIn, 2018c) LinkedIn also became a public company in 2011, its stock being publicly traded in New York stock market (LinkedIn, 2018c).

Boasting around 500 million users, LinkedIn is a social networking site designed for business and professional communities, which seems to be more popular in industrial countries such as the U.S and China (LinkedIn, 2018d) . It provides an opportunity for businesses as well as individuals who want to engage with like-minded people in a more professional environment. The platform has been growing rapidly since its launch in 2002 and is expected to continue its growth in the realm of B2B business. The platform is recently acquired by Microsoft, and this acquisition paves the ground for LinkedIn to use a very well-known sales tools Sales Navigator, integrated within the platform (LinkedIn, 2018a). At the moment, by applying simple filters on the platform, it became evident that moment there are 19,684,959 companies own brand pages on LinkedIn. Meanwhile, despite the presence of around 20 million companies on the platform and the important role of branding in B2B market and environment, due to the complexity of purchase decisions (Keller, 2013, p. 40), very limited number of researches haave been conducted on leveraging the strategic power of LinkedIn in branding.

LinkedIn's interaction can also be characterized as dyadic. In most cases, brands, individual or professional group administrators post about a topic on their page and trigger discussions and interactions. This dynamic can go forward and expand, depending on how involved the network is

with the posted topic. Unlike most other social media platforms, the conversational tone is rather professional, and the content is job or business related. User involvement is similar to other platforms, in terms of liking, sharing and commenting under the posts. These posts can also be text-based or dynamic, however, the content is almost always professional, informative, scientific or inspirational.

#### **2.1.4 Twitter**

In 2006, a news and social networking channel was introduced which soon became a valuable and practical tool for many businesses (Comm, 2010). At the launch time, Twitter members could interact with messages and Tweets, which were restricted to 140 characters. In the late 2017 this restricted number raised to double, and now members can post their messages with up to 280 characters on this microblog tool (Wikipedia, 2018c). Today, with more than 330 million monthly active users (Statista, 2018g), Twitter is labeled as the 11th most popular global social media and messaging network (Statista, 2018d). Although standing on the 11<sup>th</sup> rank may imply lower practicality of Twitter in comparison with more popular ones, it is important to highlight that Twitter is a special favorite of B2B companies, which enjoys bigger popularity than LinkedIn (Michaelidou et al., 2011).

Twitter has brought in interesting features like following anyone from any country, group, industry without limitation, retweeting interesting posts and messages, or finding out about the most trending discussion on the platform. It has also provided businesses the opportunity of advertising via direct ads such as promoted accounts or trends, sponsored tweets (third-party network advertising), or publishing normal advertisements (Logan, 2014, p. 61).

Interaction on Twitter is mostly initiated and followed in a common pattern. It is commonly started by sending out a tweet, which can include a link, document file, picture, or video, which might be reflected on in four different ways. Other users may like the post, retweet the content, reply to it with an answer, question or comment, and finally interact with the person who tweeted via a direct message. Twitter has a few important features, of which using hashtags seem to be very popular. Hashtag is a word or phrase which comes after a hash sign (#) and gives shared content a label to be categorized in a topic on social media. This feature has been used in the world of social media since 2007 and was first introduced in order to gather discussions and posts on Twitter. Today hashtags play an important role on Twitter, stronger than other platforms, and can introduce hyped and trendy discussions of either different topics or geographical places (Doctor, 2013).

## 2.2 Motivation

As noted in the previous chapter, marketers wish to move customers upward in the KELLER CBBE model, and achieve the level at which customers show preferred behaviors such as positive word of mouth or repurchasing. In order to achieve to such a level, brands need to build a relationship with their customers. Additionally, it was discussed that knowing the reason of customers behind their interactions with brand is important and knowing the motivations can be a key point for defining companies' roadmap in branding (Rodgers & Thorson, 2000, p. 47).

Further on, it is believed that individuals can range from being proactive and engaged to passive and alienated. This is largely a reflection of their social conditions in which they develop and function. Also, the classification is due to individuals' motivation, which is manifested by energy, direction, persistence and equifinality, the aspects of activation and intention (E. Deci & Ryan, 2000, pp. 68–69).

According to Dualism theory, motivation can fall into two major categories, intrinsic or extrinsic (Reiss, 2012, p. 152), intrinsic motivation could be defined as performance of an action for its own sake, on the other hand, extrinsic motivation is believed to pertain “to a variety of behaviors in which the actions are instrumental and performed for an outcome separate from the activity itself” (E. Kim & Drumwright, 2016, p. 971). In addition, self-determination theory, focusing on how social and cultural factors can expedite or impede people's performance, suggests that extrinsic incentives would normally weaken intrinsic interest by involving external factors (E. L. Deci & Ryan, 1985), and predicts “the more self-determined a person's motivation to engage in a behavior is, the more positive will be the outcomes that result from that behavior; positive outcomes will include enjoyment, need satisfaction, and general well-being.” (E. Kim & Drumwright, 2016, p. 971)

## **2.3 Motivation behind using social media**

It is suggested that to understand what underlies users' contribution, it is important to understand what motivates the contributors (Nov, 2007).

According to DEIWorldwide (2008), brand pages on social media are visited more frequently than companies' webpages, which demonstrates social media's role in revolutionizing brand-customer interaction, particularly when it comes to creation, distribution, and consumption of brand-related content (Tsai & Men, 2013). Additionally, in order to revolutionize brand-customer content, marketers have been trying to make them more captivating than before to involve their target customers at a higher level, hence achieve important outcomes such as usage, effect, and responses to communication messages (Calder, Malthouse, & Schaedel, 2009).

Moreover, to produce appealing content for online customers, marketers first need to understand their motivations for being present online and the drives behind interacting with brands on social media (Tsai & Men, 2013). This can be stemmed from not only the discussed self-determination theory with its significant emphasis on the motivation factor, but also "the extensive literature on UG (Use & Gratifications) theory which highlight the crucial role of motivation in dictating individual media choices and usage" (Tsai & Men, 2013). According to Saridakis, Baltas, Oghazo, and Hultman (2016), the generic selection motivation of media can be classified into four categories; surveillance, personal identity, personal relationships, and diversion. This has ever since evolved in UG literature and is used in social media related studies.

To shed light on the drive to use social media, and also analyze its role for B2B SMEs, this thesis will begin with creating an overview of the users' evolved motivational factors which are considered relevant, and also have already been used in plenty of similar studies (Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011) and (Saridakis et al., 2016). These motivational factors include information, entertainment, personal identity, social integration, empowerment and remuneration. Furthermore, these categories can fit into groups of self-determination theory as intrinsic, extrinsic or sometimes both. They also could be seen as servers of users' hedonic or utilitarian needs, based on their practicality and benefit for users.

### **2.3.1 Information**

In the previous subsection, an overview of motivation and its different aspects were given, and then the topic was narrowed down to the online world and social media. Subsequently, the main motivational factors that are relevant to this thesis and evolved from UG theory, were pointed out. This subsection is dedicated to demonstrating why information-seeking motivation is one of the main concentrating points of this thesis.

Information seeking behavior is believed to be one of the most recognized drives of using internet in general (Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009), which refers to different aspects such as surveillance (i.e., staying up-to-date on one's environment), knowledge (i.e., consuming media to learn more about a product or brand), pre-purchase behavior (i.e., information to facilitate purchase decision-making process), and inspiration (i.e., engaging in online activities) (Saridakis et al., 2016, p. 1064).

Additionally, it is believed that social media has more than ever lowered the barriers of sharing information by using its networking features which allows users to receive information from sources they trust and find interesting (Gao & Feng, 2016, p. 869). Therefore, it is not surprising to see results of research such as (Agrifoglio et al., 2012; Bonds-Raacke and Raacke 2010; Raacke and Bonds-Raacke 2008; Witkemper, Lim, and Waldburger 2012) showing information is a gratification sought by most social media users (Logan, 2014, p. 63).

The information-seeking motivation is abundantly present in social media motivations literature and covers several information-related media gratifications (Muntinga et al., 2011, p. 20). In general, information-seeking behavior is associated with consumers' desires to reduce risk when making purchase decisions (Logan, 2014, p. 23), and also could be aimed to reduce uncertainty about environment and people intentions and behaviors, by providing detailed information about people's personal background, current condition, interests, etc. (Valenzuela et al., 2009, p. 878). Additionally, the information gratification motive can manifest in behaviors such as searching for definite type of content, looking at brand pages, searching advice, opinions, as well as exchanging information (Tsai & Men, 2013).

Moving down to the information seeking behavior on social media brand pages, one could argue that the sheer amount of customers' engagement on some of the brand pages could also be a manifestation of their information seeking intention. Endorsing this idea, Liang, Ho, Li, and Turban, (2011, p. 72) believe that a key point behind customers' intention of using social media in



the future is the information they receive and the quality they associate with the information. Generally the high quality of the extracted information from social media is due to the fact that brand followers on social media brand pages are more interested in the comments of real people as opposed to corporate messages (Logan, 2014, p. 68) .

In parallel, it is important to notice as concluded by Kim, Sin and Tsai (2014, p. 176), people's demographic background, educational level and personal preferences could play a vital role in the information they seek for, how they perceive the information and what platform they choose as their trusted source.

### **2.3.2 Entertainment**

This subsection looks into another highly noted motives behind customers' presence on social media, which is entertainment-seeking drive. Branded as the product of fun by Dholakia, Bagozzi, and Pearo (2004), the entertainment motivation could satisfy different desires of the users, which may differ from one to another.

In general, the entertainment motivation covers several media gratifications that are related to escaping, or being diverted, from problems; relaxing; getting intrinsic cultural or aesthetic enjoyment; filling time; emotional release; sexual arousal (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009). Also, Stafford and Stafford (2001, p. 101) go further and associate online entertainment with three items of entertainment, fun and games.

Narrowing the discussion down to the social virtual world, entertainment is defined as the result of fun and play acquired through social media (Agichtein, Castillo, Donato, Gionis, & Mishne, 2008). This can be applied to the people who use social media, following their hedonistic needs, and seek entertainment as well as pleasure in different virtual communities and pages, organized focusing on definite interests (Dholakia et al., 2004). Additionally, it is believed by some studies such as Park et al., (2009), as well as Popp, Woratschek, and Roth (2008), that the entertainment-related motives are one of the key drivers behind customers' presence on social media and brand pages.

Moreover, not only an effective driver of customers' presence, but also on the engagement (e.g., Uploading content and interaction with social media pages), the entertainment factor and its descended elements such as relaxation and escapism, are found to be playing a significant role. (Muntinga et al., 2011, p. 19).

Believing in the influential role of entertainment, plenty of social media brand communicators have considered Tsai and Men (2013) suggestions in their social media policy, and incorporated “a variety of entertaining and enjoyable content, such as riddles and jokes, daily horoscopes, music videos of brand endorsers, and human interest stories.” Moreover, focusing on a more relevant case study, Hashemi’s (2017) conclusions demonstrate how HubSpot, B2B SaaS company, uses entertainment factor as the main tool to attract and engage its audience. Also, the fact that plenty of audience believe entertainment is the main reason for them to follow HubSpot on social media.

### **2.3.3 Personal identity**

This subsection will give a presentation of personal identity, especially the aspects which are relevant to this research, and how it can be an influential player as one of the drives behind audience engagement with brand pages.

According to some researches, identity concerns how an individual defines oneself and the tension embedded in how that person connects to the social groups in the environment (Kornum, Gyrð-Jones, Al Zagir, & Brandis, 2017, p. 433). Additionally, who we actually are lies in how we live our day to day, and not just in what we think or say about ourselves (Wenger, 1998, p. 6). Also in concern with goods consumption, personal identity could acquire a more collective angle as Veblen (1899) suggests, people do not consume goods for themselves, nor for their usage value, but to acquire social esteem, to be admired or recognized as a member of certain groups or apart from inferior groups.

In a more detailed sense, personal identity could involve different aspects of self-expression, identity management and self-fulfillment (Papacharissi, 2006, p. 35), all of which are representative of different behaviors and actions. Additionally, another highlighted concept in identity is self-concept, which according to Kleine, Kleine, and Kernan (1993) is the affective and cognitive understanding of who we are, and falls into two categories of the actual-self and the ideal-self. In fact, a person’s perceived reality of himself or herself forms the actual-self, and a person’s ideals as well as goals create the ideal-self.

Furthermore, as it comes to the brands world, Hung (2014, p. 597) suggests consumers engage with the brand’s personality in order to express their self-concept or to receive a sense of comfort from the brand’s fit with their self-concept. Also, Schau and Gilly (2003, p. 388) believe customers would choose specific brands to shift away from their actual-self and get closer to their ideal-self.

Moreover, personal identity is considered a motivational factor of people online presence by a wealth of previously discussed studies. As an example, Muntinga et al., (2011, p. 29) suggest that personal identity drive refers to different aspects such as self-presentation (i.e., participating in social media to provide others with an image of our personality), self-expression (i.e., participating in social media to show that brands or products are an extension of a person's personality or identity), and self-assurance (i.e., participating in social media to get positive feedback from others) (Saridakis et al., 2016, p. 1064).

This motivation also could have other angles to look into, for example when people believe “they are able to express their “true self” better online than they ever could in face-to-face contexts”, and also they could share bad and sinful things easier without feeling guilty (Belk, 2013, p. 484), they define how using social media can help them to be more expressive.

In the world of social media there has also been a significant focus on personal identity as a being-active motivational factor. A very frequent comment is the idea that suggests, being engaged on social media and with certain brand related activities gives the audience an opportunity to express their identity in association with the brand (Muntinga et al., 2011, p. 30). Yet this level of perceived congruity between the self and the brand directly affects the extent of such a self-expression (Taylor, Strutton, & Thompson, 2012, p. 16). This means there might be motivational factors like identity management toward ideal-self involved with being active on social media, and therefore the motivation behind using social media to express oneself alone may not predict participation intention (Gao & Feng, 2016, p. 888).

Given the aforementioned, personal identity can be considered as one of the motivational factors of being present on social media platforms and getting involved with business related content. Also, as pointed out this drive can have different aspects such as self-expression, impression management, and identity management. Yet it should be kept in mind that, personal identity motivations could include other sub-motivations such as, “gaining insight into one's self; reinforcing personal values; and identifying with and gaining recognition from peers” (Muntinga et al., 2011, p. 20).

#### **2.3.4 Social integration**

In this subsection another motivational factor, social integration, will be introduced and discussed. As it is suggested by plenty of researchers, “social integration involves the sense of belonging, the supportive peer groups, and the enhanced interpersonal connections” (Tsai & Men, 2013)

Additionally, since sense of belonging to a group is one of the basic human needs, by expansion of the internet use and the exponential attention it has received in the last decades, more and more people are turning to the online world to satisfy their social and psychological needs (McKenna & Bargh, 1999, p. 250). Perhaps this could explain why people are seeking and gaining sense of aggregation by being present on affinity groups, brand communities, and other virtual groups online (Belk, 2013, p. 493).

Moreover, individuals gain value by being part of an interaction with others. These social values can be referred to the social benefits such as social support, friendship, and intimacy which are gained by initiating and maintaining contact with others, and also hedonic or entertainment values which are derived from fun and relaxation through socializing or interacting with others (Dholakia et al., 2004). By flashing back to previous media usage motivational factors, Muntinga et al., (2011, pp. 19–20) believe that the classification of motivations for general media introduced by McQuail (1983) is still applicable to the modern media, hence, the validity of social integration motive is an applicable drive to consider in regard to social media. Therefore, it seems to be logical to argue the mentioned values are building blocks of social integration motivational factor behind being present on social media.

It is also important to know social integration factor can have various influences on the online world, audience and also businesses' behavior. For instance, "individual's identification with the group in the sense that the person comes to view himself or herself as a member of the community, as belonging to it" (Dholakia et al., 2004, p. 245). It could also be the visibility of brand community identification on social media, which implies how a person's self-concept could get similar to other in-group members and distinct from outsiders (Tsai & Men, 2013). Another option is how feasible it is for consumers to connect with brands to interact with others on that brand's network, rather than to connect with the brand itself (Wallace, Buil, & de Chernatony, 2014, p. 34). Hence, having understood the important role of social integration, peer liking, as well as the customers' communities, facilitating in-group relationship building is introduced as a tool to create a strong sense of community (Tsai & Men, 2013).

Finally, another key concept that is considered to be a descendant of social integration is peer pressure, which may directly affect whether consumers engage with specific organizations and corporations on social media (Logan, 2014, p. 62)

Overall, social integration is found to be an important motivational factor as it feeds different social and psychological needs of humankind such as social support, intimacy, sense of belonging, etc. Yet there are studies that display a very low-profile role of this drive in attracting audience on social media (Tsai & Men, 2013), which may also become weaker and less tangible when it comes to SMEs in B2B environment.

### **2.3.5 Empowerment**

Empowerment is defined by Carmon (2002, pp. 298–299) as letting consumers take control of certain aspects of a brand, which are usually predetermined by marketers, in order to increase consumer satisfaction. Some very simple examples of this include a customer's ability to specify product features, the delivery channel, decision on their exposure to the brand advertisements and sharing their experience of using the service or product with other customers.

Empowerment, one of the motivational factors introduced by McQuail (1983), is also considered as one of the motives behind social media presence. This factor has already been discussed in the social media literature and could be described as the urge to use social media in order to influence people's cognitive processes as well as their behavior (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2003). Also, Cova and Pace (2006, p. 1087) results show that the virtual community gathered around a brand shows a form of sociality and customer empowerment, which is not based on interaction between peers, but more on personal self-exhibition in front of other consumers through the marks and rituals linked to the brand.

Additionally, in the brands online presence, empowerment motive seems to be an important and influential tool to consider. It is particularly influential when the audience are displaying interest and enthusiasm for a brand, creating content about the brand and also enjoying to persuade others that the brand is worth using or purchasing (Muntinga et al., 2011, pp. 32–33). Such audience are very helpful for the business as they play the role of brand's online ambassadors.

On the other hand, it is important to know that the scenario is not always as easy and beneficial for brands. Although as discussed, brands tend to endow a degree of brand control to their customers, it is probable that companies occasionally lose control of specific aspects and face a situation where their customers' community tries to redefine and re-appropriate the brand (Guinn & Muniz, 2005, p. 499).

Finally, it should be considered that customer empowerment is usually achieved through the creation of a brand community, and brands with small shares hardly have brand communities (Guinn & Muniz, 2005, p. 502). Hence, it might be challenging to find evidence of SMEs activities targeting this motivational factor.

### **2.3.6 Remuneration**

In this chapter so far five different motivational factors driving audience presence on social media have been delineated. In this sub-section the last relevant motivational factor will be presented.

The literal meaning of remuneration is “an amount of money that is paid to somebody for the work they have done” (OxfordDictionary, 2018). In regard to audience motivational factors, remuneration is considered as an online media specific drive (Tsai & Men, 2013, p. 78), and highlights people use of social media or engagement in relevant activities to gain rewards such as money, coupon, discount, prize, or job related benefits which is usually shared on different platforms (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2003).

Knowing the drive behind customers’ engagement, brands also try to engage their audience with their content by offering incentives. This could result in high content creation and contribution by customers (Saridakis et al., 2016, p. 1067), which is to the benefit of the brands’ publicity.

Hence, economic rewards are an effective way of demonstrating audience appreciation, which makes it a strong drive behind audience presence on social media, (Hennig-Thu, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004, p. 43). However, there might be other incentives such as job opportunities (Nov, 2007, pp. 62–63) or satisfying personal needs (Ex. software) (Hars & Ou, 2002, p. 28) that should be considered as the fuel to feed the remuneration desire.

## **2.4 Involvement**

Previously, the main contributing theories and information of this thesis were presented. These discussed concepts were motivational power behind audience presence and involvement on social media, as well as the main contribution social media platforms. Further in the section, the six drives, information, entertainment, personal identity, social integration, empowerment and remuneration, were explained, and their relevance to the social media context of businesses was established. Although, the focal point of this thesis is finding the main motivational factors, still to have a better understanding of the ongoing dynamics on brand pages, an overall picture of customers' journey to the resonance level of CBBE pyramid seems beneficial. Therefore, the next steps of the customers' journey on social media will briefly be pointed out and explained.

This section gives an overview of audience involvement with brand pages and their content on social media, which according to former studies plays an important role in the individual's social media behavior (Lim, Al-Aali, Heinrichs, & Lim, 2013). As an example, Richard (2005, p. 1638) findings suggest that whenever content is more effective, online pages seems to be more involving. Additionally, such a more involving content, urges the users to develop a more positive attitude toward the content, which results in an intention to spend more time on searching for information and interacting with the page.

### **2.4.1 Role of motivations in users' involvement with brands**

According to Calder et al., (2009, p. 322) a collection of pleasant experiences with the brand pages' content determine the attractiveness of the page. These pleasant experiences, or in other words involvement with the content, are created when the audience finds the page's content the right fit to their life. As an example, "content can be engaging because users have a utilitarian experience with it" or the page "provides information to help them make important decisions and accomplish something in their lives" (Ibid).

Given the above provided discussion and examples, one can relate the audience's pleasant experience with their life's needs and argue that the pleasant experience is obtained whenever the users satisfy the need because of which they visited the page. In other words, customers make rational decisions to get involved with content on social media based on the benefits it brings for them (Harrigan, Evers, Miles, & Daly, 2017), therefore, involvement is a motivational state comprising utilitarian, hedonic and social dimension (Chahal & Rani, 2017).

## 2.4.2 Social media involvement

Social media involvement can take many different forms depending on the platforms, types of content and some other contextual factors. Therefore, Muntinga et al., (2011) proposed framework is applied as a general overview in this thesis. As visible in the table below, Muntinga’s framework divides involvement with brand-related content on social media into three major categories of consuming, contributing and creating, which later are broken down into subcategories (Ibid, p.16).

**Table 1: COBRA typology as a continuum of three usage types – consuming, contributing and creating**

COBRA type	Examples of brand-related social media use		
Level of brand related-activeness ↓ Consuming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Viewing brand-related video</li> <li>• Listening to brand-related audio</li> <li>• Watching brand-related pictures</li> <li>• Following threads on online brand community forums</li> <li>• Reading comments on brand profiles on social network sites</li> <li>• Reading product reviews</li> <li>• Playing branded online videogames</li> <li>• Downloading branded widgets</li> <li>• Sending branded virtual gifts/cards</li> </ul>		
	Contributing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rating products and/or brands</li> <li>• Joining a brand profile on a social network site</li> <li>• Engaging in branded conversations, e.g. on online brand community forums or social network sites</li> <li>• Commenting on brand-related weblogs, video, audio, pictures, etc.</li> </ul>	
		Creating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publishing a brand-related weblog</li> <li>• Uploading brand-related video, audio, pictures or images</li> <li>• Writing brand-related articles</li> <li>• Writing product reviews</li> </ul>

Note: this list of examples of brand-related social media use is not exhaustive – COBRAs come in countless forms. The examples mentioned are both literature (e.g. Li & Bernoff 2008) and author generated.

**FIGURE 2**

Finally, it must be noted that although the above-mentioned interactions may have been labeled by different terms such as engagement in some studies, they will be referred to as “involvement” hereafter in this thesis.



## **2.5 Brand engagement**

As of yet this chapter has introduced and detailed motivation, which is the key concept of this thesis. By splitting motivation into six different categories, the various incentives driving people to use social media can be more clearly identified. Following this, a quick overview of audience involvement with brand pages on social media was developed in order to illustrate the actual behavior of customers on social media. This section will briefly discuss the concept of how users engage with brand pages, intertwining the aforementioned concepts.

The notion of “engagement” in business relationships is not particularly new. However, due to its strategic imperative for generating enhanced corporate performance, a significant practitioner interest in the concept has developed in the last decade (Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić, & Ilić, 2011, p. 252). By narrowing down the concept of “engagement” into the world of marketing, a plethora of definitions for customers’ engagement can be observed, all with the focal points of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions (Brodie et al., 2011, p. 255). Patterson, Yu and Ruyter (2006, p. 3) define engagement as “the level of a customer's physical, cognitive and emotional presence in their relationship with a service organization.” In contrast, Brodie et al., (2011, p. 790) purport that “the level of a customer’s motivational, brand-related and context-dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activity in brand interactions.”

These two definitions reflect on how customers behave and feel towards a brand. For instance, when customers recommend the brand to a third party. A second example is when customers react to a brand-related initiative such as joining a campaign, which is started by the brand or another brand follower.

### **2.5.1 Engagement on social media**

By limiting the concept of “engagement” to the world of media, it is possible to consider audience engagement as an important prerequisite to brands’ desired outcome such as usage, affect, and responses to communication messages (Calder et al., 2009). Also, engagement is agreed to be particularly relevant to the case of social media communication, as social media brand pages are relationship centric and inherently participatory, engagement leads to the cultivation of further stronger relationships.

To simplify the investigation on customers' engagement in the virtual world, Brodie, Ilic, Juric, and Hollebeek (2013, p. 107) have developed a working definition that suggests:

Consumer engagement is a context-dependent, psychological state characterized by fluctuating intensity levels that occur within dynamic, iterative engagement processes. Consumer engagement is a multidimensional concept comprising cognitive, emotional, and/ or behavioral dimensions, and plays a central role in the process of relational exchange where other relational concepts are engagement antecedents and/or consequences in iterative engagement processes within the brand community.

Overall, engagement on social media can be viewed as the feeling and state of mind one has towards a brand, especially in the virtual world. This makes users eager to interact with the brand, and ultimately contributes to the creation of a meaningful relationship between the customer and brand.

### **2.5.2 Involvement role in brand engagement creation**

Hung (2014, p. 601) suggests that brand community identification and involvement may have long-lasting positive effects on consumers. For instance, studies show that members of communities tend to support each other and remain as members of the community even for years after the relevant product was discontinued (Muñiz Jr. & Schau, 2005, p. 739). Therefore, by getting involved with an online brand community, perhaps via social media, the customer may move to the next stage that is attributed with increased engagement for more time. This is because members accept responsibility of tasks that benefit the whole community and brand while developing a stronger relationship with the brand and members (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002, pp. 49–50).

## **2.6 Customers' Loyalty**

In the previous sub-sections of this paper, first the motivational factors behind user involvement with social media contents were discussed, and later the concept of involvement with brand page and contents on social media was presented. This was followed by a brief illustration of customers' engagement and its creation. More importantly, it was discussed how one step can shape the next stage and move the customer forward in their journey of becoming brand loyal on social media. In this section, keeping Keller's CBBE discussion from the first chapter of this thesis in mind, the author presents an overview of customers' loyalty as well as the connection between customer-brand engagement and loyalty. Later on, customers' loyalty on social media, and its forms of presences will be looked into briefly.

In general, customers' loyalty is "a commitment to repurchase a preferred product or service in such a way as to promote its repeated purchase" (Cossío-Silva et al., 2016), which can be conceptualized in the last level of Keller's CBBE model, the brand resonance stage. This stage describes the nature of customer-brand relationship, as well as the extent to which a customer feels that they are in sync with the brand. The resonance stage can be broken down into four categories with elements consisting of both brand engagement and loyalty:

Behavioral loyalty, which considers the volume and frequency of customers' purchases (Keller, 2013, p. 120). Attitudinal attachment, with the focal point of customers' positive notion and emotion toward a brand (Ibid). Sense of community, which discusses social phenomenon of self-identifying with a brand community (Ibid). And finally, active engagement with a brand by investing time, energy, or other resources, beyond those expended during purchase or consumption (Ibid).

### **2.6.1 Role of brand engagement in customers' loyalty**

Although it may vary among industries and products, plenty of studies suggest that brand engagement is positively related to brand loyalty (Harrigan et. al, 2017; Brodie et al., 2013). Demonstrating a similar result, Hollebeek (2011) conceptual model (Appendix 6), illustrates how this positive influence is created, in the period of customer-brand interaction. It suggests that the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement with a brand would boost the relationship's quality between the customer and the brand by increasing the level of customer's trust, commitment, and satisfaction. Further on, the interaction between the two sets of cause and effect,

would have a positive exponential effect on one another, consequently enhancing the elements which were previously represented as characteristics of brand loyalty at highest stage of Keller's CBBE pyramid.

### **2.6.2 Customers' loyalty on social media**

Given the aforementioned advantages of customers' loyalty, all businesses rationally wish to achieve and retain loyal customers. Also, the same reasoning applies when considering social media in the view presented by various scholars and previous studies in which "customers are highly active exchange partners with social media brands, often doing much of marketing themselves through their social links with others" (Harrigan et al., 2017, p. 2), and also it is safe to assume that an engaged customer's message is inevitably more impactful than the same message delivered by marketers (Goh, Heng, & Lin, 2013).

Additionally, businesses are seemingly unable to acquire loyal customers on social media by simply providing a decent product with its acceptable brand elements, as they also need to promote many other aspects such as "brand feeling" or "brand judgment"(Keller, 2013). This could probably be achieved through Hollebeek's (2011) model or other similar ones where the influence of customer brand engagement and the customer-brand relationship quality, ultimately produces brand-loyal customers.

Once a business acquires loyal customers or engaged social media followers and audience, according to the literature cited in Cossío-Silva et al., (2016), they should expect two major classes of loyalty: behavioral and attitudinal. From the behavioral perspective, repeated purchases are the indicator of loyalty. In contrast, the attitudinal approach suggests that, loyalty towards a brand is created through different emotions, and even if customers do not repeat the purchase, recommending the brand is a way by which customers show their loyalty. An example could be customers recommending or praising a product or service on social media, known as electronic word of mouth. These two mentioned constructs of loyalty are in accordance with Keller (2013, p. 120) CBBE model, which suggests that at the resonance stage and when customers become loyal, they tend to show two major characteristics. The first characteristic is behavioral loyalty, which is represented by repurchasing and is considered a strong sign of customers' satisfaction with the brand. The second is behaviors characterized by intensity and can be traced through activities such as positive word of mouth or pursuing brand information.

### **2.6.3 Electronic word of mouth**

As discussed in the previous sub-section, one of the most important signs of customers' loyalty toward brands is word of mouth, which is classified as attitudinal loyalty. In the virtual world, e-WOM (Electronic Word of mouth) is an informal form of communication toward other customers to inform them about both positive and negative sides of a particular product, service or brand (Brown, Amanda, & Nick, 2013). According to the literature in Deci and Ryan (2000) it "has long been considered as an influential marketing instrument," and believed to have mounting effect on sales figures as it is perceived to be more trustworthy than paid advertisements (Pentina, Basmanova, Zhang, & Ukis, 2015). In this study eWOM is considered as one of the ultimate products of customers' loyalty and will be explored in its positive sense.

### **2.6.4 Repurchase**

Probably, the first and the biggest goal of many businesses is to retain its pre-existing customers rather than acquiring new ones, since depending on the business or different studies' findings, retaining a customer is five to twenty-five times cheaper than acquiring a new one (Gallo, 2014).

Repurchasing, which can be defined as continuing to use products and services of a brand, is an important sign of behavioral loyalty, and can signal a high level of customers' trust and satisfaction toward the brand (Fang, Chiu, & Wang, 2011). Also, the findings, reported in Hollebeek (2011), demonstrates " a significant relationship between buyers' perceived relationship quality and their repurchase intentions."

## 2.7 Theoretical framework

This section presents the theoretical framework which is created based on the previously discussed theories. The theoretical framework is focused to address one of the thesis's sub-questions and ultimately shed light on the way toward primary objective of this study.

### 2.7.1 Framework overview

Below is the demonstration of the developed framework.

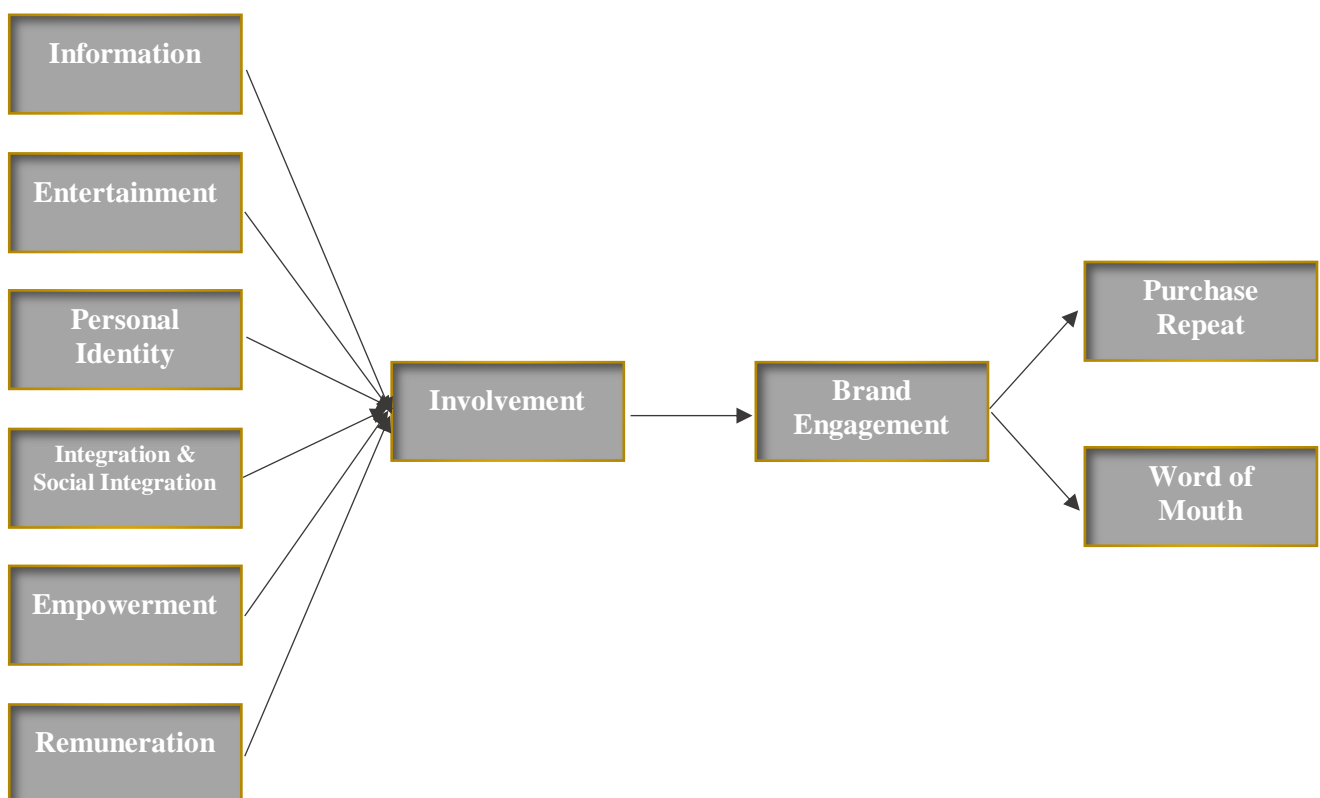


FIGURE 3

### **2.7.2 Scope and delimitation**

The general intent of this study is to contribute to B2B SMEs' strategies and approaches on social media, and to do so, based on social media literature, a proposed audience journey was mapped and presented as the study's theatrical framework.

This study is specifically delimited in seven ways. First, it is delimited to B2B SMEs which provide SaaS (Software as a Service). Second, this study only discusses and analyzes the social media platforms with higher popularity and relevancy. These platforms are Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram. Third, this research collects data related to only three companies Queue-it, Intechnica, and STACKPATH. Fourth, the primary source of data for this thesis is collected about Queue-it and the two other companies are used only to benchmark the findings against them. Fifth, this study had two major data sources interviews (only applicable to Queue-it due to availability) and online observation (for the three companies) during a three-month period. Sixth, although the theoretical framework introduces the whole audience journey on social media toward CBBE resonance level, the investigation is only limited to the two first parts of the framework, motivational factors and involvement. Seventh, although there are plenty of motivational factors behind being on social media and getting involved with brand pages as well as their content, only the six most popular and relevant drives are chosen to be investigated in this study.

Considering the above delimitation, this thesis covers an investigation about audience motivation behind involvement with brand page and content of Queue-it, Intechnica, and STACKPATH on certain social media platforms. Additionally, this study will look into the role and relevancy of aforementioned social medial platforms in the intended environment. The mentioned companies are all SMEs with main product of a software as a service, and all function in B2B market.

### **3 Research paradigm**

Previously, the background and theoretical foundation underlying this thesis has been presented. This upcoming chapter describes the philosophy which guides this thesis. This is done to explain the worldview underpinning the research, as well as how knowledge is obtained through interviews and online observations. Furthermore, this chapter will explain the chosen approach and design of this study. In the final section research methods will be discussed, which provides an overview of the case studies and data collection methods selected, in addition to a research assessment discussion.

#### **3.1 Philosophy**

This thesis adopts pragmatism as its research philosophy. The reason for this is that methodological choices were made by considering the research question and the context, rather than ontological and epistemological dependencies (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009, p. 109). Also, this study sees knowledge as the means of organizing experiences (Klenke, 2016, p. 26), and seeks a real-life pattern of how it works, rather than finding an absolute truth (Creswell, 2009)

The primary interest of this thesis is to uncover ‘how social media can enhance brand and customer relationships’ in a ‘B2B SME SaaS provider’ context. Furthermore, the research is delimited to finding the motives behind customers’ engagement with brand pages and content on social media, as well as discussing the role of different social media platforms. This will ultimately provide ideas and insights for similar businesses to increase their gained value, which also in accordance with pragmatism philosophy. Klenke (2016, p. 27) suggests pragmatic studies are focused on real life problems, leaned toward a practical and applied research philosophy, and are oriented toward an action. Hence, throughout the analytical process, being more result driven, the author has tried to investigate the points which are of interest and value, relying on how the results are developed and what the set goals are (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 119).

Finally, as far as epistemology goes, in pragmatic school, “either or both observable phenomena and subjective meanings can provide acceptable knowledge” (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 119). Therefore, this thesis has tried to interpret the empirical findings based on the available literature, perspectives, statistics, as well as implications of the context.



By presenting the research approach, the next section will describe how a methodological pathway was developed.

### **3.2 Approach**

As a fundamental difference between pragmatism philosophy and the two more traditional ones positivism and constructivism, “pragmatism supports the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods in the same study and thereby rejects the thesis that the two research traditions are incompatible” (Klenke, 2016, p. 26). Therefore, this study was embarked upon in a search for exploratory literature, in want of new insight, to be applied in a B2B SME SaaS provider context (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 139). The literature review was resulted in defining the six motivational factors and four chosen social media platforms as the ground for data collection and classification. Also, during the process, the decisions on the choosing the relevant social media, were supported by the industries’ contemporary statistics,

The data handling approach is associated more with a constructivist approach and is a case study qualitative analysis. This approach helps to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Rubel & Okech, 2012, p. 2) & (Klenke, 2016, p. 6). The choice is made since the author believes that qualitative studies are concentrated on words and individuals’ perception of reality (Bryman & Bell, 2007), and also aims to study things in their natural settings and context. Consequently, this thesis focuses on understanding the motivational factors behind customer involvement with content on relevant social media platforms. The purpose of this thesis will be fulfilled, by analysis and interpretation of the marketers’ perception toward the audience online behaviors, combined with validating the perceptions by observing audience real-world activities.

Finally, this study was initiated with an inductive approach, since most of the gathered information is the empirical observation of case studies, especially in choosing the relevant social media platforms. As the study progressed, different theories such as U&G theory, which consist of the six motivational factors, took role in defining the theoretical framework. The introduced categories, later on were used to classify different posts on social media platforms. Hence, it can be argued that this study also took advantage of a deductive approach. This means in different phases of this research, the author may move iteratively between the two approaches (Kovalainen & Eriksson, 2011, pp. 15–16), therefore, the entire approach of this study can be referred to as abductive.

### 3.3 Design

This section will give an introduction of research design which is an exploratory study done by conducting a case study. Stebbins (2011, p. 2) suggests that to “explore is to examine a thing or idea for diagnostic purposes, to search it systematically for something.” Additionally, Robson (2002, p. 59) purports that exploratory study could be a valued method to discover what is happening, to seek and gain new insights, as well as assess phenomenon in a new light. This is “particularly useful if you wish to clarify your understanding of a problem, such as if you are unsure of the precise nature of the problem” (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 139). Considering the above clarification, and since this study began with an open-ended question of “How?” to understand the way that social media can contribute to customer-businesses relationship building, an exploratory strategy was adopted for this thesis.

Furthermore, a case study design was chosen for this study as, firstly, according to Yin (2006) case studies are of value for conducting research in the field of social science, and especially in business, and are preferred when a “Why?” or “How?” question is posed. Secondly, having concentration on practical knowledge of real life, case studies fit perfectly into the methods funnel of the pragmatic research approach of this thesis (Nasemann, 2016, p. 39).

Finally, nevertheless Seale et al., (2004, p. 224) rejects the idea of generalization based on a single case study, still they believe a single study can provide valid results in social science. To address the aforementioned concern, a multiple case study was adopted. This helps to establish whether the findings of the first case occur in other cases, and as a consequence they could be generalized to other similar cases (Saunders et al., 2009, pp. 146–147).

## **3.4 Methodology**

This section will present the procedures and methods through which the cases were selected, and the data was collected.

### **3.4.1 Selection of cases**

The main case study of this research was chosen due to its relevancy to the posed research question, or seeing it from another perspective, the research idea was triggered since the author had the chance of observing Queue-it's social media platform and noticed room for improvement.

Queue-it was chosen as the main case study of this research since basically (as mentioned before), an opportunity for improvement of the company's audience involvement with posts on different social platforms was spotted. Queue-it is a B2B SME SaaS provider in a global market and is known as the leading provider of online waiting room solutions.

Later on, to address Saunders et al., (2009, pp. 146–147) concern about insufficiency of one case study, two more cases were added to this thesis. They were to be used as a validating tool for findings. Also, while opting Intechnica and STACKPATH as additional cases, Queue-it's business, social media platforms, and industry were considered as choosing criteria.

As already mentioned in the context chapter, the three companies are all considered as SMEs (EuropeanComissiom, 2018). They are all active in a global market and provide relatively similar SaaS solutions to the same industries (e.g., retail, ticketing, education, etc.). The mentioned similarities lead them to be either director or indirect competitors, and have a congenial audience on their social media platforms.

### **3.4.2 Data collection**

The primary source of data that is used in this thesis project was semi-structured interviews. It was expected that the interviews will bring in the insight over the customer-brand dynamics on social media. Later on, as the interviewees were mostly Queue-it's marketing employees, and it was not possible to interview people from other companies, a secondary source of data was introduced. Social media observation as a data-collecting method which was used to evaluate the findings of interviews in the real online life. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that, from early stages of this study, it was expected that, only some of the insights gained from interviews could get validated in

the online world. This is due to the fact that SMEs may not be able to practice every single useful tactic in their real business condition, mainly due to their limited resources.

### 3.4.3 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews, or qualitative research interviews, are set to help the researcher to develop in-depth and detailed insight about the research topic. This is done by interpreting interviewee’s answer about the topic, which enables the interviewer to see the topic from the respondent’s perspective (King, 2004, p. 2).

Following Leech’s (2002) guidelines, the main themes of the interview were pre-defined and the relevant questions were prepared beforehand. Also, the questions were a combination of different types, such as introductory questions to gain rapport with the interviewee, grand-tour questions to gain an over-all verbal tour of a topic, additional questions to dig deeper in the topic and guide the discussion, as well as clarifying questions to avoid any ambiguity (Appendix 7).

It should be considered that, semi-structured interviews are spontaneous to some extent and interviewers “may omit some questions in particular interviews,” given a specific context, or change the order of the questions to ensure the interview flows smoothly, in a safe environment (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 320).

In total, four semi-structured interviews were conducted with Queue-it marketing employees, all of whom are involved in social media strategy planning and conduction. Below, a list of participants, their title and their role in social media is provided.

The interviews were conducted in a room with no distractions, in a friendly atmosphere and without any external or time pressure from 2 to 4 pm. The results of the interviews, as mentioned before, is used as the primary source of data in this research.

Name	Title	Role in regard to social media
Camila Ley Valentin	CCO & CO-founder	Strategy setting - decision maker
Ana Teodorel	SoMe expert	Execution of strategies on social media
Mianda Galan	Content marketing head	Leading content team, creating content, etc.
Tatiana Krasnova	Digital marketing head	Paid media planning and execution, etc.

TABLE 1

### 3.4.4 Social media observation

As the secondary source of data, this research gathered information about the three companies' activities on social media, their posts, the corresponding motivational factors behind involvement with the posts, as well as the level of involvement with each update.

The platforms as mentioned previously, were Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram and the posts could take from of GIFs, pictures, videos, informative posts, games, competitions, etc. The information was gathered during 1st of May to 31st of July. In this period the amount of posts published by each company with classification of the relevant platform can be seen in the below table.

	Facebook	LinkedIn	Twitter	Instagram
Queue-it	27	42	37	5
Intechnica	16	28	34	8
STACHPATH	36	25	82	12

TABLE 2

Finally, two possible shortcomings for this research was assumed to be as follow. First, the difficulty of labeling and coding each post by a certain type of motivational factor, since the social media is not a laboratory-controlled environment, each post could be related to more than one motivational factor of an audience. Therefore, this research sometimes has connected a single post with more than one motivational factor. Second, higher involvement with a specific motivational factor does not necessarily confirms the superiority and importance of that given factor over the rest for all the audience. This is mostly a reflection of the companies' strategies. For instance, if a company's posts be more of an information-seeking type, they most probably will have more involvement with this type of content and not the entertainment type.

### 3.4.5 Data preparation

In case of the interviews, the conversations were transcribed after the interview sessions, and coded accordingly to the relevant motivational factors which were pointed out in the theoretical framework. Throughout the course of interviews, and after each session, the questions and coding were optimized based on the findings, which would have reflected on the further interviews and analysis (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 478).

In regard to social media platforms observation, the data was collected in a spread-sheet consisting of 8 column and 253 rows, presenting the three companies' data on the four social media platforms, over the duration of three months. The data was classified and characterized based on the six motivational factors and their relevant social media platforms.

#### **3.4.6 Research assessment**

The quality of a research can be evaluated based on four different aspects of construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability (R. Yin, 2003). Saunders et al., (2009) introduce construct validity as the “extent to which your measurement question actually measures the presence of the construct you intended them to measure”. Moreover, internal validity is defined as the extent to which findings can be attributed to interventions rather than any flaws in your research design,” and external validity as “the extent to which the research results from a particular study are generalizable to all relevant contexts.” (Ibid).

In this study, construct validity could be considered as ensuring the research does spot and measure the motivational factors behind customers' involvement with B2B SME content, as well as the corresponding and relevant social media platforms. Being concentrated on answering the research question in a real-life condition, pragmatic philosophy of research was found well-fitted, and since the author could not find any similar studies, an exploratory approach on a case study was chosen as the research design. Perfectly harmonious with pragmatism school of thought, this study adopted a mixed approach. First was a naturalist approach, when introducing the theoretical framework and relevant social media platforms. This was accompanied with a constructivist approach when findings were classified based on the pre-set motivational factors. Also, incorporating multiple tested results of studies and theories in building up the theoretical framework, ensured a more valid construct for this research. Later on, at the analysis stage, the purpose, approach and guidelines of the analysis was carefully defined and outlined to make sure the research achieves what it intends to.

Additionally, the author is aware that case studies may face the challenge of biased views, influencing the data and results (R. Yin, 2003). Similarly, the hardship of keeping internal validity in qualitative researches is also important to reflect on (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Yet it can be argued that adopting a deductive approach to define the six factors as well as the relevant social media platforms, based on an extensive literature review and relevant market statistics of the field has enhanced the research's internal validity.

In terms of external validity, it is arguable whether the findings are externally valid, could be applicable to similar cases. Although at first the study was concentrated on a single-case, by later opting for a multiple-case study approach in order to gather secondary data, an attempt was made to address concerns about the external validity. Also, gathering the secondary data made the data portion much larger and therefore the external validity much higher. Finally, it is worth mentioning that all the cases meet the same criteria and as discussed before, they are all B2B SME SaaS provider companies in a global market with similar audience. This provides a harmonious environment for the research in regards to all of the cases.

Considering the research reliability, “demonstrating that the operations of a study – such as the data collection procedures- can be repeated with the same results” (R. Yin, 2014, p. 45), the author believes that his subjective influence on the research process was inevitable, yet various preventive measures were taken to reduce the influence to a minimum. As an example, suitable and similar environments and procedures were prepared before collecting the data. This would help to avoid errors and biases due to the interviews condition, or interviewer’s influences.

Additionally, interviews with limited amount of data could seem less reliable as a quantitative form of data collection. Yet, quantitative data collection may face a higher risk of errors due to misunderstanding factor. Also, a qualitative form of data collecting may not provide in depth insight over the investigated topic. Therefore, this research compromised the portion of data to achieve data with higher quality.

Finally, during the data collection phase, the author observed posts on social media platforms of the three companies and made sure the motivational factors identified online are in accordance with the findings of the interviews. By incorporating the mentioned methods, the author tried to enhance the reliability of the result, which would ultimately guarantee more validity of the findings.

## 4 Analysis and discussion

The following chapter will present, analyze and discuss the findings of the interviews as well as online observations. First, the different social media platforms and their functionality will be looked into. Furthermore, the findings in regard to the six defined motivational factors will be presented and discussed individually.

### 4.1 Role of different platforms

This subsection will introduce the findings in the interviews and the online observation regarding the use of different social media platforms, and further on, discusses the relevancy and importance of each channel for the case companies.

#### 4.1.1 Facebook

The interviews revealed the following results: Facebook was the platform to be used for employee branding such as job ads (2ndInterview, 2018), but now, the company's posts are more business type, regarding their content (1stInterview, 2018). This is due to three factors. First, the company started to advertise on Facebook (1stInterview, 2018), and noticed the need of having more relevant content on the platform. Second, it is believed that there are plenty of users on Facebook, and they should not be seen as only potential employees. Therefore, Facebook is an opportunity for the company to attract more business-relevant audience and potential customers than any other platforms or even search engines (2ndInterview, 2018). Finally, traffic cross between social media platforms is very small, so it is not possible to find all Facebook users on for example LinkedIn (2ndInterview, 2018).

Contrariwise, almost all of the interviewees do not consider Facebook as their first choice of social media. They see Facebook as the best alternative for emails (3rdInterview, 2018), or a tool for personal connections, setting up meetings, catching up with people, and arranging events (4thInterview, 2018). Another challenge of using Facebook is finding the correct terminology to communicate with the audience, as it is not an expert community or network based. Thus, Facebook does not have a business context (4thInterview, 2018). Finally, it was mentioned that some users may block everything on Facebook (i.e., ads, content, etc.) (4thInterview, 2018).

**Facebook possesses the most outreach.** In line with the facts and figures presented in the social media literature review, respondents found Facebook useful for business practices, due to its high



number of users. Additionally, one of the respondents pointed out that, the traffic cross between platforms could be very low. Therefore, the platform with the largest number of active users could be of great importance.

**Facebook as an employee branding tool.** At several stages of the interviews, Facebook was displayed as an employee-branding tool for Queue-it. This means that Queue-it used to utilize Facebook for publishing job advertisements or communicate employee relevant content. However, this has changed now, mostly due to the three aforementioned factors. Currently, Facebook is used to generate business, which is also similar to many other companies all around the world, as “a whopping 95.8 percent of social media marketers say Facebook delivers the best ROI among the social networks.” (Newberry, 2018)

**Facebook and a mixed-user environment.** This can both bring opportunity and pose a threat. In the interviews, it was mentioned that Facebook’s number of users is relatively larger, in fact larger than any other social platforms (2ndInterview, 2018). This helps the company to reach out to their target audience easier than other platforms and even search engines. Also, “the median amount of time spent on Facebook by business decision makers each day is 74% higher than other people on the platform” (Mighty, 2017). This means a lot of time spent by decision makers on Facebook, which can introduce an opportunity for other businesses to interact with them. This can be considered as another indicator of relevancy of Facebook for B2B businesses. On the contrary side, interviews showed that a lot of people including the respondents are not active on Facebook, and they use the platform for messaging or finding events. In one case, the interviewee did not even want to see the Facebook feed, as the post may include depressing content (1stInterview, 2018), or another respondent who tended to block content and advertisement on Facebook (4thInterview, 2018). This means even if the users are spending time on Facebook, they may not necessary be interested in business related content.

Additionally, one of the interviewees mentioned communicating with audience can be a barrier as Facebook is not a skilled-community base social media platform. This also can be a challenge for many companies with more sophisticated or niche products (3rdInterview, 2018).

This may mean, although Facebook has the largest number of users, they may not all interact on the platform in a way that is meaningful and useful for businesses.

#### 4.1.2 LinkedIn

As for LinkedIn, the interviews revealed the following results: LinkedIn is considered as the most appropriate tool for business and professional purposes and subsequently, has received the most attention by the company (1stInterview, 2018; 3rdInterview, 2018; 4thInterview, 2018). It also seems to be challenging “to function with work if you don't have LinkedIn” (1stInterview, 2018). The platform also addresses “challenges with the terminology” for businesses which have elaborate products, as it has a proper “business context” (2ndInterview, 2018). In addition, LinkedIn brings the opportunity to find “what peers and colleagues do and up to” and spot possible relevant opportunity for the company (4thInterview, 2018).

Respondents also showed interest in the platform, due to the professional behavior and tone of language of LinkedIn users (1stInterview, 2018; 4thInterview, 2018). However, most of the other respondents consider LinkedIn as “a business tool or CRM” (1stInterview, 2018) and not a social media platform, which was surprising for the respondent. The first interviewee also mentioned that, although she would choose LinkedIn as the most important platform for her, she does not “necessarily look at the feed so much” and usually checks personal messages or connect requests (1stInterview, 2018). Moreover, the third respondent believed interactions on the platform can be affected by many factors such as posting time and “LinkedIn algorithms” (3rdInterview, 2018). Also, during the interview sessions, points like the platforms technical issues or how LinkedIn can inspire people in their professional life, were briefly touched upon.

**LinkedIn, suitable for business purposes.** Throughout the interviews, the major focus was around the fact that LinkedIn is the right platform for interaction with business audience, especially the B2B ones. This point of view is in line with the statistics released by (LinkedIn, 2018b). In fact, they suggest “94% of B2B marketers use LinkedIn to distribute content,” which means LinkedIn is perceived as a strong platform to distribute content in B2B environment by the marketers. The popularity of LinkedIn as a business relevant platform may also stem from the active presence of 61 million senior level influencers and 40 million decision-maker professionals on the platform (Golden, 2016). These facts and figures arguably justify why people may not view LinkedIn as a social media tool and rather see it as a business tool or CRM.

**LinkedIn is the place to stay up to date with your profession and find opportunities.** As discussed during the interviews, LinkedIn is perceived as the right place to be informed about peers and learn about industry advances. Having up to date knowledge of the industry and the line of

business one works in, may eventually lead to spotting opportunities for the company and/or the person. This insight has been confirmed and discussed on Quora where Groot (2016) believes LinkedIn helps people solve the business intelligence problem, either the next career or the next client, it keeps people up to date.

**It's not all about the motivational factors.** During the interviews, some of the respondents mentioned that they would not necessarily go through the content in the feed. They use LinkedIn to see what other peers up to, or connect with other people, and sometimes release content. Additionally, they referenced to LinkedIn's algorithms as a major factor of shaping the posts visibility level, and eventually involvement of users with the posts. The above-mentioned points can be relatively important to this thesis, as even if the study could spot the exact motivational factors of audience involvement on LinkedIn, there might be other non-humanistic factors affecting the online observations' results directly or indirectly.

#### **4.1.3 Twitter**

The next social media channel that was mentioned and discussed was Twitter. The discussions brought the research the following results: referring to the importance of channels for the company, two of respondents believed that Twitter holds a rank as high as LinkedIn (1stInterview, 2018; 4thInterview, 2018). This is more conspicuous "when it comes to conferences and especially some niche conferences where there are lots of tech people in the industry, they are using Twitter" (4thInterview, 2018). Most importantly, Twitter was the only channel on which an audience actively created content related to the company and also gained some followers. Additionally, twitter is perceived to be "good at reaching out to a new audience" and has applied "the concept of hashtags for work very well" (1stInterview, 2018). Also, this platform is believed to be more of a news sharing platform than an information posting one (3rdInterview, 2018). In contrast, the platform is not the first choice of use for most of the interviewees in the business context.

**Twitter is an important platform for the business.** This confirms Michaelidou et al., (2011) standing point, as they believe Twitter is a special favorite of B2B companies and is even more popular among them than LinkedIn.

At several points during the interviews, the fact that Twitter can play an important role for businesses was discussed. It was mentioned that the major reason could be the platforms capabilities to reach out to a new audience, by using some features such as hashtags (Standberry, 2017). Another associated reason was particularly relevant to the company. As the company has a

very niche product, it also has a niche group of audience in IT and E-commerce professional , and it was discussed that this given group of audience tend to use Twitter quite frequently (4thInterview, 2018). Therefore, Twitter can be considered as a special favorite of the company in reaching out to potential customers. Given the lack of studies on profession distribution of Twitter users, this notion would be an interesting area to study further.

**Hashtags and news sharing features.** Throughout the interviews, the importance of hashtag feature and how it helps to spread news by/on Twitter more efficiently, were touched upon. It is believed that these two are the most important features of the platform and can help the company to reach out to a vast audience and find out about the latest trends quite effectively. This is also supported by other marketers who believe Twitter is a “go-to place for the latest news and trends on a variety of topics” (Standberry, 2017).

#### **4.1.4 Instagram**

The least discussed platform of all the four was Instagram, and the discussed points were mainly in regard to personal usage of this platform rather than professional functions. The relevant findings were that, Instagram is relatively new to the company, and is primary used for employee branding purposes (1<sup>st</sup> Interview, 2018). Instagram is used at Queue-it “because we want to show that we have fun and provide a nice atmosphere” (4thInterview, 2018). From a personal perspective, Instagram is seen as a “more casual” platform (1stInterview, 2018), which can be used as a “personal branding or inspiration generating tool” (3rdInterview, 2018). The platform is also integrated with Facebook very nicely and can be seen as a memory sharing tool (4thInterview, 2018).

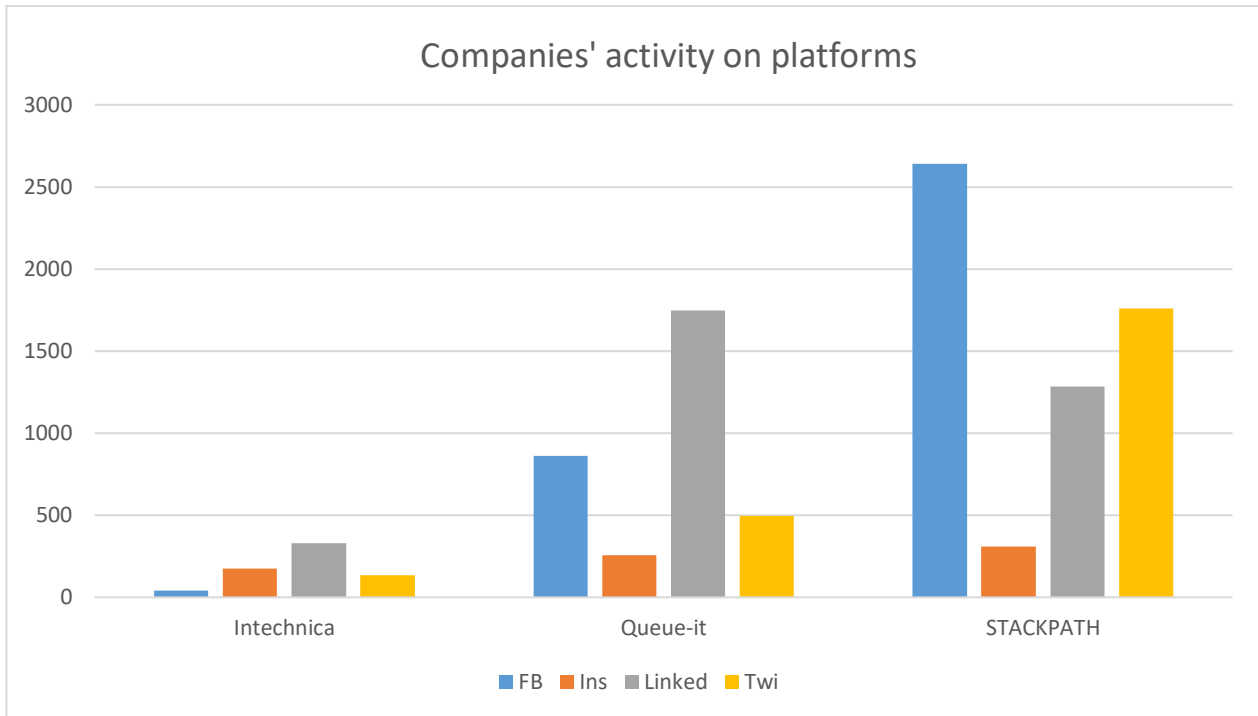
**Perfect tool, but not for B2B business purposes.** As was previously discussed and predicted in the social media review section, the respondents expressed a lot of interest in using Instagram, but for personal purposes. Goals like having an album of their experiences, being in contact with their social network, learning about new places in their immediate vicinity, or getting inspiration were brought to the discussion. Interestingly, everyone except the first interviewee chose Instagram as the most important social media (at least as for personal purposes). However, at Queue-it and in its business context, the platform only serves as a personnel-branding tool. This might be the same for similar businesses due to limited resources or having a niche audience group, yet it could be of value to know that, according to (Statista, 2018e), Instagram is considered as important as Twitter by B2B businesses (Appendix 8).

Finally, with highest rate of interaction, 2.2 percent per follower (Neil, 2016) and one billion enthusiastic users, Instagram seems to be able to play bigger role for some B2B businesses.

#### **4.1.5 Overall**

Looking into the interviews, it becomes apparent that the company considers LinkedIn as their main channel due to different reasons. These reasons as discussed previously in each subsection are first, the business context and professional theme of the platform which makes it suitable for B2B business. Second, the niche audience of the company, IT and ecommerce professionals which could be found more conveniently on LinkedIn. And finally, lower communication barrier for a company with niche product, and the need to communicating detailed technical knowledge with its audience. Furthermore, Twitter was mentioned as one the most important social media channels for the company, as the main audience, IT and ecommerce professional, tend to use this platform quite often, and use of this platform has been successful during different campaigns, especially the ones relevant to conferences (4thInterview, 2018). In addition to the two mentioned platforms, it seems that recently Facebook has found a more important role among the channels, and its role from being an employee branding channel has evolved to a more commercial centric one. There were two main reasons behind this strategic move. The first reason is the presence of a large number of users on this platform, including IT and ecommerce professional. Second, the traffic cross (mutual users) between platforms could be very low, which means the users on Facebook cannot necessarily be found on LinkedIn or Twitter. Finally, although all interviewees are active Instagram users, with higher level of activity than any other platforms, they do not associate much business value to this platform and limit its role to some employee branding activity.

Additionally, to validate the findings in real world practice, the collected data from different case companies on the relevant platforms is presented in the figure four. The graph illustrates the level of customers' involvement (like, share, comment and mention) with companies' posts on different platforms during May-July 2018.



**FIGURE 4**

Looking at Queue-it's online presence, the data presented in the figure four can almost confirm the findings in the interviews. The only nonconformity is the higher interaction on Facebook than Twitter. This can be the reflection of two factors, one, the current shift of a company's use of Facebook which was initiated in mid-April, and second the job advertisements which as mentioned before has one of the highest level of involvement among the posts so far (3rdInterview, 2018).

Moving forward to Intechnica, which is considered a direct competitor to Queue-it, almost the same pattern of social media use could be observed. The only difference is Facebook, which based on aforementioned argument, is due to the change in Queue-it strategy. This signals, the difference could be the reflection of increase in Queue-it activities on Facebook in the last few months.

Furthermore, the data about STACKPATH seems to be classified in a fairly different pattern. The strongest platform for STACKPATH is Facebook, which is followed by Twitter. On the third rank and very close to Twitter, stands LinkedIn, and finally, similar to the two other companies, Instagram is considered the least powerful social media channel. This difference can be due to a few reasons. The first assumption was, STACKPATH may have stronger focus on Facebook. Such a concentration and putting more effort on a platform, as mentioned in the (1stInterview, 2018),

would affect the level of involvement on that specific platform. However, this was rejected as the presence level of the company on Twitter (85 posts) was by far further than Facebook (36 posts). A second notion could be different preference of companies' audience in different regions. STACHPATH is the only company which is based in the USA and not Europe, which may have increased the level of involvement with their brand page on Facebook over LinkedIn or Twitter. Another notion which needs further researches is the company size. Among the three companies only STACKPATH is considered as the youngest as well as the biggest company and is the only company with a different use pattern of social media platforms.

Finally, the findings show that LinkedIn is the most important channel for Europe-based smaller companies, whereas, STACKPATH is the only one which uses Facebook as the main social media Platform. Similarly, for all the three cases, Instagram does not play a major role in business and mostly is considered as an employee branding tool.

## **4.2 Motivational factors**

This sub-section presents and discusses the findings in regard to the six defined motivational factors. The findings include the discussed points of the interviews as well as the online observations. It should be kept in mind that, as discussed before, there is no exact border to divide the factors to blacks and whites, and there is always a combination of factors behind involvement with each post.

### **4.2.1 Information**

The interviews shed light on information seeking motivation. All of the respondents consider information seeking as the main purpose of Queue-it's audience interaction with the company's social media, and some even believe that the company is "mainly or only focusing on the information side" (3rdInterview, 2018). This is believed to be the right approach, as the company sees the "need to show more information about the product, features, pricing" and has recognized that "sometimes the audience do not understand how the product works, so (we) need to show them how it works" (2ndInterview, 2018).

This strategy has also been confirmed by previous results of company's marketing plans and tactics. During the company's previous campaigns, a white paper providing information to e-commerce and IT professionals called 'Are you ready for website traffic peaks?' has been one of the most successful posts so far (4thInterview, 2018). Also, 'KPIs for a successful campaign,' an informative post for ecommerce managers, is welcomed warmly by the audience anytime it was posted on social media (3rdInterview, 2018).

Moreover, it was mentioned that people mainly get involved with content if they "are interested in our business area or performance" (1stInterview, 2018), or the content might be "specifically interesting for them." An example to this could be a post covering the product's use case for Black Friday or Cyber Monday, directly targeting people in ecommerce, or demonstrating how the solution technically integrates with CDNs if you are an IT professional (2ndInterview, 2018). Also, people might show interest in content with "a piece of information, (to find) how they can use it in their career and strategy"(3rdInterview, 2018), or simply "they have a need for (SaaS) solution like ours"(4thInterview, 2018).

Finally, moving on to the online findings, it is possible to observe that the information seeking factor accounts for most of involvement on the three companies' social media platforms. Overall it



accounts for 39 percent for Intechnica, 38 percent for STACKPATH, and 31 percent for Queue-it (Appendix 9).

Considering the above findings, it seems likely that Information seeking behavior, one of the most recognized drives of using the internet in general (Valenzuela et al., 2009), has been extended to the world of social media. This means information seeking behavior can be considered as the gratification sought by most of social media users (Liang et al., 2011, p. 72), and in particular, the users within the context of this thesis.

**Information as a utilitarian need.** As previously pointed out by Logan (2014, p. 23) information-seeking behavior can be associated with consumers, desire to reduce risk when making purchase decisions. The desire can be spotted when IT professional audience look for information about how the solution integrates with CDNs. A second example could be, when potential customers look for a solution's price or the benefits it may bring for them (2ndInterview, 2018). Another manifestation of the need for information was introduced by the fourth respondents, where she mentioned content such as 'Are you ready for peaks?' which received a lot of involvement from its targeted audience. The post addresses E-commerce professionals' concerns about online traffic during Black Friday sales. The mentioned post informs the ecommerce professionals on how they can secure their profit without worrying about website failure. In simple words, this is applicable when customers need and actively look for a solution (4thInterview, 2018).

**Information beyond immediate need.** According to Kari (2006), personal development intention is positively related to information seeking behavior of individuals on the internet. This was also mentioned and discussed during the interviews while respondents were describing the nature of their audience involvement. The third respondent noted that their audience showed interest when they see a piece of information and they get an idea of how to use it in their careers. Also, the third respondent referred to her LinkedIn as "a way to see what people in her network like and what technologies they are interested in." The mentioned points argue that the audience may not be in immediate use of the information, but they most likely absorb the information to utilize it for improving their career or incorporate the information in future decision-making.

**Meaning of information for different groups.** As previously discussed, Kim et al., (2014, p. 176) suggest people's demographic background, educational level and personal preferences could play a vital role in the information they seek. This was also reflected in the findings of this research, as respondents mentioned different types of sub-audience, who could be interested in their relevant

type of information. As an example, IT professionals look into more technical parts of the solution, while managers and owners are keen on knowing about the price of product. Moreover, such an interest might not only be due to an interest in product related information, but also can be the audience interest to a job post, which also creates noticeable involvement (1stInterview, 2018; 3rdInterview, 2018).

On the other hand, it was previously discussed that a key reason driving customer to use social media is the source of information, which is commonly the real people as opposed to corporate messages (Logan, 2014, p. 68) . However, in regard to the context of this study, B2B SaaS provider SMEs, the role of other audience as information provider was almost none. This can be due to plenty of factors such as unavailability of a user-based community or blogs to facilitate two-sided communication, which could be a notion to investigate in further studies.

Finally, based on the analyzed results, it seems information seeking motivations stands out as the most important drive which urges customers to be involved with company's content. This insight is also reflected in the company's social media strategy, and the company tries to provide content for different needs as well as different segments of their audience.

#### **4.2.2 Personal identity**

This sub-section introduces the results around the personal identity motivation factor, and later on discusses them using relevant theories.

Introduced as the second important factor in the company's approach on social media by most of the respondents, personal identity manifests itself as the perception people want to create, toward their own "online personality", by liking a post (2ndInterview, 2018). In other words, simply they like something "to show it to their colleagues as well as people in the market and give some kind of impression over themselves". As an example, "if I see that Tim Champers from ticketing Whirlpool consultancy likes a post, and I see it, there is a big chance that I would like to like it too, because I am also trendy, or I'm also in the topic." (2ndInterview, 2018)

Additionally, the third respondent expressed an experience that "in marketing campaigns people react to the job title," and as an example the audience on LinkedIn would welcome the posts from the CEO better than other people (with lower positions). (3rdInterview, 2018)

Moreover, the fourth respondent believes that "on LinkedIn people always try to keep it more professional, even if it (their post) has some human touch in it. And by them "having an

engagement with similar articles or people, (they) actually build them as an expert ...., like professional profile” (4thInterview, 2018). Another mentioned point in the fourth interview, was that people tend to get connected with someone like Camilla Valentine (CCO), who is usually in the media and was introduced as one of the 100 women in Europe to follow on LinkedIn and Twitter by Forbes (Kapin, 2018) .

Also, the first respondent, who sees the company’s milestone posts as one of the most successful ones, believes the reason behind this is the audience’s tendency to show they are part of startups’ community. She believes “it's nice to follow startups and be excited about them,” and show “you are following successful startups.” This involvement or support might have been demonstrated by “another user not associated with Queue-it at all, (who) created his own handle on Twitter that was the green walking man” (1stInterview, 2018).

By observing the online gathered data, it can be concluded that the pattern is similar in the three companies and reflects the findings of the interviews. Personal identity, standing in the second rank of motivational factors, accounts for 33 percent of STACKPATH, 29 percent of Queue-it and 26 percent of Intechnica audience involvement on social media (Appendix 9).

**Building an ideal self.** Previously, this thesis presented personal identity which is defined as self-expression, identity management and self-fulfillment (Papacharissi, 2006, p. 35), and contains two concepts of the actual-self and the ideal-self (Kleine et al., 1993).

The research results reflect the above explanation of motivational factor. This happens when individuals try to create an impression in their colleagues and people in the industry, by showing that they are aware or involved in certain relevant topics. In fact, regardless of peoples’ actual self, individuals try to participate in social media activities to provide others with an image of their personality (Muntinga et al., 2011, p. 29), and impress others by creating and showing their ideal-self. An example of this, could be when an audience demonstrates their involvement and awareness of a certain topic by liking, sharing or commenting on them. This is evident in one of the interviews when the respondent said, “they didn't really read the post or article or what so ever, but they want to make the impression that they are interested in this topic.” (2ndInterview, 2018). A second example could be when people like or share a post, only because an important person in the same line of profession did this before (2ndInterview, 2018). A third signal of this motivation factor could be recognized when the audience try to show their connection with highly ranked people. They want to show off their connection with someone like the CEO or the CCO, an introduced

influencer by Forbes, by following them or being involved with their posts (2ndInterview, 2018; 3rdInterview, 2018; 4thInterview, 2018). This interaction is aimed to show that, as I am an important person, I am connected to important people.

Additionally, it was mentioned that, people try to “build expert profiles” by liking and sharing a post in the area which is close to their ideal professional self (4thInterview, 2018).

**To be part of (startup) community.** As mentioned before, personal identity can be a more effective motivation factor, when it is concerned with a certain community or brand (Taylor et al., 2012, p. 16). In fact, ideal-self presentation becomes meaningful, and creates online activeness when the audience try to express and associate themselves with brand or community, otherwise, using social media to express oneself alone may not predict participation intention (Gao & Feng, 2016, p. 888).

This was also identified during the interviews, when individuals try to be involved with startup communities, show their concerns and supports for newly established companies, and be excited for their development (1stInterview, 2018). An example of this could be when audience perceived the posts about startups’ improvement and milestones as interesting and get more involved with them than other common posts of the same company. A second example could be when an unaffiliated individual tried to show their support by creating a handle (mentioning a twitter user), using the company’s logo and support the business on Twitter, which was seen as “just a group dynamic” that people “do for other startups and not only us (Queue-it)” (1stInterview, 2018).

As Hung (2014, p. 597) suggests, consumers engage with the brand’s personality in order to receive a sense of comfort. Yet, in this study, it might not be the best choice to label the acquired feeling as comfort, since the case study is not about a famous brand with a personalized product. The feeling can be extended as a sense of belonging to a professional and trendy tech community with its own certain characteristics. This also can be seen as a result of self-assurance seeking, participating in social media to get positive feedback from others (Saridakis et al., 2016, p. 1064).

Yet, it must be considered that, personal identity in this sense, may have some similarities and overlaps with the social integration factor. As mentioned about social integration before, more and more people are turning to the online world to satisfy their social and psychological needs (McKenna & Bargh, 1999, p. 250). Since one of these needs is belonging to a certain group (Belk,

2013, p. 493), people try to resemble other in-group members and distinguish themselves from outsiders (Tsai & Men, 2013).

Finally, as the results show, personal identity plays a limited role in audience drive to be involved with B2B SaaS provider SMEs on social media and in the case of this thesis could be considered as the second influential factor. This is confirmed both by the interviews and the online gathered data.

### **4.2.3 Social integration**

This sub-section will present the results regarding social integration and discusses its implications by means of previously introduced as well as new relevant theories.

Social integration motivation and its implications were the most discussed of the six factors after information, yet the majority of respondents place it on the third level of importance. Also, as discussed in the previous section, this motive has some similarities and connections with some areas in personal identity.

From the personal-use perspective, some of respondents see it as one of the most important reasons to use social media, as they (for instance) use Facebook and LinkedIn only to see who their connection requests are or reply back to the messages they have (1stInterview, 2018; 3rdInterview, 2018). Also, even if they post or share content on the platforms they may do it to support “some cool achievement from someone that they know”(1stInterview, 2018), or because the “community gives something to them, so they give something back” (3rdInterview, 2018). Additionally, social media can become handy when they “want to know what their industry peers are doing, content wise” (4thInterview, 2018).

On the company-use level, the results were concentrated on the three major areas. First, would be the individuals behind a business, as it was mentioned; a. One of the sources which generates followers for company is “people we've met or they heard us speak at events” (1stInterview, 2018) b. A company “has to be a very strong brand to have a lot of followers, otherwise people tend to gravitate towards the individuals behind the company” (1stInterview, 2018) c. When the audience sees that “Queue-it is present on a website and social media, they want to see who is behind the company” (4thInterview, 2018). d. “Everything that goes through a company account so far doesn't really bring us any results, the content that is being posted by personal accounts, of those who are working here, is much more effective” (2ndInterview, 2018)

This perspective is confirmed by the company's results during the time. For example, when a company sees they "have new customers or potential customers, they'll go on LinkedIn and look at some of our employees, founders' personal profile's (1stInterview, 2018). Or whenever, the company used personnel and showed their real selves and not just a business oriented profile, the content is welcomed by the audience, " as they see we are human and not robots, we laugh, we cry, we eat lunch, ....." (2ndInterview, 2018)

Second is personal relationship, and was touched upon by remarks like a. "Personal factor works better, if I know this person, there is much bigger possibility that I would like the post" (2ndInterview, 2018) b. "Maybe someone recommends us" so they become interested in the company's social media (4thInterview, 2018) c. One of the areas that the company functions in is ticketing. This industry is "small group of people who are decision makers that have been rotating around theaters, venues or ticketing companies and they kind of know each other." (3rdInterview, 2018) d. Whenever Queue-it does a content post with someone that's actually performing better than anything we do alone, (4thInterview, 2018).

Additionally, The final point which was brought in only by the fourth respondent, as audience may aim for "building network , and getting more and more in touch with the people who they want to interact with"(4thInterview, 2018)

The last area to reflect is peer pressure. It was noted that sometimes the company's managers ask people (mostly employees) to like their posts (1stInterview, 2018; 2ndInterview, 2018), and by that they try to leverage employees profiles and network (if they are personally interested) to broaden the outreach (1stInterview, 2018). Additionally, it was noted that people may like a peer post "to show that they are a good colleague" (2ndInterview, 2018).

Finally, the online observations showed that social integration also could be considered as one of the influential factors, by standing on the third rank for the three case studies. More specifically the motivational factor accounts for 27 percent of Queue-it, 23 percent of STACHPATH and 15 percent of Intechnica's interactions.

As introduced before the two factors of social integration are supporting peer groups, and enhancing interpersonal connections (Tsai & Men, 2013), which are used to discuss findings in this sub-section.

**Interpersonal connection.** First, the discussions during the interviews suggests that people occasionally try to get involved with the company's social media channels and they would rather be connected with the individuals behind the company. This was discussed in all of the interviews, and the reason was associated to brand equity, suggesting audience tend to gravitate toward the individuals behind a company with lower brand equity, and not the brand page. Also, a further reason behind such behavior can be people's interest in a sincere and authentic connection with a brand than only commercial side of this relationship, and such a relationship can be formed easier when they connect with a human behind the brand (Fogelson, 2014).

This also justifies why people tend to follow the company on social media after they have an in person social experience with company's employee or owners off-line (1stInterview, 2018).

To conclude the abovementioned points, it seems that excluding companies with strong brand equity, a human-based connection creates more trust for the audience. This further on can pave the ground for a higher degree of audience involvement with the brand on social media. Yet, this is an assumption based on limited findings, and should be assessed before further judgments.

Secondly, the results noted that enhancing interpersonal connection could be considered as the main purpose of social networks, connection-building and socializing (Papacharissi, 2009, p. 201). This mostly manifests when people try to connect with other people and broaden their network. The notion can also be applied to Queue-it related interactions on social media. For example, IT and e-commerce professionals who want to be in contact with other experts in their field, and therefore, follow the company to be part of its professional network. A second example could be an individual who seeks job opportunities and tries to increase their exposure to the opportunities by connecting to the brand page and company's employees.

**Supporting peer groups.** This was another point introduced by Tsai and Men (2013), which was discovered in the interviews when as an example people of a small network like ticketing know each other and support each other by referring new people to a business. In fact, by knowing someone from the company personally, people try to be nice and supportive. This urge them not only get involved with the company's pages and content, but also encourage other people in their network to do the same.

On the other hand, this might not always be due to being supportive, but rather deriving from pressure. Individuals, due to their personal relationship, may see it as a duty to follow, share, like

content which is released by some certain sources. This was pointed to when the second respondent said “people feel the peer pressure and try to be a nice colleague by liking the company’s posts.” This statement corroborates Logan (2014, p. 62) who suggested that the audience may get involved with specific organizations and corporations on social media due to peer pressure.

#### **4.2.4 Empowerment**

So far in this section the results and respective discussion of information, personal identity, and social integration were presented. In this sub-section the results of empowerment as a motivational factor will be presented and analyzed.

Empowerment as a motivational factor was ranked as the fourth important element by two, as the third by one, and as the second by the last respondent. However, throughout the interviews, the element’s presence was much less significant than the previous ones. The below results were pinpointed during the interviews:

During the first interview, it was mentioned that after an event, an unaffiliated user “created his own Handle on Twitter, the Green Walking Man (company’s sign), which was something that started getting followers, and it was kind of funny, sounds a little weird.” (1stInterview, 2018). Also during the second interview, it was discussed how users may get involved with a post “to promote things between friends” (2ndInterview, 2018). Similarly, being involved with a post may show that the user “kind of has authority and source of information” in the topic area.

During the third and fourth interviews the respondents didn’t have any self-generated remark about this factor (3rdInterview, 2018; 4thInterview, 2018). In response to a question, the third interviewee mentioned, “it depends on the content of the post. If it’s a fun fact about something, it’s not necessarily perceived as empowerment. If it’s a piece of (technical) information about the product then yes, I think that’s the right way to label it.” She also believes, the company sometimes have to avoid such posts where empowerment factor may have been incorporated in the post. The reason associated with complex terminology of such content, which discourage majority of the people to follow the post and may create highly technical discussions.

Looking at the incoming data from the online observation, Empowerment stands on the fourth level of involvement creation, with a significant difference with the formerly discussed factors. Empowerment accounts for 11 percent of Intechnica, 9 percent of Queue-it, and 5 percent of STACKPATH social media involvement.



To clarify the observation criteria for this motivational factor, it should be mentioned that these posts are mostly concentrated on the technical aspects of the product. In particular, these posts give the audience the opportunity of confirming the topic by liking or challenging them, by posing a question or giving a second opinion about the topic. Finally, the related posts often have an overlap with other motivational factors especially information and personal identity. This was addressed mostly by counting twice or three times, once for each factor, whenever found necessary.

Empowerment means letting customers taking control over certain aspects of a brand (Carmon, 2002, pp. 298–299). On social media, empowerment is tangible when the audience or community gathers around a brand and tries to have a self-exhibition in front of other consumers and members of the community (Cova & Pace, 2006, p. 1087). Yet, as previously mentioned, on social media empowerment motivation can be used as a marketing tool through the creation of a brand community, and brands with small shares hardly have brand communities (Guinn & Muniz, 2005, p. 502). Hence, as predicted the conclusive results were abysmal.

During the interviews, two major points were touched upon, which can be considered as empowerment motivational factor. The first one was when users try to introduce themselves as someone who has the “authority” of being “the source of information.” Second, when certain users show their knowledge by getting involved with technical posts and content. Both of the mentioned points are in line with the previously discussed theories. However, it is not a common approach for the company to create an environment for such activities.

As mentioned before, Muntinga et al., (2011, pp. 32–33) suggests it can be beneficial for a business, when someone, as a brand ambassador, shows enthusiasm, creates a community and enjoys persuading the others. This was one of the rare cases which was observed during the interviews. Yet, as mentioned in the first interview there was no intention by the company to create a contribution and it was an accidental case (1stInterview, 2018),.

Finally, although there were a few mentions of the empowerment role in audience engagement with the company’s posts, and some data from the online observation, the role seem to be too insignificant to be considered as an effective factor.

#### **4.2.5 Entertainment**

Similar to empowerment, entertainment did not enjoy much publicity among the respondents and was not perceived as an influential factor in the case study’s business environment.

There was only one case mentioned in the first interview, where the company “made a T-shirt with the walking man, which said I survived the queue” and then the company “raffled it off so people could win it, and that actually brought a surprising amount of traffic because so many people were into this” (1stInterview, 2018).

Additionally, the second respondent, who was against the practicality of entertainment factor believed entertainment is “not working” as it is not “meaningful”, and even if “it gets lots of likes and people share it with their friends, people will soon forget it.” However, she mentioned that when they made video content, and showed reality and the fun part behind the scene of making videos, people have liked and welcomed the content more (2ndInterview, 2018).

During the third interview, the respondent could not recall using any post which “specifically entertains or include a more humorous tone or fun facts” except for some “about the employer branding content” which was one or two in the last 2 years (3rdInterview, 2018).

Also, the fourth respondent believes “if you do it (using entertainment) in a professional way with a funny twist, it's super nice to show the human side of a brand, but it's a little bit harder when you do B2B because you really want to keep a balance.” “We try to do it with things ..., through images with the three billion users posts.” Also she believed this factor is mostly concentrated on Instagram, as Queue-it “wanted to show that (we) have fun here at Queue-It and it's a nice atmosphere.” (4thInterview, 2018)

Not surprising when, reflecting the company’s policy, the online observation reveals similar results to the interviews. The entertainment factor accounts for only 6 percent of audience involvements with the posts. The numbers for Intechnica and STACKPATH are respectively 4 and 2 percent.

Neither the interviews, nor the online data showed significant contribution of entertainment as a motivational factor for the case studies, which was not expected at the departure point of this thesis. This result was against the findings by Hashemi (2017) which attributed social media involvement for its case study mainly to the entertainment factor. To see the reasons behind this nonconformity of the results, the author conducted a short comparison between the two studies, mostly regarding the case study differences. The result of the comparison showed five major differences: 1. Size, resource, number of followers and brand equity of the previous study’s case (HubSpot, 2018) is much larger than the case studies of this thesis. 2. Although HubSpot is a B2B SaaS provider, it is a software which is used by many users in the organizations, and not only by one or two people. The

software provided by this thesis case studies are used only for two people and not many users, therefore has much less exposure than HubSpot. 4. HubSpot has a community, an academy, and a forum which, as discussed before, creates more involvement (HubSpot, 2018). 5. The previous study was conducted only on Facebook, and HubSpot uses entertainment factor on Facebook and not on LinkedIn and Twitter. However, this thesis discusses four different channels. To see if the assumed reasons are the real reasons behind this non-conformity, or the reason is simply the company's strategy, a further study on Entertainment factors for different organizations is suggested.

The interviews showed that, entertainment factor was used randomly at Queue-it and was not part the marketing plan or strategy, and therefore, there is not much evidence on audience involvement. The only channel which has some entertainment factor is Instagram and this is in order to attract potential employees (4thInterview, 2018).

#### **4.2.6 Remuneration**

The final motivational factor according to the theoretical framework is remuneration. This motivational factor was found irrelevant to this study, and the CCO of Queue-it labeled this factor as "Not Applicable" for the business. This is mostly due to the company's activity in B2B environment, which makes remuneration "tricky" (1stInterview, 2018), particularly in case of incentives offering to individuals from a company. She mentioned, "it's something we don't do because it's complicated when we operate outside of our own country, where we don't know how things work, culturally, legally, etc." (1stInterview, 2018).

Also, it was mentioned that some of the end users (people in the online waiting room), may like Queue-it pages or posts as they think they can bypass the queues if they are a follower (1stInterview, 2018; 2ndInterview, 2018). This was not the case for many occasions and does not seem to be of any value for the company.

Finally, the only posts with incentives that received high involvement were job advertisements, as the incentive for the people could be the jobs (3rdInterview, 2018; 4thInterview, 2018). This was mentioned in the third and fourth interviews and was noted in the online observation as well. The high level of involvement with such content, could raise further awareness on what could be the definition of remuneration for different audience groups.

#### 4.2.7 Overall

Going through the interviews, it can be concluded that information, social integration and also personal identity are highly relevant motivational factors on the company brand pages and posts.

Information plays a significant role, as it not only addresses individuals' utilitarian needs such as the need for a solution to handle the online traffic of an upcoming sale, it can also help and prepare people for their future life such as finding a new job. It was also discussed how the perceived value of different pieces of information can vary among different audience groups.

Personal identity, as discussed in the theory section, can have plenty of aspects, yet in this study building an ideal self by making an impression on others was discovered as significant. This impression is mostly created by getting involved with certain types of content such as the solution's technical integration. Another relevant aspect of personal identity is the sense of belonging to a group (Taylor et al., 2012, p. 16), which is manifested here by sense of belonging to the startup communities.

It is important to note that as discussed previously, sense of belonging could be an overlapping element between personal identity and social integration.

Moreover, social integration was highlighted as another influential motivational factor by the findings. The aspects by which this motivational factor was identified are two. First, enhancing interpersonal connection, which can have examples like creating new network or having a prior offline experience with the brand or its related people. Second, supporting peer group, which may occur when people in a company like a post to show their support toward their colleagues, or when some new audience are being introduced by peers of the small ticketing industry community.

In addition to the three abovementioned factors, empowerment seems to be partially influential on involvement level of audience. The factor can contribute to involvement level by creating a positive feeling of having the "authority" of being the "source of information" in their network. This happens when individuals share, like or comment on relatively technical content of the company.

Surprisingly, and against the finding in Hashemi (2017), entertainment did not seem to be a playing factor in this thesis. Although not all the interviewees were against using the fun factor in the posts, they do not give priority to this motivational factor over previously mentioned ones. The only channel which has a tinge of entertainment factor is Instagram. However, Instagram is used only for

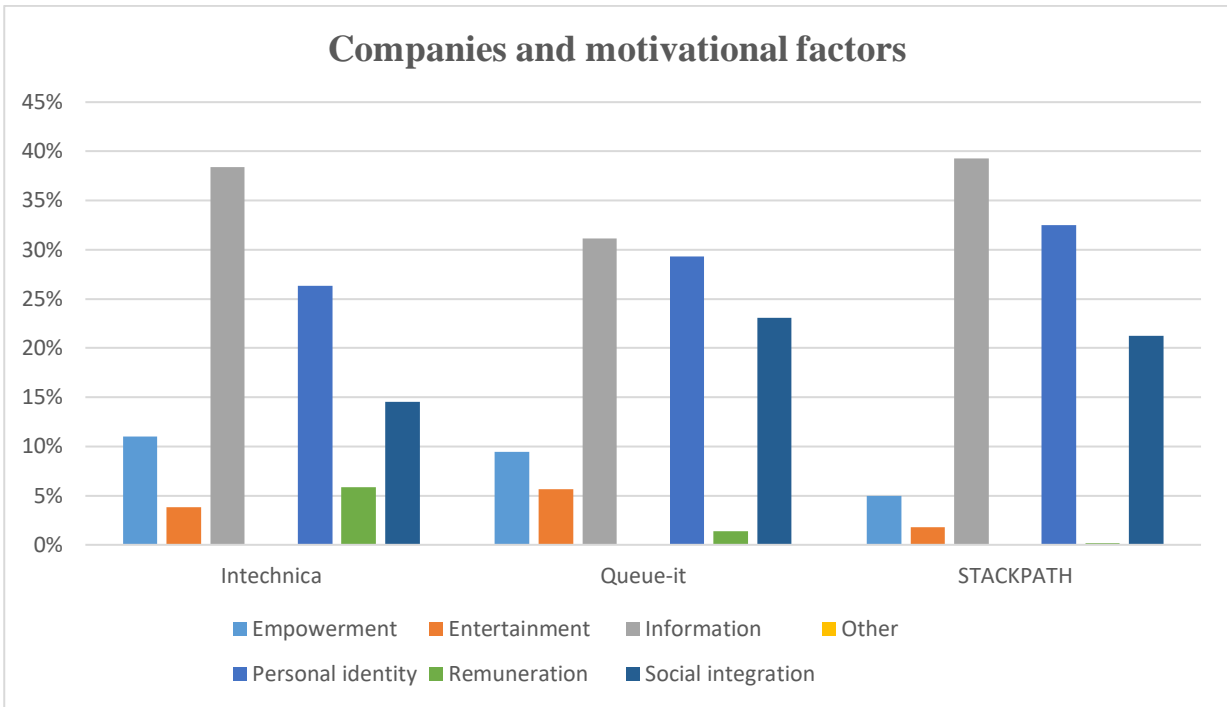
employee branding. Also, there were a few cases in which fun factors were incorporated into content, but they seemed to be random and accidental rather than strategic.

The last introduced motivational factor by the theoretical framework was remuneration. This motivational factor was rejected by almost all of the respondents, and was not found of any value toward the company's audience as it is believed to be "tricky in a B2B environment" (1stInterview, 2018).

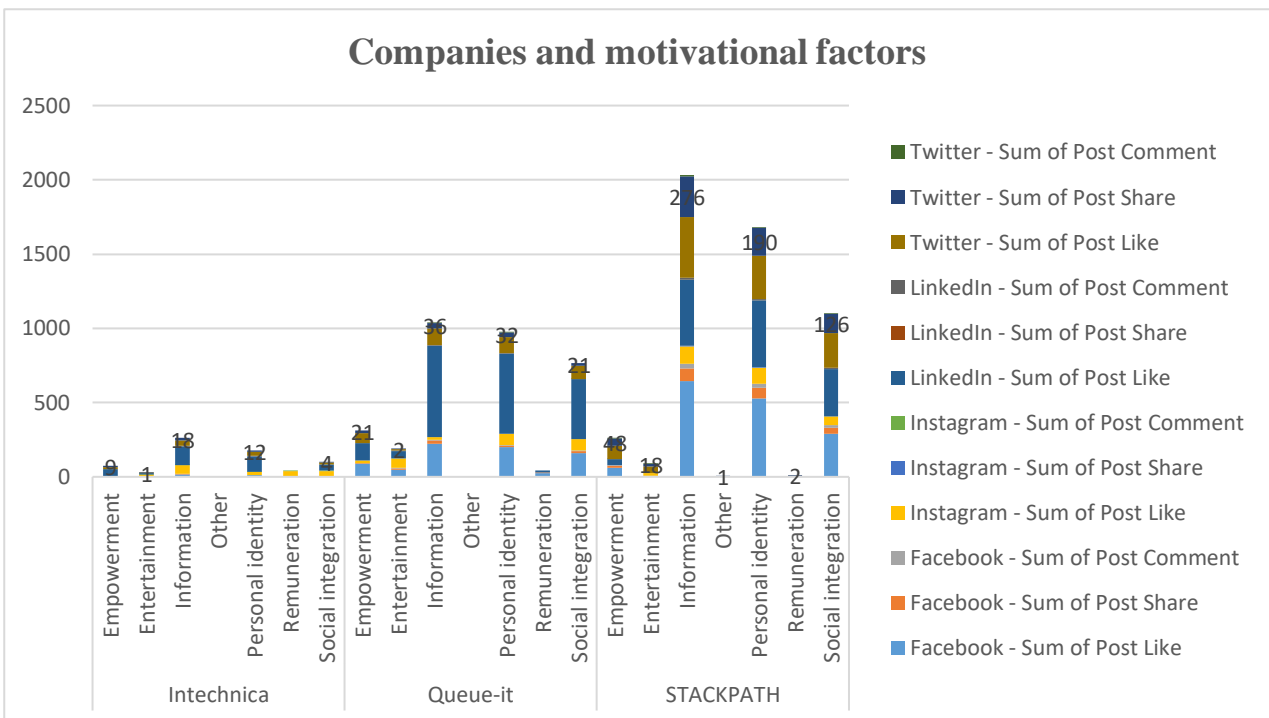
Finally, to validate the findings on the social media channels, the data collected from the three case companies are presented in the below graphs. Figure five and six show which motivational factors were used in the companies' posts and to what level they contributed in involvement creation. Also, the figure four illustrates the same information yet broken down to the social media channels.

The information in the graphs also follows the same pattern found in the interviews as ranks the motivational factors in the following order. 1. Information 2. Personal identity 3. Social integration 4. Empowerment 5. Entertainment.

The only factor which does not follow the pattern is remuneration in Intechnica. The reason could be that Intechnica offers some webinars regularly in which they teach audience about some technical side of e-commerce, and the posts relevant to the workshops are found to be interesting by some audience (Intechnica, 2018a). Acquiring such knowledge was considered as remuneration seeking motivation, hence counted in the account of this motivational factor.



**FIGURE 5**



**FIGURE 6**

## **5 Closing remarks**

This chapter aims to conclude findings and suggestions of this thesis. The chapter includes remarks about the thesis objectives, and the extension to which they are met. Further on, the limitations that this study have faced is noted. Finally, the recommendations for further work, both from academic and business perspective are presented.

### **5.1 Conclusion**

The idea for this thesis was initiated by the goal of shedding light on how social media can play a role in enhancing customer-brand relationship, in a B2B environment and for SME SaaS providers. The primary objective was set to understand the customers' motivational factors behind their involvement with B2B SaaS SMEs brand pages. In addition, as a complementary part of primary objective, this thesis aimed to evaluate each of the motivational factors and investigating the level of their relevancy to the cases. Moreover, the secondary set of objectives, was evaluating the role as well as the relevancy of different social media platforms in the aforementioned business context. In order to achieve these objectives, a qualitative research methodology was applied throughout the research journey.

At the first stage, and after defining the context of this thesis, the research question was proposed. Further on, to define a framework toward meeting the primary and secondary objectives, two sub-questions were posed. This was followed by an overview of the main case company, and two other similar companies which were used for benchmarking purposes. Having a pragmatic approach toward conduction of this research, the author could benefit the already established theories to define motivational factors in the proposed theoretical framework. Additionally, relevant literatures as well as statistics were utilized to suggest insights about intended social media platforms.

After conduction of four interviews and three months of social media observation, the previously defined factors were used to classify and discuss the findings related to the motivational factors. Also, relevant findings were highlighted and discussed to understand the relevancy and importance of different social media channels. Hence, addressing the objectives of this thesis within the defined context.

The primary objectives of this thesis were represented in a sub-question asking about the audience motive behind being on social media and getting involved with B2B SMEs. The interviews and

online observations were used to find that the most influential motivation behind customers' involvement was information-seeking factor. The research showed that customers are present on social media and get involved with online posts to address needs like knowing about a solution or gaining some information to use it for their future personal development. A second factor, which was highlighted by the data, was personal identity. This could be noticed when individuals try to leverage opportunities created by social media posts to present an online ideal self. This behavior is usually accompanied by an effort to get closer to a group or community, which to some extent overlaps social integration, another important discussed motivational factor. Social integration was also a highlighted factor in the interviews and online observations, as it could contribute in having stronger network within an intended community. This factor often represents itself in behaviors such as supporting peers, or effort to enhance interpersonal relationships. According to the interviews and online collected data, empowerment stands on a lower level of importance and relevancy. This motivational factor could be relevant to this thesis context since sometimes the audience had the chance of boasting about their knowledge and skills to the other audience. This could usually happen via getting involved with technical content on the brand pages, during which the audience would comment, reject or suggest relevant knowledge to others. Against some findings within a similar context, entertainment factor was not recognized as valuable to the businesses' strategies based on the conducted interviews. Not having entertainment in the social media agenda, the company did not have enough posts with fun and entertainment theme on its platforms. Therefore, also the online observed data did not show any meaningful contribution of this factor in creating involvement. Finally, the last projected motivational factor, remuneration, was labeled as not applicable in the interviews. This was mostly the result of regulations and cultures of different countries, which causes relationship complexities in B2B environment. On the other hand, the online observed data showed some audience involvement because of the remuneration motivational factor. However, this data was not created by potential customers and mostly created by individuals who may seek job opportunities. This means some people, would see getting a specific job as the remuneration of being involved with company's content, and in this case the content is a job posting.

Another sub-question represented the secondary objectives of this thesis. This question was raised to seek the contribution and relevancy of different social media platforms in this thesis context. Prior to data collection, it was decided that the most relevant social media channels in the case studies are Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram. These platforms were chosen as first, the



social media facts and figures showed the relevancy and importance of these channels in B2B context, and second, the three case companies were present and active on them. The interviews and the online observation of the main case study showed that; LinkedIn is considered as the most important social media channel since it is easier to communicate a niche product in a topic-literate community of professionals on LinkedIn. Further on, Facebook has newly become a platform of interest for the company, since it is titled as the largest social media community. Also, Twitter is considered as highly important due to the fact that IT and Ecommerce professional are usually present on this platform. Finally, it was found that, Instagram is not really of business value, except for showcasing the culture and values of the company. Aiming to validate the findings, the research moved forward with comparing mentioned results with collected data on the two other companies' social media platforms. However, the results of this comparison showed a partial conformity among the companies. As an example, STACKPATH was more in favor of utilizing Facebook and Twitter, while Queue-it gains higher level of interactions on LinkedIn and then Facebook, and finally Intechnica's audience are involved with the company's content on LinkedIn and Instagram. Overall, the two smaller companies which are located in Europe, showed similar preferences in terms of social media platforms, comparing to the US based larger one, STACKPATH.

In regard to meeting the objectives of the thesis, the author believes, this research could meet its primary objectives in defining the motives behind audience engagement as well as their relevancy. This is assumed as the findings in the interviews, were validated by the same findings during the online observations, for all the three companies. However, there is still room for a deeper investigation on the two rejected motivational factors.

On the other hand, results regarding the secondary objectives were not harmonious among the three case companies, and it is believed the objective was met partially. In case of relevancy and use of social media channels, two companies Queue-it and Intechnica would value LinkedIn as the most used channel and showed similar preferences. On the contrary side, STACKPATH would consider Facebook as the main communication channel with its audience.

## 5.2 Limitations

This thesis contributes mostly in practical implications of social media usage, which should be viewed in the light of several limitations. These limitations are introduced in the succeeding paragraphs.

There were only four conducted interviews, of which all the respondents were employees of one company, Queue-it. Although the results of the interviews were mostly confirmed by the online observations of the two other case companies, it was not confirmed if those companies had the same mindset and strategy. Therefore, it is not possible to generalize the findings and apply it to other B2B SaaS SMEs, before further investigations.

Another limitation which should be mentioned is the respondents understanding of the motivational factors. At several points during the interviews, the interviewer had to stop the session and clarify what he means by each of the motivational factor, aiming to avoid any misunderstandings of the respondents. However, it is not guaranteed that all of respondents have had the same perception of each factor. Ex. remuneration could be something different than a gift or a coupon or materialistic incentives, but it is not confirmed that the interviewees thought so. Therefore, this may, to some extent, have affected respondents' point of view and responses about each motivational factor.

Also, this thesis interviews were bound to Denmark, and the online data collection was limited to the companies from western world, Denmark, the UK and the USA. Additionally, the used literatures were all in English language. These shortcomings can limit the introduced insights of this thesis to the western world and English language, as motivational factors can vary from culture to another, or there are countries with their own popular social media in use.

Finally, the online gathered data was limited to only three months and may not show the overall approach of a company. As an example, Queue-it was performing on Facebook stronger than Twitter due to their current alteration of approach. Such strategies and approaches may undergo changes in a short time for B2B SaaS SMEs, and hence produce online data with different look.

### **5.3 Further research suggestions**

This study was initiated to help relationship building of B2B SME SaaS providers with their audience on social media. To do so a theoretical framework was developed, but since the time and scope of this thesis was limited, only the first part of the framework was looked into. This brings in a wealth of opportunities for further researches to see how/if the created involvement may move forward in the framework and create a deeper brand-customer engagement. Also, this can step to a next level, by researching if such a deep engagement would lead to creation of more loyal customers, and if they show brands' desired behaviors such as word of mouth or repurchase.

As mentioned in the preceding sub-section, the number of interviews and companies were limited. Therefore, with reference to the notion of reliability and validity, presented in the chapter three, further researches involving larger sample size (interviews) and more case studies are suggested. The interviews could be set to seek insight of the respondents of different demographic, cultural and geographic backgrounds. For conducting such an investigation, it sounds essential to adjust and tailor questions according to the regions' culture and language, so it guarantees the same understanding of the questions and motivational factors for all the interviewees. Also, as a complementary solution, a quantitative analysis of larger and longer online observation data is suggested. Such a quantitative analysis would address the time, geographical, cultural and language limitations and concerns.

At the analysis stage of this thesis, entertainment was introduced as an unimportant motivational factor in B2B environment. This finding was against the suggestion of previous studies. To clarify this nonconformity, the author suggested a few reasons which also brings in another opportunity for further studies.

Finally, although this study was focused on the organic side of customers' involvement with brands, the respondents pinpointed a few additional factors which may have an important impact. The mentioned factors were sponsoring the posts (pay to boost a post) and the platforms algorithms, which could be a notion for further researches.

## 5.4 Recommendations

At this point, it is learned what the audience's motivation factors behind being involved with a B2B SaaS provider SME are, and how it is reflected in the relevant companies' social media strategy and execution. Similarly, an understanding toward social media platform use, within the intended business context, has been acquired. Therefore, this subsection suggests a few managerial implications which could be valuable for the relevant businesses.

More and more people are accessing internet via their cellphones or computers. Also, these people are active on different social media of their preference, and the number of these individuals is increasing year by year. This have brought companies an undeniable opportunity to improve their brand equity and promote their products in an online boundaryless world. Yet, how to do this is of dire importance, especially for smaller companies with limited resources.

This thesis discussed that, initiation of any action either from company side or customer side is due to some needs. However, these needs might be of significant difference in their nature. Therefore, if companies want to improve a brand-customer relationship on social media, they should find their customers' motivation and need behind being present online. By understanding these motivations, the companies can provide their customers a ground to fulfil their needs and ideally get involved with the brand exponentially.

This study found a highlighted connection between information seeking, personal identity and social integration factors, and customers' involvement with posts. Also, empowerment and entertainment could still play a role in improving customers' and brand relationship on social media. These findings can be used for setting B2B SaaS SMEs social media strategies, however to have a more accurate plan and execution, the relevant businesses should research and find the needs and motivational factors of their own specific audience. In this path, they could utilize the findings of this thesis as a beginning framework to map their journey.

Additionally, this thesis shed light on the role of different social media platforms, and how they can contribute to this relationship building. LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter are the ones with higher relevancy and power to outreach the audience of B2B SaaS SMEs. LinkedIn is a helpful channel as it has created a business professional society, and it is easy to find niche product related communities on it. Facebook can contribute to the businesses by having the largest social media user depository among all of the platforms. Twitter has very practical capabilities such as reaching

new target audience with help of some features like hashtags. Additionally, although not as popular as the mentioned ones, Instagram has opened its way to B2B world as the perfect place to be less formal and more employee branding oriented. Finally, it should still be considered that a combination of the platforms may work the best for businesses, as the overlapping traffic between the platforms are believed to be low. This means if a customer is active on Facebook, they are not necessarily present and active on LinkedIn. Also, choosing the right combination of these platforms should be based on the business environment and resources and there is no single suggestion to apply to all of the similar companies.

To sum up, it should be mentioned that customers' involvement with a brand is the first step of a journey which ends in acquiring loyalty for the brand. However, this journey would never begin if a business does not know the real needs of their audience.

## 6 Literature and appendixes

### 6.1 Literature

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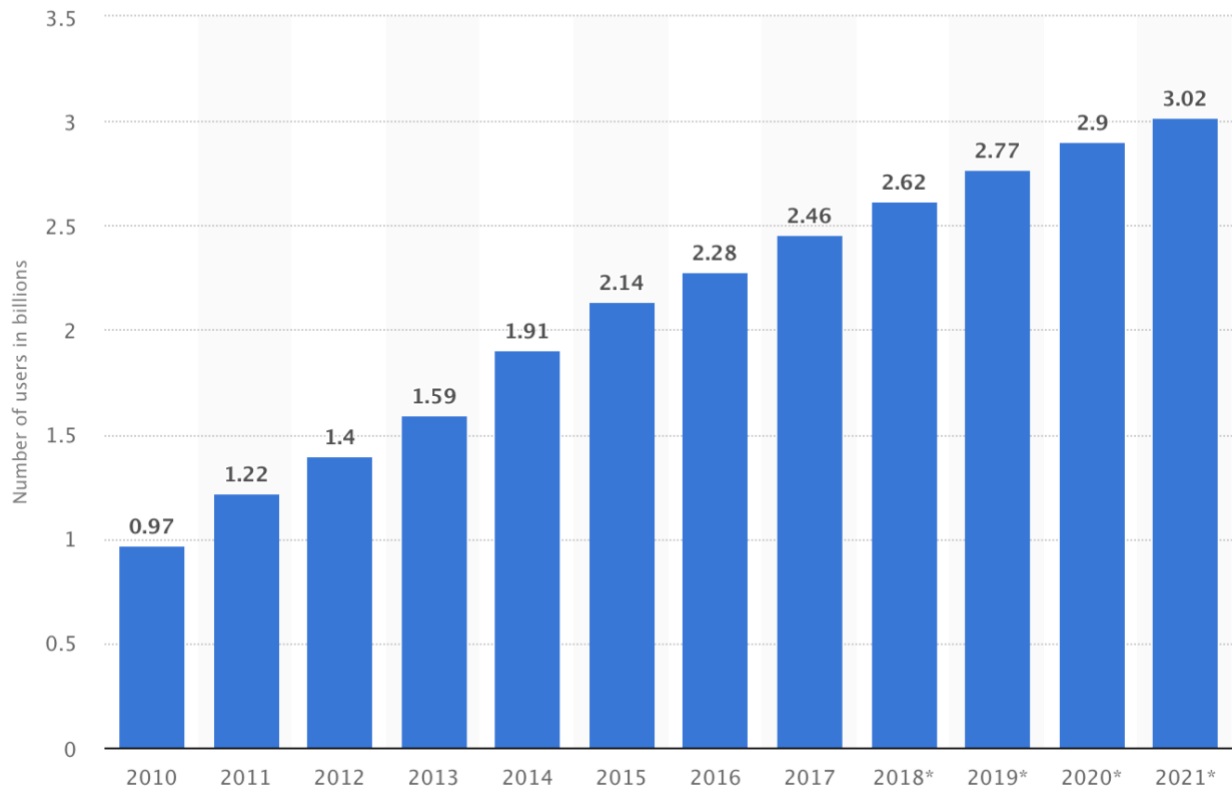
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## 6.2 Appendixes

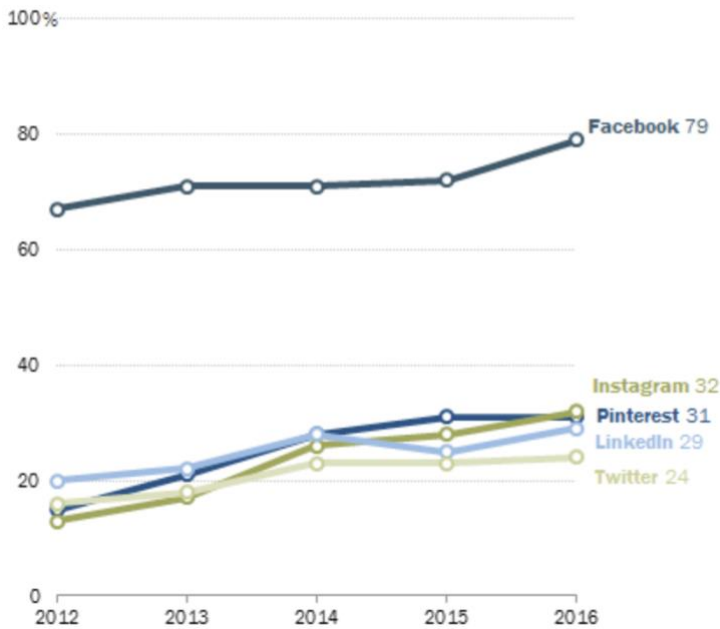
### Appendix 1



## Appendix 2

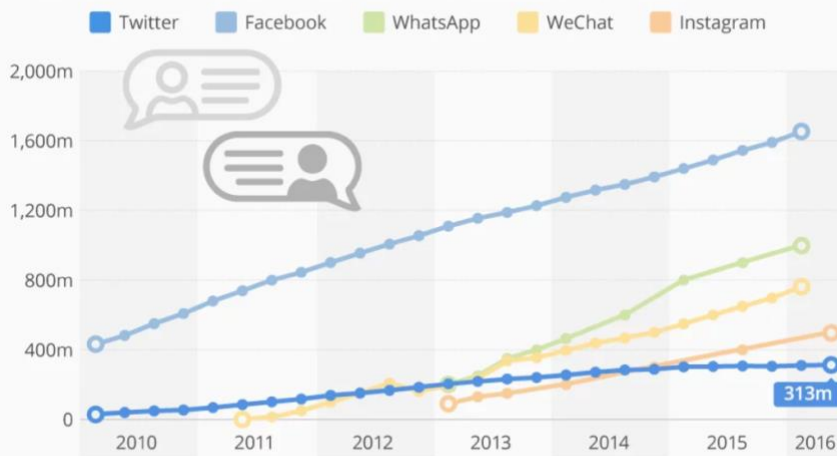
### Facebook remains the most popular social media platform

% of *online* adults who use ...



### Competition Leaves Twitter in the Dust

Monthly active users of selected social networks and messaging services

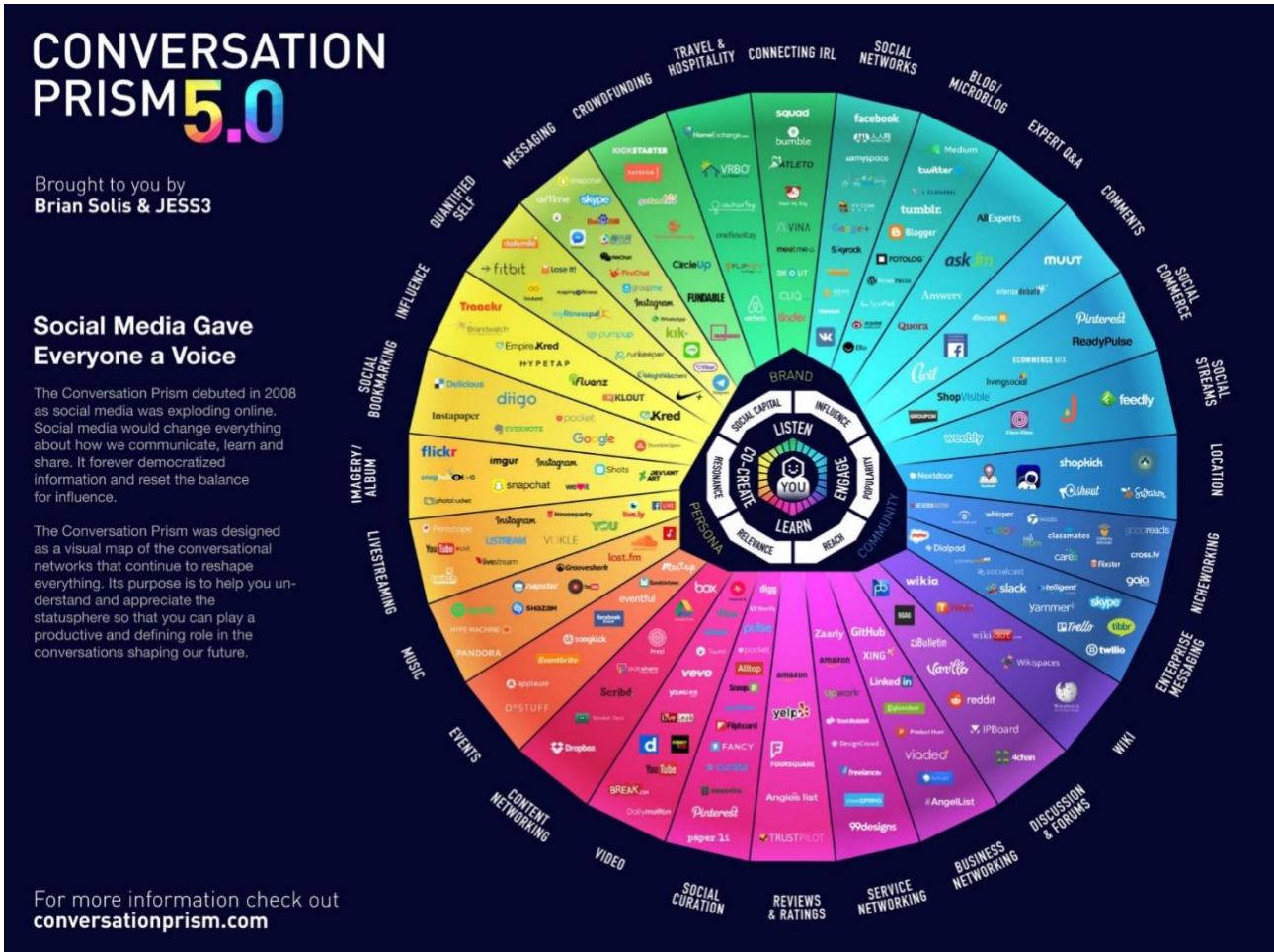


WhatsApp and Instagram user numbers are not disclosed on a regular basis  
 Sources: Company reports, China Internet Watch

statista

## Appendix 3

### A glance on social media in 2017



## Appendix 4

**Table 2**  
Most popular SNS.

	SNS	N (%) <sup>a</sup>
1	Facebook	17 (77)
2	LinkedIn	11 (46)
3	Twitter	12 (55)
4	Other	2 (9)
5	MySpace	1 (5)

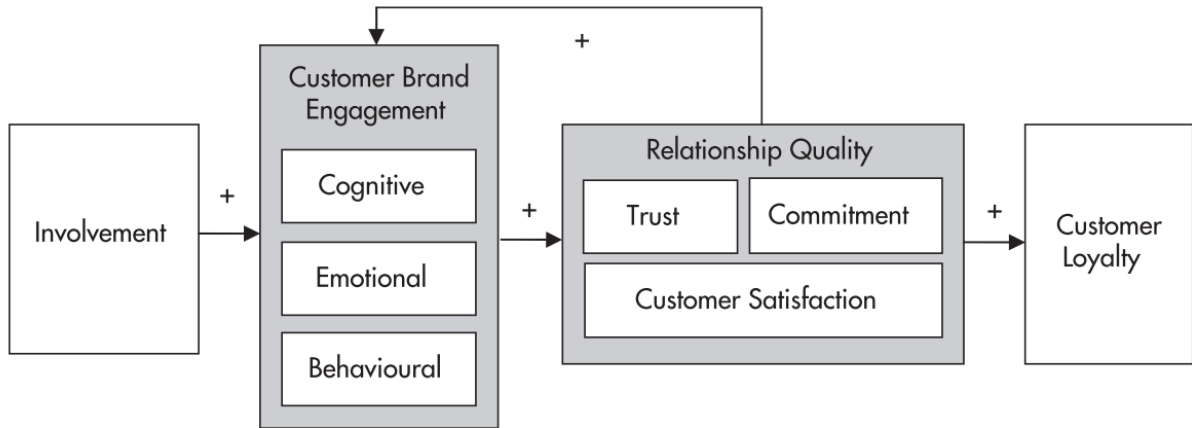
<sup>a</sup> Missing values; valid percentages used.

## Appendix 5



## Appendix 6

**Figure 2** Conceptual model.





## Appendix 7

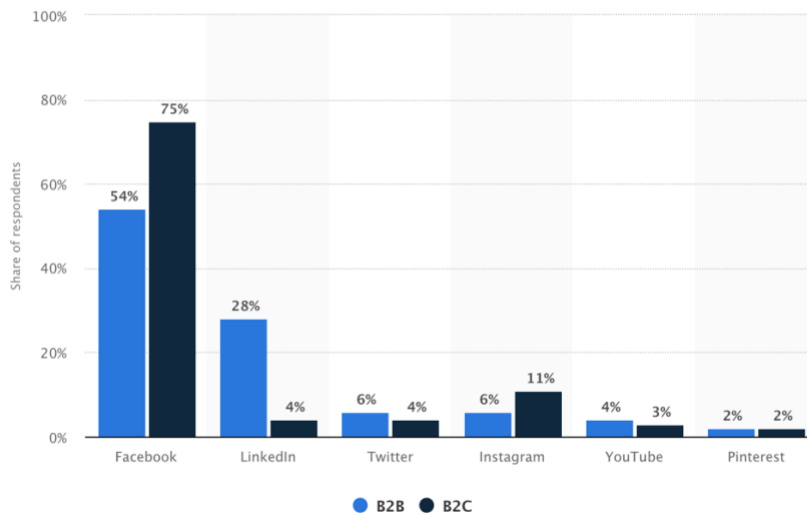
This interview is conducted as part of a master thesis data collection, which is concentrated on social media usage by SMEs in B2B environment.

Some questions might seem to have a clear answer, I will just ask them for the sake of data-collection.

Main Questions	Additional Questions	Clarifying Questions
<b>Introductory questions</b>		
How often do you use Social media?	What do you usually do on social media?	
Which platform is your favorite?	How often do you visit X?	Why X is your favorite? What is your favorite type of posts on X?
Can you tell me a little about your role in concern with SoMe at X?	How much time do you usually spend on X?	Depends on the context
<b>Main topic related questions</b>		
Why do you think people follow X on SoMe?		
Which one of X SoMe platforms is the most popular?	Do you think it's the same for other similar companies?	Why is that?
Which posts are most welcomed by your audience at X?	Anything else close to X posts?	On which platform? Why?
If we define "their mentioned factor" as your audience motivation, what do you think about entertainment?	gain information? remuneration/reward? Information? Self-expression? Socializing and integration?	Which platforms?
Do you think if there is any other reason people get involved with your posts?		Why? Where? How?
<b>Closing questions and remarks</b>		
I will give you a piece of paper, with the motivational factors we discussed written on it, can you rank them from most important to least important by numbering them?		
Is there anything you would like to add?		

## Appendix 8

### Most important social media platforms for B2B and B2C marketers as of January 2018



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#### CITATION (FAQ)

Select citation

#### DESCRIPTION SOURCE MORE INFORMATION

The statistic presents responses business-to-business and business-to-customer marketers from around the world gave when asked about the most important social media platform for their business. As of January 2018, 11 percent of B2C and six percent of B2B respondents stated Instagram was the most important social media platform for their business.

## Appendix 9

