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The Power of Customer Engagement on Modern Social Media Platforms

Exploring the mechanisms of customer engagement on
Instagram and TikTok to thrive in today's digital marketplace

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Karolina Szewczykowska (133584)
Tanja Blomgaard Løyche (133586)
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Abstract

Platforms are a new business model which allow organisations and people to connect in an interactive ecosystem where value is created and exchanged. Of the different types of platforms, social media platforms are a significant subcategory; TikTok and Instagram are prominent examples of social media platforms which this paper focuses on. With developments and growth in social media platforms, along came an increased need for and interest in customer engagement. Yet, there are gaps in existing customer engagement literature in terms of the digital aspect of the concept. This paper investigated customer engagement and its significance for a successful marketing strategy with a focus on TikTok and Instagram. The findings were analysed with the use of qualitative survey conducted with TikTok and Instagram users in Denmark and The United States as well as expert interviews with six brands managers who use both platforms in their marketing strategy. Theoretical and conceptual literature of customer engagement and social media platforms were combined to make additions to the existing framework of customer engagement by Pansai and Kumar (2017). Such additions argue that brand managers should focus on facilitating customer-initiated customer engagement through social media platforms to spur online brand communities. Additionally, branded content on social media platforms must be personal, humoristic, authentic, informative and entertaining. Brand managers should learn how to make use of the technical features of social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok to evoke emotion and satisfaction among platform users, thus increasing direct or indirect contributions. Other findings show that TikTok is a significant driver of customer engagement due to its algorithms and nature of content but there's a misconception about the generational audience on the platform. Instagram is a far more popular social media platform but it falls short of TikTok in terms of enhancing indirect contributions. Instagram on the other hand holds more social and promotional aspects and is a great driver of direct contributions.

Key words: customer engagement, social media platforms, content, TikTok, Instagram, platforms, emotions, satisfaction, contributions

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1. Introduction

The first part introduces the reader to the subject of the research and the problem we seek to investigate. It then presents the research question and the sub-questions that will be answered through the findings from the gathered data and literature. The introduction chapter also contains a structure of the thesis and the scope which help the reader to understand the structure of this paper and the way it will be organised.

1.1. Problem Area

Platforms are a new business model which allow organisations and people to connect in an interactive ecosystem where value is created and exchanged. Examples of platforms are Facebook, Airbnb or Uber (Parker et al., 2016:3). Platforms also radically transform businesses, economies and societies as they create opportunities and new challenges not only for professionals but also for individuals (Parker at al., 2016:5). One type of platform is known as a social media platform, such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat or Twitter. The popularity and importance of social media platforms has been increasing due to societal trends and variety of available social media platforms. Social media platform refers to a virtual place that allows users to share content and information with online communities (Vincent, 2016; Ellison & Boyd, 2013:157). It allows social interactions which are facilitated through accessible communication tools such as web or mobile which enhances communication and turns it into a dialogue between people (Malthouse et at., 2013). With the development of technology, social media platforms are currently easily accessible for most people with access to the Internet. As many as 3.6 billion people use different social media platforms worldwide (Tankovska, 2021).

Social media platforms have been revolutionary for not only society but also business. Such platforms not only allow users to stay in touch with their friends, upload photos and videos but also allow businesses to promote their brand and advertise their products instantly to a wide audience of potential customers (Friedman, 2014). It is also a highly visible place to spread company or product information. Brand managers can also use social media platforms to engage with their existing and potential customers and to develop a brand voice and image (Friedman, 2014). Looking at the market research presented by Aggregate Knowledge in 2013, brands on the Fortune 500 list which included a social media platform marketing

strategy increased sales by 24% in comparison to brands that did not include a social media strategy (Boehmer & Lacy, 2014).

With developments and growth in social media platforms, along came an increased need for and interest in customer engagement (Palmatier et al., 2018:2). In marketing, marketers were mostly focused on transactions up until the 1990's where frequency of purchases, monetary values and similar transaction-based measures were important (Palmatier et al., 2018:2). Marketers then started to build relationships with customers rather than just looking at them as a transaction. Therefore, customer lifetime value, trust, customer loyalty and commitment were buzzwords in marketing up until the early 2000s. (Palmatier et al., 2018:1). Marketers have more recently developed their focus on customer relationships due to the growth of social media platforms (Palmatier et al., 2018:2). In marketing, customer engagement is about the relationship which is shared between a brand and its customers and how customers actively engage with the brand. Customer engagement became a concept for research in academia around 2010 and continues to be analysed, investigated and discussed (Palmatier et al., 2018:3). Its popularity is clear, as customer engagement was the 8th most popular concept used in the business field in 2014 (Palmatier et al., 2018:3). Pansari and Kumar (2017) define customer engagement as the value that customers bring to a brand through direct or indirect contribution (Palmatier et al., 2018:4). The direct contribution that customers can bring to a brand is the purchase itself of a product or service. The indirect contribution from customers can unfold as a variety of mechanisms; word of mouth, discussions and conversations on social media platforms that are rooted in the brand or its product/service-offerings, reviews by customers and similar (Palmatier et al., 2018:4). Customer loyalty, customer experience, customer commitment, customer satisfaction and customer involvement are all customer relationship management (CRM) concepts just like customer engagement (Palmatier et al., 2018:4). However, customer engagement differs from the aforementioned concepts as it exclusively focuses on what the customers give back to the brand. It is more about the customer's active contribution, directly or indirect. Thus, customer engagement is what the customers give back to the brand when they feel emotionally attached to the brand and are satisfied with the active relationship with the brand (Palmatier et al., 2018:4).

TikTok and Instagram are only two out of many social media platforms that are available for brand managers to be used in their marketing strategy. However, TikTok became popular in 2019 and has been the fastest growing social media platform in 2020 (Post, 2020). On the

other hand, Instagram has been the most trending and favourable platform for businesses to reach their target audience (Kuligowski, 2020). TikTok is expecting exponential growth in upcoming years and is already extremely popular among brands and users (Post, 2020). Therefore, TikTok could become the number one platform for businesses to target their customers. This is why brand managers should understand the possibilities on both TikTok and Instagram to be able to successfully implement customer engagement practises.

1.2. Problem Formulation

As the world becomes increasingly digitalised with technological developments and the availability of different social media platforms, it's more important than ever that brand managers keep up their marketing efforts to not fall behind and keep customers engaged and interested. Customer engagement is one of the last steps of the relationship and interaction that a brand and customer share (Palmatier et al., 2018:4). The contribution indicates an active customer that wants to spend their resources such as time and money on giving back to the brand and the desired active communication. Customer engagement therefore presents a lot of opportunities and can be a driver of value and must not be ignored. Brands should always aim to entice, enhance and grow customer engagement (Harmeling et al., 2018:312).

Tiktok and Instagram are channels of opportunity for brands to connect with their customers. However, empirical research on customer engagement and social media platforms' roles in marketing strategies is limited (Palmatier et al., 2018:23) especially a comparison of customer engagement on Instagram and TikTok. There is a lack of sufficient understanding about how these two social media platforms help users engage with brands. Both platforms have common traits such as the type of the content as they are both highly visual social media platforms compared to other text-focused apps like Facebook or Twitter (Post, 2020). Some brand managers realised that TikTok and Instagram have a big potential and started using the platforms as their strategy to gain more recognition with the hope of increasing growth of the businesses. Even if Tiktok and Instagram are both social media platforms and allow brands to create content, there might be some differences between the platforms in how to achieve high customer engagement. Additionally, it is harder for brand managers to make sure the social media platform users stay engaged since there are many accounts of different brands available which can have more interesting content (Lu & Lee, 2010). Thus, competition for achieving high customer engagement on Tiktok and Instagram can be argued to be high.

Additionally, the fact that the most trending and favourable platform for businesses to reach their target audience is Instagram and that TikTok is on the right track to the become number one social media platform in the upcoming years (Post, 2020), understanding the process of creating customer engagement on each platform and how it can affect brands is necessary to investigate in order to find out how to profit from these free-of-charge facilitators.

Therefore, this paper will investigate customer engagement and its significance for a successful marketing strategy on TikTok and Instagram. Both platforms will be analysed and compared. Additionally, customer engagement activities on both platforms will be discussed. The findings will be analysed with the use of qualitative survey conducted with TikTok and Instagram users in Denmark and The United States as well as expert interviews with six brand managers who use both platforms in their marketing strategy. Thus, the aim of this Master's thesis is to understand the power and mechanisms of customer engagement and explore how brand managers can create and enhance customer engagement on Tiktok and Instagram to thrive in today's digital marketplace.

1.3. Research Question:

How can brands use modern social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram to nurture customer engagement and thereby optimise marketing efforts?

1.3.1. Sub- Question 1: Why is ensuring a high degree of customer engagement important for brands?

1.3.2. Sub- Question 2: What is TikTok and Instagram's significance as parts of marketing strategies in today's digital world?

1.4. The Scope

The purpose of including the scope is to present how the research question helps to analyse and investigate the problem presented in the problem formulation. The research question presented above is answered with the help of the two formulated sub questions.

The overall aim of this thesis is to understand customer engagement. Then, the analysis aims to present the findings on why and how brands can benefit from focusing on customer engagement on Tiktok and Instagram. This is all done with the use of literature, theoretical and conceptual frameworks and collected data. The conclusion which answers the research questions presents a comprehensive but critical answer for understanding customer engagement on TikTok and Instagram and identifying the benefits as well as recommendations for future strategies.

The theoretical and conceptual framework by Pansari and Kumar (2017) is a base for understanding and analysing customer engagement as a multidimensional concept. The conceptual framework by Pansari and Kumar (2017) is combined with theoretical literature by Van Doorn et al. (2018), Harmeling et al. (2017) and Carlson et al. (2018) to create an inclusive conceptual framework of customer engagement. Furthermore, the framework is combined with the Uses and Gratification Theory from a model created by Kamboj (2019) to explore customer engagement in the context of social media platforms. However, before doing that, understanding what platforms are and how they work is necessary. This is explained with reference to Parker, Van Alstyne and Choudary (2016) as well as Perren and Kozinets (2018) research. The theoretical and conceptual framework and the literature review are studied in the context of social media strategies that brand managers use to engage with social media platform users through TikTok and Instagram.

The sub questions presented guide us to answer the research question. The analytical chapter analyses the mechanism of customer engagement, how to measure it and why it is so important for brands to invest in creating a well-fitted customer engagement strategy. It also focuses on understanding social media platforms and why they are used. A comparison of TikTok and Instagram is also presented. The chapter then focuses on presenting the benefits and weaknesses of using these platforms for customer engagement with the use of existing literature, theoretical and conceptual framework and gathered data. It also presents

recommendations for brand managers on how to create a successful strategy on TikTok and Instagram.

1.5. Structure of The Thesis

Chapter 1. Introduction

The introduction chapter includes problem area and problem formulation of the thesis and presents the research question and sub-questions that will be answered in the analytical chapters with the help of multiple data sources. The introduction chapter also includes the scope and the structure of the thesis which informs the reader what each chapter of this paper includes and how the research question will be answered.

Chapter 2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

This chapter includes a literature review and theoretical and conceptual framework choice for this research. It presents the background of concepts such as platforms, social media platforms and customer engagement that are used as a framework for the analysis of the topic. Lastly, the chapter presents the literature review of TikTok and Instagram.

Chapter 3. Methodology

The Methodology chapter starts with the presentation of the chosen approach we take in regards to Philosophy of Science. The chapter contains the research approach, strategy, design and the time horizon of the study. Explanation of the methods we desired to gather with the detailed information about the collection of data, the gathering process, the analysis of the gathered data and the ethical implications will also be presented. Additionally, the quality of the data regarding reliability along with validity will be explained.

Chapter 4. Analysis and Findings

This chapter starts with research settings for the analysis which present the process and end results of the chosen methods. The chapter then presents findings from the research where data and literature are included and analysed. In this chapter, we answer the sub questions by discussing the capabilities and opportunities of customer engagement. In doing so, we explore customer engagement mechanisms and how it can be spurred through social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram. The chapter takes into analysis data gathered through the expert interviews with six brand managers, the qualitative survey of platform

users and statements of the conceptual and theoretical literature of social media platforms and customer engagement.

Chapter 5. Discussion

This chapter demonstrates the deeper understanding of the problem and provides solutions based on findings. In this chapter, we contrast and compare our findings from the analytical chapter to reach further conclusions. First, it compares TikTok and Instagram as social media platforms to drive customer engagement. Then, it compares brand managers and platform users in terms of similarities or differences in opinions and experiences of customer engagement.

Chapter 6. Implications

This chapter takes into consideration the findings of the study and provides theoretical and managerial implications. The managerial implications include recommendations from the results we presented to enhance customer engagement on social media platforms. On the other hand, theoretical implications can be used by researchers for further studies in regards to social media platforms and customer engagement as we present how our research contributed to the existing theoretical and conceptual framework.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

The conclusion sums up the knowledge gathered through the use of the collected data and concludes the findings by answering the research question. We aim to answer how brands can use modern social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram to nurture customer engagement and thereby optimize marketing efforts.

Chapter 8. Limitations

The chapter presents the reader with the specific limitations that impacted and influenced the outcome of the research and findings.

Chapter 9. Further Research

This chapter contains indications for the further research based on the findings presented in this thesis which can be used by researchers in the future studies regarding customer engagement on social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram.

Chapter 10. Bibliography

The chapter includes all the sources used throughout the paper. The reader is able to find the origin source of the claims and findings used in the text.

Chapter 11. Appendices

The appendix includes our raw data that we collected for this research. The chapter contains the questions sent to the brand manager, the qualitative survey questions along with the answers from each interviewed brand and survey participant.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical and Conceptualized Framework

The following chapter gives insights to the theoretical and conceptual framework of this Master's thesis by explaining each component in the theoretical framework and providing a literature review of the studied phenomenon. The framework, combined with gathered data through qualitative survey, expert interviews and literature from the field of customer engagement and social media platforms, set the tone of the following analytical chapter and thereby has direct influence on the outcome and conclusion to the overall research question. The chapter consists of a literature review of platforms, social media platforms, customer engagement, TikTok and Instagram, thus gathering the necessary information in order to answer the research question.

2.1. Social Media Platforms

Before understanding what social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram are and how they can be used, it is necessary to understand what *'platform'* means and how it works in today's digitalized world.

2.1.1. Platforms

Platforms are a new business model which allow organisations and people to connect in an interactive ecosystem where value is created and exchanged. Examples of platforms are Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Airbnb or Uber (Parker at al., 2016:3). Platforms radically transform businesses, economy and society. This is why platform businesses are taking over the growing share of the economy in many places all over the world. They also create opportunities and new challenges not only for professionals but also for individuals (Parker at al., 2016:5). Parker, Van Alstyne and Choudary (2016), refer to a platform as a space where value creation interactions between actors/users happens. The phenomenon of platforms that connect actors has different names such as *'the sharing economy'* (Belk, 2014), *'collaborative consumption'* (Benoit et al., 2017), *'commercial sharing systems'* (Lamberton & Rose, 2012), and *'access-based consumption'* (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). Although the phenomenon has grown rapidly and been an important aspect in society over the past years, it is a new subject that has not been researched by many to understand how it actually operates. However, Perren and Kozinets (2018), have investigated this phenomenon and called it a

'*lateral exchange*' which explains the exchanges between actors which could be professionals but also amateurs (Perren & Kozinets, 2018:20). Lateral exchange markets (LEM) are created through technology platforms that make exchange activities possible for a network of actors/users. The role of the platform and network actors includes buying, selling, renting, trading, bartering, swapping, sharing and gifting (Perren & Kozinets, 2018:21). According to Parker et al (2016), the purpose of using a platform is to make it easier to exchange information, goods, services or social currency (Parker at al., 2016:5). Users on a platform enter a set of personal or professional relationships with one another. Different platforms attract different sets of users and create different values, depending on the aim of the platform and the industry (Parker at al., 2016:6).

There has been limited research done regarding the phenomenon of different types of platforms and their characteristics. Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012), focus on '*access-based consumption*' which is about '*transactions that may be market mediated in which no transfer of ownership takes place*'. On the other hand, Benoit et al. (2017), explains that platform providers' main job in matchmaking and the authors focus on '*collaborative consumption*'. Arnould, Price, and Malshe's (2006) work include '*networks of relationships*' which explains relationships such as families, ethic groups or even customer based relationships like brand communities. The authors call them social operant resources. Thus, Perren and Kozinets (2018), emphasise the importance of defining sociality and consociality as recognizing different forms of social operant resources can enhance our understanding of LEMs. Consociality is a physical and/or virtual presence of social actors available in the network which allows social interactions between these actors (Perren & Kozinets, 2018:23). These interactions are institutional and are governed by '*procedures, norms, cultural practices, public opinion, legal systems, and certification and accreditation bodies*' (Scott, 2015). New social operants can be then created by adding a technological element of platforms where new types and forms of social connections and experiences are formed. This phenomenon has been named differently by many scholars. For example, Wittel (2001), called this social interaction a '*network sociality*'. Rainie and Wellman (2012), refer to it as '*networked individualism*' which focuses on more individualistic sociality. On the other hand, some scholars related to business studies have connected sociality to trust. Gefen and Straub (2003), explain that '*socially rich exchanges*' have a positive effect on customers' trust and purchase decisions. Besides trust in customers and society, there is another type of trust in relation to technology platforms. Trust in technology platforms has also been investigated and

the results present that there are different types of trust: trust in a platform itself, trust in reputation-based algorithms (Lu et al., 2012), trust in the objectivity of computer algorithms (Aberer & Despotovic, 2001). Therefore, platforms should be initiating trustworthy behavior, inspiring trust for the exchange between actors and making sure to avoid duplicity which was termed *'platform intermediation'* to define a software platform or tool which manages and supervises the exchange between actors in the network (Perren & Kozinets, 2018:23).

'Network effects' refer to the impact the number of people that use a platform has on the success of the platform and thus, value creation for each user. The effect can be either positive where a platform is well- managed or negative where a poorly managed platform reduces the value produced for each user (Parker at al., 2016:17-21). '*Same-side effect network'* refers to a user's effect on other users, therefore it could have positive and negative same-side effects. Positive refers to the benefits created by users when their number increases. The more people use it, the greater benefit for others who use the platform. On the other hand, negative same-side effects refer to a too great amount of users on one side which creates competition and it is harder to match with other users in the network. The authors of the book *'Platform Revolution'* have also included another type of networks, '*cross-side effects'* which focuses on the user's effect on the user on the other side (Parker et al., 2016:17-21). Positive cross-side effect which refers to the benefits users get when there is an increase in one side of the network, therefore the more options you have, the more users join. On the other hand, the negative cross-side effect refers to the phenomenon that there are too many users on one side, causing problems for another side (too complex, too overwhelming). Lastly, the '*two sided network effect'* refers to attracting actors on one side of the market and when they join, the other side follows (Parker at al., 2016:17-21).

The core interaction on platforms involves the users/actors, the value unit which is often not created by the platform but users and the filter which is an algorithmic software-based tool to enable the exchange of appropriate value units (Parker at al., 2016:11). Platforms often scale by adding new interactions or features on top of the core interaction which sometimes are planned from the beginning or emerge thanks to observation and experience (Parker at al., 2016:11). Platform creates a better place for not only society but also businesses. Platform scale efficiently by eliminating inefficient gate keepers as they are replaced by market signals provided by the community on the platform. They also unlock new sources of value creation and supply that might have not been possible before. Now, with the use of platforms, the

growth of companies can be much faster. Providing users with policies or insurance, trustworthiness is created which encourages proper behaviour (Parker at al., 2016:10-14). Additionally, data-based tools available on the platform create community feedback-loops. The quality of the content, interactions and exchange can be seen on the platform through the feedback given (Parker at al., 2016:11). Lastly, platforms invert the firms inside-out where activities are shifted from internal to external and engaging with communities. For example, when looking at the message delivery, it has changed from traditional to more relational marketing which is more about creating value for customers through strong relationships and interactions rather than just selling the products or services to them (Parker at al., 2016:11; Hollensen, 2015:11).

An article by Perren and Kozinets (2018), clarifies the conceptualization of platforms and proposes four types of these markets with explained principles. Differentiating these types can lead to better marketing and managerial practises. The authors took into consideration two attributes to be able to create the four types: the extent of (1) consociality and (2) platform intermediation. The four types: '*Forums', 'Enablers', 'Matchmakers',* and '*Hubs'* provide value. '*Forums'* connect actors, '*Enablers'* equip actors, '*Matchmakers'* pair actors, and '*Hubs'* centralize exchange (Perren & Kozinets, 2018:27).
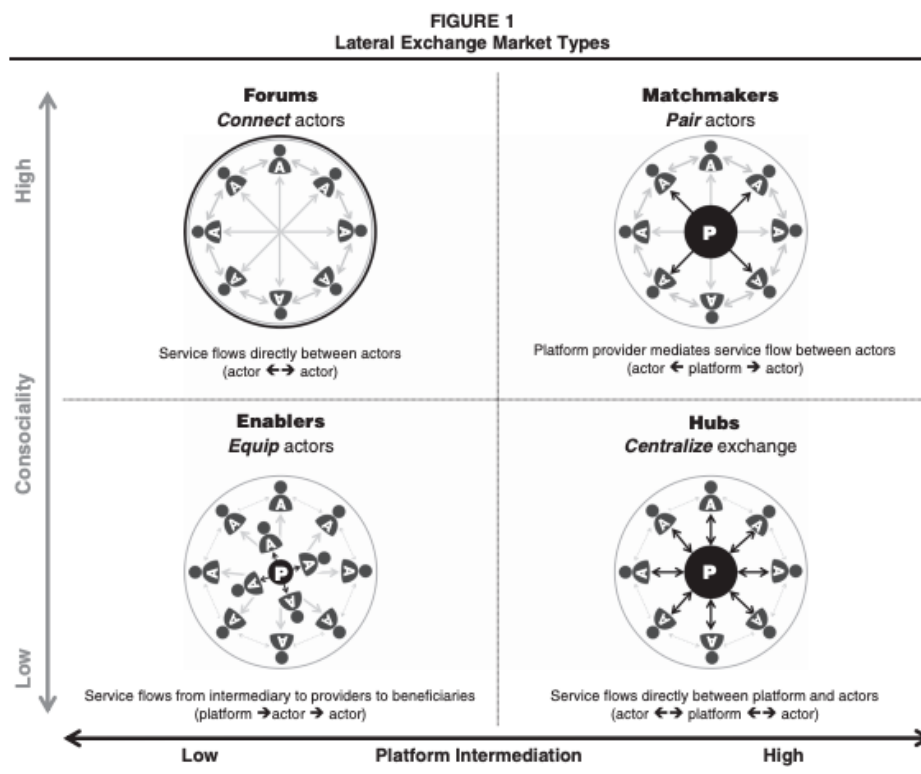

FIGURE 1
Lateral Exchange Market Types

Figure 1: Perren & Kozinets (2018:27)

Forums connect actors

'Forums' help with facilitating the flow of interaction between actors (actor ↔ actor) where the platform intermediation is low but with high consociality. The main value of a *'forum'* LEM is to connect actors on the social markets (Perren & Kozinets, 2018:28). This type has the most social users experience compared to other types and the actors within the network organise many aspects of exchange. The social experience is done offline, in person meetings. Trust is created through interpersonal social exchange as the LEM does not have a direct influence on the exchange (Perren & Kozinets, 2018:28). By facilitating connections, forums reduce search costs when actors in the network try to find each other in the market which is usually disorganised and hectic (Perren & Kozinets, 2018:28). Thus, in order to manage forums successfully, investment in technology must be done to attract enough actors on the platform so people can network and communicate with each other. According to Perren and Kozinets (2018), *'forums'* are most powerful when there is a loose flow of messages on the platform. Additionally, managing transactions risks for actors is another task of '*forums'*. Information about the possible dangers that can happen about the exchange between actors should be provided. This can be done through moderators, system and verification activities that can be helpful with possible dangerous outcomes of an exchange which then will increase the trust in the platform (Perren & Kozinets, 2018:28).

Enablers equip actors

'Enablers' are created not to facilitate but to help actors to provide service to actors in the network (LEM firm → actor → actor). The level of platform intermediation is low as well as low levels of consoliality. The main value proposition of the *'enablers'* is to provide a platform for actors who supply service for other actors in a trustworthy exchange (Perren & Kozinets, 2018:29). However, it can be difficult to build trust in the network. The communication between actors is limited, therefore the transactions and exchanges can be problematic in regards to trust. Additionally, actors who supply service are presented with a set broad exchange rules, however, they can be implemented according to the actors involved. By lowering search costs, the actors are given an opportunity to decide if they want to be involved in the exchange or not (Perren & Kozinets, 2018:29). The recommendations by Perren and Kozinets (2018) is to provide tools for actors that will enable them to supply an excellent value for interested actors on the other side. The value creation activities include customizing, badging, and milestoning programmed in the software. *'Enablers'* can also

encourage other actors to promote their service with a personal message that will then encourage other actors to participate in the exchange (Perren & Kozinets, 2018:29).

Matchmakers pair actors

'Matchmakers' facilitate an interaction between providers and actors (actor ← LEM firm → actor) through pairing one another. *'Matchmakers'* have high platform intermediation as well as high levels of consociality. The system also decreases search costs, makes a decision easier by showing the possibility of exchange through matchmaking (Perren & Kozinets, 2018:30). Additionally, the major task of the LEM is to manage the consociality, monitor equitability and safety of the exchange and ensure the smooth process of the exchange. However, most exchanges are finalized offline and in-person. This is why trust is an important aspect in this type of LEM (Perren & Kozinets, 2018:30). Thanks to *'matchmakers'*, actors are able to make a better decision for exchanges by being paired with another actor through a simplified search. Due to high consociality, the risks that come with it must be managed by *'matchmakers'* through third-party screening, identity verification, and reputation systems which will decrease the safety concerns. On top of that, *'matchmakers'* must introduce screenings of actors, quality verification, and satisfaction guarantees (Perren & Kozinets, 2018:30).

Hubs centralize and standardize service flows.

'Hubs' are seen as a main part of the exchange (actor ↔ LEM firm ↔ actor). *'Hubs'* characterise high platform intermediation with low consociality which decreased the interaction between both actors involved in the exchange (Perren & Kozinets, 2018:31). *'Hubs'* gather resources from different actors and create a central place for exchange for other actors in the network. The marketplace then is created where the search costs are still low, where product offerings are guaranteed, actors are monitored and the whole process of exchange is planned and ensured (Perren & Kozinets, 2018:31). In order to manage, the actors who supply the platform with service must be encouraged by *'hubs'* to participate in the collaboration with the *'hubs'*. Therefore, the platform must be attractive to them to decide to participate and it can be done through a proper branding of the platform and ensure a profitable place for them to be in (Perren & Kozinets, 2018:31).

To sum up, LEM platforms help with enabling, directing, and constraining social and economic interactions. The platforms can be seen as a social place where actors have the

possibility to communicate with each other. Therefore, combining technology with exchange of social behaviours presented by Perren and Kozinets (2018), has given a broader understanding of the phenomenon of platforms. By understanding the meaning behind platforms and how they operate, we are able to deeper understand how it translates to social media platforms which are a subcategory of platforms.

2.1.2. Social Media in The Context of Platforms

Social media definition used in research has been developed by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010). They define social media as *"a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content"* (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010: 61). Social media can take many different forms including social networks, internet forums, web logs, social blogs, micro blogging, wikis, podcast, pictures, video, rating and social bookmarking (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Social media platforms are a subdomain of social media and have been defined as *"a networked communication platform in which participants 1) have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-provided data; 2) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and 3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site"* (Ellison & Boyd, 2013:157). Boyd and Ellison (2007), suggested the definition of social media platforms as *"web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system"*. However, we notice in the process that social media platforms are often called social networking media, social networking platforms, social networking sites and some scholars refer to social media platforms with a general term '*social media'* to describe the interactions between actors/users in the network. Social media platforms help with creating and maintaining online relationships and communities for professional and personal use (Schauer, 2015). They came about in the late 1990's and since then, the amount of platforms available have been increasingly growing (Jung & Lee, 2016). The most important forms of social media platforms are social networks, blogs, opinion platforms, and content

sharing platforms (Rauschnabel & Linn, 2016). A social media platform is any digital platform where users can share messages, content, read news and see videos as well as photos which have been shared with the community online. It allows individuals to share information and personal content with others which creates a social interaction (Salihu et al., 2016). It is also used by brands to share information about products or brands (Murugesan, 2007). On top of that, social media platforms are inexpensive to use for promotion and are completely free to use (Whiting & Williams, 2013).

According to Mayfield (2008), social media platforms bring participation, openness, conversation, community and connectedness. By participating users are able to be creators. Additionally, users are able to give feedback, share content, comment and effectively communicate and connect with others through social media platforms in a two-way information transmission. Therefore, we can argue that users engage in passive (reading other users' content) and active activities (posting one's own content) on social media (Hinsch, 2011; Pagani et al., 2011). However, according to Muntinga et al. (2011), there are three user behaviour activities: consuming, contributing, and creating. Consuming meaning that the user reads the text, view photos and video, listen to audio through social media platforms. Creating activity is in regards to most active behaviour which is creating posts, photos or videos on social media platforms. Lastly, the contributing type of users are commenting under other users' posts, following brands, engaging in the content (Rauschnabel, 2014).

Jung and Lee (2016), presented an explanation of two kinds of users in sharing and circulation of content on social media platforms- producers and audiences. Produces that generate content allow audiences to interact with the produced content by sharing a comment or liking or sharing the content which provides feedback for the producer. The producer then can use the feedback for future content strategies (Jung & Lee, 2016). Jung and Lee (2016), also pointed out the resemblance of the concept to a research by Rochet and Tirole (2003), in regards to a two-sided market. It explains that *"one customer group gets more utilities when the mass of the other customer group is huge. Utilities of audiences increase when the contents of fine quality are shared. Meanwhile utilities of producers increase when the upload contents get active feedback"* (Jung & Lee, 2016). This interaction is called '*network externality*' and partforms are an example of it. The two-sided market structure promotes the circulation between producer, content, audience and feedback (Jung & Lee, 2016).
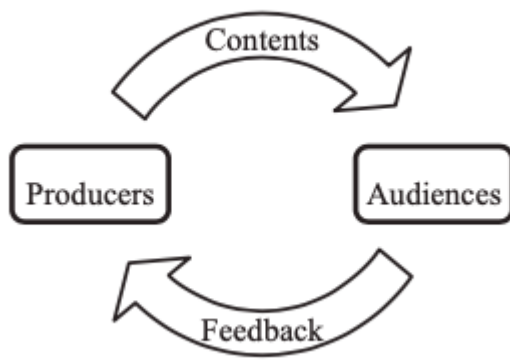
Figure 2: Two-Sided Structure in Social Media (Jung & Lee, 2016)

Rauschnabel et al. (2013), study has shown that social media platforms should be used by brand managers in a proactive and reactive way. By proactively using social media platforms, brands can achieve brand identity, customer engagement, sales, public relations and enable customers to receive a message from customers and be transmitter of the message through electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Sun et al., 2006). By using social media platforms through a reactive way, brand managers can use social media monitoring or user-generated content to have quick access to valuable information about user's profiles, preferences, brand awareness and more which leads to understanding the customer base even better (Rauschnabel et al. 2013).

2.1.3. User Gratification Theory in The Context of Social Media Platforms

The Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) is an approach to understand why people use media and how they seek specific media to meet their needs, factors that influence their motives and the outcome of the usage of chosen media (Katz et al., 1973; Jung & Lee, 2016). The research presented by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1973) have been used as a theoretical background for further studies about UGT for different media types. UGT is a flexible approach which allows researchers to create a framework for their research according to the type of media (Li et al., 2015). This is why the Uses of Gratification Theory provides a framework for understanding the motives why people use social media platforms and what needs are satisfied by using them. The Uses and Gratification Theory has been applied to marketing especially in relation to engaging in online communities through user-generated content and firm-generated content (Chwialkowska, 2017; Ruggiero, 2000; Dholakia et al., 2004). Schivinski and Dobrowski (2016), investigated the behaviour from social media

engagement through the lens of UGT. The results presented the positive effect interaction with the brand community and brand itself had on purchase decisions. Lo and Leung (2009), found out that when someone realizes that a specific media satisfies their needs, they will continuously use the chosen media that affects their behaviour. Additionally, Swanson (1987), in his research implies that content of the message affects audiences' behaviour and how the message is perceived. His research helps to identify and predict the audience behaviour on social media. The content, therefore, is an important factor in providing gratification and it must be designed to create value for the audience, hence build higher customer engagement (Malthouse et al., 2013). In the research of the gratifications that are gained through the use of social media, there are *'cognitive'* (information sharing and acquisition) and *'hedonic'* (aesthetic or entertainment) motives for customer engagement (Ha et al., 2015). Sung et al. (2010), established 6 specific psychological and social motives for customer engagement on social media: interpersonal utility, incentive seeking, entertainment seeking, information acquisition, convenience seeking and brand likeability. Kamboj (2019), created a research model for customer social media participation in brand communities with the foundation of UGT and the research by Sung et al. (2010). Understanding customer engagement in social media context is limited and has not been addressed by many scholars throughout the years. Kamboj (2019), investigated specific needs and gratifications in the light of customer engagement on social media platforms. The 5 motives developed by Kamboj (2019), are gratification from building interpersonal relationships, gratification from seeking information, gratification from entertainment, gratification from brand likeability which is obtained through attractiveness and credibility and love toward brand and lastly, gratification from incentives received.
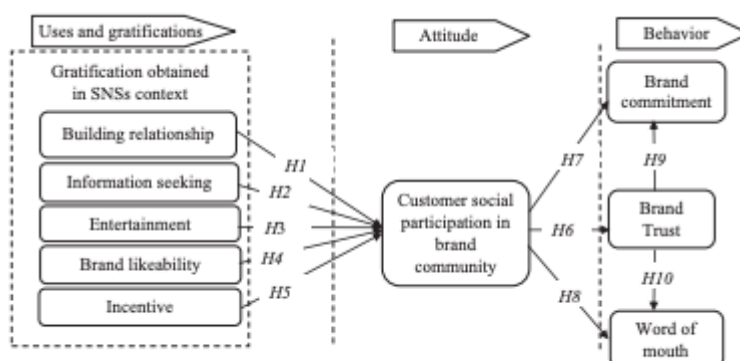

Figure 3: Research Model (Kamboj, 2019: 210)

According to the results of the study by Kamboj (2019), relationship building gratification does influence customer engagement on social media platforms which have also been confirmed in the studies by Park and Valenzuela (2009), or Urista et al. (2009). Second motivator, information seeking means *"to acquire information that satisfies curiosity, fulfills general interests, and explains current news and cultural events"* (Kamboj, 2019). It could be acquiring knowledge about a specific topic of interest and that ability to gain knowledge increases the motivation of the user to engage in social media platforms (Kamboj, 2019; Park & Valenzuela, 2009). Another motivator, entertainment has been referred to enjoyment and fun time while using social media platforms. Entertaining activities allow users to have pleasurable and relaxing time (Svennevig, 2000; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011; De Oliveira & Huertas, 2015). Entertainment has been associated with higher customer engagement on social media platforms (Sung et al., 2010). Third motivator, brand likeability, has been defined in Nguyen et al. (2013), study as *"a brand strategy based on attractiveness, credibility, and expertise in order to create attachment and love by delivering beneficial outcomes for consumers and brands alike".* In the study by Sung et al. (2010), brand likeability has been discovered as a strong gratification in terms of customer participation on social media. Lastly, incentives are referred to personalised service and treatment (Kim et al., 2014). The additional benefits that come along with being engaged and part of a community influences the users to have a higher customer engagement and contribution on brands' social media pages (Kim et al., 2014). To conclude, all 5 motives investigated by Kamboj (2019), have been positively influencing users to engage in brands' social media content.

The study by Kamboj (2019), confirms that when users' needs are met on social media, customer engagement is then improved. The information seeking, brand likeability and incentive have been identified as strongest among all other analysed gratifications in his study in regards to customer engagement. Additionally, the study found that the gratification obtained through social media platforms can then lead to brands trust, commitment and WOM as a result of customer engagement which has been confirmed before by multiple scholars (Kim et al., 2014; Jang et al., 2008).

2.2. Customer Engagement

With the popularity and growth of social media platforms, marketers have in more recent time developed their focus on customer relationships to now being increasingly focused on customer engagement (Palmatier et al., 2018:2). In marketing, customer engagement is about the relationship which is shared between a company and its customers and how customers actively engage with the company. Customer engagement became a concept for research in academia around 2010 and continues to be analysed, investigated and discussed (Palmatier et al., 2018:3). Thus, customer engagement has been a widely used concept in both business and research and different scholars have started to form their own understanding of the concept and brought different perspectives into light.

2.2.1. Pansari & Kumar (2017)

The paper *'Customer Engagement: The Construct, Antecedents, and Consequences'* by Pansari and Kumar (2017), has been a key piece of literature for the research of this Master's thesis and for our theoretical understanding of customer engagement. The authors focus solely on customer engagement as a concept and unfolds its mechanisms in the paper whilst providing a literature review of the customer engagement field. They start out by explaining the evolution of customer engagement as they argue that customer engagement developed from relationship marketing (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:294). As companies have shifted to focus on building a relationship with customers they now focus on how to make those customers engage in the active relationship and thereby the authors argue that customer engagement is a higher level of relationship marketing (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:294). As focus was on trust and commitment in the era of relationship marketing, focus in customer engagement is now on emotions and satisfaction experienced by customers (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:294). Pansari and Kumar (2017), present the emotions and satisfaction as antecedents of customer engagement and argue through a couple of examples that companies should no longer just focus on selling, they should focus on emotionally connecting with their customers in order to establish the building blocks for customer engagement. The article further focuses on managerial implications and how to increase customer engagement (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:297).

A Wholesome Conceptual Framework of Customer Engagement

The authors present a wholesome conceptual framework of customer engagement with a base in the customer engagement and marketing field. They explain how Vivek et al. (2012), and

Brodie et al. (2011), define customer engagement as the outcome of customers affected by different activities that a firm activates (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:294). Most customer engagement research defines customer engagement as a multidimensional concept (295) which Pansari and Kumar (2017), agrees with in their article (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:298). They provide a wholesome definition of customer engagement, pulling together the different definitions of the field in their definition (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:295). Pansari & Kumar (2017), defines customer engagement as *"the mechanics of a customer's value addition to the firm, either through direct or/and indirect contribution"* (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:295).

The conceptual framework presents the entire process of customer engagement (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:300) all the way from marketing activities to the consequences and benefits of customer engagement. The authors highlight that existing customer engagement literature is restricted and not taking consequences and benefits into account (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:298). They argue that understanding both the antecedents (that is emotions and satisfaction) and consequences of customer engagement, thus the entire process of customer engagement, is key to understanding how companies can maximize customer engagement (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:295). The introduction of this Master's thesis has highlighted the importance of customer engagement for companies which Pansari and Kumar additionally emphasises in their article (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:297). The framework includes moderators of the connection between the ascendants and contribution and the tangible and intangible benefits of customer engagement. The wholesome definition and conceptual framework by Pansari and Kumar (2017), is the argumentation for why this Master's thesis takes departure in the conceptual framework by Pansari and Kumar (2017), as it provides deep, complex and a wholesome theoretical understanding of the entire process and mechanisms of customer engagement. Understanding the process behind customer engagement and the connection between its mechanisms, moderators and outcomes will fuel the analysis of this Master's degree by focusing on how companies can enhance customer engagement on social media platforms. The key is to understand customers first and the conceptual framework of customer engagement by Pansari and Kumar (2017) can help to do so (Figure 4).
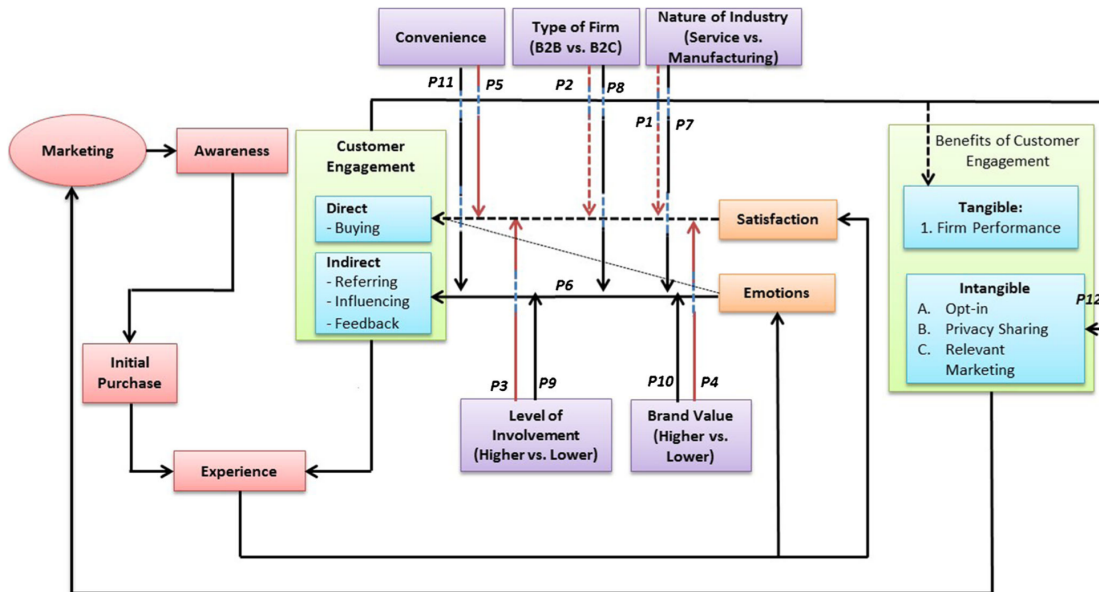
Figure 4: Conceptual framework of customer engagement (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:300)

First and foremost before exploring the different steps of the conceptual framework by Pansari and Kumar (2017), it is important to state that customer engagement is important because it directly or indirectly affects firm performance (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:298). That is also the argument for why companies should discover how to improve and maximize customer engagement, something which the article by Pansari and Kumar (2017) explains how to approach.

The Mechanisms

If marketing efforts succeed in appealing to customers, it can create awareness of the company and its product/service offerings. It can therefore be argued that the marketing and awareness already here have potential to create the first vague positive emotions in customers or simply is a great offer that the customer wishes to pursue through their first initial purchase, laying the groundwork for customer engagement. When customers have made their initial purchase after becoming aware of the company and noticing marketing efforts, the customer naturally set up certain expectations in their mind. Such expectations are functionality or quality of the product-or service offering itself, of customer service or of delivery and shipping. If the company succeeds in meeting the expectations of the consumer or exceeds them, the customer will establish a positive experience of the company (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:300; Palmatier et al., 2018:10). If the customer experience is negative, the process of customer engagement, thereby the motivation to contribute directly or indirectly, fails.

Depending on the level of positive customer experience, the customer might experience certain levels of positive emotions towards the company and certain levels of satisfaction with it (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:300-301;Palmatier et al., 2018:10). By feeling emotionally attached to the company and/or satisfied with the company, then customers perhaps experience motivation to positively contribute to the company, either directly or indirectly, thus engaging with the company. The direct contribution is driven by satisfaction (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:300-301; Palmatier et al., 2018:10) and is another transaction or purchase as a satisfied customer is more likely to purchase from the company again. The indirect contribution is driven by positive emotions (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:300; Palmatier et al., 2018:10) as well as Pansari and Kumar (2017), categorize such activities of indirect contribution into referring, influencing and feedback (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:302).

Types of Indirect Contributions: Referrals, Influence and Feedback

First, referrals contribute indirectly to firm performance as they can help new customers become aware of the company and make their initial purchases (Pansari & Kumar, 2017: 302). Referrals are therefore not a direct contribution as they are a longer process which involves communication between existing and new customers and is therefore not a direct contribution (direct purchase). Second, and perhaps most relevant to the research topic of this Master's thesis is the indirect contribution of customer influence. As customers engage in brand communities, share brand related content and start brand related conversations on social media, companies can enjoy enormous benefits from when the customers positively affect and influence each other (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:302). Social media platforms provide higher customer engagement than traditional marketing methods (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:302) due to their social nature and that positive brand communities can easily form. As positive influence and interest for a company between customers create a snowball-effect, customer influence and customer engagement on social media indirectly lead to happy, new and engaged customers which indirectly benefits the company, thus arguing for why social media platforms are a powerful tool to maximize customer engagement (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:302). Thirdly, customer's knowledge is valued by the firm through feedback. When customers engage with the company by providing feedback it can indirectly benefit the company as such knowledge can help the company to adapt their product/service-offerings to customers' desires or to produce new offerings. Thus, in the long term, such new innovations can create even more satisfied customers which may purchase more (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:301).

Moderators Regulatory Effect on the Conceptual Framework

The framework further presents moderators which might affect the connection between the ascdencents and direct or indirect contribution, thus the process of customer engagement (Palmatier et al., 2018:10). The moderators are in the conceptual framework presented as 11 propositions of the research article by Pansari and Kumar (2017); P1-P11 (Figure 4). Such moderators are the level of convenience experienced by the customer, if the company operates on the B2B or B2C market, industry, level of how involved customers are in the purchase and relationship with the company and the level of brand value of the company (Figure 4).

Regarding how the moderators affect the connection between satisfaction and direct contribution, satisfaction is highest in companies that operate in service industries and on the B2B markets. Reason being is first, due to higher demands of quality and functionality of the product or service offering on B2B markets than B2C markets. Decisionsmaking is additionally a longer and more thorough process amongst more people on the B2B market than a single customer on B2C (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:303). Second, service is often higher and more quickly accessible in service industries than with standardized products (Palmatier et al., 2018:10; Pansari & Kumar, 2017:302-303). Similarly and naturally, satisfaction is high with high convenience as customers naturally prefer convenience and are unsatisfied if a purchase from a company somehow becomes inconvenient for different reasons such as packaging, design, opening hours and location (Palmatier et al., 2018:11;Pansari & Kumar, 2017:303). The demand for convenience is high and companies aim to improve so as to better customer management and as a competitive advantage (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:304). Satisfaction is high when brand value and involvement is lower as customers expect less from companies with low brand value than high brand value as customers connect personal identity with brands of high status and therefore expect more from them (Palmatier et al., 2018:10-11; Pansari & Kumar, 2017:303). Furthermore, low-involvement products are bought more frequently by customers and with less expectations (Palmatier et al., 2018: 10). The customer might notice more negative aspects with high-involvement products as the customer has invested more resources in the buying process (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:303).

It's important for companies to pay attention to how their business activities affect customers' emotions as emotions have an effect on customer behaviour towards the company (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:304). When customers have positive emotions towards a firm and feel

emotionally attached to the firm, they are more likely to engage in indirect contributions which creates value for the firm indirectly (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:304). Furthermore, when customers have positive emotional attachment to a company, their overall assessment of the product or service will also be positive (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:304). When it comes to moderators' regulatory effect on the connection between emotions and indirect contribution, positive emotions are often obtained and higher in service industries as customers tend to share their positive emotions and experiences more when it comes to services than products (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:11,304). High brand value, high convenience and high involvement products create more indirect contributions based on positive emotions. Customers are more willing to share and feel stronger emotionally, if they have been highly involved emotionally and resourcefully in the purchase, they have higher expectations and more emotional attached to companies with high brand value and are more willing to "give back" to the company and communicate if convenience is high (Palmatier et al., 2018:11; Pansari & Kumar, 2017:305). Moreover, emotions are more dominant in consumer behaviour and purchasing decisions on B2C markets than B2B markets due to the professional nature and demand for functionality and information over emotions in B2B (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:304-305). Lastly, and an important point for this Master's thesis is that all in all when customers feel much positive emotional attachment to the brand they are more motivated to recommend the product/service offering, share visual content of it and start conversations about it on social media platforms (Palmatier et al., 2018:11; Pansari & Kumar, 2017:304).

Tangible and Intangible Benefits

Once the customer has engaged with the firm through direct or indirect contribution, the benefits for the firm can be harvested (Figure 4). The benefits from direct or indirect contributions can be either tangible or intangible (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:305).

The tangible benefits are direct benefits, meaning that direct contribution by customers (which are direct purchases) directly positively benefits firm performance. It is rather obvious that direct purchases benefit the firm through increased profits and revenue (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:305).

Intangible benefits of customer engagement can be noticed in a few more ways than direct benefits and stems from indirect contribution by customers (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:305). Pansari and Kumar categorize intangible benefits in Opt-in, privacy sharing and relevant marketing (Figure 4). Opt-in happens when customers agree to sign up for marketing content

and activities by the company (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:306). First, such opt-in for marketing materials can for example be when the customer signs up for newsletters from the company, downloads the app or becomes a member of facebook groups of the brand community (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:306). Such positive actions by customers, which indirectly improves firm performance, would not be likely if the customer was not emotionally attached to the company and thereby have interest in seeing those marketing materials. Second intangible benefit is privacy sharing which refers to when customers have strong emotional attachment to a company, increased trust in the company often follows (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:306). Since an emotionally attached customer oftens trusts a company, they might be willing to share their private information which benefits the company indirectly as the company can get to know their customers on a deeper level. Such privacy sharing might be supplying the company with personal information or allowing the company to get in contact on social media platforms (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:306). Third, when holding together all information about a customer such as their private information and what marketing materials they have signed up for, the company can better target their communication and further marketing activities to that customer, explaining the arrow from intangible benefits back to marketing in the conceptual framework by Pansari and Kumar (2017) (Figure 4). When the company succeeds in supplying the right marketing communications to the customers, it might evoke even more positive emotions in customers regarding the company, indirectly benefiting the company as the company should always desire to retain and keep customers happy, profitable and happy (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:306).

2.2.2. Harmeling et al. (2017)

The theoretical paper by Harmeling et al. (2017), *'Toward a theory of customer engagement marketing'*, has been important to our understanding of customer engagement for different reasons. Harmeling et al. (2017) argue that customer engagement is still (in 2017) confusing to many academics and professionals as there are many differing definitions of the concept (Harmeling et al., 2017:312). The authors argue that the existing definitions of CE by Bowden (2009), Kumar (2013), Van Doorn et al. (2010) and Vivek et al. (2012), are too different which is problematic (Harmeling et al., 2017:313). The paper is written in marketing and the focus is therefore on engagement marketing first and foremost. Harmeling et al. (2017) provides a review of existing customer engagement literature and criticizes it for not making a clear distinction between engagement marketing and customer engagement

(Harmeling et al., 2017:314). The authors make a clear distinction as they define engagement marketing as the strategic efforts that a company can employ to facilitate customer engagement (Harmeling et al., 2017:317). Customer engagement on the other hand, they define as "*a customer's voluntary contribution to a firm's marketing function beyond financial patronage*" (Harmeling et al., 2017:316). This important distinction between engagement marketing and customer engagement deepened our conceptual understanding of customer engagement. Additionally, we realised that we to some extent in this thesis focus on engagement marketing as we asked brand managers what they do in practice and strategically to enhance customer engagement. The authors further explain that existing customer engagement literature focuses both on customer behaviour and psychology, however often not at the same time. They build on existing literature here too, by arguing that behaviour is the most significant in studying customer behaviour as the behaviour is a consequence of the psychological process that customers go through. (Harmeing et al., 2017:314). This argument goes hand in hand with Pansari and Kumar (2017), the behaviour is direct or indirect contribution to the company from customers, thus the customer engagement itself.

Network, Persuasion, Knowledge and Creativity as Customer-owned Resources

In their definition of customer engagement, distinct but related to engagement marketing, the authors argue that at the essence of customer engagement is the fact that the customers have something of value which benefits the company besides transactions (Harmeling et al., 2017:313). In that regard, the authors present four related but different customer-owned assets which the company must learn to utilise to achieve a successful engagement market which then leads to customer engagement (Harmeling et al., 2017:331). The four customer owned assets are network assets, persuasion capital, knowledge stores and creativity (Harmeling et al., 2017:313). Network assets present the diverse social network or brand community which the customer engages in. Such networks can help the companies to spread awareness and reach new customers through the networks of their existing customers. Persuasion capital is the influences and trust that a partner radiates to other customers. Customers with high persuasion capital are valuable to a company as they make other customers trust them due to the positive influence and brand managers should learn to take advantage of such (Harmeling et al., 2017:316). Customer knowledge stores is the knowledge held by customers about the brand, its products and its other customers. Brads can utilise this for product innovations desired by customers (Harmeling et al., 2017:317). Last customer creativity is the creative ideas of customers and the brand can use it for product or

brand innovations and ideas or creative marketing communications (Harmeling et al., 2017:317). These customer-owned resources are the building blocks for engagement marketing and therefore also customer engagement streams if used purposely by the brand (Harmeling et al., 2017:316).

In addition to the four customer-owned resources, the authors come up with concrete examples of how engagement marketing tools can help to enhance and measure customer engagement (Harmeling et al., 2017:332), helping us understand in more depth how to analyse the expert interviews conducted with brand managers. Our understanding of customer engagement has further been diversified by the paper as the authors too, highlight the pitfalls of customer engagement in addition to stating the importance of the concept in academia and practise. Specifically, the authors argue that the brand can become more vulnerable as customers gain more agency as they are increasingly getting more involved in business processes such as product innovation (Harmeling et al., 2017:332). However, it is strongly emphasised that this threat is also an opportunity and reason to enhance and facilitate customer engagement. The word 'facilitate' is key in the context of customer engagement as the authors argue for the importance of providing the right tools and platforms for customers to spur customer engagement (Harmeling et al., 2017:332). This connects with the context of this study as we focus on how social media platforms can be used by companies to spur customer engagement. At the same time, the authors argue that brands must keep in mind that such platforms and tools can also make the brand more vulnerable as negative experiences and thereby perceptions can easily spread on social media platforms, thus destroying the positive value of customer engagement (Harmeling et al., 2017:332).

The paper by Harmeling et al. (2017), connects to this thesis as the general question of their paper is: *"how can firms strategically guide customer engagement in ways that benefit their performance?"* (Harmeling et al., 2017:312). The goal of their paper is to present a theory of customer engagement marketing and to explore the benefits of customer engagement (Harmeling et al., 2017:312), connecting with the focus of benefits and consequences by Pansari and Kumar (2017). The question posed is very similar to the research question of this thesis, including the context of customer engagement on social media platforms. Furthermore, our thesis is also exploratory in nature. The paper by Harmeling et al. (2017), have deepened our understanding of how customer engagement differs from engagement marketing as well as deeper mechanisms of customer engagement. It thereby, in combination

with other academic articles, allows us to combine and build on top of the conceptual frameworks by Pansari and Kumar (2017). All in all, a conceptual framework that puts customer engagement in distance to engagement marketing by Harmeling et al. (2017), shows how long-term customer engagement is mechanised. Despite the engagement marketing focus of the figure, it helped us to gain a bigger picture of customer engagement and its role connected to customer-owned resources (that provides value to the firm) and firm performance:
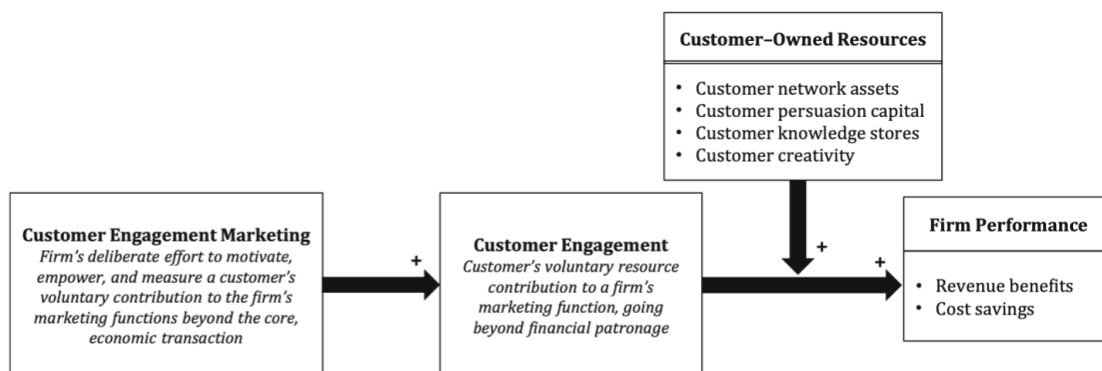
Figure 5: Visual representation of key constructs in customer engagement marketing (Harmeling et al., 2017:314)

2.2.3. Palmatier, Kumar & Harmeling (2018)

The book *'Customer Engagement Marketing'* edited by Palmatier, Kumar and Harmeling (2018), has proved useful for this Master's thesis as it contains many aspects of customer engagement. Chapter 1 of the book is written by Palmatier and Kumar and provides much similar information about customer engagement as their article from 2017 as explained above in this chapter of the Master's thesis. The introduction of the book was one of the first readings we familiarize ourselves with, thus providing us with initial conceptual knowledge of customer engagement and it offers a conceptual framework (Pansari et al., 2018:9). The conceptual framework presented in chapter 1 of the book was initially what built the theoretical background of this Master's thesis. However, the benefits and consequences were not a part of the framework in such a clear way as the conceptual framework by Pansari and Kumar (2017), which presents the process in more detail in the article. What is beneficial regarding the book is it's structure which focuses on part 1: the antecedents of customer engagement, part 2: the consequences of customer engagement and part 3: the application of

customer engagement. Thus, the book focuses on the antecedents and consequences of customer engagement in its structure and contents which is why the book has fueled this Master's thesis with valuable knowledge.

2.2.4. Van Doorn et al. (2018)

In their article *'Good, better, engaged? The effect of company-initiated customer engagement behaviour on shareholder value',* Van Doorn et al. (2018), focuses on company-initiated customer engagement and its opportunities and risks. To extend the above-mentioned literature, Van Doorn et al. (2018), does not make the same distinction between engagement marketing and customer engagement as Harmeling et al. (2017). Rather, Van Doorn et al. (2018), refer to the strategies and initiatives that brands can make in relation to customer engagement as firm-initiated customer engagement (Van Doorn et al., 2018:365). Furthermore, the authors of the paper also refer to the valuable customer contributions as value-related consequences rather than customer engagement as Harmeling et al. (2017) does. For comparison, Pansari and Kumar (2017), defines the direct or indirect contributions as customer engagement itself and thereby agrees with Harmeling et al. (2017).

The Risks of Customer Engagement

The goal of the paper by Van Doorn et al. (2018), is to assess the risks of customer engagement on market value (Van Doorn et al., 2018:367) as they argue that the benefits have been covered extensively in existing customer engagement literature and further agrees with Harmelig et al. (2017) in that *"there has been some debate on the scope of customer engagement",* thus not a clear definition (Van Doorn et al., 2018:367; Harmeling et al., 2017:312). Thus, the authors argue that they present the first paper to investigate the risks associated with customer engagement (Van Doorn et al., 2018:367), specifically in the context of shareholders interests. In the paper, the authors focus on the customer contributions which go beyond transactions as they argue it is covered plenty in existing literature (Van Doorn et al., 2018:367). All in all, Van Doorn et al. (2018), investigates how firm-initiated customer engagement can take a bad turn as digital campaigns on social media platforms and word-of-mouth can spur negative debate of the brand, thus hurting firm performance. This is where shareholders come into the picture as they are first and foremost interested in the financial wealth and firm performance of the company rather than customer engagement (Van Doorn et al., 2018:366).

The paper by Van Doorn et al. (2018), provided us with a deeper and broader understanding of the mechanisms and potential contexts of customer engagement. First, the distinction between firm-initiated customer engagement and customer-initiated customer engagement gave us an important way to think about customer engagement as the mechanisms of it. Second, we must not forget the risks of customer engagement in our thesis, especially since the context of modern social media platforms can play an accelerating role in negative customer engagement such as negative word of mouth, due to its social sharing essence (Van Doorn et al., 2018:369,371). Lastly, the paper provided us with a deeper understanding of the opportunities of customer engagement, providing us with arguments rooted in academic literature for the following analysis.

2.2.5. Carlson et al. (2018)

Continuing the discussion of opportunities and risks related to customer engagement, Carlson et al. (2018), focuses in their article '*Customer engagement behaviours in social media:capturing innovation opportunities'* on how managers can drive innovation from customer engagement behaviours. This piece of literature was important for our thesis as it moves into which opportunities companies can harvest from initiating customer engagement on social media platforms. Thus, the article has a digital focus which connects with the focus of this Master's thesis. Carlson et al. (2018), argue in their article that there is a gap in the literature when it comes to exploring the mechanisms of customer engagement behaviour on branded social media platforms (Carlson et al., 2018:83). This statement further connects with this thesis as our research question is: '*How can brands use modern social media platforms to nurture customer engagement and thereby optimize marketing efforts?'.* In the article, the authors talk about interactive engagement platforms where customers can connect and engage (Carlson et al., 2018:83) as well as social media in general. This is where this thesis refers to modern social media platforms instead. Furthermore, the authors argue that in this digital day and age, companies have been able to turn passive random people into engaging customers through *'online social networking sites'* (Carlson et al., 2018:84). We allow ourselves once again, to connect such a statement to this thesis and reformulate to our similar topic of the potential power of customer engagement on modern social media platforms.

The article particularly focuses on how innovation opportunities can be derived from customer engagement behaviours on social media brand pages and other digital platforms.

The idea is that engaged customers come up with creative ideas, feedback, share knowledge and support the company (Carlson et al., 2018:83), thus providing value and innovation initiatives for the company. The authors agree with most other customer engagement scholars such as Harmeling et al. (2017), Van Doorn et al. (2018) and Pansari and Kumar (2017) that customer contributions stretch beyond transactions only (Carlson et al., 2018:83). The authors measure innovation as feedback from customers to the company and collaborative efforts (Carlson et al., 2018:83).

The SOR Theoretical Model

The following figure is the theoretical model that the article build on and shows the process from beginning to customer engagement behaviour used for innovation:
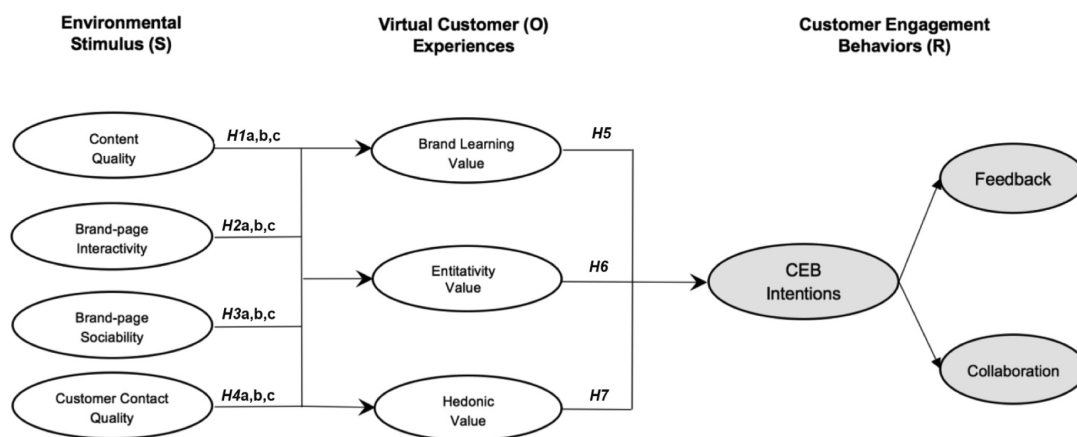
Note: CEB intentions is a multidimensional reflective construct

Figure 6: Proposed theoretical model (Carlson et al., 2018:86)

The process builds on a Stimulus-Organism-Response paradigm in its analysis. This means that the digital environment (S) has implications for the perceptions and emotions of customers (O), which then has implications for customer engagement behaviours (R) (Carlson et al., 2018:84). Thus, the theoretical models presented in the article are structured likewise. The authors emphasise that the digital environment are brand pages, *'web-based services'* and the described *'online social networking sites'* (Carlson et al., 2018:85). Once more, we argue this is similar to the context of this thesis.

As seen on the above model, the authors use a few different concepts at different stages of the model to describe the process. In sum, the concepts in the model explain how customers

experience and perceive the surrounding digital environment and act on them through certain customer engagement behaviours (Carlson et al., 2018:85). This idea connects to the conceptual framework by Pansary and Kumar (2017), as they argue that emotions and satisfaction have implications for the direct or indirect contributions, that is, the customer engagement behaviours. However, Carlson et al. (2018), uses the concepts of brand learning value, entitativity value and hedonic value to describe how customers feel motivated to engage. Brand learning refers to the desire and opportunities for customers to share and gain knowledge of the brand and its products. Entitativity value refers to the sense of belonging a customer might feel when engaging and being part of a brand community (Carlson et al., 2018:85). Finally, hedonic value refers to the more entertainment-focused part of the digital environment and spur feelings of excitement or satisfying stimulation (Carlson et al., 2018:86).

Carlson et al. (2018), present useful arguments for how the three types of value can be enhanced through either content quality, interactivity on the digital platforms, sociability of the digital platforms and the quality of contact that customers share. However, deeper explanations and statements that explore these connections on a deeper level will not be presented in this part of the thesis because such arguments have been used to fuel the following analysis. The deep explanations and statements which focus on how managers can benefit from the mentioned process is what we have benefitted from the most, is the article by Carlson et al. (2018). As the goal of the article is to understand how managers can facilitate customer engagement behaviour on social media platforms and realise how they can use that value for innovation purposes, we rely quite heavily on the underlying arguments due to high similarity of research topics. However, we want to make it clear that we do not focus solely on innovation derived from customer engagement but on the benefits of customer engagement to optimize marketing efforts as this thesis is written in the field of marketing.

2.3. TikTok

TikTok is a creative, short video social media platform. It is available for download in the Apple, Android and Amazon app stores (Anderson, 2020:7). On TikTok users can select a song from the library in the app to create a short video. The person who uploads the video is an *'uploader'* (Wang et al., 2019). They can then engage with other users/creators. People can see videos on TikTok without having an account, however, to fully engage, an account is necessary. Creating an account is easy. The new user has to select their interest from a list as

it is a primary algorithm-driven app. The app will then select the videos that the user wants to see. TikTok shows one video at a time. Users need to swipe up if they want to see another video and the amount of videos is unlimited (Anderson, 2020:8). The default main page is the algorithm driven *'For You Page'* which shows videos chosen for the user based on their interests and the engagement behavior on the app. If the user wants to limit the videos on the feed, they can do that by switching the section to only see the users' they follow videos (Anderson, 2020:8). Icons that show on the video screen are the creator's avatar, a heart which allows users to show that they like the video, a chat bubble which allows others to comment, a share arrow which forwards the video to friends or other social media platforms and a spinning circle which shows the music selected for the video. A video can also be reported if it breaks the community guidelines (Anderson, 2020:8). Users can also signal that they are not interested in a specific video so the algorithms can pick it up and not show similar videos in the future. The viewer can also react or duet the video. Reacting to the video is to create your own video as an answer to the viewed video. Dueting allows the creator to split the screen into two where both videos are playing alongside. This is one of the most unique features of the app (Anderson, 2020:8). Lastly, hashtags also are used under each video. They are clickable and where other users can discover similar videos. A *'discovery page'* allows users to see trending sounds, hashtags, challenges or tutorials. When creating videos, users are able to include a sound, picture, filter, stickers and edit the video's speed or length (Anderson, 2020:8).

According to the literature review by Wang et al. (2019), short videos have become popular in recent years due to the fact that these videos focus on emotional experience for visual wonders (Wang et al., 2019). TikTok has been the fastest growing social media platform in 2020 (Post, 2020). It was available worldwide in 2017, however, it became popular in 2019 all over the world. The app has more active users than LinkedIn, Twitter or Snapchat and is on the right track to beat other huge social media platforms such as Instagram and Youtube (Post, 2020). The high growth rate can be thanks to an impressive engagement rate which is the highest than any other platform, even Facebook which puts Tiktok in a position where it could become number one social media platform in the upcoming years (Post, 2020). The videos created by different uploaders provide others with the latest music trends, information, news or tips. Thus, providing them with knowledge on various topics. For example, users can find videos for dance tutorials, painting tutorials, work out tips or lifestyle hacks. Everyone at any age can find something interesting for them to watch (Wang et al., 2019). Therefore,

users' needs are satisfied thanks to audio-visual, graphic integration of short videos which are chosen especially for the user's interest. Business users can use TikTok for marketing campaigns to increase brand recognition and gain fans. TikTok helps to achieve sensory stimuli that will relieve stress, provide entertainment and relaxation to those who need it (Wang et al., 2019).

2.4. Instagram

Instagram is a lifestyle photo sharing app which allows users to upload photos and short videos with short descriptions (Wang, 2020:2). Users are able to follow other accounts, hashtags or search for particular content they want to see. On Instagram, users can see photos and videos on their *'feeds'* of the other users that they follow. Alongside the feeds, users can see and use *'stories'* which are a short video-status that is no longer than 15 seconds and also *'IGTV'* which allows users to see and upload longer videos . More than 500 million accounts use the feature of *'stories'* daily (Wang, 2020) Additionally, the *'explore'* page recommends posts from other accounts that the user does not follow. These posts are generated through the activities of the user on the app which are aligned with their interest. However, the algorithms on Instagram are considered not useful for users since it is not transparent what activities contribute to the choice of recommended content (Kim & Kim, 2018). The latest feature additions to the app have been *'reels'* and *'shop'*. '*Reels'*, similarly to TikTok videos, are clips which last for 15-30 seconds which are set with music selected from Instagram. On the other hand, '*shop'* allows users to shop the products right from the Instagram brand's page, making it easier and faster for the consumer. It also allows users to directly enter the brand's website to see more details about the specific product they are interested in. The *'shop'* is also a separate section on the app where a user can see different products that they can buy even if they don't follow the brands (Wang, 2020).

It is a highly visual social media platform compared to other text-focused apps like Facebook or Twitter (Post, 2020). It is the most trending and favourable platform for businesses to reach their target audience (Kuligowski, 2020). The platform has become very popular over the years and this is why businesses use it for targeting their audience.It has become a powerful tool for marketing especially for businesses which want to become more visible and reachable for customers (Kuligowski, 2020). As much as 60% of users use the platform daily. It has over 35 million business accounts and as much as 80% of Instagram users follow at least one business account (Kuligowski, 2020).

2.5. Conclusion

This chapter laid out the grounds for the theoretical background, conceptual understandings and literature review of this Master's thesis. The chapter presented a literature review of the theoretical and conceptual literature in the fields of customer engagement and social media platforms, thus providing us with scholarly arguments and statements, theory and deeper theoretical understandings of the two concepts under study. First, the chapter introduces the reader to the concept of platforms through a lens of Parker et al. (2016), as well as Perren and Kozinets (2018), research to understand what platforms are and what they are used for. Then, literature review of social media platforms is exloadered as well as explanation of why users interact and engage with one another which also introduces customer engagement topics. This is done through the research by Kamboj (2019), and his take on the Uses and Gratification Theory.

The second part of the chapter explores customer engagement as a concept and the underlying theory behind it. It chronologically starts with literature from 2008 and ends with 2018, explaining the aim, findings and theory of each piece of literature. It has provided us with a conceptual framework by Pansari and Kumar (2017) from which we will take a stand and combine with theoretical ideas of Harmeling et al. (2017), Van Doorn et al. (2018) and Carlson (2018), all in all to inductively add our own findings to the framework. Thus, we aim to build on top of existing customer engagement literature in the context of social media platforms from our findings in the following analytical chapters.

Lastly, literature reviews of TikTok and Instagram are presented to provide the reader with a better understanding of what the apps are used for, how they work and what has been written about them by scholars.

3. Methodology

The Methodology chapter presents the research approach, research design and methods of the thesis. Taking the right approach and choosing methods affects the collected data which then allows us to analyse the topic and answer the research question (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011). In this part of the paper, first the philosophy of science is explained as well as research design which includes research approach, strategy and the explanation of the desired choice of methods and data. Additionally, ethics, time horizon, reliability and validity of the research are also explained.

To be able to clearly present the structure of the methodology, the research onion will be used as a foundation for this research (Saunders et al., 2009).
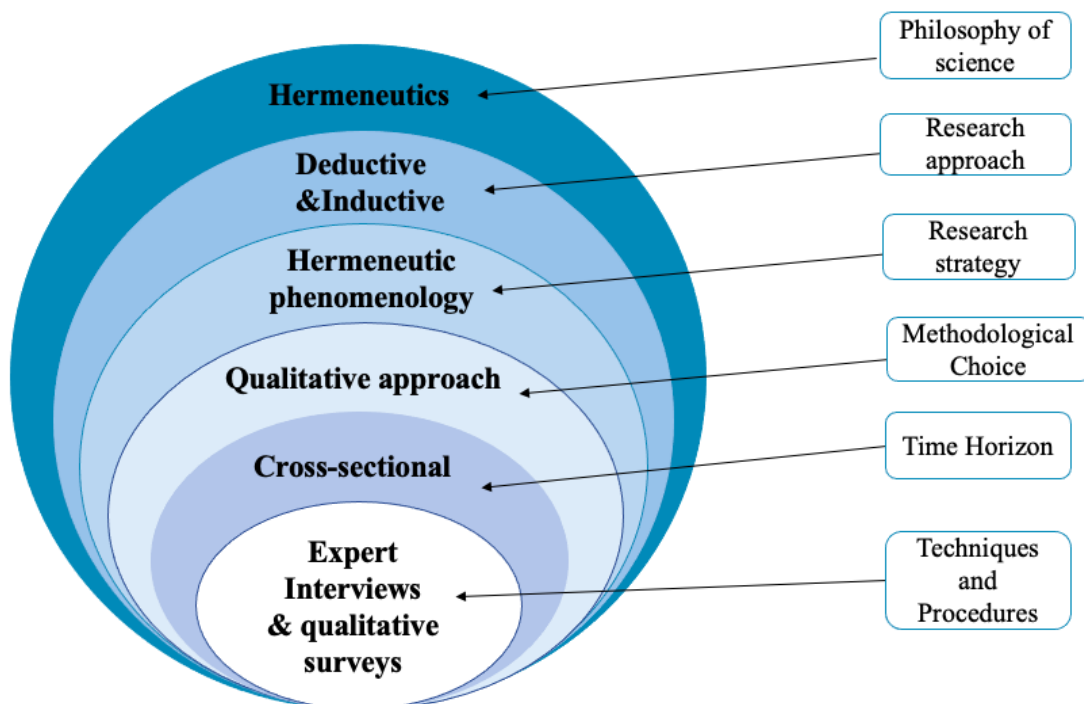
Figure 7: Based on "Research Method for Business Students (Saunders et al., 2009)

3.1. Philosophy of Science

The philosophy of science has direct influence on the process and outcome of an academic research project as the philosophical approach determines the methodology and the way that a phenomenon is studied. The philosophy of science can in discussions be abstract, however it's truly important to understand how it affects the way knowledge is produced in a project and the standpoint that is taken when studying a certain phenomenon in the world (Engholm,

2014:12). To remind ourselves, the studied phenomenon in this Master's thesis is customer engagement and its mechanisms, on modern social media platforms such as Instagram and Tiktok. All in all, the philosophical approach behind a scientific study has influence on how questions are asked, how the studied phenomenon is actually studied and therefore also the conclusion that is reached (Engholm, 2014:17-18). In philosophy of science, two key concepts help to understand what the philosophy of science itself is all about; ontology and epistemology.

Ontology is essentially a way to think about how we exist in the social world, thereby the science of being in the world (Engholm, 2014:25). Ontology is a key concept in philosophy of science as it represents the way we understand the world, the changes and events in it and thereby influencing the philosophical approach and way of thinking about and studying a phenomenon (Engholm, 2014:25). It's important to note that there's a separation between realism and constructivism in ontology (Engholm, 2014:25) as philosopher Immanuel Kant (1727-1804) started the discussion of how humans perceive the world (Egholm, 2014:28). The discussion is still relevant today and in realism, it is argued that things exist in the world regardless of how we understand, think of and perceive them. Constructivism on the contrary, takes into account the argument that we as humans always perceive the world around us, thus the world is a construct which we can only study from our own perception of it (Enholm, 2014:25-26). The second key concept is epistemology which is about how we can know the world, thus how knowledge is generated (Engholm, 2014:28). Epistemology therefore has influence on methodology as the way we gather data and apply methods have influence on the knowledge we generate (Egholm, 2014:31). In epistemology, distinction between objectivity and subjectivity is dominant (Egholm, 2014:28). In this regard, Egholm (2014) poses the question if objective knowledge is even possible and how we can identify a piece of knowledge as being true, taking objectivity and subjectivity into account (Egholm, 2014:28).

The philosophical approach that drives this Master's thesis methodology is hermeneutics. Hermeneutics essentially builds on the idea of interpretation and is the *"study of human-generated opinions and meanings"* (Egholm, 2014:226). As such, hermeneutics consider humans to be intentional beings and in hermeneutics, one studies the subjective opinions, perceptions and interpretations of humankind (Egholm, 2014:226-227). The research of this thesis aims to understand exactly that; the subjective interpretations of TikTok and Instagram users regarding content posted by brands and customer engagement on

those two social media platforms. Furthermore, this research also aims to understand the opinions and experiences of brand managers regarding customer engagement on TikTok and Instagram. The goal is to hold together the perceptions of both TikTok and Instagram users and brand managers to understand if there's a mitch match and/or alignment of opinions and perceptions in terms of achieving successful customer engagement on TikTok and Instagram.

The perceptions and opinions of social media users drive customer behaviour and actions. The actions are the potential direct or indirect contributions, in other words, the customer engagement itself. Therefore, the subject matter and focus of hermeneutics is mirrored in the goals of this thesis. Hermeneutics have a realist ontology (Egholm, 2014:226) which means that opinions and meanings exist in the world separate from the mind of the researcher (Egholm, 2014:89,95). Furthermore, the epistemology of hermeneutics is about interpretation (Egholm 2014:89) and a hermeneutics study is therefore often qualitative (Egholm, 2014:98) as the materials and data collected focuses on perceptions and opinions of people (Egholm, 2014:98). As this project focuses on understanding customer engagement on TikTok and Instagram, we must first understand platform users' and brand managers' perception of the phenomenon. Therefore, this study has a qualitative research approach.

With a hermeneutical approach, knowledge is about understanding a phenomenon rather than explaining it (Egholm, 2014:227). The understanding focuses on humankind, culture, perceptions and actions (Egholm, 2014:94) which is true for this study. The goal of this thesis is to gain deep understanding of customer engagement on social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram and its mechanisms rather than purely explaining it objectively as would be with a positivist philosophical approach.

Both text and interviews are often the type of materials collected for a hermeneutical study as they can provide deeper insights into the mind of individuals (Egholm, 2014:99). This goes hand in hand with the data collection and methods used in this Master's thesis. The expert interviews conducted with brand managers, qualitative survey with platform users and literature of customer engagement and social media platforms allows us to gain a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of customer engagement on modern social media platforms.

Context is important in hermeneutics as the goal is to understand a phenomenon contextually

as it's argued that one cannot fully understand a phenomenon without understanding its context (Egholm, 2014:93,226). Customer engagement is in this thesis researched in the context of social media platforms rather than its pure conceptual form, thus shaping the authors' understanding of the concept in the particular context. The context of social media platforms narrow the scope of the concept of customer engagement, thus reaching a more narrow and deeper understanding of customer engagement. Furthermore, this research focuses on how social media platform users and brand managers understand and interpret customer engagement in the particular context of TikTok and Instagram. Such focus of this research correlates with the focus of hermeneutics which is humans' understanding of a phenomenon rather than the phenomenon itself. Hermeneutics starts with people and so does this study, all in all to gain a deep understanding of a phenomenon through the eyes of people first and foremost.

Lastly, a hermeneutical study can both be inductively and deductively conducted, yet often deductively (Egholm, 2014:227). A deductive research approach starts with a theoretical starting point and the goal is then to test it through analysis (Bradford, 2017). Deductive research approaches go well with more quantitative studies as the theoretical starting point can for example benefit from being tested through hypothesis. Inductive research approaches are on the other hand, theory building as they start out with a more general starting point and build more narrow theory (Egholm 2014:31). This study uses a combination of deductive and inductive approaches. Deductive, because it takes its starting point in existing theoretical framework and definition of customer engagement by Pansari and Kumar (2019). Inductive, because the context of social media platforms and other theoretical literatures are used to add to that framework to come up with new general conclusions. Further discussion of the combined research approach unfolds in more depth below.

3.2. Research Design

The research design is needed to be able to present a plan and strategy for this study (Flick, 2014:112). It takes into consideration factors such as data collection, underlying theory, empirical material such as literature, resources available and analysis of the data to ensure effective investigation of the phenomenon and present the overall conclusion of the study (Flick, 2014:112).

3.2.1. Research Approach

This thesis is a combination of deductive and inductive approach. Deductive reasoning starts with a general statement or theory and narrows down to a specific conclusion during the research (Saunders et al., 2009). The first step was to find a theoretical framework and apply it to the specific phenomenon of customer engagement on the chosen social media platforms. Applying a deductive approach in this thesis enabled us to explain relationships and patterns between customer engagement and social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram and gathered data, and provided a conclusion to the researched topic (Saunders et al., 2009). Thus, we rely on a theoretical framework that is already formulated by Pansari and Kumar (2017).

Inductive approach focuses on creating a theory from a set of data gathered beforehand. The research has an inductive element given the methods we use (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The inductive approach involves beginning with a set of empirical observations of customer engagement on TikTok and Instagram, seeking patterns and regularities in those observations, and then theorizing the patterns. The expert interviews and qualitative survey data were well suited to an inductive approach as we looked for patterns across the interviews and survey answers and then tried to make sense of those patterns by theorizing them. By combining deductive and inductive approaches, the thesis aims to present a deep understanding of customer engagement on TikTok and Instagram. Thus, the argument for why this study uses a combination of deductive and inductive is the following. First, deductive because the research takes its starting point in existing theoretical and conceptual framework as well as theoretical literature of customer engagement and social media platforms. Second, it is inductive because this research puts customer engagement in the context of chosen social media platforms and analyses qualitative data to explore findings, correlations and gaps in the field, thus building on top of existing theoretical framework.

3.2.2. Research Strategy

Research strategy explains the way the research is conducted. A well designed research strategy allows one to investigate the chosen phenomena through the collected variety of data and the theoretical analysis of the data (Vargas-Hernandez et al., 2011:48).

It can be argued that the aim of the research strategy of this Master's thesis is both exploratory and explanatory. First, exploratory as this study aims to explore and gain deep understanding of the mechanisms of customer engagement on chosen social media platforms. Such understanding starts with exploring the perceptions of platform users and brand managers in terms of customer engagement on TikTok and Instagram, through qualitative data gathered from expert interviews and the qualitative survey. Second, explanatory as the study aims to understand mechanisms that are used to explain how customer engagement can be improved and enhanced on social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram (Saunders et al., 2012:175-176). However, the majority of the research will be exploratory in nature.

The research strategy of this thesis is hermeneutic phenomenology which is a variant of phenomenology as a research strategy and design, first written by van Maanen in 1990 (Creswell et al., 2007:253). Hermeneutic phenomenology considers interpretations, experiences and the studied phenomenon to be key in the research strategy (Creswell et al., 2007:253). The hermeneutic part of the strategy is coherent with the underlying philosophy as the opinions, interpretations and perceptions of multiple individuals have been gathered for this study, laying the foundation of the analysis (Creswell et al., 2007:252). Those opinions, interpretations and perceptions of individuals about a phenomenon, in this case customer engagement on social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram, should in hermeneutic phenomenology be taken and studied for what they are (Creswell et al., 2007:252) which too fits with the strategy of this thesis as the statements of individuals are directly analysed with existing customer engagement literature. Taking a look at the phenomenological part, it focuses more on studying the phenomenon than the interpretations as with hermeneutics. The phenomenon, customer engagement on social media platforms, is studied as something humans experience which is highlighted and explained by Cresswell *"the basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce the experiences of persons with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence"* (Creswell et al., 2007:252). Thus, the experiences of individuals of customer engagement on TikTok and Instagram are the starting point of this thesis and

thereby take on an explanatory form to understand generally how to enhance customer engagement on social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram. Furthermore, as customer engagement is often defined as an interdisciplinary concept (Pansari & Kumar, 2017) it goes well with phenomenology which is often dominant in social sciences, psychology and sociology (Creswell et al., 2007:253). The authors of this study had preconceptions about customer engagement prior to the process and we too interpret customer engagement in the context of social media platforms as we ourselves are users of social media platforms and occasionally engage with brands and other platform users. This goes hand in hand with the description of hermeneutical phenomenology by van Manen (Creswell et al., 2007:253).

All in all is the goal of a hermeneutic phenomenology research strategy-and design to gain deep understanding of how individuals share experiences, perceptions and interpretations of a phenomenon in a specific context (Creswell et al., 2007:255). Thus, the goal of the outcomes of this Master's thesis is exactly that. First, to gain a deep understanding of TikTok and Instagram users and brand managers' opinions about customer engagement and its mechanisms in the context of social media platforms. Second, to generally explain how brand managers can enhance customer engagement on social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram.

3.2.3. Qualitative Approach

Qualitative methods are used as a main approach for gathering data. Qualitative methods help to understand the relation between an issue and a method (Flick, 2014: 89). It focuses on social relations as it expresses life worlds (lifestyle, experiences, cultures, opinions or way of living) in the plural form of text rather than numbers which is a quantitative approach (Flick, 2014:12). The choice of the approach was based on the problem formulation and the focus of the study. Since the aim of this thesis is to understand customer engagement on TikTok and Instagram, having expert interviews and qualitative survey allows us to get inside social media platform users' minds to understand why and how they engage on TikTok and Instagram. Furthermore, to get brand managers' understanding on how customer engagement works and how, in their opinion, it should be nurtured to maintain a strong customer engagement on their TikTok and Instagram accounts. The chosen qualitative approach allows to investigate the complex issue of customer engagement where words matter more than data in numbers. The interpretation of the words will present the overall social reality of the

participants (Flick, 2014:15).

3.2.4. Primary and Secondary Data

Primary data refers to original data gathered by research which is not yet analysed (Flick, 2014:90). In this research, the primary data consists of expert interviews with brand managers and qualitative survey with TikTok and Instagram users. The choice of data is aligned with the qualitative approach chosen which is then interpreted and analysed in the analytical chapter in order to address the problem presented. The primary data collected from brand managers present their perspective of customer engagement on their TikTok and Instagram brand accounts. On the other hand, gathered survey answers help to understand the opinion of TikTok and Instagram users and investigate the actions taken by brand managers that work best for customer engagement for these platform users.

Our secondary data mainly consists of the data in the form of numbers such as views, likes, followers or comments gathered from chosen brands' TikTok and Instagram accounts provide us with a deeper understanding on the effects of specific content and engagement. The data is used to back up the claims gathered through the expert interviews and qualitative survey and is helpful for the reader to get a better understanding of chosen brands used as examples throughout this study.

3.2.5. Time Horizon

The time horizon in this study is cross-sectional which allows us to compare many different variables at the same time in the observational study. This thesis takes place at a single point in time which is also a characteristic of a cross-sectional study (Saunders et al., 2009). This is done through qualitative survey and expert interviews which were conducted and answers were provided at a single point in time. Longitudinal studies, on the other hand, involve taking multiple measures over an extended period which this thesis does not intend to do (Bryman, 2016). Using a cross-sectional type of observational study allows us to look at different characteristics such as gender, age or place of living which give an overview of what is happening in a current population (Bryman, 2016; Saunders et al., 2009). The purpose of this study is to understand how and why customer engagement is an important part of a strategy for brands, therefore using cross sectional study is in line with the main purpose of the thesis.

3.2.6. Research Methods

This sub-chapter presents the two primary data collections chosen for this thesis which are expert interviews with brand managers and qualitative survey with Instagram and TikTok users. It also presents the way the data was collected and how it will be analysed.

3.2.6.1. Primary Data Collection: Expert Interviews with Brand Managers

Expert interviews with brand managers, who might also be owners or founders present their opinion of the importance of customer engagement and why they think is necessary to maintain a strong relationship with the social media platform users online.

In order to learn more about customer engagement on social media platforms from a brand managers perspective, we have chosen brands which are active on TikTok and Instagram and have a successful following on only one of these platforms. Having such distinction will allow us to compare how these brand managers use their social media marketing strategy to ensure customer engagement. The sampling goal was furthermore to interview brand managers with an international focus since TikTok and Instagram are available worldwide and the content posted by brands can be seen by users from all over the world. However, we wanted to make sure that the brands also have an international following and customer base to see patterns in brands' activities and the effects. It then allows us to have a broader perspective of content decisions and actions taken by brands without taking into consideration a specific location of a brand since they are internationally available.

The interviews can be classified as expert interviews. An expert interview is defined by Flick (2014) as an interview conducted with a person who is an expert in their field or organization in some shape or form (Flick, 2014:227). Expert interviews differ, but are similar to, elite interview which focuses more on the relatively high status of the person rather than their expert knowledge in its pure form (Flick, 2014:227). In expert interviews, it is not the person itself that is of interest but rather their professional position (Flick, 2014:227). This is true for this study. Brand managers are in this study considered to be experts as they in their daily jobs have practical experience with customer engagement on TikTok and Instagram. Their task is to enhance customer engagement and therefore it was of interest for this study how they have done so, what they have thought of it and what their experiences have been with it.

Expert interviews are by nature semi-structured interviews (Flick, 2014:227). A semi-structured interview is focused on revealing subjective everyday knowledge especially in different professional aspects (Flick, 2014:217). In semi-structured interviews, questions are open to allow the interviewee to elaborate on their subjective knowledge (Flick, 2014:218). In our interviews conducted with brand managers, all questions in the interview were open ended. The goal was to allow room for brand managers to explain and elaborate as much as possible about customer engagement on specifically TikTik and Instagram. The goal was to gather their subjective opinions, perceptions and experiences and they were therefore also asked to provide stories and examples in open ended questions. As emphasis was put on brands managers' subjective knowledge, experiences and opinions about customer engagement through open ended questions, we argued that our interviews conducted were categorised as semi-structured expert interviews.

3.2.6.2. Primary Data Collection: Qualitative Survey with Instagram and TikTok Users

The aim of the thesis is to understand customer engagement on TikTok and Instagram. Therefore, the focus of the qualitative survey was to get answers from people who use TikTok and/or Instagram and have different backgrounds, age, lifestyles and cultures. We have received answers from 77 people, who live in 16 different countries, in ages 17-57 (Figure 8). By designing the qualitative survey like so, we were able to receive more survey responses, thus aiming at a diverse data sample with many experiences and subjective opinions of customer engagement on social media platforms in general.

We have only limited the sampling to the users of TikTok and/or Instagram which will help to understand their perception of these social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram and brands they engage with or not. Random sampling took place and everyone had a relatively equal chance of participating in it (Flick, 2014:168). Random sampling was ensured by allowing everyone to decide if they would like to participate or not. Before entering the answers, participants were informed that the survey is only for people who use TikTok and/or Instagram. To get the responses from people with different backgrounds we have used diverse sources such as our own social media networks which contain more than 3,000 people from all over the world as well as Facebook groups consisting of more than 500,000 users. Another reason why random sampling took place is the fact that the individual person responding to the survey did not matter per se (Flick, 2014:168) as a large and wide sample size was desired to get many perspectives on the subject as possible, to reveal interesting opinions or ways of

thinking about customer engagement on social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram. The qualitative survey consists of 18 open-ended questions making the data qualitative as subjective opinions were desired. The questions were designed to be able to get as much information about customer engagement on both Instagram and TikTok as possible. The questions can be seen in Appendix #3.

	Denamrk	USA	Poland	France	Philippines	The Netherlands	Iceland	Bulgaria	Italy	Australia	Canada	Wales	United Arab Emirates	England	Sweden
Nr of Participants	33	20	7	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Figure 8: Number of Participants in Each Country

3.2.6.3. Data Analysis Method

The qualitative survey with social media users and expert interviews with brand managers were analysed through thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is a strategy that combines narrative analysis, discourse analysis and grounded theory analysis (Flick, 2014: 421). Narrative analysis focuses on stories that people create and which are analysed by researchers (Flick, 2014: 246). Discourse analysis are studies of written or spoken language in regards to its social context and how the language is used in real life situations (Flick, 2014: 446). However, grounded theory analysis helps to build a theory from gathered data. The theory is grounded in the data (Flick, 2014: 398). Thematic analysis helps to identify, report and analyse the gathered data through themes by finding repeated patterns. The authors also distinguish two types of thematic analysis, '*inductive thematic coding'* which is used to find themes from gathered data and '*theoretical thematic analysis'* which is helpful for researchers in the analytical and theoretical decisions (Flick, 2014: 421). This is why this method is used in this thesis. Inductive thematic coding was used for analysing our expert interviews and qualitative survey. Theoretical thematic analysis was used in the analytical chapters that helped to notice patterns in the analysis and create a built-on to the theoretical and conceptual framework.

There are 6 steps of thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke which was also used in this research as a backbone of the data analysis. First step is to make sure the expert interviews and qualitative survey answers are transcribed properly which helps to be able to read the answers multiple times to grasp the general context of the answers. Next step is to

find codes and themes that are clearly visible, as well as not visible yet, but which can have underlying meaning later in the process (Flick, 2014: 422). The third and fourth step is to categorize the themes and codes selected which then must be reviewed again where only the relevant ones are chosen and picked for analysing. In the fifth step, the reviewed themes and codes are given labels which leads to the last step - presenting the results of the completed thematic analysis (Flick, 2014: 422).

In this research, the qualitative survey conducted with TikTok and Instagram users was coded through thematic analysis. We used different colours for specific labels and themes. The answers to each question of the survey with the given labels can be seen in the Appendix #6. We used different colours to gather, combine and filter the specific codes. The marked expert interview answers with brand managers can be found in Appendix #7. We have started by reading the answers to each question from all participants where themes and codes were found. We then categorised them by only choosing the ones which are relevant to our research and will help us to answer the research question. However, we aimed at including a diverse set of opinions into analysis to bring about interesting aspects to the analysis. Then the chosen codes were labeled and presented throughout the analysis.

3.3. Reliability and Validity of The Research

This following section discusses the quality of the conducted qualitative research of this Master's thesis. It's naturally important to ensure a high sense of quality of the research conducted as the quality of the research and data directly influences the outcomes of the study and the quality of findings. This study uses classical criteria for assessing the quality of the research; reliability and validity (Flick, 2014:481).

3.3.1. Reliability

In the book *'An Introduction to Qualitative Research'*, Flick (2014) introduces reliability as a classical measure of quality of the research and introduces a few ways which the researcher can ensure reliability of the research. As the main methods of this Master's thesis are expert interviews with brand managers and a qualitative survey with TikTok and Instagram users, reliability of such methods must be ensured. First, ensuring reliability of expert interviews can be ensured by making test interviews and checking for quality of interview guides (Flick, 2014:482). We ourselves filled out both the qualitative survey and the expert interview

questions in multiple trial rounds to ensure coherency, clear questions and ensure that questions are able to be elaborated on by the responder by being open ended. The goal was to leave room for the respondent to reply freely and thereby ensure subjectivity and avoiding that responders are guided too much in a particular direction by the questions, leaving misleading or biased data. For the same reason, the interview guide and survey questions were edited in multiple rounds before going live and being used to ensure that all aspects of the studied phenomenon were included in a non-biased manner.

Second, thorough and high quality thematic analysis of the gathered data have been aimed for as a good data analysis strategy increases reliability of the data (Flick, 2014:482-483), in this case being responses from expert interviews with brand managers and qualitative survey with TikTok and Instagram users. Literature of how to conduct thematic analysis and carefully assessing it prepared us to conduct thematic analysis to our best ability. As Flick (2014) argues that documenting the research process heightens reliability (Flick, 2014:483) we saved all methodological documents in relation to the research process. Such documents include specific interview guide drafts, expert interview responses from brand managers in original language (danish or english) and e-mail correspondence with brands' representatives. The aim is to be able to bring forward any of those documents if needed to ensure that original documents can serve as ground for reliability of the research and methodological choices. Furthermore, in the following analytical chapters, we were careful when stating a quote from the qualitative survey by clearly marking it with # and the ID number of our survey respondents. This should increase reliability as the reader is able to see the concrete survey respondent, to understand the broader context of the specific quote used in-text. This marking of quotations further helps the reader to understand where data is presented separately from the argument of the analysis provided by us which too should ensure reliability (Flick, 2014:483).

3.3.2. Validity

The goal of any research is to make findings and results as valid as possible (Flick, 2014:13). Validity is about academic trustworthiness and quality of the study. It is also about how we can trust and assess produced knowledge (Flick, 2014:484). A few validity problems can arise (Flick, 2014:483). However, we considered validity issues and therefore made a conscious choice to include opinions, perceptions and interpretations of both brand managers and TikTok and Instagram users to bring in as many points of views as possible. This is to

attempt to avoid getting a screwed picture of customer engagement on social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram. Other validity errors can show if researchers are asking wrong or misguided questions in relation to the phenomenon, miss any connections or even see wrong connections that do not exist (Flick, 2014:483). The theoretical and conceptual framework and existing customer engagement and social media platform literature guided the questions we asked.

Validity was further ensured through factual accuracy in relation to qualitative survey and expert interviews as both mostly were texts and therefore could not be misheard or mistranscribed (Flick, 2014:485). Both TikTok and Instagram users and some brand managers wrote down the answers themselves in most cases. For the expert interviews with brand managers which were conducted through a video call over GoogleMeets, specific software called Otter.ai (https://otter.ai/) was used to transcribe the expert interviews in real time. These transcriptions were checked for errors by us so not only the software was used to transcribe the interviews which ensured less errors in the text. All for aiming at maximum validity of the answers provided by brand managers. Lastly, we aimed at taking the responses of TikTok and Instagram users and brand managers for what they are and not to abstract them or misinterpret them, to ensure interpretative validity (Flick, 2014:485).

Furthermore, triangulation can help to assess the quality of the research and thereby also says something about the validity of it. Triangulation is a strategy in qualitative research methods to ensure validity and quality of the research and its findings (Flick, 2014:183). There are a few types of triangulation as a strategy to assess the quality of research. We here focus on methodological triangulation (Flick, 2014:183) to assess how we can validate the research in this thesis and study the phenomenon of customer engagement in the context of social media platforms. However, similar for them all is the ability to validate results through examining how theory, data and methods are combined, to ensure a coherent framework for analysis. The key in understanding triangulation, is to understand that the data, the theory and the methods should be linked and connected. Thereby, triangulation has implications for how a phenomenon is researched (Flick, 2014:183-184). We wish to use triangulation in a way that enables us to cross-check our findings between our methods (qualitative survey and expert interviews), the underlying theoretical framework and literature review and the perceptions gathered in our data set. With such cross-checking, hopefully our findings can bring all perspectives together in such a way that it enables us to give valid conclusions to our overall

research question. The aim of considering triangulation for this study lies in the fact that more than one method was used in this study and that we wish to gain a comprehensive and deep understanding of customer engagement on chosen social media platforms. The following figure highlights our thoughts of triangulation in our study (Figure 9).
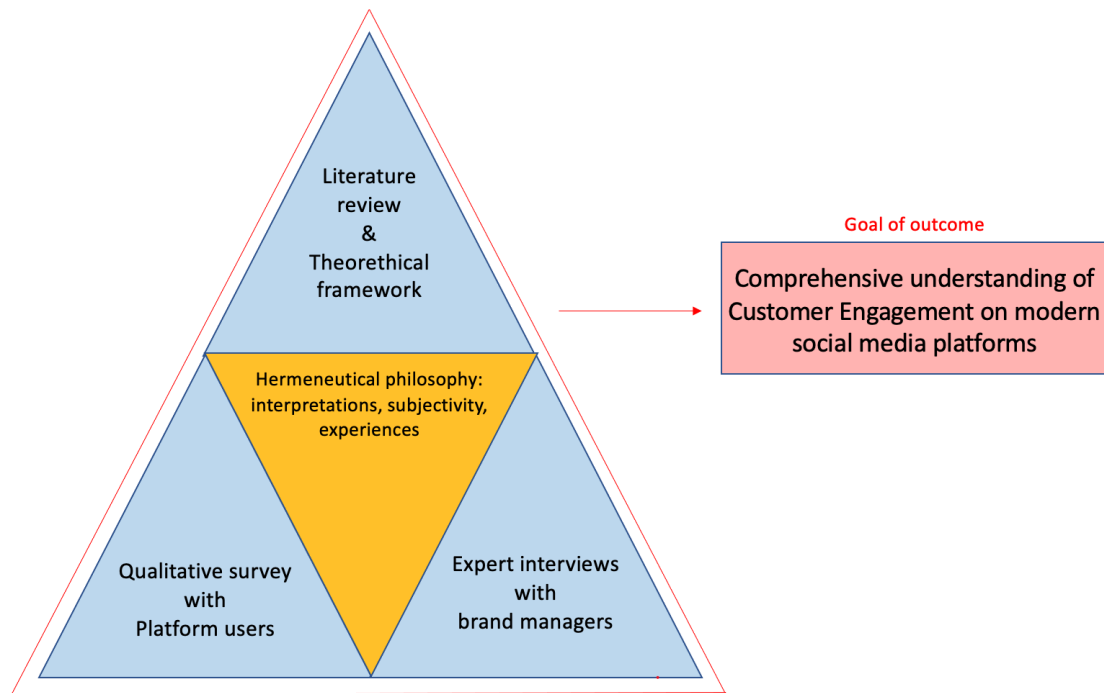
Figure 9: Methodological triangulation of this Master's Thesis

3.4. Ethics

It is important to take ethics into consideration when planning the study since *"all aspects of the research process, from deciding upon the topic through to identifying a sample, conducting the research and disseminating the findings, have ethical implications"* (Northway, 2002:3 in Flick, 2008, 41). It is necessary to take on participants' perspective and reflect on the way the researchers should help the participants when participating in the study. The participants need to be informed about the research and the purpose where they can decide to consent or not. They are also given a choice to stay confidential (Flick, 2008,43). Additionally, gathering data should not be harmful for participants in any way. This can be ensured when the analysed data does not include judgement on a personal level but interpretation lies in the data through interview statements (Flick, 2008:41).

The qualitative survey participants, who are TikTok and Instagram users, were invited to participate in the survey through social media platforms, therefore they were able to decide if they wanted to participate or not. Before answering the questions, participants were informed about the purpose of the survey and how their answers will be used in the thesis. In the description of the survey, data protection information was also included where anonymousness was ensured. We kept the qualitative survey anonymous for ethical reasons (Flick, 2014:54). Additionally, an email address to the researchers was provided in case participants had any additional questions regarding the study. The full description provided to the participants along with the questions can be found in Appendix #3.

The participants of the expert interviews conducted with brand managers were also informed about the purpose of the study and if necessary, their answers can stay anonymous and confidential. This would mean that the study would include the quotes by presenting the participants with names such as Brand Manager 1, Brand Manager 2 and so on. To make sure it stays confidential, the confidentiality agreement would have to be signed with Copenhagen Business School, the authors and the interview participants. However, none of the interviewed brand managers requested confidentiality agreement but allowed the data and their names to be shared publicly. The participants agreed to have their information and quotes shared in the thesis. Participants were also informed that they can withdraw their participation in the study even after submitting the answers.

All the information that was gathered was used according to the agreement with all participants which can be publicly shared. The answers, therefore can be found in Appendix #2 for both expert interviews with brand managers as well as the qualitative survey with social media users. We have not changed the raw data that we have collected (Flick, 2014:54).

3.5. Conclusion

To conclude, the research onion by Saunders et al., (2009) presented a structure of the methodology. The philosophy of science of this thesis is hermeneutics while the research approach chosen was a mix of inductive and deductive research based on the nature of the research. Additionally, hermeneutic phenomenology is determined as a research strategy and qualitative approach as our methodological choice where expert interviews and qualitative

survey were chosen for investigating the topic. Additionally, thematic analysis is used to analyse the gathered data and provide the reader with the conclusion. The choices are made with consideration of the cross-sectional time horizon, reliability, validity and ethics.

4. Analysis and Findings

This chapter first presents the research setting which explains the actual choices of methods used. First, we explain what brands have been chosen for this study and why, then it explains the reasoning behind the choice of qualitative survey respondents. The chapter then presents the analytical chapter where the findings are presented based on gathered data and literature review of the chosen concepts.

4.1. Research Setting

4.1.1. Chosen Brands

This section explains how the process of choosing brands to interview was finalized. It also presents an explanation how we think these choices will impact the research. It also includes the presentation of the chosen brands.

We decided to collaborate with six brands; Spirekassen, FaceYoga by Kari, BYKARTHI, Click & Grow, Queen Cosmetics and ARTESANA Soaps. They are active on TikTok and Instagram and have a successful following on only one of these platforms. They all cater to the B2C market.

TikTok and Instagram are available for all brands who have access to the Internet and through the use of these social media platforms they are able to connect with users and potential customers from all over the world. These brands have already had international followers and customers. Therefore, a representation from different countries could give us examples of actions taken by different brand managers disregarding their location. The brand manager's opinion gathered through the interviews will only be used to understand perception, opinions and experiences of the brand managers when it comes to customer engagement on their TikTok and Instagram accounts and helped to back up claims gathered in the qualitative survey with TikTok and Instagram users. Six brand managers/owners have been interviewed from: Estonia, England, two from Denmark and two from The United States (Figure 10). However, the choice made for these brands was based on the fact that we wanted to include brands which have more customer engagement on TikTok than Instagram but also interview brands which have higher customer engagement on Instagram. Therefore, 2 out of 6 brands (Click & Grow and Spirekassen) prefer Instagram and have more followers on that platform.

The rest, 4 of 6 brands, are very successful on TikTok but not on Instagram. Therefore, it allows us to compare their opinion regarding the content and customer engagement with TikTok and Instagram users who can potentially be customers of the brands since they are available internationally.

The six brand managers had further different functions within the brands; most were the founder and owner and one was PR manager. Thus, they are highly involved in the brands and have first hand knowledge and experiences. Moreover, their opinions and thoughts were of interest for this research since we consider them experts in terms of social media strategy on their TikTok and Instagram accounts.

The expert interviews conducted with brand managers were both conducted through text and verbally, however both online. The current Covid-19 pandemic and the fact that we from the beginning focused on brands from all over the world made it difficult to meet brand managers face to face as normally done in qualitative semi-structured interviews (Flick, 2014:233). Considering the world situation and respect for the brand managers' time, we proposed two options for the interviews once the brand managers had agreed to collaborate with us. We proposed to have a call, video call or simply send the open-ended interview questions to them by mail. The majority of the brand managers preferred to send answers to questions by e-mail and therefore, the answers were written down by the brand managers themselves. On one hand it saved us valuable time as transcribing the interviews were not needed for the majority of them. On the flip side, face to face interactions might leave a more fluent and unstructured interview form, allowing for more subjective knowledge to be revealed. Furthermore, as the subject under study is customer engagement on social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram and that brand managers are relatively tech-savvy, the online aspect of the interviews fell well into the context of the study (Flick, 2014:234). As the majority of brand managers wished to reply to the interview question through e-mail, we might have a significantly lower sample size if we had not given the option of e-mail interviewing. Face Yoga by Kari's owner and Queen Cosmetics' owner have agreed to a video call through GoogleMeets where questions were sent beforehand. Online video calls allowed us to ask follow up questions to their answers which gave us an opportunity to get more in depth information regarding their TikTok and Instagram experience.

4.1.1.1. Presentation of the Brands

This section of the chapter aims to present the six brands whose brand managers we've interviewed for the purpose of gathering subjective opinions and experiences of customer engagement on social media platforms. The six brands operate in different industries which are gardening, beauty and cosmetics, clothing and wellness services. All six brands cater to the B2C market, which this thesis focuses on. The brands further all have in common that they all manage profiles on both Instagram and TikTok and aim to facilitate a high degree of customer engagement on those platforms. However, some of the brands focus more on Instagram, others on TikTok. The six brands are all small-or medium sized businesses. The six brands are:

	Country	Type of product/service	Number of Instagram followers	Number of TikTok followers	Number of overall 'likes' on TikTok
Spirekassen	Denmark	organic flower-vegetables plant seeds and gardening products	12,400	21	221
Click & Grow	Estonia	smart gardens and plant pods	80,900	145	2,813
BYKARTHI	Denmark	personalized embroidery of clothes and tote bags	7,757	16,600	124,000
Queen Cosmetics	USA	makeup and beauty products	16,700	443,400	4,900,000
ARTESANA Soaps	USA	handmade and natural soaps	2,801	541,600	11,300,000
FaceYoga By Kari	England	online face yoga classes	908	131,600	951,700

Figure 10: Characteristics of Chosen Brands

Spirekassen

Spirekassen is a Danish company founded by Christine who is educated as a gardener and agricultural technologist. Spirekassen is a webshop and a blog all in one. Spirekassen sells organic flowers, vegetables and other plant seeds as their primary product. However, they too sell other gardening products such as gardening books, gardening tools and fertilizers. Spirekassen sells to both B2C and B2B markets with the focus on B2C. The blog is updated

with new posts every day, containing inspiration for gardening, information about specific plants and general tips and tricks to gardening. Spirekassen puts emphasis on specific core values such as sustainability, urban farming, self-sufficiency and organic gardening. Spirekassen engages in charity by donating seeds to organizations to improve psychiatry in Denmark (Spirekassen.nu).

Spirekassen uses four social media platforms; Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and TikTok. However, the main focus is on Instagram and TikTok as "*we chose those media since that's where our target groups are*" (Appendix #2, Interview #1). Spirekassen joined Instagram in 2018 and TikTok in 2020. Spirekassen informed us that they post on Instagram three times daily and on TikTok a couple of times a month. Spirekassen currently spends 25% of their budget on creating content and controlling Instagram and TikTok. Furthermore, they run ads on social media platforms approximately 6 months per year (Appendix #2, Interview #1). At the time of when this study was finalized, Spirekassen had 12,400 followers on Instagram and 21 followers on TikTok and 221 overall likes on TikTok.

Click & Grow

Click & Grow is an Estonian brand founded in 2009 by Mattias Lepp, the CEO. Click & Grow sells smart gardens and plant pods to satisfy gardening desires from customers living in urban areas around the world. The idea came when Mattias read a NASA article about growing plants on Mars combined with the fact that Mattias felt depressed living in a city as he grew up with a large garden and nature in the countryside. Click & Grow used NASA technology, hydroponic gardening and the idea of a capsule coffee machine when collaborating with universities to invent the products. The mission of Click & Grow, in the words of Mattias, is to "*bridge the gap between modern man and nature*" (clickandgrow.com). Click & Grow sells their products on B2C through their website where they also maintain a blog. Customers can buy a subscription to a supply of plant pods or simply buy the products individually (clickandgrow.com).

The PR Manager of Click & Grow, Martin, told us in the interview that the brand joined Instagram in 2014 and TikTok in 2020. Besides that, Click & Grow maintains a YouTube channel, Facebook page and Facebook group containing engaging fans of the product. Martin emphasizes that Click & Grow focuses on Instagram because of the target group and the fact that Instagram is visually driven. Click & Grow aims to mature more on TikTok in the near

future to reach a younger target group. They aim to post onto their Instagram feed every other or third day, Instagram '*story*' function every day and posted lastly on TikTok Spring 2020. (Appendix #2, Interview #2). Click & Grow continuously run ads on social media platforms. By the time of this study, Click & Grow has 80,900 followers on Instagram and 145 on TikTok and 2813 overall likes on TikTok.

BYKARTHI

BYKARTHI is a small Danish brand founded in 2020 which specializes in personalized embroidery of clothes and tote bags. However, the founders and owners, Thilde Fink and Karoline Fink, told us that they actually started out selling jewelry four years ago. They dreamed of creating a creative universe of personalized clothing and bags and then started to engage in personalized embroidery by October 2020 (Appendix #2, Interview #3). BYKARTHI sells to B2C and orders go in through their website where customers can select an item, design and upload pictures of the desired embroidery and place the order. Thilde founded the brand and runs it daily including handling social media, shop goods and the embroidery itself whereas Karoline helps with smaller tasks.

BYKARTHI uses Facebook, Instagram and TikTok but focuses mostly on Instagram and TikTok. BYKARTHI joined TikTok in October 2020 and Instagram four years ago. They aim to post on TikTok everyday and on their Instagram feed every other day. The Instagram '*story*' function is posted on to every day (Appendix #2, Interview #3). They are currently in the process of finding someone to help with tasks related to social media platforms. BYKARTHI ran ads on Instagram prior but no longer does (Appendix #2, Interview #3). By the time of finalizing this study, BYKARTHI had 9,757 followers on Instagram and 16,600 followers on TikTok and 124,000 overall likes on TikTok.

Queen Cosmetics

Queen Cosmetics is a US brand founded by Elimar Depaula who from a young age was interested in makeup and beauty and wanted to start something unique, bold, all-inclusive, and boundary-breaking. After suffering a spinal cord injury due to a gunshot in 2019, she decided to finally pursue her dreams and created the makeup and beauty brand. The purpose of the brand is to enhance the natural beauty of all the 'queens' around the world. Elimar Depaula wants everyone to *"Be you always. Unapologetically. And remember...NEVER LET YOUR CROWN FALL QUEEN"* (queencosmetics.store).

The founder who is also responsible for the social media content joined Instagram in June 2019 and TikTok in November 2019 after hearing a lot of positives about it. Elimar posts at least once a day on both TikTok and Instagram. However, all in all, she prefers to use TikTok to promote her brand. By the time of finalizing this study Queen Cosmetics had 16,700 followers on Instagram and 443,400 followers on TikTok and 4,900,000 overall likes on TikTok.

ARTESANA Soaps

ARTESANA Soaps is a US brand founded by owner Cecilia Davoren. The company makes and sells handmade and natural soaps to the B2C market. Their mission is to make high quality, natural and handmade soaps, skincare and bath products whilst providing high quality of customer service. ARTESANA Soaps started as a hobby for founder Cecilia and were only sold to fundraisers but the soaps quickly became popular. After a couple of years, her daughter-in-law Elizabeth joined the company (artesanasoaps.com).

ARTESANA Soaps uses Facebook, Instagram and TikTok, focusing mostly on TikTok. They joined TikTok with great success on March 17th 2020 after fighting revenue-and sales losses as a direct consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, they decided to join TikTok to reach their online customers as their Facebook and Instagram pages were mainly used to connect with local customers. ARTESANA Soaps employs a student, Alyssa, who is in charge of posting to their social media platforms, especially TikTok. Thus, ARTESANA Soaps employs three individuals in total (Appendix #2, Interview #5). They aim to post to Instagram and Facebook twice a week and on TikTok every day. ARTESANA Soaps informed us that they have run ads on social media platforms without success, thus ending the ads. They currently do not spend any of their budget on maintaining social media platforms (Appendix #2, Interview #5). ARTESANA Soaps currently have 2,801 followers on Instagram and 541,600 on TikTok and 11,300,000 overall likes on TikTok.

FaceYoga By Kari

The brand focuses on online face yoga classes with Kari Cordier who is the founder. The brand is based in England where Kari also works part time in a yoga studio. Kari is a certified face yoga instructor. Face yoga includes a series of facial stretches, exercises, and postures that help the face to regain and preserve a youthful and desirable appearance. Face yoga is not well known in society and therefore, Kari's goal is to make face yoga accessible and easily incorporated into often chaotic lifestyles. She also advocates for self-awareness and empowerment (faceyogabykari.com).

By the time of finalizing this study FaceYoga By Kari had 908 followers on Instagram and 131,600 followers on TikTok and 951,700 overall likes on TikTok. Suddenly, in one day, she gained around 20,000-30,000 followers on TikTok (Appendix #2, Interview #6). Her first Tiktok was posted on May 14th, 2020 and the first Instagram post on June 1st, 2020 and out of the 900 followers she has on Instagram, she has gained around 600 followers through people just finding her from TikTok (Appendix #2, Interview #6).

4.1.2. Chosen Survey Respondents and Their Characteristics

This section explains the reason why not all qualitative survey answers were taken into consideration and how it can affect the research. First, it's important to notice that 77 people who participated in the survey were not amongst followers/platform users of the six interviewed brands. The reason is that the nature of the questions in the qualitative survey did not exclusively focus on the six brands but rather on the use of TikTok and Instagram and customer engagement activities on the platforms in general. Despite the fact that the Instagram and TikTok users of the qualitative survey were not selected amongst the followers of the six brands, we would like to argue that the subjective opinions and experiences of the brand managers and platforms users can be compared. Reasoning behind it lies in the mentioned; that we measure general subjective opinions and experiences of customer engagement on social media platforms from TikTok and Instagram users and brand managers. The focus is not on a specific brand because then it would have been a case study which this thesis does not intend to do. Rather, the opinions and statements of brand managers are used as examples to back up our arguments, combined with theoretical and conceptual literature.

We decided to focus only on survey participants from Denmark and The United States. After receiving all survey answers, we realized that we received them from 16 different countries

(Figure 8) which could be problematic in terms of validity of the data. Especially because most of the countries were mentioned only by 1 or 2 participants. At the beginning of the research process, we wanted to have a diverse set of data, however, we realized that due to the different economic state of certain countries, cultural differences, lifestyle and buying behaviour, focusing on only 2 most chosen countries will give us a more focused perspective and more valid results. Therefore, after receiving 30 answers from Denmark and 19 answers from The United States, we decided to focus on the two most frequent locations in the data set. Additionally, choosing Denmark and The United States can give us deeper perspectives on TikTok and Instagram in those two countries. Looking at statistics, Instagram is on the 13th place on the app ranking in Denmark whereas TikTok is on the 25th place. On the other hand, Instagram is on the 8th position in the ranking in The United States but TikTok is on the 3rd place in the overall app ranking (Similarweb, 2021). This is why, we think that choosing participants from Denmark and The United States can bring interesting findings since the popularity of the platforms differs and thus, their opinions and experiences can also differ. Additionally, choosing these two countries will still allow us to have a diverse set of opinions regarding TikTok and Instagram and possibilities on each platform, therefore presenting diverse but critical argumentation in regards to the use of these social media platforms.

Out of 77 survey responses, 53 survey answers are in total from Denmark and The United States. However, only 49 responses out of the 53 will be taken into consideration since 4 of them answer that they do not use either TikTok or Instagram, therefore will not not be used since the survey was directed to only those who have either TikTok or Instagram. Table 11 presents the characteristics of the 49 respondents in which 30 are from Denmark and 19 from The United States. Below, Table 12 and 13 present the age range of participants.

	Female Participants	Male Participants
Denmark	22	8
USA	12	7

Figure 11: Gender of Participants (Denmark and The United States)

	24 years old	25 years old	26 years old	27 years old	28 years old	29 years old	31 years old	35 years old	36 years old	49 years old	55 years old	57 years old
Denmark	3	5	5	3	4	4	1	1	1	1	1	1

Figure 12: Age of 30 Participants in Denmark

	17 years old	19 years old	20 years old	22 years old	24 years old	25 years old	26 years old	27 years old	28 years old	29 years old	30 years old	34 years old	35 years old	36 years old	40 years old
USA	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	1

Figure 13: Age of 19 Participants in The United States

4.1.3. TikTok and Instagram - Platform Type

There are many types of platforms available which help actors to connect which are presented in the literature review. Some platform types can help to initiate or increase customer engagement and some can also disturb the process (Perren & Kozinets, 2018:21). TikTok and Instagram as social media platforms are examples of '*enablers*' type where the platforms allow actors - in this case brands and users to connect which then can help with customer engagement practises (Perren & Kozinets, 2018:28). The level of TikTok and Instagram's intermediation is low meaning that TikTok and Instagram have rules and policies, however, the supervision is low compared to any other type of platforms. Additionally, TikTok and Instagram have low levels of consoliality meaning that there is a low social or virtual presence which refers to a social interaction between a brand and a user (Perren & Kozinets, 2018:28). Users can get in contact with brands mostly through comments or direct messaging. However, social media platforms also allow brands to block private messaging functions, meaning that it is harder to get in contact with the brand. Then users are still able to comment and ask questions, however, it depends on the brand if they answer the questions. This is why the interaction between a brand and a user is considered limited. '*Enablers*' type of a platform like TikTok and Instagram can also encourage brands to promote their service and products with a personal message that will then encourage other users to participate in the exchange, in this case in the interaction between a brand and a user. Also, these platforms allow brand managers to customize their page to attract more users and spur customer engagement (Perren & Kozinets, 2018:28).

The choice made for *'enablers'* type was the fact that social media platforms have been increasingly becoming a part of our everyday life and TikTok as well as Instgaram realize the opportunities that lie in creating a social media platform that encourages interaction between users. '*Enablers'* type of platforms which are social media platforms are a great facilitator for customer engagement and customer relationship and allow social connections and experiences to form. Users are able to give feedback, share content, comment and effectively communicate and connect with others in a two-way information transmission between producer, content, audience and feedback which contributes to higher customer engagement (Jung & Lee, 2016). This is why customer engagement must be investigated through the lens of social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram.

Harmeling et al., (2017) argue for the importance of providing the right tools and platforms for customers to spur customer engagement. This connects with the context of this study as we focus on how social media platforms can be used by brands to spur customer engagement and platforms like TikTok and Instagram are great examples of facilitators of such interactions, thus will be the focus of this study. TikTok and Instagram are only two out of many social media platforms that are available for brand managers to be used in their marketing strategy. However, TikTok became popular in 2019 and has been the fastest growing social media platform in 2020 (Post, 2020). On the other hand, Instagram has been the most trending and favourable platform for businesses to reach their target audience (Kuligowski, 2020). TikTok is expecting exponential growth in upcoming years and is already extremely popular among brands and users (Post, 2020). Therefore, TikTok could become the number one platform for businesses to target their customers. This is why brand managers should understand the possibilities on both TikTok and Instagram to be able to successfully implement customer engagement practises.

4.2. Analytical Chapter:

Customer Engagement Mechanisms on Social Media Platforms

In this chapter, we answer the sub-questions by discussing the capabilities and opportunities of customer engagement by looking at TikTok and Instagram. The analytical chapter is split into six sub-chapters, presenting a funnel which first focuses on customer engagement as a concept and ends with how managers can utilise social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram for building strong customer engagement practices. The first part of the chapter explains why customer engagement is a popular concept and desired goal for brands. The second part focuses on the distinction between firm-initiated customer engagement and customer-initiated customer engagement. Additionally, we take a stand in such distinction and propose an addition to existing structure. The third part of the chapter focuses on the deeper explanations of the use of social media platforms The fourth part of the chapter focuses on the importance of the right content to drive customer engagement. The fifth part of the chapter explains how customer engagement goes beyond transactions and the underlying mechanisms in such engagement beyond transactions. Here, we further make our addition to the conceptual framework by Pansari and Kumar (2017) with an offset in the discussion of emotions, satisfaction, content and value. The last part focuses on the opportunities of technical features of TikTok and Instagram and how brand managers should utilise those to engage platform users. We here make our final addition to the conceptual framework by Pansari and Kumar (2017). The chapter ends with a sub conclusion which answers the sub-questions and argues for why every brand should aim for a high degree of customer engagement and how TikTok and Instagram can help to initiate the engagement.

4.2.1. Why customer engagement?

There's a sense of agreement in the existing customer engagement literature that customer engagement is a profitable and effective tool for brands. Customer engagement plays an increasing role in the corporate world today and the practice of facilitating it is more present than ever (Varn Doorn et al.2018:366;Pansari & Kumar 2017:297). Brand managers have even realised the importance of customer engagement to the extent that customer engagement managers are hired and allowed to use many corporate resources to facilitate and enhance customer engagement for the organizations (Harmeling et al.2018:312). Furthermore, the academic interest in the phenomenon of customer engagement is equally popular (Van Doorn et al.2018:366). Customer engagement has reached more than 6 million Google searches, further proving the popularity of the phenomenon (Harmeling et al.2017:312). Customer engagement was, as of 2017, twice as effective as radio advertising, seven times more effective than forms of print advertising and four times more effective to drive sales than personal selling (Harmeling et al.2017:316). Furthermore, fully engaged customers are 23% more profitable. Disengaged customers are 13% less profitable on average according to a study by Gallup (Pansari & Kumar 2017:297). This explains why customer engagement has capabilities to step in where advertising is not effective (Van Doorn et al.2018:380).

But what do those numbers mean in actuality? As social media platform users have gotten more say and power in today's marketplace (Harmeling et al.2017:312) and since engaged customers are actively coming up with ideas, shares informative knowledge and supports the brand (Carlson et al., 2018:83), it's hard not to start to grasp the beneficial power of customer engagement. Customer engagement is essentially about value. Value created between customers and the firm and customers in between. It can therefore be argued that customer engagement is essentially about building relationships (Van Doorn et al., 2018:369) and customer engagement is not just about selling, it is about emotional connections and trust (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:23;Van Doorn et al.2018:369). The value derived from customer engagement provides powerful opportunities for brands in all industries (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:297,298). Especially today's connected and digital world has made customer engagement more relevant than ever (Van Doorn et al., 2018:366) and the digital part is a significant aspect of the phenomenon. Social media platforms go hand in hand with customer engagement and this is why it's necessary to understand why people use social media platforms and what TikTok and Instagram as social media platforms are capable of in regards to customer engagement.

4.2.2. Firm-initiated and Customer-Initiated Customer Engagement

Customer engagement on social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram brings not only brand commitment and brand trust but also eWOM (Kim et al., 2014; Jang et al., 2008). The communication between brands and users is limited due to the type of a platform TikTok and Instagram is, therefore the transactions and exchanges can be problematic in regards to trust (Lu et al., 2012). Brand managers should first use social media platforms to achieve brand identity, customer engagement, sales and public relations which will then contribute to trust and eWOM created by the audience (Rauschnabel et al 2013;Sun et al 2006). Also, brand managers can monitor user-generated content to have quick access to valuable information about user's profiles, preferences, brand awareness and more which leads to understanding the customer base even better (Rauschnabel et al 2013).

As Spirekassen's owner explained "*the dialogue is really important and free information about our customers*"(Appendix #2, Interview #1). Many survey participants included commenting as a main reason for engaging with brands which also increases eWOM. The participants explained that *"I usually comment to give my opinion or ask something I'm wondering about. I usually comment if i want to buy the product and have a question or if i already bought it and know if its bad"* (#67), *"I also sometimes comment if i purchased the product and hated it so other people can know"*(#76) and*"on TikTok I comment if I want to ask something"* (#74). Even Queen Cosmetics's owner confirmed that "*I've gotten a lot of customers that have said that they referred me to a friend, a cousin, a sister*"(Appendix #2, Interview #4). The brand hopes that word of mouth helps to market the brand, thus reaching increased value for the brand (Van Doorn et al., 2018:369). The increased value stems from the fact that word of mouth campaigns help to acquire new customers and as an effect, drives increased sales from the new customers (Van Doorn et al., 2018:378). Some scholars of customer engagement (Van Doorn et al., 2018) make a distinction between firm-initiated and customer-initiated customer engagement. The mechanisms of the engagement differ and depend slightly if the engagement is initiated by brands or customers.

Firm-initiated customer engagement is a two-way interaction between social media platform users and the brand (Van Doorn et al., 2018:368) and focuses on the efforts of the brand to spur customer engagement in different ways. Such an example is when brand managers for example try to stimulate word of mouth on the market amongst social media platform users. Firm-initiated customer engagement is different from traditional marketing initiatives as it

does not have the main goal of sales. The main goal of firm-initiated customer engagement rather focuses on building relationships with customers and simply to make them engage back and forth with the brand (Van Doorn et al., 2018:368). If a brand succeeds in facilitating and initiating customer engagement, chances are that social media platform users feel more motivated to engage in brand communities, provide feedback to the brand and perhaps even come up with creative ideas involving the brand. Thus, social media platform users provide value to the brand by reacting in an engaging way on the initiatives done by the brand (Carlson et al., 2018:84).

Customer-initiated engagement is any type of engagement which customers of a brand have come up with themselves and thereby signal a natural interest in the brand rather than if it's initiated by the brand. Research shows that customer engagement that is organic, which means that it is not initiated or facilitated by a brand, is more effective, trustworthy and memorable (Harmeling et al., 2017:316), that is customer-initiated engagement. Social media platform users trust other social media platform users more than brands, even if the same information is provided (Harmeling et al., 2017:316) which is perhaps the reason that customer-initiated customer engagement is more effective. This connects to one of the four customer-owned resources that a firm can benefit from; customer persuasion capital. Customer persuasion capital is *"the degree of trust, goodwill, and influence a customer has with other existing or potential customers"* (Harmeling et al., 2017:316). For example, if a group of customers have high customer persuasion capital, they can naturally make customer-initiated engagement effective as they can connect to and positively influence other customers in favor of the brand. A few platform users emphasised the desire to be exposed to customer-focused customer engagement when asked what type of content provided by brands, they prefer on social media platforms: *"I like to give my feedback and also see feedback and comments from other customers"* (#2), *"other user-generated content"* (#35) and *"when they (the brand) create videos with reviews of (from/by) people"* (#43).

Feedback given by users can give insights for brand managers what content works and what does not. On platforms like TikTok and Instagram, the interaction includes the producer and the audience (Jung & Lee, 2016). By posting on TikTok and Instagram pages, brand managers can get feedback from the audience, which are the users and create a better fitted strategy for the future by considering the given feedback (Jung & Lee, 2016). ARTESANA Soaps' owner told us that "*we certainly do* (listen to feedback)*, and that is something that has*

worked really well for us" (Appendix #2, Interview #5). Also Spirekassen's owners added "*yes they are* (customers) *good at bringing feedback and it's important with the dialogue for the customer to experience affiliation*"(Appendix #2, Interview #1). As well as BYKARTHI's owners said that "*we take that* (feedback) *very seriously! We love when customers come up with great ideas or things that could be better! We also occasionally try to hear our followers what they would like to see more of etc.*"(Appendix #2, Interview #3). Queen Cosmetics' owner added that "*I don't think I've gotten too many criticisms under my posts, but I remember one time a customer DM* (direct messaged) *me on Instagram, and told me 'hey, I would like to see this, this and that', and I was like, 'of course, we're gonna do our best, you know for the next products to be better*"(Appendix #2, Interview #4). If the feedback is not taken into consideration, the brands can lose their followers and thus customers and potential customers. When asking TikTok and Instagram users in our survey what makes them unfollow the brands, the mentioned reasons was the fact that the brand posts too often and too much content, making their feed clocked with their posts (mentioned 12 times), having not interesting content which was included in 11 answers from the survey participants. Therefore, if users comment with recommendations for future content, it is possible that they are not happy with the current content and need something else to spur positive emotions. Listening to the feedback is therefore an important part of social media strategy in order to keep customer engagement.

When asking platform users what they think that brands can do better to make their customers more engaged, one respondent had an interesting argument related to how customer engagement is initiated and by who. The argument goes: "*maybe my tip would be to not try to force engagement down consumers throats- it can feel inauthentic when every plan is made with the obvious objective behind it*" (#21). Thus, the respondent supports the idea that customer-initiated/organic customer engagement is more trustworthy and effective than when firms clearly try to initiate customer engagement. Other survey respondents additionally emphasise the importance of authenticity and trustworthiness as understood by the following statements: "*be honest and transparent!*" (#27), "*be transparent and authentic*" (#28) and "*give us more insight into their functioning, who works for them, even more so if the brand is not huge and mainly local to a city like Copenhagen*" (#33).

Brands that operate in highly competitive markets which fail to market themselves to a sufficient extend or don't yet have a strong brand image can benefit to a high extent from customer engagement (Van Doorn et al., 2018:366) as customer engagement can fill in for advertisement (Van Doorn et al., 2018:380). Such brands can thereby initiate customer engagement to create awareness of themselves such as initiating campaigns which spur word of mouth. However, according to survey respondents, it seems that brands must be careful not to treat customer engagement as an advertising channel but rather to facilitate brand communities where social media platform users can initiate engagement amongst themselves. This argument is supported by this quote from a survey respondent when asked what brand can do better in terms of customer engagement: *"change their mindset, and not only think about conversion rate and selling. More about building a brand community"* (#35).

In sum, it seems that smaller brands without a large reach can benefit largely from initiating customer engagement in various ways. However, the brand should be transparent, genuine and honest. The brand should rather work to spur customer engagement behaviours which are organic in nature and initiated by social media platform users themselves. Thereby, it can be argued that firm-initiated customer engagement efforts should most importantly be focused on nurturing ways that customer-initiated customer engagement can thrive. This can be done by facilitating and spurring brand communities. Thus, we argue that firm-initiated customer engagement and customer-initiated customer engagement is in fact not entirely distinct from each other. Rather, we argue that they should be considered as connected and simply are different steps to a larger process of customer engagement. We agree with the notion that it is in the very nature of firm-initiated customer engagement to not only focus on sales but to evolve around communication and relationship building between platform users and brands in between. However, we argue that firm-initiated customer engagement should take another step forward and have a goal of spurring communication and relationship building between customers as it's a more effective form of customer engagement and is desired by platform users. All in all, the power of brand communities facilitated by brands are significant to customer engagement and a hard distinction between firm-initiated and customer-initiated customer engagement should not exist. The figure below illustrates in yellow our addition of proposal to the existing conceptual framework of customer engagement by Pansari and Kumar (2017):
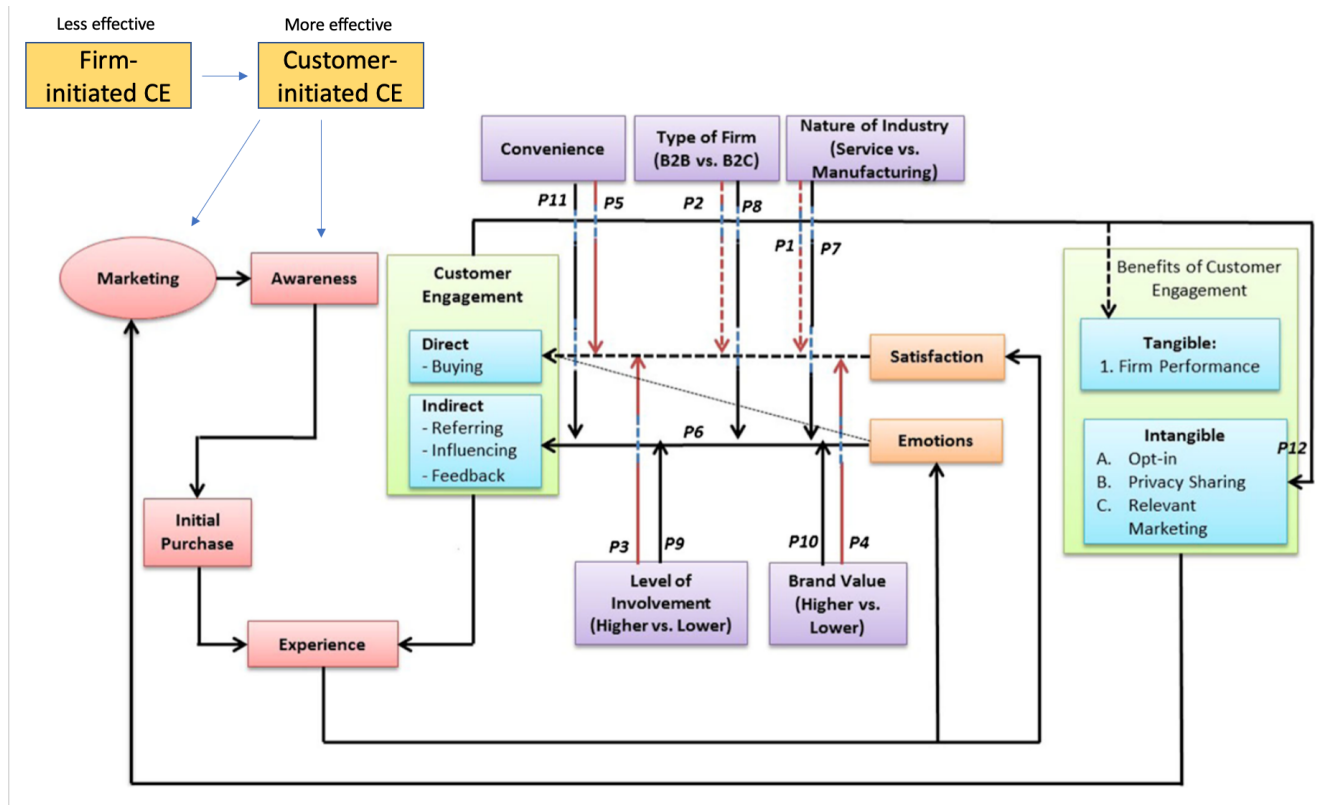
Figure 14: Ideal process of firm-initiated- and customer-initiated according to this thesis (Pansari & Kumar 2017)

4.2.3. The Explanation Behind The Use of Social Media Platforms Such As TikTok and Instagram

Customer engagement has become more relevant and accessible as social media platforms are becoming more and more popular (Carlson et al.2018:83,84). Social media platforms can be a relatively cheap way to facilitate customer engagement and have the potential to increase reach for the brand quickly (Van Doorn et al.2018:371). Creating an account on social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram are free of charge. However, brand managers can use paid ads to get more recognition and many brands all over the world use it to this day. Yet, the high growth was possible without spending money on additional paid ads for most of the interviewed brand managers. ARTESANA Soaps' owner said that "*we have done it* (digital ads) *in the past and they have not worked for us. So we no longer do it*"(Appendix #2, Interview #5). Queen Cosmetics' owner even pointed out that "*sometimes I feel like maybe going viral on TikTok brings more... sales than an ad*"(Appendix #2, Interview #4). This means that brands could achieve a high level of recognition and customer engagement through social media platforms and the content. Brand managers seem to be aware of the

importance of being present on social media platforms and they spend quite a few hours per week creating content for their social media accounts. More specifically, Spirekassen's owner spends *"10 hours"*(Appendix #2, Interview #1)*, BYKARTHI's owner replied *"we spend a lot of time...Perhaps 2 hours pr. day in total"*(Appendix #2, Interview #3) and Queen Cosmetics' owner replied that *"content creating is the biggest part of my business. It could take hours. Just today I was taking pictures earlier and that took three hours alone"*(Appendix #2, Interview #4). FaceYoga by Kari's owner explained that: *"I spend a lot of my time actually creating content... I spend too much time making content, let's just put it that way. But it's because I'm literally having fun"*(Appendix #2, Interview #6). Thus, understanding which type of content is the most effective for customer engagement is key. Such exploration will take place later in the chapter.

The increased popularity of social media platforms shows when asking platform users how much time they think they spend on social media platforms each week. A popular answer was 7 hours per week, but some platform users even replied that they spend *"maybe 10-15 hours"* (#12), *"around 3-5 hours a day so up to 35 hours pr. week"* (#20) and one respondent even replied *"a lot. 10 hours a day"* (#44). Therefore, it seems that there's huge potential for brands to facilitate and harvest the benefits of customer engagement of social media platforms as users are very present on social media platforms. When asking brand managers if they have benefited from joining social media platforms such as Instagram and Tiktok, Spirekassen replied that *"yes of course. The customers experience that they have a personal relationship with us"* (Appendix #2, Interview #1). The reply emphasises social media platform users' desire for personal aspects of the relationship they share with companies as explained earlier in this chapter. BYKARTHI replied that *"we have experienced a huge amount of growth!"*(Appendix #2, Interview #3).

We know that brands use social media platforms to connect with potential and existing customers. However, it is also necessary to understand why society uses social media and what gratification is gained through it. Firstly, the gratification from building interpersonal relationships increases customer engagement. Social media platforms bring participation, openness, conversation, community and connectedness (Mayfield, 2008). By participating users are able to be creators also through user-generated content. Additionally, users are able to give feedback, share content, comment and effectively communicate and connect with others through social media platforms in a two-way information transmission. Thus, when we

asked TikTok and Instagram users about the reasons why they use social media, most of the replies included staying in touch with friends which also applies to building interpersonal relationships with one another. As much as 30 people included that in their answer making it the most common reason why people use social media platforms according to our survey.

The content is an important factor in providing gratification and it must be designed to create value for the audience which explains why the other motives developed by (Kamboj 2019) refer to the type of content (Malthouse et al., 2013). Second motive explains the gratification from seeking information. In the case of TikTok and Instagram users, when asked the survey participants about the reasons why they use social media, the second most included answer was information, being up to date, learning something new or looking for inspiration. As much as 26 people included that in their answer. Specifically, inspiration was mentioned 12 times and information 14 times out of 49 participants. Additionally, educational content was chosen by 7 participants as a reason to follow a brand. Only 5 participants decide to follow a brand to keep up with news and information regarding the brand and their products which also includes seeking information. The third motive is gratification from entertainment. Creating and viewing short videos is increasingly growing among social media platform users as the videos satisfy the audience with the habit of fragmented reading of short stories and videos from different users which allows users to escape reality (Wang et al., 2019). TikTok videos focus on quirky content which is not professionally or aesthetically produced (Wang, 2020). On the other hand, Instagram is a place where the moments of immediacy are captured and where creativity is possible to express yourself which is not possible to do on other social media platforms such as Facebook (Suciu, 2019; Hamilton, 2019). More details on our analysis of content will be presented later in the chapter.

When asking TikTok and Instagram users about the reasons why they use social media, entertainment was chosen by 11 participants which was the third most common answer included in our survey. Additionally, *'killing time'* and being *'bored'* was chosen by 9 people whereas funny and entertaining content was also mentioned by 3 survey participants for the reason why they follow a brand. Gratification from brand likeability is the fourth motive presented by Kamboj (2019) which includes trust in a brand, attractiveness, credibility and attachment. When asking TikTok and Instagram users about the reasons why they use social media, following artists, specialists, politicians, influencers and brands was included by 8 people out of 49. Kari from FaceYoga by Kari brought up an interesting finding: *"I've*

definitely formed relationships on Tik Tok, I have a lot of followers that are like friends you know it says when it's friends, and they'll comment on a lot of my TikToks, and I'll try to reply to them. There's this one TikToker, And she is like my fan... she is so good at commenting, she has very intelligent comments, and... within a day or two she was on my YouTube commenting on my YouTube... There's another woman that I recognize. There's a few people I'd say about in the last couple months there's about five to 10 people that I regularly comment with or contact in some way. And I keep up with and I try to ask people questions on TikTok, so if someone says, oh, I can't do this exercise, whatever, and then I'll give them a tip, and then I'll say let me know how it goes, or how did it go or how does that feel or something. I try to ask questions to people, to facilitate a little bit of conversation"(Appendix #2, Interview #6). This statement further leads the thoughts onto the presence of an online brand community. Additionally, 12 survey participants decide to follow a brand because they are fans of the brand or their product, which was also a popular answer.

The last motive for using social media platforms is gratification from incentives received which includes promotions, giveaways or discounts. Only 2 survey participants out of 49 mentioned that they use social media for seeking promotions and giveaways. Additionally, as much as 9 survey participants said that promotions are the reason why they would follow a brand. However, when asking our participants how and why they engage with brands' posts, some admitted that they do it, to take part in giveaways by saying: "*I do not engage so much, unless maybe when there is a competition were you can win something"*(#24)*, "only if it is some contest that you can win something but when it does not require sharing or writing something 'deep' in the comment section"*(#30)*. Yet, when asked about taking part in giveaways, 29 participants out of 49 admitted that do either regularly participate or do it sometimes. Only 17 participants do not take part in giveaways by claiming that they do not believe anybody wins. However, most people who take part in giveaways added that they do not do it if *"I need to share it on my stories on Instagram"* (#1) or "*if I need to repost a story or picture I will not take part in the giveaways"*(#4) and "*but only if I didn't have to do that much. Don't want to tag 10 people or share"*(#5). This is why maybe some brands fail in gaining success from giveaways. For instance, ARTESANA Soap's owner explained that "*we have done a couple of giveaways, but it did not get that much attention. Definitely the free shipping is a huge success"*(Appendix #2, Interview #5) which again confirms that users do not feel motivated to participate in giveaways if there are any additional steps required.

Thus, due to the amount of hours social media users spend on TikTok and Instagram, it is necessary for brands to implement a social media strategy to their marketing efforts.

Brand managers should always take into consideration why people use social media platforms in the first place. Motives for using social media platforms are gratification from building interpersonal relationships, gratification from seeking information, gratification from entertainment, gratification from brand likeability which is obtained through attractiveness and credibility and love toward brand and lastly, gratification from incentives received. Fulfilling these motives can enhance their platform usage and increase engagement which then brands can profit from. The motives can be fulfilled with the use of content.

4.2.4. The Importance of Content

The question naturally arises how that content can drive customer engagement on social media platforms and what the underlying mechanisms are. Content quality is the most important stimuli that platform users experience on social media platforms which drives customer engagement (Carlson et al., 2018:89,90). It's further interesting, informative and entertaining content, which was also confirmed in the previous chapter, is key when driving customer engagement and especially user-generated content holds opportunities for customer engagement and innovation purposes (Carlson et al., 2018:84,85). Content has a high effect on audience behaviour on social media platforms and this is why the content must be chosen carefully to create value for the audience to participate in the exchange which creates customer engagement and what comes with it (Malthouse et al., 2013; Swanson 1987).

When asking our survey participants about what makes them follow a brand, content and creativity was the most chosen answer from 13 participants. Respondents said that *"in general I would follow a brand if their content continues to amuse/inspire me and has positive vibes"* (#13), *"quality of content and relevance to my interests"* (#32), *"entertaining content"* (#38) and *"the content is unique and inspiring"* (#35). Respondents further revealed a certain desire for content that goes beyond promotional content of products. These quotes of respondents highlight the importance of informative and entertaining content that is in accordance with the interest of the platform users and which can teach them something: *"I like the brand and they share good pictures and videos (For example Head-Ski I follow, for skiing videos not for sales or promotions"* (#23), *"content that helps me in any way to learn a new skill or stay motivated to do something"* (#28), *"if it's entertaining"* (#41), *"informative*

content and that's why Instagram is not my first choice" (#43) and one person simply replied *"creativity"* (#44).

Customer perceived value is the value that customers experience from the brand, for example branded content on social media platforms. The three types of customer perceived value are brand learning value, entitativity value and hedonic value (Carlson et al.2018:90). First, brand learning value means that customers gain value from learning more about the brand, for example through branded content on social media platforms. Carlson et al (2018) argues that brand learning value can especially be enhanced if brand managers ensure high content quality (Carlson et al., 2018:91). The statements provided above from platform users seems to confirm the desire of high quality and informative content. The most chosen answer in our survey regarding the type of content they like to see a brand focuses on was educational and informative content. For example, one of the participants asks brands "*to share valuable information, start REAL conversations, show behind the scenes, ask for feedback, share customers experiences and content"*(#3).

When asking brand managers about what they think drives customer engagement for them, including specific types of content, Spirekassen's owner said that *"IG* (Instagram) *we use a lot for DIY guides which gives high degree of trustworthiness"* (Appendix #2, Interview #1). The DIY guides are informative in nature which further confirms the claim that customers desire informative content. Furthermore, platform users might obt for certain brand communities or branded content on social media platforms to learn more about the brand and its products. Rather than conducting extensive research, platform users might benefit from the firm-generated or user-generated content, thus enhancing their brand knowledge. If platform users can get the information that they want, they might feel satisfied and become motivated to continue to engage or perhaps even decide to place an order (Carlson et al., 2018:85). This connects the importance of informative content to the satisfaction part of Pansari and Kumar (2017)'s conceptual framework for customer engagement and adds the context of social media platforms and digital content. We will discuss this argument in further detail later in the chapter.

Furthermore, knowledge stores are a customer owned-resource and something which brand managers in turn can benefit from. Knowledge stores refer to the knowledge that customers of a brand hold of its other customers, their own desires and wants, its products and services and of the brand itself (Harmeling et al., 2017:317). Customers with high knowledge stores

are desired by the brand as the brand potentially can benefit from the knowledge owned by the customer. The brand can benefit from customer knowledge stores for innovation purposes (Harmeling et al., 2017:317), however the opportunities are often not exploited well enough by brands (Carlson et al., 2018:84). Thus, knowledge is a two way street between the brand and platform users.

The second most chosen answers in our survey regarding the type of content users like to see a brand focuses on was entertainment and the recommendation is to make the content more fun. When asking Queen Cosmetics founder said that *"I think when you have to be very creative because people don't just want to see you showing off a product"* (Appendix #2, Interview #4). This response is in alignment with the responses of platform users when they said that creativity, entertainment and content which focuses on more than just selling a product, is why they follow a brand on social media platforms. The quotes from platform users support the idea that brand managers must be careful to not just show off a product but actually provide exciting content. When asking survey respondents what made them unfollow a brand, platform respondents replied: *"if it's* (the content) *just pretty pictures I often lose interest"* (#2), *"because it was getting boring, too much of the same"* (#10)*, "when it's only advertising promotions"* (#23) and *"too commercial and not genuine… simply too much the same and only about selling"* (#35). Hedonic value is about the excitement, entertainment and joy that social media platform users get from branded content on a social media platform (Carlson et al.2018:86). Thus, brand managers and platform users seem to agree that branded content on social media which is creative, entertaining and not only sales-focused can spur hedonic value for platform users. Furthermore, Carlson et al. (2018) emphasises content quality for enhancing hedonic value, proving the argument (Carlson et al., 2018:91). In turn, customer creativity is a customer-owned resource which the brand can benefit from for innovation purposes just like customer knowledge stores (Harmeling et al., 2017:317). Thus, creativity is important for both brands and platform users.

The third chosen answer in our survey regarding the type of content they like to see a brand focuses on was interesting and aesthetic content. The survey participants recommend brands to be more creative, create interesting content and focus more on the aesthetics. For example, one of the participants said that "*my guess would be to train brands on SoMe to take better pictures, interact with followers etc"* (#13) and "*focus more on content creation and the strategy and be more creative"*(#67). Additionally, one pointed out to "*make simple content*

that's not so cringy" (#16). The platforms users further put emphasis on the correlation between desired content that makes them follow a brand and their own personal values and interests. These following statements reveal that platform users follow a brand if it's similar to their own interests. Survey respondents said that what makes them follow a brand is *"if it's something I like, mostly related to food/recipes, bridal related or exercise if I can find the motivation for it"* (#17), *"if it is relevant for me"* (#25) and *"it fits into my personal interests"* (#11). When asking Click & Grow's PR manager which type of content they think works best for customer engagement on social media platforms they responded that *"high quality lifestyle photos generated by users / influencers are what drive most engagement. And a bit of humor and client-interest educational things – tips on growing etc."* (Appendix #2, Interview #2). This statement shows that users respond best to content that is generated by other customers and content which speaks to the platform's users interests.

Answering questions, giveaways and user generated content was also mentioned by survey participants. Many of our surveys included answers regarding answering questions posted under the posts of the brand. When asked about the participants about recommendations for brand managers to enhance engagement the answers include for example to *"focus more on engaging the audience like asking questions or opinion"* (#1) and 4 other participants also agreed to that. Many also included *"different types of offers to make some of their expensive things more affordable"* (#24) and more giveaways. Also, personal type of content in order to increase customer engagement was recommended by most survey participants when asked about the type of content they would like the brands to do. Quotes such as "*be honest and transparent!"* (#39) or "*be transparent and authentic"* (#40)*,"brands could be more genuine and honest. I would have more loyalty to a brand if they were more honest and showed through actions that they are trying to make improvements"* (#65) and *"I think they should be real about what they do, how they do the products and what the process is. I like seeing the real faces of people who created the brand and not just seeing the product and saying how awesome it is"* (#70) was common among the answers.

Lastly, when asking platform users what they think brands in general can do better to make people more engaged, the survey respondents seemed to agree to the emotional connections and trust. Two respondents commented that *"in general what seems to work is posting content about an issue that concerns people, being more personal and "human" or inspire positive vibes that people wants to identify themselves with"* (#13) and *"ask questions. Be*

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political? Maybe. Social awareness. Something to have an opinion about" (#18). These responses seem to emphasise a desire for deep emotions when experiencing and interacting with a brand.

TikTok

Customer engagement can be facilitated differently depending on the social media platform. For example in regards to TikTok, when asking brand managers what kind of content in their opinion works best to enhance and increase customer engagement we received interesting findings. For instance, ARTESANA Soaps' owner included *"being original, not copying other people's ways of doing things, doing our own thing and sharing the whats, whys and hows seem to be what our TikTok audience likes. Using trending audio and hashtags can also impact the algorithm. We have been sticking to voiceover videos and ASMR* (autonomous sensory meridian response) *as those videos typically get more engagement. For some followers, making one type of videos all the time does not work. Videos need to be active, energetic, different, with new content and new ways to present it, otherwise, customers get bored of seeing the same thing over and over again. We still have to find the way to make our postings work on Instagram. As for TikTok we are always staying aware of the trends, the sounds, and what type of content is new. What worked yesterday, may not work today, so keeping a fresh open mind, and above all, lots of creativity poured into the making of the videos is a must"* (Appendix #2, Interview #5). Elimar Depaula from Queen Cosmetics also mentioned the trending sounds that bring more customer engagement *"the sounds that you can add to the video that's very effective, especially when it's trending. Also certain sounds that you can use like business sounds, motivational sounds, funny sounds, the trending sound is great for that"* (Appendix #2, Interview #4).

Elimar Depaula from Queen Cosmetics added *"when I started, I was just trying to sell products to people but when I started to just be myself, without trying to sell, and just being more authentic you could say, and then sharing who I am too, that's when I started to notice the growth and numbers"* (Appendix #2, Interview #4). This is why she focuses more on creating content on TikTok where she can be more personal with the audience *"I feel like on TikTok it's more personable because I show more of me, so more people know who I am and my story and I feel like definitely TikTok, is a bit more personable just because it's more videos too you know"* (Appendix #2, Interview #4). Thus, being personal is important for the TikTok audience. Even the survey participants included *"change their mindset, and not only*

thinking about conversion rate and selling. more about building brand community" (#49) as a recommendation for brands to increase customer engagement. Elimar Depaula also added *"I think when you have to be very creative because people don't just want to see you showing off a product. I include my dad and a lot of the videos because one of my goals is to retire him so people like to see him a lot...so I like to include him. People love when you tell a story. So, like, how to start a business, how to's, or your inspiration behind the business. People love that kind of stuff. I mean at the end of the day I do have to show the products, but I can always do that if I'm packaging an order. People like to see those types of videos too"*(Appendix #2, Interview #4).

Kari from FaceYoga by Kari also noticed that sharing a story or being personal also helps to gain more audience *"I talked about how and when I started face yoga, my own journey and how I was 28 years old and I started noticing very deep expression lines forming. It got like 1.6 million views or something crazy. And I talked about my trainer and, you know, I'm not even showing any face yoga, and I talked about how I think it helps me with my overall health, my mental health, PTSD and stuff. I think it's really helpful. That video also went really viral"*(Appendix #2, Interview #6).

Additionally, it is also important the way something is described in TikTok videos. According to Kari *"what really I've noticed, gets to people more so is when I talk about myself. So, there is a trick to help people get more views by starting your video with the word 'you', and I did that for a little while, and my views went down, people didn't like it, they were not interested in that. I started a video with 'my top personal concern'. And that was super controversial, I don't know why, but it was really a big deal and some of the comments I get on that is like, oh, my top personal concern is climate change or something"*(Appendix #2, Interview #5). Thus, sharing the creator's opinion or concerns gets more views than when talking about the audience which also refers to being more personal and honest with the audience. It seems like TikTok is seen as a more authentic platform compared to Instagram. Some explain that *"I prefer Tiktok. I think it's more authentic and not as fake as instagram. Every time I post on TikTok I can be without makeup and I would not worry that people will call me out"* and *"it is more authentic and I can find so many random videos and meet so many interesting people that I would never find on instagram"* (#77).

When asking survey participants what platform they prefer, as many as 19 people chose TikTok, claiming that TikTok is more entertaining, more creative, authentic and fun to be part

of. Participants included answers such as: *"more interesting and real content and I can learn more, also more creative content is on TikTok for sure"* (#48) or *"It is hilarious and the "For You" page really is catered to your liking. I also find it much more entertaining because it consists of videos while Instagram is mainly photos"* (#55).

Thus, customer engagement on TikTok can be initiated by original, creative, entertaining, personal, honest and authentic content where trending sounds and hashtags are used to create a brand community instead of a quick sale. The type of content on TikTok that is preferable also aligns with the findings above.

Instagram

On Instagram, on the other hand, *"High quality lifestyle photos generated by users / influencers are what drive most engagement. And a bit of humor and client-interest educational things – tips on growing etc"* (Appendix #2, Interview #2) is working well for customer engagement according to Click & Grow' PR manager. Spirekassen's owner includes the importance of the content that is being posted *"we use a lot for DIY guides which gives high degree of trustworthiness, DIY* (do it yourself) *action-oriented content and at the moment Reels"* (Appendix #2, Interview #1). Click & Grow' PR manager also agreed that *"the visual nature of Instagram is great for driving sales for us since our gardens look very good visually"* (Appendix #2, Interview #2).

When asking survey participants which platform they prefer and why, one of the participants who selected Instagram explained that *"only use Instagram as it matches my medium of expression, mainly pictures"* (#46). When asked about the choice between Instagram and TikTok, as much as 32 people answered that Instagram is their preferable platform. *"Instagram. Cause I'm a visual person and Instagram is more visual"* (#25), *"I think I prefer Insta because the content is more creative than on TikTok. On TikTok I feel like people don't really try to have aesthetic videos whereas on inta, people really care how everything looks like and I think the content from that point is better"* (#68). However, some talked about the fakeness of the platform by saying *"I think Instagram is overrated and fake"* or *"on Instagram i always need to make sure the photos are perfect"* (#74). One of the users in our survey said that *"I dont like instagram anymore. It's too fake even when I work in fashion, it is important for me to see real content"* (#66). Also, for instance, Kari from FaceYoga by Kari said that *"It seems like you had to have this perfect photo. That was so unrealistic, and then I like to write*

a whole essay about it. And I don't know I just I think, you couldn't get that texture of really getting to know who someone is''(Appendix #2, Interview #6).

Thus, Instagram is a preferable platform in regards to quality of the content, creativity and aesthetics. However, the perfectly aesthetic photos can also be considered as fake and not authentic which could make it harder for brands to increase customer engagement since our findings above state that being true and personal is a preferable type of content for social media users.

All in all, this is coherent with our findings above regarding customer-initiated customer engagement. Previously in this chapter we learned that brand communities are of relevance and importance for customer engagement which further backs up the argument that platform users seem to engage when presented with content which speaks directly to their personal interests. Furthermore, entitativity value refers to a sense of belonging for customers on social media platforms. Entitativity value is essentially the value that customers experience when feeling as a part of some larger group and the relationships that exist within that group (Carlson et al.2018:85). Carlson et al. (2018) argue that entativity value is especially important when dealing with customer engagement on social media platforms (Carlson et al., 2018:90). Entitativity value proves the argument that platform users respond positively to content which makes them feel a part of something bigger and speaks to their interests. Thus, entitativity value is important for customer engagement as social media platform users seem to engage more to such content. Managers can spur such value and sense of belonging according to interests within platform users by facilitating initiatives where social media platform users can engage with each other (Carlson et al., 2018:91). It further backs up our argument made earlier in this chapter that firm-initiated customer engagement should in fact be focused on facilitating customer-initiated customer engagement by for example facilitating online brand communities.

This way of thinking about customer engagement speaks into the customer-owned resource of customer networks. Customer networks refers to the social networks of customers and is essentially about brand communities (Harmelig et al., 2017:316). When customers engage in different networks or communities with other potential or existing customers it can be a source of value for brands. Customers with high customer networks can help to create brand awareness and reach for the brand, which might not be possible otherwise, thus becoming a

competitive advantage (Harmeling et al., 2017:316). In sum, if brand managers facilitate strong online brand communities and a sense of belonging according to interests for platform users, brands can enjoy the opportunities of strong customer networks such as increased reach.

All in all, the right content and brand communities might spur a certain emotional response in platform users depending on how they perceive the content (Carlson et al., 2018:85). We have proved in this chapter that content should be more than sharing a beautiful product picture on social media platforms. Content should be exciting, informative, have humor, speak to interests and perhaps most importantly- evoke positive emotions.

4.2.5. Customer Engagement Beyond Initial Purchase and Transactions

Customer engagement stretches far beyond transactions (Van Doorn et al., 2018:367). The contributions (the customer engagement) beyond transactions are classified as indirect contributions by Pansari and Kumar (2017) and can for example be referrals, conversations on social media platforms customers, feedback provided from platform users to the brand and suggestions of creative ideas from platform users to brand (Pansari & Kumar, 2017:298). Customer engagement beyond transactions can also be such as writing product reviews, commenting, liking and sharing content on social media platforms and participation in brand communities (Van Doorn et al., 2018:367). Thus, customer engagement, that is customer contributions to the firm, goes beyond the purchases of products and services (Harmeling et al., 2017:313,316). When asking Click & Grow's PR manager how they think customer engagement on social media platforms can benefit their brand, brand manager Martin replied that *"they* (social media platforms such as Tiktok and Instagram) *are a great place for content marketing and branding without the specific goal of making money"* (Appendix #2, Interview #2).

We therefore argue that emotions and satisfaction do not only depend on the initial purchase as argued in the conceptual framework by Pansari and Kumar (2017). From this chapter, we argue that emotions and satisfaction can develop from a much earlier step due to the opportunities of social media platforms, the perceived behaviours and characteristics of brands on social media platforms. Additionally, the right content on social media platforms can spur emotions and satisfaction and thereby customer engagement, already from the stage of awareness. We argue that customer engagement, when initiated by customers, too can

spark positive emotions and satisfaction due to brand learning, hedonic value and entitativity value as discussed above. Furthermore, if brand managers manage to provide the right content and facilitate customer-focused engagement, they can enjoy the fruits of customer knowledge, customer networks, customer creativity and customer persuasion capital. We therefore, with a basis in this analytical chapter, allow ourselves to add our argument to the conceptual framework by Pansari and Kumar (2017). All of our propositions are highlighted with yellow boxes and arrows:
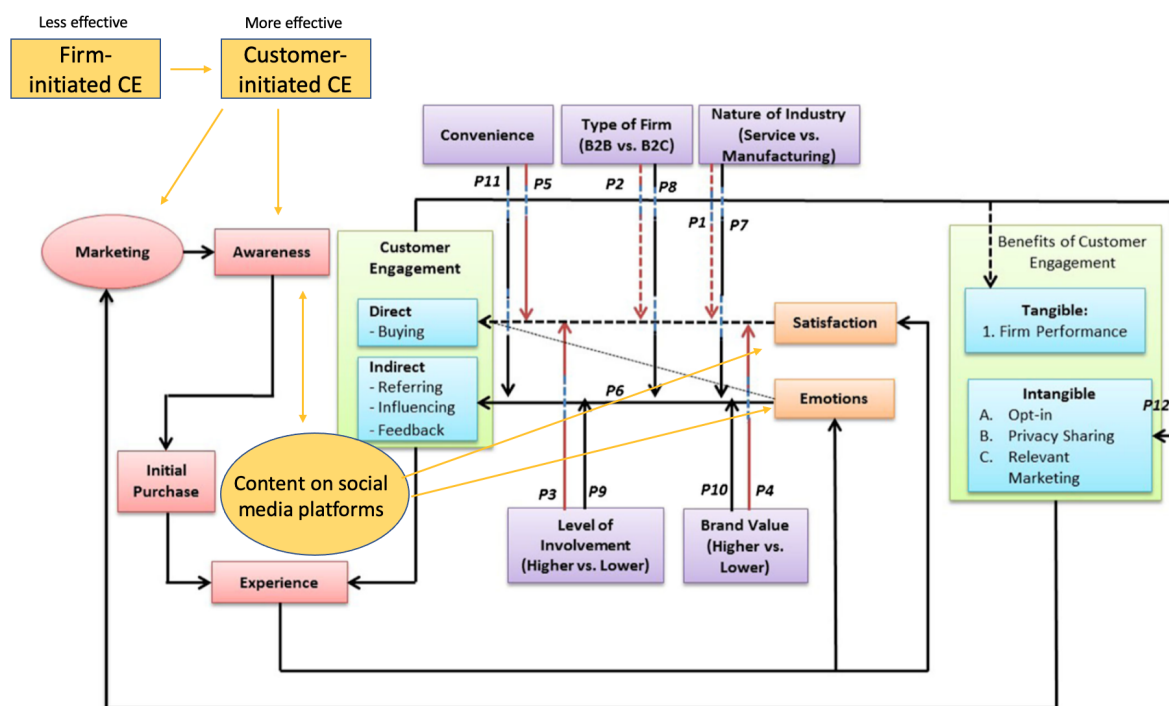

Figure 15: Content on social media platforms and its effect on emotions and satisfaction according to this thesis (Pansari & Kumar, 2017)

4.2.6. Opportunities of Customer Engagement in The Features of TikTok and Instagram

We have now established an understanding of why customer engagement might be beneficial for brands to facilitate. It was argued that brand managers should focus on initiating ways for social media platform users to engage naturally through customer-initiated customer engagement rather than interfering in the engagement too much through firm-initiated customer engagement, according to platform users. Brands must help to facilitate customers' contributions to the firm such as building brand communities and a way to do so is through social media platforms (Harmeling et al., 2017:332). Therefore, how TikTok and Instgaram

can help brand managers to achieve a high customer engagement? We took a deeper look into the possibilities of TikTok and Instagram. We asked our survey participants which platform they use, only 1 participant selected TikTok as the only social media platform. Instagram is used by 23 participants as the main platform and as much as 23 participants use both TikTok and Instagram. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the reasons behind their choices by exploring the possibilities of each platform.

Instagram

The most trending and favourable platform for businesses to reach their target audience is Instagram (Kuligowski, 2020). It has over 35 million business accounts and as much as 80% of Instagram users follow at least one business account (Kuligowski, 2020). When asking our survey participants about the number of brands they follow, the number ranged from 5 to 500 brand accounts on Instagram whereas on TikTok the number ranged only from 5 to 50. One of the survey participants explained that *"Instagram is more serious and I think bigger brands I follow are on Instagram and not on TikTok"* (#69) which might be one of the reasons why people follow more brands on Instagram rather than on TikTok. However, when we asked our survey participants if they engage more on TikTok or Instagram, only 18 out of 49 admitted that they engage with brands on Instagram the most.

Brand managers prefer Instagram more than any other social media platform as it is very effective for promoting products and services (Kuligowski, 2020). For instance, Glick & Grow's PR manager admitted that Instagram "*over time it has become one of the main channels for customer acquisition. (Instagram) makes us more lovable, closer, funnier. It is where we're not just a company that produces and sells gardens, we feel like a normal human being there. People reach out to us there a lot as well"*(Appendix #2, Interview #2). Additionally, even if Thilde and Karoline from BYKARTHI prefer to use TikTok, "*we chose Instagram because we love to use the app - and then we love to take pictures. We think it's a faster medium than Facebook and then it's not as "official" as Facebook! We love using stories on Instagram as it gets a little more mundane than itself the postings do"*(Appendix #2, Interview #3). Also, some admit that Instagram keeps them connected with specific types of customers.

As the brand manager and owner of ARTESANA Soaps, Cecilia Davoren explained "*we already had Facebook and Instagram platforms that mainly worked for local customers to keep them informed as to what we were making and availability of products, but did not work that well for sales. Again, Instagram has not been a game changer for us, but TikTok has definitely expanded our horizons to all over the world.*"(Appendix #2, Interview #5). As Thilde and Karoline from BYKARTHI explained, it has something to do with being more personal and closer to the people who are interested in the brand: "*You are very close to your followers when it comes to posting 'stories' and writing messages with our customers! We experience a lot of people writing to us. We write very personally with our customers on Instagram, we do not do that on TikTok.*"(Appendix #2, Interview #5). Interesting findings came from interviews we have conducted explaining that when a brand gets recognition on TikTok, automatically their Instagram account gets more recognition! Queen Cosmetics' owner, Elimar Depaula said that *"once I started switching things up a bit* (on TikTok)*, I started getting more followers and a lot of the followers that have me on Tik Tok also followed me on Instagram. So it's working out pretty well"*(Appendix #2, Interview #4). BYKARTHI's owners also added that "*TikTok has really made a big difference for us - we have not grown much for many years alot on Instagram - but after we got TikTok, even our Instagram has also grown withmore than 1000 followers"*(Appendix #2, Interview #3).

Instagram is growing exponentially especially due to new features that are constantly being added and improving the platform which emerge due to the observation of the users or have been planned all along to create new possibilities for interaction (Kuligowski, 2020; Parker at al., 2016:11). As Elimar Depaula from Queen Cosmetics said *"Instagram is like stepping up their game in that sense, they just added their 'reels'"*(Appendix #2, Interview #4). *"Reels"* have been mentioned by many brand managers we interviewed. *'Reels'* are clips which last for 15-30 seconds which are set with music selected from Instagram (Wang, 2020). Some brand managers think of the feature as a good addition, however, as Elimar Depaula added: "*I don't think to me they have not been as effective as TikTok, but it's still pretty good if you want to get exposure on your Instagram"*(Appendix #2, Interview #4). When asking TikTok and Instagram users which platform they use and why some do not feel the need to sign up for TikTok because: *"all the big TikTok trends get reposted to Instagram anyway I guess"*(#32) and *"I wasn't interested in TikTok and there is already a lot of content from TikTok on Instagram"*(#34). Therefore, the *'reels'* are very similar to TikTok when it comes to video creation. Even if some brand managers admitted that *'reels'* are similar to TikTok, they are

not as great as they only allow you to post a 15-30 second video compared to 1 minute video allowed on TikTok. ARTESANA Soaps' owner Cecilia Davoren proposed that: *"Instagram needs an increase in video length for Reels. Why would a user stay on Instagram to watch incomplete, 15 second 'Reels' when they could join TikTok? Most videos I see on Instagram now are videos that have been downloaded from TikTok"*(Appendix #2, Interview #5). Even Kari from FaceYoga by Kari said *"the problem is, I personally don't like making 'Reels'. The music, where did it come from? I've never heard of any of those people, maybe I'm using it wrong, I don't know but I don't see any music I recognize. And I've gone through the 'reels' of other people, not as much as Tik Tok, but they seem just kind of like long Instagram videos. They don't have that raw kind of sarcastic funniness of TikTok"*(Appendix #2, Interview #6). Additionally, Instagram has a feature called 'shop' which allows users to shop the products right from the Instagram brand's page, making it easier and faster for the consumer. It also allows users to directly enter the brand's website to see more details about the specific product they are interested in. The shop is also a separate section on the app where a user can see different products that they can buy even if they do not follow the brands. It is then an easy way to discover new, interesting brands.

Additional feature that has been widely used by brand managers is *'stories'* (Wang, 2020). They allow brand managers to upload a quick interactive video which is available for 24 hours for the public where the audience can react to the videos by sending a message or by replying to questions or answering a poll. Even one of the survey participants suggested to *"focus more on stories than posts!"*(#4) when asked about recommendations for brands to increase engagement. Thilde from BYKARTHI admitted that they *"use 'story' on insta, we like it a lot! Then we think it's cool that you have the opportunity to let your customers ask questions or we can ask them questions"*(Appendix #2, Interview #3). According to Queen Cosmetics' owner, Elimar Depaula, 'stories' keep followers engaged: *"I try to post 'stories' every day. I feel like that also keeps followers engaged if I'm not posting like a regular post. So I definitely use that"*(Appendix #2, Interview #4). It can be argued that Instagram 'stories' speak to emotions of platform users as they provide behind the scenes, entertaining and authentic content. Thus, Instagram 'stories' can contribute to indirect contributions from platform users.

Additionally, Instagram has features such as '*lives*'. Brand pages can create *'live'* streams where the users who follow the page as well as the public can enter the stream and ask

questions. Many brand managers use this feature to stay close to their followers and make them more engaged. The *'live'* streams are available for 24 hours but can be saved on the brand's account (Wang, 2020). Thus, Instagram live streams can spur both satisfaction and emotions for platform users. *'Live'* streams can speak to satisfaction as platform users can get deeper information and details about the brand and what it has to offer in a convenient and fast way. Furthermore, satisfaction can be enhanced if the '*live'* stream is in accordance with the interests of the platform user. It further can speak to their emotions if the *'live'* stream is entertaining, humoristic and personal.

Unfortunately, there are some brand managers and owners that are not fond of Instagram and possibilities on the platform. When asking about the disadvantages of Instagram, Click & Grow's PR manager admitted that "*visibility of a page for a user should be determined by the amount s/he spends interacting with it. TikTok's algorithm does this quite well. Instagram not so much. If one would like to be updated on someone's content more, they should like, comment, share it more. Downside of this is people getting stuck into echo chambers. And most companies would lose a lot of views = lot's of ad money going away for Facebook*" (Appendix #2, Interview #2) which can become problematic for brands which want to get more recognition on the platform and gain new customers.

However, users can save the post and come back to them later (Wang, 2020). The app allows users to make collections and folders for these saved posts. Looking at the survey participants, most users save the post they like to come back to it later. As much as 22 out of 49 mentioned saving it for later, for example "*if I found a specific product that I liked*"(#4)*, "if i want to buy the product in the future*"(#75)*, "if i want to use it for my content*" (#48) *or "if I feel inspired*"(#15). The fact that users save a lot of content, makes it easier for the brand to be visible for the people that do not follow them. *'Liking'* or *'commenting'* is not enough to be able to be seen by other users. As Queen Cosmetics' owner explained: "*Instagram- 'saves' are more of 'likes' you could say, because just a regular 'like' doesn't show and won't show up as much on somebody's timeline compared to a picture that has 'likes', so 'likes' don't really matter anymore. So basically your followers' 'likes' don't matter as much because what Instagram wants is people that are not following you, for you to get on the Explore page and then for that person to 'save' the picture, and then they continue to push it out more. So, you see how that's a lot already, compared to just a 'like'*"(Appendix #2, Interview #4). Meaning that, by saving a video by a follower makes the post more visible

on the explore page for the people who do not follow a brand, whereas the *'likes'* do not mean much for the algorithms and will not help to gain more recognition. Additionally, Kari from FaceYoga by Kari told us interesting insights that she "*don't think I've gotten a single client from Instagram. I much prefer to talk to Instagram which you can probably tell, based on my content, but I felt like Instagram kept saying, like the actual app, like, 'oh, promote this post to get more followers', like 'boost your posts' and I was like 'what is this?' I think that Instagram is similar to Facebook, they want you to pay money to get your content in front of more people, unless you post a ridiculous amount of content*"(Appendix #2, Interview #6).

From the users' perspective, when asked our survey participants about the choice between TikTok and Instargam, most choose Instagram and included in their answer that their friends are on Instagram and that is why they prefer that platform "*I have all my friends there, we follow each other to stay up to date*"(#75). "*it is how I stay updated with what my friends and family are doing. It is more personal*"(#4)," *it works really well for me and all my friends are there*"(#15) However, Instagram is seen as a perfect place for millennials. Even Kari explained that "*all of my friends are on Instagram, so I'm 30 years old. I work part time at a yoga studio. And, most of my friends in yoga in the wellness space they're on Instagram, you know, in their 30s so millennials in their late 20s or 30s,*"(Appendix #2, Interview #6). It makes sense that Instagram appeals better to younger adults as Instagram allows them to feel more connected to people they know (Suciu, 2019; Hamilton, 2019).

TikTok

TikTok has been the fastest growing social media platform in 2020 (Post, 2020). It was available worldwide in 2017, however, it became popular in 2019 all over the world. The app has more active users than LinkedIn, Twitter or Snapchat and is on the right track to beat other huge social media platforms such as Instagram and Youtube (Post, 2020). The high growth rate can be thanks to an impressive engagement rate which is the highest than any other platform, even Facebook which puts Tiktok in a position where it could become number one social media platform in the upcoming years (Post, 2020). ARTESANA Soaps' owner Cecilia Davoren confirmed that by saying: "*they* (customers) *definitely engage more on TikTok. Maybe it is because of the videos, or because they feel a closer connection. TikTok has great features that make post engagement easy*"(Appendix #2, Interview #5). Also, Thilde from BYKARTHI said "*there is clearly the most activity on our TikToks in terms of commenting and likes*"(Appendix #2, Interview #3). Additionally, when asked about the

actions taken when a user likes the content posted by brands, only 5 people out of 49 said that they do not engage at all.

TikTok has many features that makes it easier for brand managers to keep users engaged. As Cecilia Davoren from ARTESANA Soaps commented: "*the features of both apps is most likely the key in why TikTok engages our followers more than Instagram. TikTok's features such as replying to comments with videos, and stitching make this app more engaging. People like having their questions answered and getting a real "behind the scenes" experience. Also, TikTok makes it easier for the user to find more people that they may want to follow. The more a user likes videos of a specific creator in the FYP, the more that creator's videos will continue to show up in the user's FYP - meaning that the user will (probably) follow that person after this cycle happens a few times. Also, the video editing features for 59 second videos on TikTok are much better than Instagram's 15 second videos on 'Reels'*"(Appendix #2, Interview #5).

Also, Queen Cosmetics' owner added that along with customer engagement, TikTok has been a great place to get more sales. "*Customers engage more on TikTok. I get more sales from TikTok because like, I said, if a video goes viral, my sales explode. I know the majority of my sales come from TikTok. And definitely on TikTok, you get more exposure because of course a 'for you page' and then if a video goes viral, hundreds of 1000s and even millions of people can see that video alone*" (Appendix #2, Interview #4). Also, Thilde from BYKARTHI added that "*on TikTok where we come up on people's foryou page. It has definitely given us more attention and more sales! We experience a much greater customer engagement on TikTok than on Instagram - but we are confident that it gives us greater credibility to share out of our everyday lives and behind our company*"(Appendix #2, Interview #3). To understand better what they mean, *'For You Page'* is the main page after opening the app which allows you to scroll down and explore videos of people who you also do not follow but they fit with the content you engage with. The videos on the *'For You Page'* are chosen by the algorithms which on TikTok is great compared to any other platform (Anderson, 2020:7). Thus, the *'For You Page'* can be argued to speak to the interests and thereby emotions of the platform users, leading to indirect contributions through various types of engagement. One of the survey participants admitted that one of the reasons why they prefer TikTok over Instagram is that *"I like the algorithms more and I can see videos of people who I don't even follow and it's so fun*

to watch videos and just scroll. It's easy to use"(#1). Another one said that "*the fact that the app knows what i want to see is the best part of it"*(#66).

Thus, some brand managers realised that TikTok has a big potential and started using the platform as their strategy to gain more recognition for the hope to increase growth of the businesses. For example, Thilde from BYKARTHI said that "*we definitely prefer to use TikTok - we think it's the coolest medium! You can be creative in a completely different way, and then we just think it's cool that you never quite know where a similar video reaches out*". Kari added "*TikTok is more brand appropriate. So my brand is very much based on establishing trust is more of like kind of a fair, like I'm trying to do it more in a therapeutic way. Yeah so that authenticity is just so much easier to display on TikTok"*(Appendix #2, Interview #3). However, when asked by our survey participants how many brands they follow on TikTok, it ranged from 5 to 50, whereas the range for Instagram is 5 to 500 which is much higher. This can be explained by the target audience of the platforms and due to the fact that many people and countries still have not fully discovered the potential and possibilities of TikTok. The platform is often thought to be for the younger generation and this is definitely visible for the brand managers as well, which means that there are some requirements to keep the users engaged. For example, ARTESANA Soaps' owner noticed that "*it is a younger generation that requires more interaction"*(Appendix #2, Interview #5). Click & Grow's PR manager has not used TikTok as other interviewed brand managers. Therefore, they do not realize what could happen if they focused more on TikTok content, thus Instagram has been a choice for them "*the majority of users will grow up to be our customers in around 5 years, videos are more difficult to create and there are too many trends to keep an eye on. No clear monetization value as of yet. So, Instagram all the way!"*(Appendix #2, Interview #2).

By thinking that the platform is only for the younger generation is it wrong to assume that since the numbers from sales are only increasing for those brands who we interviewed and use TikTok regularly. However, Kari from FaceYoga by Kari added "*the Gen Z people, a lot of them aren't that old and use TikTok. So, when I went viral on TikTok - none of my friends have a TikTok"*(Appendix #2, Interview #6). Kari also added "*I was talking to (my friend) and I was telling her how much I hate Instagram. I hate posting on there, and she's like 'okay well, what do you like, what social media do you like?' and I told her I like Tik Tok, and this woman, she's in her 50s, she was like 'I'm scared of Tik Tok' she literally told me that she's scared. And I said Well, George* (social media mentor) *doesn't teach Tik Tok like in his*

course. He teaches Facebook and Instagram, and George doesn't even talk about it. Maybe it's not worth it. She's like, 'No, he's just scared of it too''(Appendix #2, Interview #6). Therefore, some brand managers might be scared to start using TikTok, especially if they think that the only target group is the Gen Z generation. However, one survey participant who uses TikTok very often admitted that "*it's fun to create videos and people of all ages can have fun with this app*"(#70). There is a stigma around the target audience of TikTok, however, when entering the app, you can see videos from people of all ages (Anderson, 2020:7).

When asking our survey participants which platform they use most, Instagram was chosen by most. Many admitted that TikTok is not for them due to the target audience. Some answers include an explanation *"it seems more for a younger audience? Not a huge fan"*(#25)*, "I don't like TikTok because it seems childish"*(#71) o*r "I don't use TikTok, it's not for me, maybe I'm too old"*(#75)*.* Some also do not understand the concept by claiming "*I don't understand the point of TikTok and I honestly cringe everytime I see a video from the platform*"(#13) or just "*I'm not really familiar with TikTok apart from seeing people dancing"*(#24)*.* It might be due to the fact that the platform is relatively new and people are still sceptical about it since the initial popularity increased due to young people dancing to trending music. However, most answers from the survey included that they just do not need another platform to consume their free time. Answers such as *"I don't want to add more media consumption to the mix when I am already consumed by existing social media apps. I want to limit my consumption"*(#65)*, "I figured i would increase my time of unnecessary scrolling if i downloaded TikTok "*(#41) and "*now I don't want another soul sucking app on my phone, I'm distracted enough as is"*(#32).

In order to create a core interaction on the platform the filter, which is an algorithmic software-based tool must be present to help with finding the right value unit (another user) (Parker at al., 2016:11). The fact that TikTok is primarily driven by a high level of algorithm makes the platform unique from other social media platforms which are driven more by the following. Therefore, a TikTok user can gain a lot of audience even without any followers (Anderson, 2020). The interview with brand managers gave us an insight of the power of TikTok and their algorithms. According to Cecilia Davoren from ARTESANA Soaps: "*After a few videos, sales started coming in, our audience started growing and expanding and here we are, a year later with over 525K followers. Our business has grown tremendously since joining TikTok, we have also expanded our target audience and have focused on catering to*

our new audience by coming up with new products and new designs"(Appendix #2, Interview #5). On the other hand, Kari from FaceYoga by Kari explained that it is not the same on Instagram *"It took me like, months, even to get to like 200- 300 followers on Instagram. My Instagram now is 900 followers, so I've gained 600-ish followers through people just finding me from Tik Tok. So, in one day, I think I grew 20,000-30,000 or something in one day on TikTok. I wasn't expecting this to be honest. I wasn't expecting that within two months I would have over 100,000 followers and platform, I thought it would take me at least six months to get anywhere near this. At the moment, most of them (sales) are coming from TikTok"*(Appendix #2, Interview #6). Queen Cosmetics' owner confirms that algorithms are much better on TikTok. The *'For You Page'* makes it easy to get recognised. Kari added that *" it's been easier to find my people on Tik Tok, find people, match me with the people who are interested in that. And then on Instagram, it's just like, yeah, it's just impossible"*(Appendix #2, Interview #6) .

Looking at the answers from the survey, when asked about what the participants do when they like a post posted by a brand, as much as 28 users said that they usually *'like'* the content, which in the case of Tiktok is important for the algorithms. Also, commenting on TikTok is helpful for the algorithms (Anderson, 2020:7). However, only 9 people out of 49 survey participants mentioned that they comment where even one said that *"on TikTok I like to comment to have better algorithms"*(#1). However, most brand managers still do not know the power of TikTok for customer engagement. Looking at the example from Artesana Soaps' owner *"I had no idea what this new social media platform was, but I definitely did not have time to take over it, so I told Alyssa that we could do it if she would manage it"*(Appendix #2, Interview #5). Even if all of our interviewed brands have TikTok and Instagram accounts, only 2 brand managers out of 6 prefer to use Instagram.

Besides adding videos, there are many additional features that can be used. For example voiceover which can be used instead of using your own voice. This is what BYKARTHI's owners implemented and which is also working well for them. However, Kari from FaceYoga by Kari told us that: *"maybe another thing that I've noticed is that my content does a lot better if I use my own voice. One of these videos I had like a robotic voice when that was kind of a trending thing, and that also went really viral, because people didn't like it. It was a very confusing video but I kind of left it deliberately a little confusing because the topic itself is not an easy topic to talk about and I wanted to get people to start thinking about it. And they*

were like, can you just use your voice can you just explain it yourself?" (Appendix #2, Interview #6). Also, it is possible to do *'live'* streaming on both Instagram and TikTok. For example Kari from faceYoga by Kari *"I've done TikTok live. And I do like that. I haven't done Instagram. I don't know how much this matters, but yeah, I've done TikTok live's and that's been, I think quite good as well for my business I mean, I'll do a TikTok live, and then I'll check my phone, I'll have some people signing up for classes like right after"* (Appendix #2, Interview #6). Users can also download the videos on their phone or come back to them in their *'likes'* folder on the app (Anderson, 2020:7). Other features that are useful for brands is the '*discover'* page where you can see the current trends in music, trending hashtags, trending challenges and content (Anderson, 2020:7). Brand managers can also use different effects, filters and enhancements to edit the videos (Anderson, 2020:7). The videos can be added with a trending music, sounds or voiceover. It also makes it possible to add subtitles for people who have hearing problems, which makes the app inclusive. Effects, filters, sounds and music can help to make the content more entertaining and humoristic which speaks to the emotions of the platform users.

However, ARTESANA Soaps' owner pointed out that " *now, TikTok needs better features in their direct messaging. Users on TikTok tend to post videos about messaging others on Instagram rather than TikTok"* (Appendix #2, Interview #5). The Queen Cosmetics' owner noticed that "*the only thing I would say sometimes TikTok shadow bans you after a video goes really viral. Your next couple of videos will get shadow banned. So I don't like that. It's not always but I've noticed that some of the time that does that. And then you have to work really hard to like, and post a lot just to be able to get a lot of views again. So that's the only thing I would say about TikTok"* (Appendix #2, Interview #4) which could be a problem for brand managers when making the content.

In sum, it can be argued that the technical features of Instagram and TikTok can help to spur emotions and satisfaction for platform users, thus contributing to indirect or direct customer engagement. Brand managers must learn to utilise such features to drive customer engagement on social media platforms. The following figure presents such additions to the existing Pansari and Kumar (2017) conceptual framework of customer engagement. The pink boxes represent the technical features of Instagram and TikTok. The pink double arrows present how the technical features play an important role in the quality of branded content on social media platforms. Finally, the pink dotted lines present how the technical features of

TikTok and Instagram can spur emotions and satisfaction for platform users, resulting in customer engagement on social media platforms:
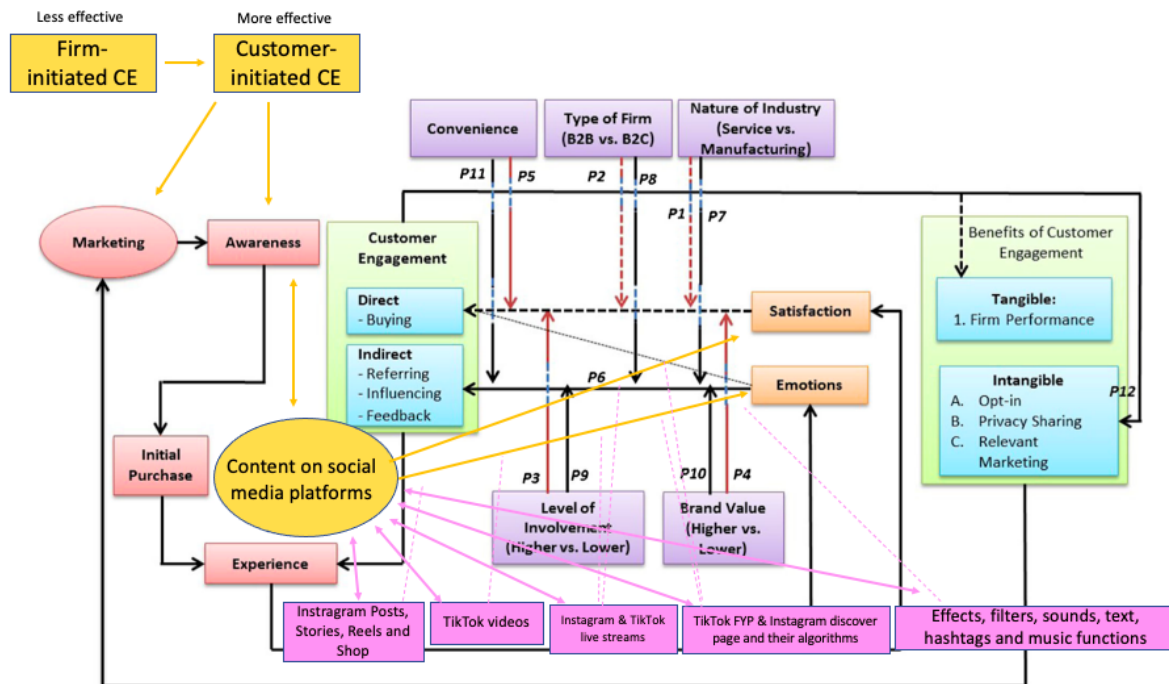

Figure 16: Content on social media platforms and its effect on emotions and satisfaction according to this thesis (Pansari & Kumar 2017)

4.2.7. Sub-conclusion

Customer engagement is about building relationships and that is now more relevant than used to since today's connected and digital world. Since social media platforms make it easier for brands to connect with their potential and existing customers, they can increase reach for a brand quickly and achieve high customer engagement and strong relation between a brand and a user through content. Since users on platforms spend a significant amount of time throughout the day, social media platforms are a huge potential for brands to interact with users. Social media platform users gain gratification from building interpersonal relationships (online community), gratification from seeking information (being up to date, learning something new), gratification from entertainment, gratification from brand likeability and love toward brand and lastly, gratification from incentives received such as giveaways and promotions.

Customer engagement stretches far beyond transactions by an indirect contribution through referrals, conversations on social media platforms, feedback provided from platform users to the brand and suggestions of creative ideas from platform users to brand writing product reviews, commenting, liking and sharing content on social media platforms and participation in brand communities. If the brand succeeds in the mentioned, it can benefit from the networks, creativity, persuasion capital and knowledge of the platform's users. Thus, a high degree of customer engagement on social media platforms is fruitful and should create value for both platform users and brands. However, if brand managers don't provide users with the right content, users will unfollow accounts when the brand and content is not relevant to them anymore, the brand posts too often and too much content, making their feed clocked with their posts, having not interesting content.

On TikTok, brand managers that use trending sounds, are aware of the trends and show more personal side, notice significant rise of customer engagement. According to our survey participants, TikTok seems to be more entertaining, more creative, authentic and fun to be part of. The respondents highlighted the importance of informative and entertaining content that is in accordance with the interest of the platform users and which can teach them something new. Thanks to advanced algorithms on TikTok, the content that appears for users is much more personalized and according to their interests. Additionally, according to our results, joining TikTok as a brand can bring much bigger recognition than on Instagram where the ability to discover a brand that a user does not follow is limited. The *'For You Page'* on TikTok can be argued to speak to the interests and thereby emotions of the platform users, leading to indirect contributions through various types of engagement which then allows brands to get more recognition even if users do not follow them and do not know about them. However, many people and brand managers still have not fully discovered the potential and possibilities of TikTok. There is definitely a stigma around the target audience of TikTok, however, when entering the app, you can see videos from people of all ages.

TikTok's features make it easy for brand managers to facilitate and initiate customer engagement. Besides the advanced algorithms, the app has features such as *'likes'*, easy sharing options, comment section and the *'discovery'* section. Additionally, the brand managers can use effects, filters, sounds and music to create a content that is more entertaining and humoristic. We discovered that TikTok sometimes shadow bans videos after previous videos go viral, which makes the process of creating a content strategy much harder

since there is uncertainty for every video posted. Additionally, TikTok has not developed an easy way for direct messaging which on Instagram has been an important feature since social media platform users contact brands to ask specific questions.

On the other hand, we discovered that Instagram is considered a more visual platform than TikTok. However, some think of the platform as not authentic. Even if this is an opinion of some of our survey participants, Instagram has much more engagement in terms of following. In our results, we found out that most people follow brands on Instagram rather than on TikTok. We also have come across interesting findings in regards to the connection between Instagram and TikTok. When a brand gets recognition on TikTok, automatically their Instagram account gets more recognition. The features that make the platform a great place for building a brand community are *'stories'*, *'lives'* as well as *'reels'* that keep followers engaged. However, it is not easy to get recognition compared to TikTok. The *'explore'* page does not have such advanced algorithms and is under great criticism. It is not enough to simply *'like'* or comment on the video to reach the *'explore'* page. Users have to *'save'* the video to make the post more visible. Additionally, the *'reels'* are compared to TikTok videos and are considered a *'copy'* .

5. Discussion

This part of the thesis sets out to explain our findings from our analytical chapter above. The findings are discussed in terms of how comparisons can be made between them. First, we discuss comparisons between TikTok and Instagram for enhancing and facilitating customer engagement. Second, it is discussed how opinions of platform users and brand managers differ or what they agree on in terms of customer engagement on social media platforms. Lastly, it is discussed how we can compare and contrast different types of brands in terms of how they can enhance customer engagement on social media platforms.

The analytical chapter of this thesis explored in particular the opportunities of using social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram to drive customer engagement. Our findings, derived from interviews with brand managers, survey responses from platform users and theoretical literature, revealed that the nature and technological concept of TikTok has some clear benefits to drive customer engagement. First, the video-based content on TikTok allows brands to be authentic, real and personal as such videos often show behind the scene scenarios of a brand. It was a clear finding that platform users desire such content. Such videos furthermore tend to make the content more informative. It was found that content that is informative is additionally desired by platform users. Furthermore, the '*For You Page'* on TikTok is driven by algorithms that are great at targeting content which fits with the interest of platform users, thus making the platform more entertaining and interesting. Sounds, well-known music, text and effect further adds to the humoristic and entertaining side of content on TikTok, something platform users enjoy. Thus, these benefits and technological characteristics of TikTok happen to drive customer engagement to a large extent. Although Instagram and TikTok have in common that they both have low barriers of entry for platform users and are visual in nature, Instagram seems to fall behind in such ways.

As TikTok relies on quirky, personal and fun content, Instagram is more about aesthetics, something that platform users quickly lose interest in and thereby feel less motivated to engage in. First, Instagram does not use the same algorithms, thus it falls short of TikTok in terms of capturing the immediate personal interests of platform users. Instagram uses *'reels'* which was found to be less effective to drive customer engagement than TikTok videos, thus *'reel'* being a less significant 'version' of TikTok. Although, Instagram is better at driving direct contributions due to its shop feature and this is where TikTok falls behind. The main difference between TikTok and Instagram is perhaps the very nature of the platforms. TikTok

is all about making videos go viral and in the virality, incredible customer engagement lies implicitly. Instagram on the other hand is all about the platform user's own social circles of following friends and family and brand pages which are more like advertising at its core with its aesthetically pleasing content, shop function and private messaging. Thus, Instagram is more promotional at core, something that according to our findings does not hold as strong opportunities for customer engagement as the nature and core of TikTok which is more entertaining and personal.

In general, platform users and the interviewed brand managers seemed to be in alignment in terms of their perceptions of what drives customer engagement on social media platforms. Platform users desire for the right content seemed, according to our findings, to be known by the brand managers. For example platform users did not like when customer engagement felt forced through various firm-initiated customer engagement initiatives. Brand managers seemed to be aware of it by waiting to provide informative, personal and entertaining content, something TikTok is great for driving customer engagement from. However, not all brand managers were using TikTok to a sufficient or significant extent as there seems to be a misconception that the audience on TikTok is only made up of very young people.

Many platform users and brand managers seemed to lean on Instagram quite heavily despite the many opportunities for driving indirect contributions on TikTok. All brand managers agreed in general that being present on social media platforms was highly beneficial for building relationships with users and thereby driving customer engagement digitally. Furthermore, all brand managers focus actively on creating content for social media platforms, something that all the brands allocate much time to. TikTok is the preferred social media platform for Queen Cosmetics, ARTESANA Soaps, FaceYoga by Kari and BYKARTHI where they also have much more followers and *'likes'* compared to their Instagram accounts. They also agree that the customer engagement is higher on TikTok. Instagram is the preferable and main social media platform for Click & Grow and Spirekassen as it is a high quality lifestyle photo platform and that the visual nature of Instagram is great for driving sales, thus being more promotional and drives more direct contributions. All in all, when Instagram and TikTok are contrasted and compared in accordance to the opinions of brand managers and platform users, TikTok seems to be the platform with potential to drive most customer engagement despite the undeniable popularity of Instagram.

6. Implications

This chapter contains the managerial and theoretical implications based on the findings presented in the analytical chapter.

6.1. Managerial Implications

This section sets out to explain how the findings of this thesis and the knowledge derived from it can have a positive impact for brand managers.

First, findings showed that a digital presence on modern social media platforms is important to drive online customer engagement. In doing so, there are a few guidelines for brand managers to follow to satisfy and emotionally connect with platform users. First and foremost, brand managers can now be aware that naturally and organically grown customer engagement that is initiated by customers themselves can bring about powerful benefits for the brand. Specifically, brand managers should set up social media platforms so that they can drive an active and engaging online brand community. Next, the right content is key to unlock the motivation for platform users to engage with the brand and its other customers. Such content should be informative, authentic, transparent, entertaining and humoristic. To achieve such, brand managers should allocate time and resources to create such content which is true to the brand and speaks to emotions of the brand community. Therefore, tech-savvy social media, marketing and strategic departments of the brand should corporate to have a collective and clear vision and strategy of such. Hiring an experienced customer engagement manager is beneficial.

Furthermore, brand managers should not be alarmed by the false misconception that TikTok is only for very young people as TikTok is a powerful tool to facilitate customer engagement. No matter what brand or target groups the brand goes for, a presence on TikTok with high quality content should bring about customer engagement, thus benefiting the brand. Especially smaller brands with relatively weak brand images or that operate in highly competitive markets can gain benefits connected to advertisement, competitive advantages, enhance sense of brand image and help platform users to build strong brand communities. Furthermore, if the brand wishes to drive more promotional focused strategies by using methods such as giveaways, it should be easy and entertaining for platform users to engage in

such initiatives as they otherwise will lose interest and therefore not drive organic customer engagement.

In sum, if brand managers facilitate strong online brand communities, put out high quality content on social media platforms and a sense of belonging according to interests of platform users, brands can enjoy the opportunities of strong customer engagement. Brand managers can from this thesis learn the importance of a digital presence on social media platforms and more specifically how to manage such presence. Essentially customer engagement is about people that feel emotions and satisfaction and thereby behave accordingly. If the brand succeeds in providing value through content on social media platforms for platform users, platform users can provide value back to the brand. Thus, customer engagement on social media platforms is about value and that value is a two-way street. Brand managers should focus on creating a strategy for both TikTok and Instagram since they have different features that can help with initiating customer engagement. Instagram is a great place for creating a fanbase and keeping followers engaged, however, it is harder to be discovered by other users who do not follow the brand. On the other hand, TikTok is a platform that can bring tremendous growth and customer engagement thanks to the algorithms which can help with recognition and turn potential customers to customers or fans. Since we found out that some brands notice a growth on Instagram whenever their TikTok account gets more followers, we recommend creating a strategy for both platforms to gain more recognition on TikTok and a fanbase on Instagram where only loyal followers of the brand engage the most. Brands must not miss the chance to keep a finger on the digital pulse of todays' world and one major way to do so is to employ a strong digital customer engagement strategy that focuses on the people behind it: platform users. The value and fruits of it all essentially is increased firm performance, either directly or indirectly.

6.2. Theoretical Implications

This part of the thesis discusses how the findings take place in the theoretical fields of customer engagement. There is a gap in existing customer engagement literature as not much research has been done connecting customer engagement to social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram. This thesis found that the digital aspects of customer engagement is and should be, unavoidable. The technical features and content of social media platforms directly takes place in the existing conceptual and theoretical frameworks of the mechanisms of customer engagement. Content on social media platforms and the technical features have

implications for emotions and satisfaction within platform users and thereby directly affect the direct or indirect contributions to the brand, that is customer engagement itself. Thereby, content is directly woven into the mechanisms of customer engagement in a digital setting. As we live in an increasingly digital world and the fact that customer engagement continues to be a highly popular and researched concept, it makes sense that such a gap in the customer engagement field should be closed and hopefully this thesis can play part in doing so. Theoretical literature of the fields of customer engagement and social media platforms were combined to build on top of the theoretical and conceptual framework of customer engagement by Pansari and Kumar (2017). Thus, more mechanisms which are rooted in a digital context were added to the framework from the findings of this thesis.

Specifically, the opportunities and power of connecting social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok can help to add further detail to the mechanisms of customer engagement. This thesis contributed to the theoretical and conceptual understandings of customer engagement in a digital setting by first, arguing that brands should initiate digital places where platforms users naturally can initiate engagement with each other as starting mechanisms. Second, by arguing how content relates to the mechanisms and antecedents of customer engagement which is emotions and satisfaction as argued by Pansari and Kumar (2017). It was further argued that conceptual mechanisms can be directly skipped in the process, as social media platforms can skip the mechanisms of customer experiences and initial purchases. Thus, surpassing mechanisms further add to the theoretical understanding of customer engagement on social media platforms. Furthermore, technical features of social media platforms were placed as mechanisms to drive direct or indirect contributions, thus customer engagement.

7. Conclusion

This Master's thesis aimed to explore the mechanisms of customer engagement on social media platforms in depth to attempt to fill out a gap in the popular customer engagement literature. One goal of the thesis was to explore how brand managers can improve customer engagement through social media platforms and thus, harvest the benefits of it. The thesis specifically focused on Instagram and TikTok for that purpose, two major players in the market of social media platforms. To fully grasp the mechanisms of customer engagement on social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, the first goal of the thesis was to explore why customer engagement is important to ensure for brands. Second, the thesis aimed to further explore in deeper detail the role of social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok as tools for marketing strategies in the modern digital world that we live in today. The research was conducted by combining two main methods of qualitative survey with TikTok and Instagram users and six expert interviews with brand managers, further combined with theoretical and conceptual literature of the fields of customer engagement and social media platforms.

Amongst our main findings was that the mechanisms of customer engagement change when put in the digital context of social media platforms. Customer-initiated customer engagement is the most effective type of customer engagement when utilised through high quality content on social media platforms. The content presented by brands must be humoristic, informative, transparent, authentic and personal to speak directly to the emotions and satisfaction within platform users, resulting in direct and indirect customer engagement. Furthermore, technical features of social media platforms have direct influence on the contributions as well as they too can speak to emotions and satisfaction in different ways laid out in this thesis.

Following down the digital path of customer engagement, another key finding of this thesis concerns the two social media platforms under study, Instagram and TikTok. Instagram is found to be incredibly popular as a social media platform perhaps due to the social aspects of it. Yet, it was found to be less effective for driving indirect engagement due to its lack of technical features. The core of Instagram is promotional in nature and focused on aesthetics. TikTok on the other hand was found to be an effective and modern tool for driving customer engagement due to its technical core of less promotional content, but rather personality, humor and information are keywords in the content of TikTok. Such, is what platform users

desire to be motivated by, to engage more with the brand or other platform users. However, TikTok is yet less popular as a social media platform, perhaps due to the paradox of misconceptions about its audience.

Brand managers can enhance digital customer engagement and harvest its benefits such as competitive advantage, increased overall firm performance and increased brand image by laying out a customer engagement strategy as part of the overall marketing strategies of the brand. An option for the brand is to plan a customer engagement strategy which can for example be facilitated by tech-savvy customer engagement managers in accordance with marketing, social media and strategic departments of the brand. The strategy must be on-brand and involve multiple social media platforms for ultimate customer engagement. A fundamental and detailed understanding of the nature, core and technical features of each platform is key to a successful customer engagement strategy. The importance of such strategy for any brand, have been argued for. Brand managers must in the process remember that customer engagement when facilitated on social media platforms, a competent medium, is about value creation for the brand itself and for platform users. Without mutual value-creation and understanding of its mechanisms, customer engagement simply loses its power.

8. Methodological Limitations

It is important to address the limitations of the research of this Master's thesis as those limitations have direct or indirect implications for the research and outcome of the study. First, limitations regarding data collection and the time horizon of the thesis are important. Six brands, Spirekassen, ARTESANA Soaps, FaceYoga by Kari, BYKARTHI, Click & Grow and Queen Cosmetics were selected. They all have in common that they are relatively small-or medium businesses with a strong online presence on either TikTok or Instagram. All of the six brands cater to the B2C market primarily and have quite engaging followers and a relatively large following on either Instagram or TikTok. We would have liked to gather data from even more brands under the same criterion had the process been longer. However, we believe that sufficient data was gathered still. Similarly, 77 number of survey respondents filled out the qualitative survey which focused on gaining insights and data in terms of consumer customer engagement on Instagram and Tiktok, however only 49 will be taken into consideration since we decided to focus on Denmark and The United States. At one point, the data collection had to come to an end due to time restrictions and the analysis had to begin in order to complete the thesis and reach the conclusion to the research question. Had more brand managers and platform users agreed to interviews and answered the qualitative survey in time, the research would have benefitted from more diverse data and a larger sample size.

An important limitation to mention regarding data collections is that we did not sample the platform users directly amongst followers or customers of the six brands. Rather, the platform users were selected randomly and thereby not in alignment with the six brands. It was a conscious choice to do so for one main reason. As the goal was to explore platform users' general opinions of TikTok and Instagram and how they engage on the two platforms, no direct connection to the six brands had to be made. However, it can be argued that if the platform users had been customers or followers of the six brands, further correlations between their opinions and experiences could have been explored. However, the goal of this thesis is to explore customer engagement as a concept in the context of social media platforms such as TikTok or Instagram rather than focusing on the six brands exclusively.

A second limitation is that there might exist a difference between what people say and their actual behaviour; here referring to the survey respondents and the brands. Regarding the qualitative survey, people might tend to think that they engage more or less than they actually

do with brands on Tiktok and Instagram. Similarly, brand managers might say that they put more effort into customer engagement than they actually do, or, they might have a screwed perception of how well their efforts are actually working in terms of enhancing customer engagement. The question of, if people are actually fully aware of the effects of their actions on social media prevails and this might bring about a gap in the research in terms of data. However, the hermeneutical approach of this study puts weight on the power of interpretation and the subjective, and perhaps screwed, data is still relevant for the research as the goal was to understand and interpret platform users and their perceptions in order to understand customer engagement on social media platforms rather than measuring the actual amount of engagement.

Furthermore, this study mainly focuses on Instagram and Tiktok leaving all other social media platforms out of the analysis. Focusing on more social media platforms in terms of customer engagement would provide the research with a bigger picture of overall social media usage and strategies for customer engagement af mechanisms might be different on other social media platforms due to technical features and the nature of the platform.

The majority of the expert interviews conducted with brand managers were conducted online, especially through e-mail interviewing. Such forms of interviewing can pose limitations to qualitative research. As no face to face interaction was present in email interviewing, perhaps the brand managers have typed their answers rather quickly due to their busy schedules. Being able to interview the brand managers face to face, even online, would perhaps leave an atmosphere of being present. This could mean that the brand managers would to a higher extent leave spontaneous anecdotes or examples while explaining verbally (Flick, 2014:235). Such would be useful subjective knowledge of the brand managers which might have gone lost through the email interviewing. As this study has a qualitative approach with a hermeneutical philosophical background, the more subjective elaborations, anecdotes and examples the merrier, as it would fuel the analysis to a greater extent. However, a conscious decision to balance the amount of data from multiple brand managers in different locations versus quite a few elaborate interviews were made to ensure as diverse a dataset as possible. Furthermore, as we never heard voices, met or saw the majority of brand managers, a sense of high anonymity was present. Despite knowing their name, email address and professional position with each brand, we did not have much idea of the person behind the screen. Such high anonymity can pose limitations to the reliability of the brand managers which can be a

problem in qualitative research which studies subjectivity, opinions, emotions and experiences (Flick, 2014:236). However, the professional role and experience of the brand managers was deemed just as significant and the characteristics of the brand managers less important.

9. Further Research

This research of customer engagement on TikTok and Instagram can be extended through further research in order to understand more about the topic of customer engagement on social media platforms.

The results of our research showed that customer engagement is necessary to thrive in today's digital marketplace. TikTok and Instagram are great platforms to initiate customer engagement. Both platforms have plenty of features which can be helpful for brand managers to affect the level of customer engagement. However, the platforms also differ and have some disadvantages. Our recommendation for brand managers is to focus on creating a strategy for both platforms to get the full advantages of each platform. Instagram can help with creating a fanbase and keep up to date the users who are interested in the brand. However, TikTok is a great place to get more recognition and create a greater customer base. The content presented by brand managers must be humoristic, informative, transparent, authentic and personal to speak directly to the emotions and satisfaction within platform users, resulting in direct and indirect customer engagement.

However, further research can be done in regards to the bad side of customer engagement and how it impacts brands. One of the main concepts that could be investigated in depth is eWOM that affects the customer and their engagement. Our research showed that eWOM takes a big part of customer engagement on social media platforms, however, sometimes negative eWOM can be created. This is why understanding the negative side of eWOM through customer engagement could be useful to investigate. This can also be connected to research regarding spreading misinformation through eWOM and how brands can deal with it since anyone can give their opinion regarding the content, brand or product.

Additionally, this research has focused on TikTok and Instagram, however, there are many other social media platforms available which should also be investigated in regards to customer engagement since the research gap in this topic has not been fully closed. This research has not focused on a specific industry or a brand, therefore a more in depth research can be facilitated to understand the correlation between a specific brand, their content strategy and their followers. This can bring more specific findings especially for the brand that is in focus. Due to the fact that we focused on users of TikTok and Instagram in

Denmark and The United States, a research with a greater sampling size and addition of quantitative data could bring more coherent results.

Another interesting point for further research potentially could be in regards to 'going viral' since our data has shown that TikTok helped brands with customer engagement thanks to viral content. Going viral on social media platforms has not been fully discovered and the understanding of it could help brands to increase their engagement on social media platforms.

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