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HOW THE MOST LIKED BRANDS ON FACEBOOK INTERACT WITH THEIR CUSTOMERS

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Abstract

This paper investigates how the 15 most liked brands on Facebook communicate with customers on this social networking site (SNS). The content shared as well as the engagement received in different posts are analysed through the lenses of social presence theory and a framework for categorizing social media posts. This study follows an explorative approach, where a total of 1256 Facebook posts during a six months' time frame were collected from the 15 investigated brands, and thereafter analysed to obtain answers to the research questions of the study: what type of content do these companies share and which approaches to keep and promote engagement can be determined from their Facebook posts? The results show that video is the most common type of posts shared by the companies and sales promotion is the most shared category of post. Accordingly, the engagement achieved by posts were also investigated in the study. The findings suggest a higher level of engagement of Facebook users in photos and in the categories of emotional, cause-related and current event posts. The results provide basic insights into what strategies brands could consider when sharing content on Facebook and which types of posts to share, as well as how to keep and promote user engagement. Future research is needed in the topic as the subject is relevant for today's businesses.

Keywords

Social media; SNS; Facebook; content; brands online; social presence theory; online marketing; social media engagement; a framework for categorizing social media posts.

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Background	3
2.1. Defining social media and social networking sites	3
2.2. Social media engagement	3
2.3. Likes, shares and comments	4
2.4. Conceptualizing Facebook	4
3. Theoretical framework	6
3.1. Social presence theory	6
3.1.1 Social presence on social media	6
3.1.2. Type of content shared on Facebook	7
3.2. Communication strategies on social media	8
3.3. A framework for categorizing social media posts	9
4. Methodology	11
4.1. Research design	11
4.2. Sample selection	11
4.3. Operationalisation	12
4.4. Pre-test	13
4.5. Data collection and data analysis	13
5. Results	15
5.1. Type of content shared by the 15 most liked brands on Facebook	15
5.1.1. Categories of posts shared	17
5.2. Type of post that create the highest engagement	17
5.2.1. Engagement by type of post	17
5.2.2. Engagement by category of post	18
5.2.3. Frequency of posts per week	19
5.2.4. Frequency of posts per weekday	19
5.3. Top 10 posts with the highest engagement	21
6. Discussion	22
6.1. Consistency with the literature	22
6.2. Interesting findings	23
6.3. Implications	24
7. Conclusion	25
7.1. Limitations	25
7.2. Future research	25
Reference list	27

Appendice.....	31
Appendix A. Codebook – Posts categories	31

List of Figures

Figure 1. Social networking sites ranked by number of active users as of January 2019	5
Figure 2. Most popular product brands on Facebook as of April 2019.....	12
Figure 3. Most popular type of posts shared on Facebook (N=1256).....	15
Figure 4. Types of posts shared per company	16
Figure 5. Visualisation of number of posts and engagement per week.....	19
Figure 6. Representation of number of posts and engagement per weekday.....	20

List of Tables

Table 1. Categories from the framework for categorizing social media posts and author’s category.....	13
Table 2. Posts of brands divided by type of posts	16
Table 3. Posts by categories divided by companies.....	17
Table 4. Visualisation of types and numbers of posts, and engagement per post	18
Table 5. Visualisation of total of posts by categories and engagement and engagement per post	18
Table 6. 10 posts with highest engagement	21

1. Introduction

The way the internet is used has changed throughout the years as new purposes have arisen. Social media platforms appeared in the early 2000's which revolutionized the internet usage. In the new millennium, the internet became more accessible to the general public and it has transformed into a platform where people can share user-generated content and form social groups (Obar & Wildman, 2015). Moreover, in 2004 the term Web 2.0 appeared and characterized a new platform of websites where it allowed all users to modify information in a collaborative way. Wikipedia is a known example of a website from the Web 2.0 era. The Web 2.0 was the start point for the creation and popularity of social media platforms, with the user generated content gaining space and force (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009, Rutherford, 2010).

Since social media first appeared, the number of users has and continues to increase. In 2010, a breakthrough in social media usage occurred. For illustration, the social media platform Facebook became the second most accessed website on the internet that year just behind Google (Botha & Mills, 2012). In the same year, there were almost one billion people using social media in the world. By 2017 this number was almost two and a half billion, and it is forecasted that this number will reach three billion by 2021 (Statista, 2019).

Social media has altered the way business is done (Qualman, 2012). Hence, brands have adapted to the new social media era to interact with their customers (Kumar et al., 2016). Social media is an essential tool for brands in their marketing strategies and businesses use social media with the same purpose of old marketing tools, to sell products or services (Paniagua & Sapena, 2014). Social media users can be perceived as virtual customers in the digital platform in which the brands represent themselves. The online platforms provide a low-priced, effective and reliable method to serve customers (Verhagen et al., 2015). A brand that is online on social media can engage directly with its customers, creating a dialogue that is encouraged by the brand (Pereira et al., 2014)

Social media allow individuals to present themselves as they choose. These platforms give possibilities for people to engage and relate to different groups of people, as well as communicate with family, friends and colleagues through the internet (Al-Deen & Hendricks, 2012). Furthermore, social media is also conceptualized by Botha & Mills (2012) as a type of digital media that enables the distribution of content through social interactions. Social media users have the possibility of creating and sharing own generated content. Among the most popular social media websites today are Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter (Statista, 2019).

Previous to the social media era, communication occurred from individual to individual. For illustration, if an individual had a negative experience in a restaurant, the individual could complain about it to close friends, whom in turn could pass on the information through word of mouth, which somewhat limits the reach of the message. Today, however, the customer can post the negative experience on social media, exposing it to the customer's social media network, and the customer's social media connections in its turn can access the information and share the experience with their network, and thereby reach a larger number of people (Qualman, 2012). Social media has changed the way individuals communicate with each other and given power to consumers and customers to influence a brand and its reputation (Close, 2012).

Social media platforms provide tools for people to become famous, do marketing, create or improve a brand, sell products, promote events and others. With the social media growth and its influence, the traditional way of doing business has adapted to this new social media era and social media has become a big platform for various business activities, including marketing, buying and

selling (Qualman, 2012). Additionally, how businesses communicate through social media is a relevant topic of study, considering the influence it has outside the digital world as well as its implications. Social media platforms have become so influent that they are perhaps more powerful than the traditional media tools, which creates a great impact on business success (Botha & Mills, 2012). Brands can use social media as an asset to gain customers attention, engagement and market to international audiences (Lin et al. 2017). Discussion regarding business communication on social media is current and fundamental as social media has become an important tool for businesses. Even if a brand is not officially active on social media, it might still be on social media through customers' posts, comments, shares or uploaded photos and videos (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

The vast and growing number of users, the fact that brands are discussed on social media whether the company intends to or not, as well as social media's increasing impact on business success, points to the importance of studying how businesses can benefit from using social media to communicate with their customers. Therefore, the main goal of this study is to analyse how brands communicate with social media users and to provide insights into how customer engagement can be increased. To narrow it down, this research focuses on Facebook, as it presently is the most popular social media platform (Statista, 2019). The dimensions considered in this research involve the types and categories of companies' posts, as well as the received consumers' engagement. These aspects will be investigated through the lenses of the social presence theory (Short et al., 1976), a framework for categorizing social media posts (Tafesse & Wien, 2017) and other relevant works. The research questions for this study are the following:

RQ1: What kind of content is shared by the 15 most followed brands on Facebook?

RQ2: Which approaches to keep and promote customer engagement can be determined from these brands' Facebook posts?

This paper starts by briefly describing the difference between social media and SNS platforms, discussing social media engagement, likes, shares and comments, as well as presenting a conceptualization of Facebook (Chapter 2). In order to understand the brands' behaviours on social media, theoretical frameworks and early studies on the field are covered in Chapter 3. Following this, Chapter 4 introduces the method of the study, including its research design, operationalization, pre-test, data collection and analysis. The results are presented in Chapter 5 according to the research questions: the types of content shared by the 15 most liked brands on Facebook and their strategies for promoting customer engagement. Chapter 6 is dedicated to the discussion of the results related to the theories explained in the literature review. Finally, in Chapter 7, the conclusion of the study, its limitations and suggestions for further research are presented.

2. Background

This chapter explains the difference between the concepts of social media and social networking sites. The concepts of like, comment, share, and social media engagement are further discussed. Lastly, the conceptualization of Facebook is presented.

2.1. Defining social media and social networking sites

There is an ongoing discussion in literature regarding the definition and differences of the concepts of social media and social networking sites. According to Kaplan & Haenlein (2009), different social media platforms are not clearly divided into groups, however, one can analyse a classification based on theories of media research and social process such as social presence, media richness, self-presentation and self-disclosure. With that in mind, there could be classifications of social media in the media research field regarding social presence, the analysis of how close individuals feel when communicating online. Through the lenses of media richness, how individuals communicate with reduction of uncertainty and ambiguity, that is, the amount of information allowed to be exchanged between individuals. Concerning social process theory, the social media platforms can also be classified in a group where self-disclosure and self-presentation is allowed; for illustration, liking a page or sharing a thought. In a different line of investigation, Rutherford (2010), explains that social media platforms can be divided into three groups, the first groups are the sites where content sharing and organizing is the focus, such as YouTube and Flickr. The second group regards content creation and editing such as Google Docs and WordPress. The final group concerns social networking sites (SNS), for example Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Boyd & Ellison (2007) define SNS as websites that allow users to create a public or semi-public profile and connect with other users. SNS provide users with the possibility to share their connections with other users by making their networks visible, and thereby granting them opportunities to connect with users' connections; hence the name social networking site (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). This research explores the brands representation on the SNS Facebook through the lenses of the social presence theory that will be presented in the next chapter. These definitions are important when analysing the results of this study, as the research focus entails SNS and not all social media platforms.

2.2. Social media engagement

Social media engagement has recently become a topic of interest as the importance of the subject has increased (e.g. Oliveira et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2016, Jiang et al., 2015; Chirumalla et al., 2017; Pentina et al., 2018). Social media engagement has yet to be defined as one clear concept, however concepts of engagement are constantly used by scholars to define the term. Higgins (2006) explains that to be engaged “is to be involved, occupied, and interested in something”. Moreover, according to Higgins (2006) the level and strength of engagement is likely to influence the performance of brands. Social media engagement entails promoting users' interactions (Luarn et al., 2015). More specifically, Osei & McLean (2018) define brand engagement on social media as the communication and connection between the brand and the social media platform users through the use of tropes of the brand's identity, including, images, meanings and language.

Social media platforms have altered the meaning of relationships. Friendship for example, is classified by social media software according to the degree to which individuals like each other's posted content or interact with each other online (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Additionally, the relationship among users is also important; if users can associate with each other and start a

conversation or share content, give likes, or follow each other, they are associated. Many social media platforms allow users to see who else is connected on the platform, and who has engaged through for instance likes or comments on certain social media pages (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

Another line of investigation is that consumers and users of social media and SNS do not want to engage with brands but with family and friends and establish or strengthen personal connections (Heller Baird & Parasnis, 2011). Admittedly, there are users that do not want to engage with brands online, however, concerning the users that engage with brands on social media their most popular actions are tagging, liking and sharing content (Pentina et al., 2018). In this research, liking and sharing content generated by the brands are further analysed. The action of tagging, on the other hand, falls into the category of commenting, and is therefore not separately analysed for the research purpose. It is the consumers choice to engage with brands online and therefore, brands need to motivate their audience in order to develop their products and brands (Osei & McLean, 2018). Finally, in the analysis phase of this research, the Netvizz application for Facebook defines engagement as the sum of reactions, likes, comments and shares (Netvizz, 2019) and that is the concept adopted to investigate the material collected.

2.3. Likes, shares and comments

Online customers can have different approaches regarding social media engagement and participation. Customers are categorized into two groups regarding their online behaviour. One category of actions indicates a passive user, which browses through the social media platform without adding any information. The other type is the active user, which adds to the community by engaging with the shared content (Su et al., 2015). Analysing the particular case of Facebook, actions available for users in the platform such as likes, reactions, shares and comments are considered electronic word of mouth (eWOM) because they allow users to validate the brands content shared (Liu, et al., 2017). These functions enable consumers to manifest their personal opinions, both negative and positive, to their networks (Liu et al., 2017). In addition, Liu et al. (2017) demonstrate that comments have a higher level of eWOM, whereas shares and likes have a lower level.

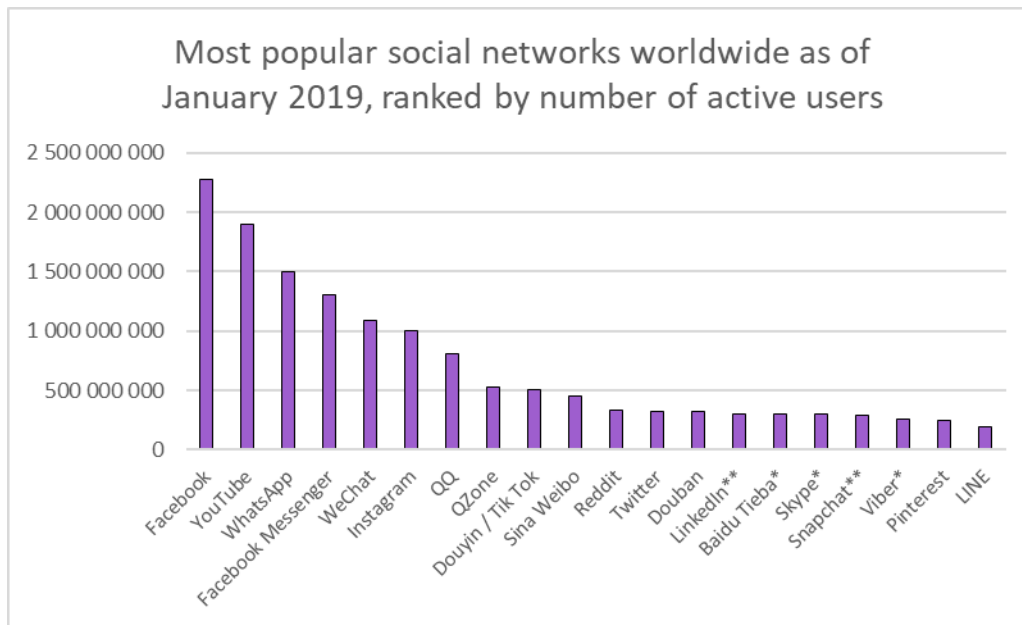
To offer clarity between the terms like, comment and share on social media, van Dijck (2013) consider the like action as the one with the least commitment demanded from the user, as the action merely requires one click. The comment action demands more thinking in expressing what the user aims to write. Once the comment is made, the content will appear in the user's news feed. The share is also generated through clicks; however, the shared post appears on the news feed and on the personal page of the user, making the content available to a wider audience (Kim & Yang, 2017). Su et al. (2015) explain that even though the like, share and comment made by a user will be presented in the user's newsfeed, the most important is how the customers feel regarding the brand and their relationship with the brand. These online actions can strengthen the organizations' public relationship (Wang et al., 2017).

2.4. Conceptualizing Facebook

The social networking website Facebook was founded in 2004 and since then its popularity and number of users has increased, making Facebook the most used social network platform in the world (Facebook, 2019). The social networking sites with the highest number of users is visualized in Figure 2. Facebook comes first, followed by YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, WeChat and others (Statista, 2019). The scope of this research has been limited to Facebook, as it

is the world's largest SNS at the time of the study and has the highest monthly active users among SNS.

Figure 1. Social networking sites ranked by number of active users as of January 2019



(source: Statista 2019)

(*platforms have not updated their user figures in the past 12 months, **data from third-party reports)

Facebook has a specific tool called business platform and it enables brands with the possibilities of showing different content to users in different countries and regions based on their location. These specific pages by location are called global pages and can be defined as “market pages” or “default pages”. They allow a richer experience to users by providing unique content that may be relevant to some users in a specific region (Facebook, 2018). For this research, the default pages of the brands examined were defined based on Sweden as the market and location, some of the analysed pages were international and in English, and some were automatically directed to the Swedish website.

3. Theoretical framework

The following section will present the theories applied in this study. The research draws on the social presence theory by Short et al. (1976), a framework for categorizing social media posts by Tafesse & Wien (2017), as well as others relevant studies with the field of research.

3.1. Social presence theory

The social presence theory has been vastly considered and discussed in the mediated-communication field migrating from the original field of psychological theories by Short et al. (1976). Earlier, the social presence theory did not encompass computer mediated communication, however this theory has evolved and adapted to different types of interactions, including online technologies (Cui et al., 2012). The social presence theory defends that the social presence of a medium influences the awareness of a message by the receiver (Miranda & Saunders, 2003; Chang & Hsu, 2016). According to Short et al. (1976), social presence is the degree of salience between the interaction among individuals and the degree of salience of the resulted relationship. Moreover, social presence can be defined as the “quality of the communication medium” (Short et al., 1976). In the same line, Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) affirm that the social presence theory presence is positively associated with the influence of the communication on individuals’ behaviour. Research in the area of social presence and technology has been vastly study in the field of online learning (e.g. Cui et al., 2012; Zhan & Mei, 2013; Wei et al., 2012; Sung & Mayer, 2012).

Social presence can influence intimacy and immediacy of the communication between individuals (Short et al., 1976). Intimacy regards the personal vs. mediated aspect while immediacy regards to asynchronous vs. synchronous (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Intimacy entails the actions of eye-contact, smiling, proximity and topic of conversation. Immediacy is the “psychological distance” between the sender and receiver (Short et al., 1976) this distance can be verbal or non-verbal (Tu, 2000). Social presence contributes to the level of intimacy and immediacy, the medium of communication chosen can make greater intimacy between individuals (Short et al., 1976).

In a similar spirit, Short et al., (1976) explain the term ‘technological immediacy’ providing the illustration of an employee who uses a phone call to speak with a co-worker when she could easily reach the other person physically. This situation creates a distance between the parts and non-immediacy would likely to be created. In comparison, the same co-workers that work in distant locations would not be able to walk to each other to interact, and therefore the phone call would be necessary, hence, the immediacy would not be affected (Short et al., 1976). This concept can be adapted to social media in the sense that there is not another possibility for users and brands to interact with each other physically in a simple way such as in a walking distance. This model can be adapted to social media providing the link for the communication between brands and consumers online. Another development in the literature is provided by Biocca & Nowak (2001), that conceptualize the term social presence technologies as technologies that aim to ‘increase real time social interaction’. Biocca & Nowak (2001) explain that these technologies intend to increase social presence.

3.1.1 Social presence on social media

Social presence theory has evolved to the technology mediated communication field, including social media, and it can be defined as an engagement between parts that are resulted from the presence awareness of one another (Cui et al., 2012). In a similar spirit, social presence is fundamental for brands on social media in order to engage with its users and consumers. Moreover,

Osei & McLean (2018) consider the connection created through the online engagement a result of online social presence which can influence customers' buying decision. Hence social media do not only serve as a tool for networking but as a platform for users to connect and engage with brands (Osei & McLean, 2018). A high degree of social presence of a medium enhances the users' feeling of belonging as well as the understanding of a message which can motivate them to engage in online brand engagement (Osei & McLean, 2018, Shen et al., 2010). Consequently, online content provides users the possibilities of interacting with the content they are interested in, particularly, brands posts (Chang and Hsu, 2016, Osei & McLean, 2018). In consonance, users can engage in deeper experiences with brands by sharing experiences, giving feedback and constantly receiving informative content (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). The customer salience is increased based on the quality of the medium and the consequent interactions. The higher the salience, the more likely is a customer to engage with a brand on social media (Osei et al., 2018; Nowak, 2013). Social presence can be considered a tool to enhance consumer trust levels and social presence online can be defined as "the perception of personal, sociable, sensitive human elements of a website" (Ogonowski et al., 2014). Online platforms should provide the customers a feeling of sociable human contact (Gefen & Straub, 2004).

Finally, Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) classify the degree of social presence in different platforms. Blogs and Wikipedia are the platforms with the lowest degree of social presence, Facebook and other SNS score as medium degree of social presence once they allow the share of videos and photos in addition to text-based communication. With the highest level of social presence are the virtual games that allow real life dimensions regarding face-to-face interaction online (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In this research the social presence theory will serve as a basis for the analysis regarding number of posts shared by companies and their content, as well as their social presence online, in other words how often they share content and how engagement with the social media users is promoted.

3.1.2. Type of content shared on Facebook

Facebook allows users to share four types of posts: videos, links, photos and statuses (Luarn et al., 2015). These media differ in quality through the lenses of media richness (Coyle and Thorson, 2001) and in level of social presence (Short et al., 1976). Through the lenses of social presence, sharing content such as videos and photos increase the social presence online. The video is the post type with the highest level of social presence. Further, videos about brands are more likely to be viewed when shared by consumers' personal connections. Hence, the brands that succeed in influencing one consumer online to share the video with their network, is likely to have the content exposed to a bigger audience that it would normally not reach (Nikolinakou et al., 2018).

In 2013 photos were the most shared type of content on Facebook and looking at photos on these platforms was the most frequent online activity of users (Eftekhar et al., 2014). In contrast, Su et al., (2015) explain that the content of a Facebook post is not as important as what is written in the caption in order to promote user engagement. The category of the post is more important for user interaction, as people tend to prefer the message of the post in contrast to the type of post (Su et al., 2015). In the same spirit, Cvijiak et al. (2011) suggest that the post type influence user interaction and that statuses are the type of posts with the highest number of comments, while videos produce more likes. Photos were the type of posts with the lowest engagement received. Likewise, Moro et al. (2016) explain that the status has the highest level of engagement among other types of content shared.

3.2. Communication strategies on social media

Brands can benefit from social media exposure from various angles (Felix et al., 2017). Through social media, brands have the opportunity to promote products and services, responsibility and social causes (Pereira et al., 2014). In addition, brands can use social media for different goals, such as to increase brand awareness, increase sales, reduce marketing costs, generate traffic to online platforms and create user visibility by encouraging users to share firm-generated content. The concept of firm-generated content (FGC) is defined by Kumar et al (2016) as the content officially shared by firms or brands on social media. Moreover, businesses can acquire valuable insights regarding customer behaviour, thoughts and feelings (Pereira et al., 2014), as well as monitor user interactions to discover how consumers feel and what they think regarding the brands' products, services and actions (Felix et al., 2017).

Another development in the literature is that social media should not be used for exploitation, as many users do not want to be exposed to marketing on their social media pages. Failing to take this into account might create consumer resentment towards the brand (Arnaboldi & Coget, 2016; Pentina et al., 2018), and brands can be considered unwanted by some consumers on their social media pages (Felix et al., 2017). Then again, brands' participation on social media is anticipated by some users that promote conversations with the brands through actions of tagging, sharing, liking or commenting in their own or on the brands' official pages (Felix et al., 2017). In summary, the divergency regarding users' expectations toward brands on social media platforms can be compared with the heterogenous base of consumers in general (Felix et al., 2017).

Early works have investigated how individuals behave on social media and which strategies that can be used to better communicate online. Kietzmann et al. (2001), for instance, have proposed a framework called "the functional building blocks of social media". This framework presents identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation and groups as a basis of what to consider when creating a social media strategy. That is to say, brands could consider how they represent themselves and facilitate conversations online, for example through posts that ask users' feedback, as well as the number of posts and clues of physical presence they share to create a feeling of proximity, relationship and trust with users, as well as the groups created because of common connections, as this can serve as a basis for strategic social media communication approaches (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Similarly, Floreddu & Cabiddu (2016) identified six strategies to communicate on social media: egocentric, conversational, selective, openness, secretive and supportive. These strategies englobe the possibility of companies to influence customers' perceptions, establish a transparent relationship with the customers that will motivate interaction and show credibility, and provide support by solving issues that may appear (Floreddu & Cabiddu, 2016).

Brands' pages on Facebook aim to promote user engagement by transmitting messages through posts that users will interact with. The topic of the shared content can be an important tool regarding user engagement (Su et al., 2015). Su et al. (2015) suggests that users prefer conversational posts instead of marketing posts. Continuous and repeated interactions between brands and customers can enhance brand-customer relationship (Floreddu & Cabiddu, 2016). Emotional posts promote a deeper engagement of users resulting in more comments and likes on these categories of posts, and brands can use this insight to share more content of this type in order to generate a higher number of user engagement (Swani & Milne, 2017). Another perspective analysed by Cvijiak et al. (2011) is that the weekday of posts has little influence on user interaction.

Additionally, there are aspects of posts, such as questions in the text asking users direct opinions, that can increase the number of comments while decreasing the number of likes (Su et al., 2015) and posts related to special offers may create more engagement than a product marketing post by itself (Moro et al., 2016). It is essential for a company to be aware of its goals on social media when choosing what strategies to follow online. Companies' online strategies should be based on their offerings and overall goals (Swani & Milne, 2017).

3.3. A framework for categorizing social media posts

Drawing from the principle of message strategy from a branded content introduced by Puto & Wells (1984), Tafesse & Wien (2017) proposed a framework for categorizing social media brand posts. Message strategy regards the link between what the customers want to see/hear, with what the brands need to expose to their audience. The aim of message strategy lays with the marketing message being successfully reached by the target consumers, in order to attain desired outcomes (Puto & Wells, 1984). In addition, Tafesse & Wien (2017) consider the differences between informational vs. transformation advertising based on the concepts of Puto & Wells (1984), Laskey et al. (1989) and Taylor (1990) to categorize the brands' posts in the proposed framework. The informational type of advertising aims to instruct the consumer in a clear and logical way towards a product or a service, so they can fully use the product or service. The transformation advertising regards the idea of providing the consumer with a changing experience that differs from products or services from other brands (Tafesse & Wien, 2017). This typology of advertising messages serves as a foundation for the framework for categorizing social media brands posts, however, as the scope of social media branded posts is richer than the traditional messages, there was the necessity of a framework that entails the entire social media advertising message spectrum, which Tafesse & Wien (2017) proposed and which is applied in this study.

Brand posts are the content shared and updated on social media by brands. Social media users can access the brands' posts in the brands' pages or directly in their newsfeed if they follow or like the brands' pages (Tafesse & Wien, 2017). There are four types of posts available on Facebook: status, photo, video, and link. These posts have not been categorized by many authors, however, Tafesse & Wien (2017) have proposed a framework in which the brands' posts are divided into 12 different categories. The brands' posts were grouped by content in the following categories: emotional, functional, educational, brand resonance, experiential, current event, personal, employee, brand community, customer relationship, cause-related and sales promotion.

Emotional brand posts are the type of content shared with the aim to stimulate emotions in the audience, creating an emotional bond between the customer and the brand. Functional brand posts aim to provide information regarding the functionality, affordability or efficiency of the product or service of the brand. Educational posts seek to inform and educate the customers about a product or service, or to inform about broader subjects. Brand resonance posts intent to show the identity of the brand such as brand image and personality, through slogans, themes and others. Experiential posts regard posts that stimulate sensory and behavioural responses from the audience, including sports or music events. Current events posts are those that comment actual events such as holidays, seasons or anniversaries. Personal posts focus on the customers' personal connections, such as friendships and family and aims to start deep conversations with the audience. Employee brand posts center around employees' experiences, such as their hobbies or worldviews. Customer relationship are posts that ask for feedback and participation of consumers, they enable the brands to learn about the audience from the audience. Cause-related posts promote social causes supported by the brands and inspire the customers to participate. Finally, sales promotion posts encourage consumers into buying actions (Tafesse & Wien, 2017).

This framework aims to facilitate further research in the field, but as Tafesse & Wien (2017) mention, a high number of posts shared by brands fall into more than one category which can interfere in the results of posts analysis researches. Further, the authors suggest that researches can follow the approach of only analysing brands' posts that fall into one single category or a new category of message strategy called interactional could be created (Tafesse & Wien, 2017). For the purpose of this research, even the posts that fell into more than one category were analysed and were categorized depending on the analysis of the main message of the content as perceived by the author of this study. Moreover, from the 12 categories proposed, nine were applied, as well as one additional category ([see 4.3.](#)).

4. Methodology

To identify how the selected brands communicate through Facebook with users by sharing content, and what kind of approaches that can be determined to keep and promote user engagement, the method used in this study is explorative and descriptive with the aim to investigate and understand a social phenomenon (Renz et al., 2018) as well as common behaviours. The focus of this research was therefore on the written texts as well as visual cues with care to context and structure. This study aims to provide understanding of social media strategies through the method of coding to discover patterns and themes (Renz et al., 2018) through both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative aspect will examine the content analysis as well as the analysis of the communication actions. The quantitative approach will focus on frequencies of posts and engagement. This chapter explains what methodology was used to explore and identify the types of content that are shared on Facebook by the 15 most liked brand' pages and the approaches to keep and promote engagement with Facebook users. The first subchapter (4.1.) explains the research design and setting. The second subchapter (4.2.) outlines the sampling of this research and how the brands were selected. The third subchapter (4.3.) regards the operationalization of the categories investigated and the pre-test phase. The fourth subchapter (4.4) explains how the data was collected and analysed.

4.1. Research design

The present research is an explorative study, which investigates how the 15 most liked brands on Facebook share content and promote user engagement by using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The 10 most engaged posts, as well as the categories of posts, are studied by qualitative method, and types of posts, frequency and engagement is examined by quantitative method.

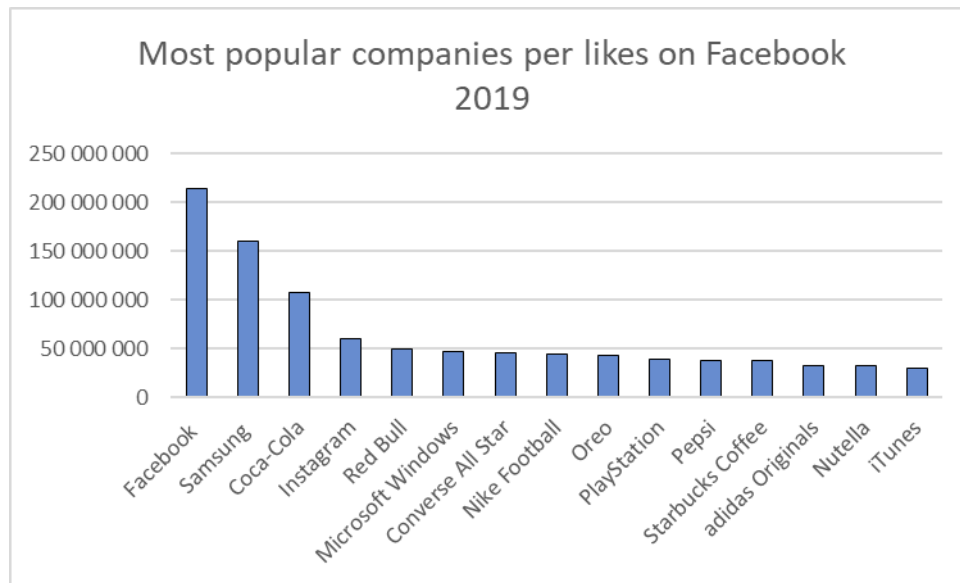
Reliability, replication and validity of the study have been taken into consideration when the research design was made. The reliability aspect concerns how repeatable the study is, that is, if the study is repeated with different cases and different researchers the results will be the same or very similar. The replication refers to that the research is possible to be replicated by other researchers with the same or similar results. Validity refers to if the research demonstrates valid results and if the results can be generalized to other cases and studies (Bryman, 2012). The study was designed with qualitative and quantitative approaches. The data collected was grouped in categories with the use of a coding book that described different meanings and interpretations to these categories, a method described by Schreier (2012). The codebook was based on the framework for categorizing social media posts by Tafesse & Wien (2017). The replication aspect of this study might be compromised if another researcher categorizes the posts that fall into more than one category differently.

4.2. Sample selection

As previously mentioned in the literature review, the focus of the research is the social networking site Facebook, because it is currently the SNS platform with the biggest number of members in the world. Its website shows that in December of 2018 there were 2.34 billion active users per month and 1.52 billion active users per day (Facebook, 2019). The 15 brands with the highest amount of likes by users on Facebook, were analysed and the relevant material was collected. These 15 brands were: Samsung, Coca-Cola, Red Bull, Windows, Converse, Nike, Oreo, PlayStation, Pepsi, Starbucks, Nutella and iTunes. Figure 2 shows the number of likes received by each brand's Facebook page. The information regarding the most liked brands was initially acquired from the

Statistics website Statista (2019), thereafter the author updated the data with the current number of likes on the brands Facebook pages at the time of the study. Among the 15 most liked brands on Facebook, Facebook itself is the most popular one with the highest amount of likes on the platform. Aiming the impartiality of this research, Facebook was not considered a part of the analysis, even though it had not shared any content in the timeframe analysed. The time frame was considered regarding the scope of the explorative analysis and the number of posts shared by the official accounts. The author chose to focus on a period of 6 months, from September 2018 to March 2019.

Figure 2. Most popular product brands on Facebook as of April 2019



(source: own depiction based on Statista 2019)

The companies included in this research were from various branches. There is a field in the Facebook platform where one can disclose the field of the company. In the Facebook page, the company is characterized as a website. Samsung and Windows are classified as electronics or computer companies. Coca-Cola, Oreo, Pepsi, Starbucks Coffee and Nutella are food & beverage companies. Instagram is classified as an app page. Red Bull is media or news. Converse All Star and Adidas Originals are considered shopping and retail. PlayStation is a video game company and finally, iTunes and Nike Football are classified as product or service.

4.3. Operationalisation

The codebook of this research was based on the framework brought by Tafesse & Wien (2017) for categorizing social media posts. The framework contains the information about the main characteristics of the posts analysed in this research with the exception of one category derived from extensive note taking and reviewing of the material collected. The posts analysed were repeatedly reviewed by the author and notes of the different content of posts were listed in different types and formats. Subsequently, the author presented one new category to the framework and decided not to use three categories that did not appear, or it did not appear enough in the data collected and were therefore not important for this particular case. The three categories of the framework that were not included in this research were regarding functional posts, i.e. posts that highlight the brands' functionalities. Personal posts, there are the posts regarding personal relationship of customers and, employee posts, that regarded employees of the brand. In the data

collected, there were three employee posts by the same brand, Starbucks, which was not relevant for the main goal of this research. This study proposed the additional category “photo/video updates”, due to their appearance and lack of a category to group them in. Table 1 presents the nine categories proposed by Tafesse & Wien (2017) and the additional category observed in the data collection phase.

Table 1. Categories from the framework for categorizing social media posts and author's category

Post categories	Definition
Emotional	Brand posts that stimulate emotions to customers
Educational	Brand posts that aim to educate customers
Brand resonance	Brand posts that show the identity of the brand
Experiential	Brand posts that stimulate sensory and behavioral responses
Current event	Brand posts that comment actual events such as holidays
Brand community	Brand posts that encourage the online brand community
Customer relationship	Brand posts that ask feedback and customers' participation
Cause-related	Brand posts that promote social causes
Sales promotion	Brand posts that encourage the buying decision on customers
Photo/video update*	Brand posts with photos or videos update
*Note: author's category	

(source: Tafesse & Wien, 2017)

4.4. Pre-test

Initially, categories were created and ascribed to the posts gathered in the collection phase. The categories were created by the author of this study based on the frequency and types of content shared (Schreier, 2012). Later, the categories created by the author were compared to the framework for categorizing social media posts by Tafesse & Wien (2017) resulting in similar findings. The framework for categorizing social media posts presented by Tafesse & Wien (2017) were subsequently applied to the posts collected, substituting the initial categories.

4.5. Data collection and data analysis

The data collected in this research was drawn from one main source: the official brand pages on Facebook. From the 15 brands' Facebook pages that were analysed, two had not shared any content during the time frame studied, from September 2018 to the beginning of March 2019. The main study involved a total of 1256 posts from 13 brands which were later analysed. In order to collect the data, observations were first made on each brand's Facebook official page and the material, consisting of the content shared on the brands' pages such as date of posts, day of the week, type of post, category of content, description of content, likes, reactions, comments and shares received, were noted on Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. In addition, the same material, in other words the same posts from the same time frame, was collected through the application Netvizz for Facebook. Netvizz is a tool for the Facebook platform that enables analysis of various Facebook pages with different possibilities by extracting the pages' data for the purpose of research (Netvizz, 2019). In this study Netvizz was employed with the function to analyse the posts of the brands investigated. The same information gathered by the author's observations along with the Netvizz application was compared to increase reliability and validity. In addition, triangulation is a method of analysis that seeks to decrease uncertainty and researchers' bias through the use of multiple data sources (Renz et al., 2018).

Regarding the analysis phase, even though the program Microsoft Excel has been used mostly for quantitative analysis, it can be a valuable tool for qualitative analysis. In this research, Excel is the preferred method because of its logical formula coding function that enables nonnumerical data to be analysed (Meyer & Avery, 2008). The posts analysed in this phase were categorized based on the framework by Tafesse & Wien (2017), some of the posts analysed from the material collected fell into more than one category and were therefore sorted according to the main message of the post as perceived by the author of this study. In addition, one category was proposed as result of observations and the creation of a codebook with different themes that have emerged from the data in an inductive approach (Schreier, 2012). Furthermore, the data collected was mainly in the English language with the exception of Samsung, Coca-Cola and Pepsi that had global pages activated and were therefore in the Swedish language, based on the location of the author ([see 2.3.](#)).

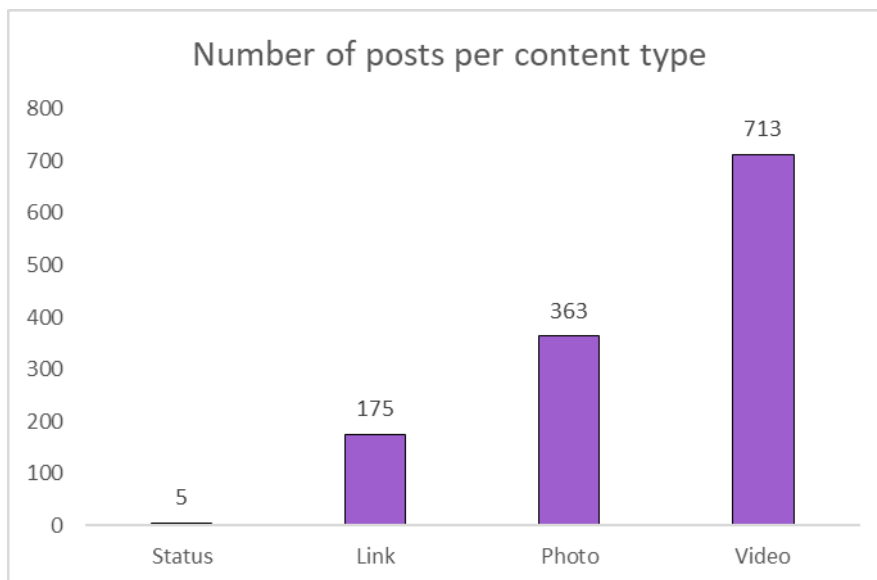
5. Results

This chapter presents the research findings of the data which is based on 1256 posts by the 15 most liked brands on Facebook in the selected time period. First, subchapter 5.1. and 5.1.1. examine which type of content that is shared by the brands (RQ1). The findings are divided by types of posts shared and their categories. Then, subchapter 5.2 investigates the engagement received on the posts (RQ2) and which communication approaches are used. Finally, subchapter 5.3 aims to analyse what type of content is the most shared by the brands (RQ2).

5.1. Type of content shared by the 15 most liked brands on Facebook

The data demonstrates that video was the preferred type of post within the selected sample. From the total of 1256 posts evaluated, 713 posts were videos, 363 were photos, 175 posts were links and only five posts were statuses (*Figure 3*).

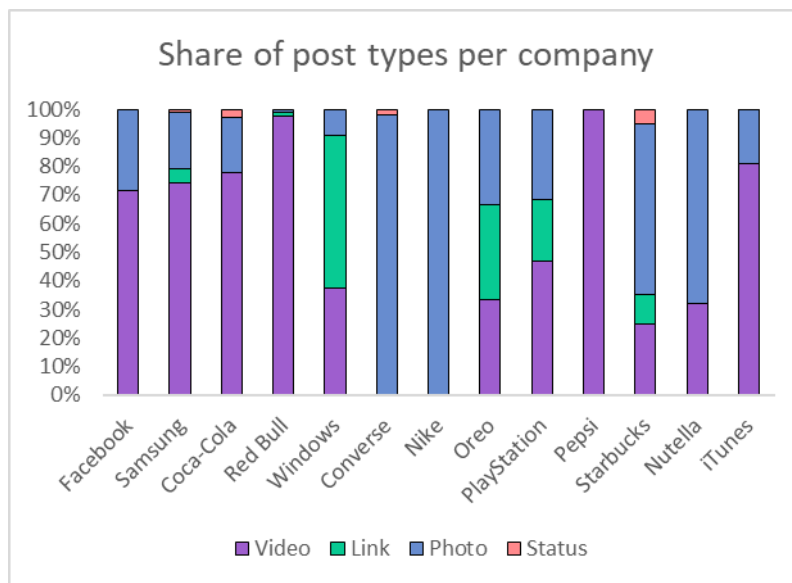
Figure 3. Most popular type of posts shared on Facebook (N=1256)



(source: own depiction based on Facebook data)

The percentage of videos shared by the brands considered was 56,8%. Photos were the second most shared type of content with 28,9%, followed by links with 13,9%. Lastly, status was the least popular type of post with only 0,4% of shares. Videos are clearly the majority of the total content shared, however, if analysing each company in an individual perspective, as Figure 4 shows, videos are not the favourite type of post by all the brands. Converse and Nike, for instance, shared mainly photos. Nike only shared one post, a photo, in the time frame analysed, and therefore its percentage of photo posts is very high. Converse shared 52 posts, of which 51 were photos, showing a preference for this type of post. On the other hand, Pepsi shared seven posts in the period investigated and all of them were videos. Following the same pattern, Red Bull shared 78 posts, of which 76 were videos. Other companies such as Oreo and PlayStation shared different types of content, with a more heterogenous approach.

Figure 4. Types of posts shared per company



(source: own depiction based on Facebook data)

As can be seen in Table 2, PlayStation had the highest number of posts among the brands in the study, with 562. The brand with the second highest number of posts was iTunes with 272. After these followed Windows, Red Bull, Samsung, Nutella, Converse, Coca-Cola, Starbucks, Facebook, and Pepsi. The two companies with the least amount of posts were Oreo with three posts and Nike with one post.

Table 2. Posts of brands divided by type of posts

Companies	Video	Link	Photo	Status	Total
Facebook	5		2		7
Samsung	57	4	15	1	77
Coca-Cola	28		7	1	36
Red Bull	76	1	1		78
Windows	33	47	8		88
Converse			51	1	52
Nike			1		1
Oreo	1	1	1		3
PlayStation	264	120	178		562
Pepsi	7				7
Starbucks	5	2	12	1	20
Nutella	17		36		53
iTunes	220		51	1	272
Grand Total	713	175	363	5	1256

(source: own depiction based on Facebook data)

The companies that shared more videos than other types of posts were Facebook, Samsung, Coca-Cola, Red Bull, PlayStation, Pepsi and iTunes. In contrast, Converse, Nike, Starbucks and Nutella

preferred to share more photos. Only Windows shared more links than other types of posts and Oreo shared the total of three posts, one video, one link and one photo.

5.1.1. Categories of posts shared

Based on their content, the posts were categorized according to the framework by Tafesse & Wien (2017). Some of the posts fell into more than one category and were therefore sorted according to the main message of the post as perceived by the author of this study. For illustration, some posts were identified as belonging to the current event category and sales promotion simultaneously, e.g. a Halloween post that also promoted a game or a post about the new year that also promoted a product. In these particular cases, the current event category was chosen as the main part of the message regarded the special date being celebrated.

The sales promotion category was highly shared by the brands on their pages, with a total number of 788 posts (*Table 3*). The highest number of posts of this category were shared by PlayStation followed by iTunes. Following sales promotion was the customer relationship category with 139 posts. Third, was the current event category with 109 posts. After these followed the experiential category, brand resonance, educational, photo/video update, brand community, and cause-related. Lastly, three emotional posts were shared.

Table 3. Posts by categories divided by companies

Post categories	Facebook	Samsung	Coca-Cola	Red Bull	Windows	Converse	Nike	Oreo	PlayStation	Pepsi	Starbucks	Nutella	iTunes	Total
Brand community	2	5			1				3		2	2	1	16
Brand resonance		4	6	1	3	3		2	16	1	5		2	43
Cause-related	1										5			6
Current event	3	11	16		7	4		1	18	2	4	18	25	109
Customer relationship		10	8	4	5				65			22	25	139
Educational		1			23				5					29
Emotional	1						1				1			3
Experiential			3	71	5				19				5	103
Photo/video update		2	1		1	2	1		12	1				20
Sales promotion		44	2	2	43	42			424	3	3	11	214	788
Total	7	77	36	78	88	52	1	3	562	7	20	53	272	1256

(source: own depiction based on Facebook data)

The least preferred category of posts was thereby the emotional. Concerning the posts in this category, one post was made by Facebook, one by Converse and one by Starbucks. The second least favourite category of posts was cause-related, with the total of six posts shared, and five of these posts were shared by Starbucks.

5.2. Type of post that create the highest engagement

With respect to the engagement element discussed in the literature review, the total number of comments, likes, reactions and shares made by users in the brands' posts will be analysed. This subsection presents the results regarding the amount of engagement per post, per category of posts, per week of the year and per day of the week.

5.2.1. Engagement by type of post

The engagement per post was analysed using the total engagement received by a type of post divided by the total amount of posts, generating the average engagement per post. The results show that the type of post that created the highest engagement was the photo, with an average of 3934 engagement per post. Video was the second most engaged type with an average of 2831

engagement per post. Link had 1666 engagement per post. Finally, status had the lowest engagement per post, with a total of 797. Status was also the least shared type of post (Table 4).

Table 4. Visualisation of types and numbers of posts, and engagement per post

Type of posts	Number of posts	Number of engagement per post
Link	175	1666
Photo	363	3934
Status	5	797
Video	713	2831

(source: own depiction based on Facebook data)

These results demonstrate that the most popular type of posts shared by the studied brands, video, is not the type of post that results in the highest engagement. The type of post with the highest engagement is photo, the second most shared.

5.2.2. Engagement by category of post

The engagement performance per post category is also further investigated. Table 5 displays the total engagement by category of post as well as the average engagement per post. The highest engagement per post is the cause-related.

Table 5. Visualisation of total of posts by categories and engagement and engagement per post

Post categories	Number of posts	Number of engagement	Number of engagement per post
Cause-related	6	141659	23610
Emotional	3	34262	11421
Current event	109	835544	7666
Experiential	103	625071	6069
Brand community	16	68466	4279
Brand resonance	43	137224	3191
Photo/video update	20	46631	2332
Sales promotion	788	1649293	2093
Customer relationship	139	193536	1392
Educational	29	10823	373
Total	1256	3742509	2980

(source: own depiction based on Facebook data)

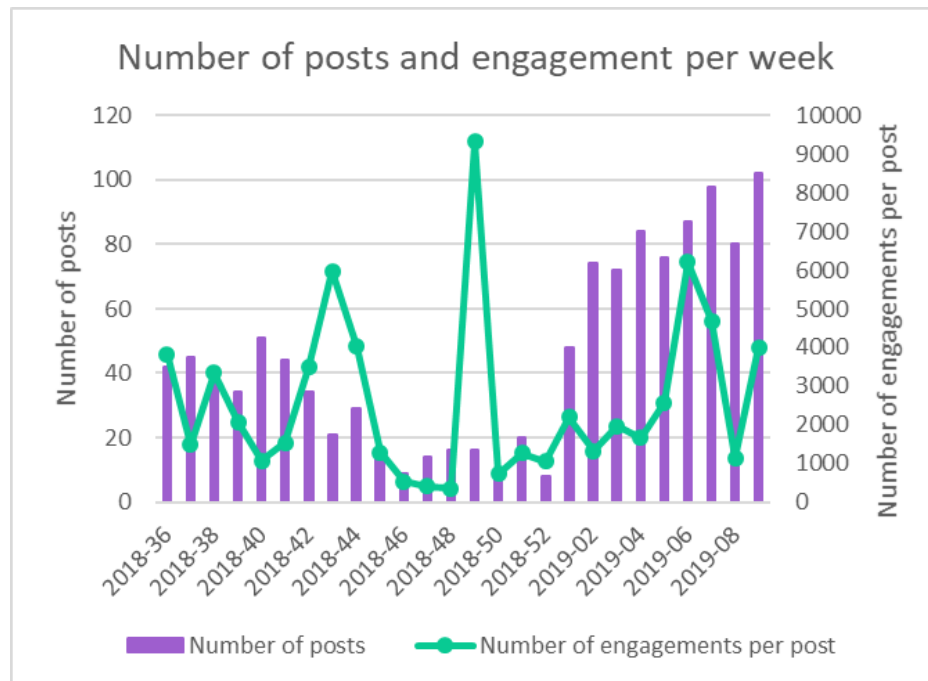
Cause-related posts were not broadly shared by companies, in fact, only six posts of this category were shared. In the same line, the emotional post category received the second highest engagement per post with only three posts shared. This implies that further research regarding these particular categories of posts is needed to achieve significant results. The current event post category comes in third place with the highest engagement per post, with a significant number of posts shared in this category.

The posts with the lowest engagement per post are the educational ones. The number considered is low when compared to the other categories. There were 29 posts shared by brands in this category, Windows was the company with the highest number of shares with 23 educational posts.

5.2.3. Frequency of posts per week

The analysed data also show the brands' posting activity in periods of time, for example, weeks of the year. The engagement per week of the year is analysed. Figure 5 displays the weeks counting from the first full week analysed in this research, the 36th week of 2018, from September 3rd to September 9th, as well as the last full week analysed in this research, the eight week of 2019, from February 18th to February 24th. Data collected from the first and last weeks of the time frame are not considered in this subchapter as they were not full weeks, that is they did not include data for all seven weekdays.

Figure 5. Visualisation of number of posts and engagement per week



(source: own depiction based on Facebook data)

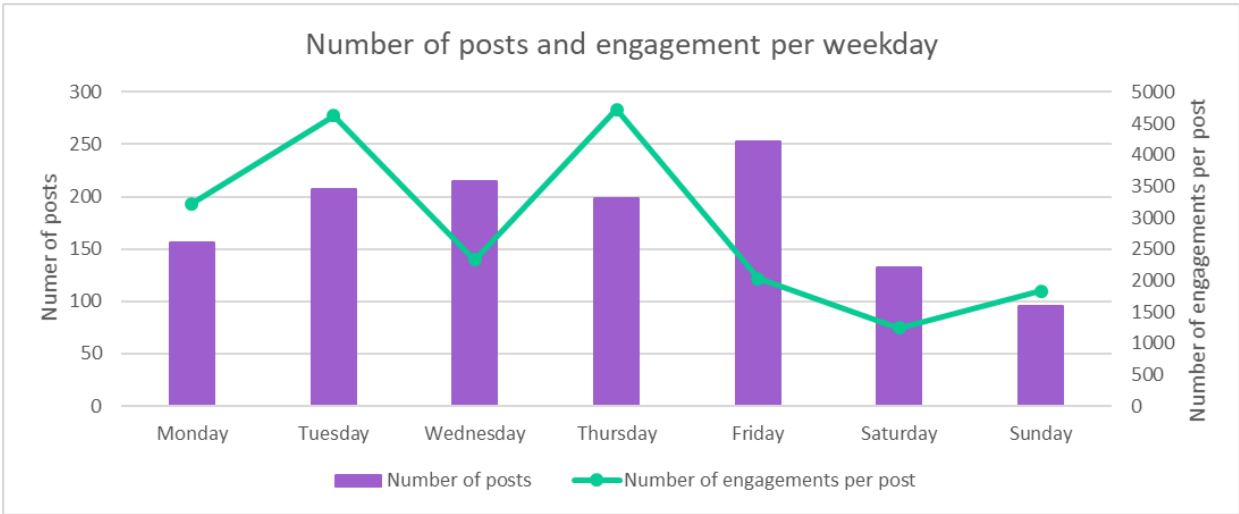
The results show the difference in numbers of shared posts per week of the year. The most shares of posts occurred in between week 2 to week 9 of 2019. The numbers of posts shared in the year 2019 are considerably higher than the number of posts shared in 2018. The week with the lowest number of posts shared is the week 46 of 2018, from November 12th to November 18th, and the week with the highest number is the last full week analysed, from February 25th to March 3rd. Additionally, when analysing the engagement aspect, the week 49 of 2018 had a higher engagement in comparison to the other weeks. One video shared by PlayStation during this week received the third highest engagement in the data. The engagement in this post is 125748, hence the high engagement in comparison to the number of posts shared. The 10 posts with highest engagement are further analysed in subchapter 5.4.

5.2.4. Frequency of posts per weekday

As Figure 6 displays, Friday was the most popular weekday to share content among the selected brands, followed by Wednesday, Tuesday, Thursday and Monday. The least popular days were Sunday and Saturday. In contrast, the highest engagement received per post was on Thursdays,

followed by Tuesdays. Saturdays and Sundays are the days of the week with the lowest engagement per post (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Representation of number of posts and engagement per weekday



(source: own depiction based on Facebook data)

The selected companies shared more content on Fridays, the weekday that according to the data did not receive as much engagement. They did however share the lowest number of content on Sundays, the day with the second lowest total engagement.

5.3. Top 10 posts with the highest engagement

To provide a deeper understanding of the nature of the most engaged posts, Table 6 presents the 10 posts with the highest engagement in more detail:

Table 6. 10 posts with highest engagement

Company	Type of post	Description	Category of post	Week number	Weekday	Engagement
Nutella	Photo	The post is about 'World Nutella Day', and it displays a photo of a Nutella jar with a text asking consumers how they will celebrate the day	Current event	2019-06	Tuesday	370276
Facebook	Photo	The photo is a Valentine's card with an animated couple. The text includes an emoji and the artist's name	Current event	2019-07	Thursday	174126
PlayStation	Video	The video and the post's text are promoting a video game	Sales promotion	2018-49	Friday	125748
Facebook	Photo	The photo shows a Valentine's card made by an artist with a drawing of a chocolate box	Current event	2019-07	Thursday	97377
Starbucks	Video	signing store. The description reflects on the diverse communities of consumers	Cause-related	2018-43	Tuesday	81491
Red Bull	Video	The video displays Danny MacAskill, a cyclist, doing a trick with the bicycle	Experiential	2019-09	Sunday	77807
Red Bull	Video	The video is about an air show and shows a journey in an aircraft	Experiential	2019-09	Thursday	64327
Red Bull	Video	The video displays a soul flyer in France, flying in snowy slopes	Experiential	2019-10	Tuesday	60764
Red Bull	Video	The post is about windsurfing in violent conditions. It promotes the contest Storm Chase 2019	Experiential	2019-10	Thursday	58009
Red Bull	Video	The video presents a trailer of a movie about the snowboarder Mark McMorris and it gives the link to Red Bull TV where the movie is available	Brand resonance	2019-10	Monday	50667

(source: own depiction based on Facebook data)

There are some similarities between the posts. Four of them are experiential and three are current event. Three posts were shared on Thursdays and three on Tuesdays. Seven posts are of videos and three of photos. Three posts display thematic photos without persons. The last five videos were shared by the same company and related to sports or athletes.

6. Discussion

With the high increase of social media usage during recent years (Obar & Wildman, 2015). It is imperative to understand which types of content and social media strategies that generate higher engagement with customers. The following section will present the discussion of the findings regarding types and categories of shared posts and engagement approaches based on social presence online. The results showed that 13 brands shared some content during the studied six months, while two brands did not share any post. The discussion will be structured into three parts: the result's consistency with the literature, interesting findings, and practical implications for companies.

6.1. Consistency with the literature

The most shared type of posts in this study was the video, followed by photos. This contrasts earlier studies (Eftekhar et al., 2014) which state that photos are the most shared post category. Nikolinakou & King (2018) observe that using videos is an important tool for brands to connect with consumers online. Short et al. (1976) also regard the video as a richer medium when compared to audio, telephone and business letter. In this scenario, adapting the social presence to the social media layout, the video is a richer medium in comparison with photo, status and link. The results of this study indicate, however, that video merely generated the second highest number of engagement; the type of post with the highest level of engagement was the photo. It seems that the media with the highest social presence was not the one that users interacted or engaged the most with. This could be due to that watching videos is more time-consuming than watching photos, which makes it easier for the user to understand and interact with the message of photos. Therefore, it seems as if the social presence theory alone cannot explain which type of post that generates the most engagement.

Five posts of the status category were shared by the selected brands in the time frame analysed. This study also shows that status was the least engaged type of post, even though more statuses should be analysed to draw any conclusions regarding their engagement. A status is a text message, and therefore it can be considered as having a lower level of social presence than videos or photos (Short et al., 1976). Statuses have shown the lowest engagement of the posts which is consistent to the social presence theory, but not consistent with earlier research that has found status to be the type of post producing the highest engagement (Cvijjak et al., 2011; Moro et al., 2016). In the same spirit, links are also text messages and have a lower level of social presence (Short et al., 1976) producing lower engagement among customers.

Regarding the content of the posts, the most shared category of posts within this study was sales promotion. This category, as earlier mentioned, aims to influence customers' buying decisions (Tafesse & Wien, 2017). As social media increasingly becomes a platform for brands to do marketing, it is also an indispensable tool to influence customer decision making (Pentina et al., 2018) and therefore it is expected that companies are using social media for this purpose. Sales promotion was, however, not the post category that generated the highest number of engagement in this study. This could be due to the fact that people do not like commercials or marketing appearing on their social media pages (Arnaboldi & Coget, 2016; Pentina et al., 2018). Moreover, this post category does not create any deep connection between the brand and its customers, revealing a lower social presence (Osei et al., 2018).

Cause-related and emotional posts had the highest average engagement among customers in this study. These categories have a higher level of social presence as they can influence people's

emotions and involve the customers in a deeper perspective, providing a feeling of belonging, as well as the possibility of participating or supporting a cause (Short et al., 1976). These post categories enhance the intimacy and immediacy, in consonance with the theory developed by Short et al. (1976). As suggested by Swani & Milne (2017) emotional posts create more engagement. The findings of this study are, however, limited due to the small sample sizes of these post categories.

The second most shared post category was the customer relationship. This category aims to involve the customer and has a higher level of social presence as it decreases the psychological distance between the users and the brand by engaging in a direct communication (Short et al., 1976; Tu, 2000). Yet, this category did not present high engagement, as these posts were the second least engaged by users. Following the customer relationship category was the current event. These posts were vastly shared and relate to special events that happen during a year such as Christmas or seasonal competitions (Tafesse & Wien, 2017). The least engaged post category is the educational. This can be interpreted through the low social presence of these posts. Even though the message is clear and defined, there is a lack of immediacy and intimacy that creates a bigger distance between the brand and the customer (Short et al., 1976). Windows is the company that shared the most educational posts in this study. An understanding of Windows products is necessary for customers to be able to fully use the products and services provided, and therefore the high number of posts of this category might still be a reasonable approach taken by the company.

6.2. Interesting findings

Some strategies were identified to promote customer engagement online. The categories of posts can be further analysed regarding the brands' product portfolios. PlayStation is the company with the highest number of posts, which could be explained through the wide range and continuous releases of its products. On the contrary, Red Bull and Pepsi have a limited number of products and new releases to promote and one interpretation of the results could therefore be that they focus on different kinds of content. It is possible to conclude that each company plans their communication strategies on Facebook based on various factors such as their product and service lines. Through the lenses of social presence theory (Short et al., 1976), a brand does not always need to share new content but should share *some* content with frequency. Coca-Cola and Nutella are also examples of companies with limited products that have a big number of posts of different categories, and which also receive high engagement. Sales promotion posts were vastly shared but received lower engagement, whereas cause-related, emotional and current event posts received high engagement. These results suggest that companies might consider increasing these categories of posts in order to increase customer engagement; to strive for a balance between sales promotion posts and other categories, that generate higher engagement, seems advantageous to both be able to market products and obtain a closer connection with the consumers. Another finding in this study was that current event was the third most shared post, as well as the category with the third highest number of engagement per post. Thus, the results suggest that the brands participating in this research are sharing a proper amount of current event posts on their platforms in regard to user engagement.

Concerning the time aspect of the posts in this study, the first quarter of 2019 had significantly more posts than the last quarter of 2018. However, the highest number of engagement per post occurred in week 49 2018. A longer time frame is necessary to find seasonal trends regarding posts shared and engagement, to for instance conclude that more posts are shared in the beginning or the end of the year. Fridays and Wednesdays were the most popular days for brands to share content, and early research in the area has found similar results (Cvijikj et al., 2011). The results of this study, nevertheless, indicate a higher average engagement on Thursdays and Tuesdays. To draw

conclusions from this result, further studies will need to verify the results and determine if weekdays should be considered when planning a social media strategy.

Special events such as festivals or sports competitions may also influence engagement. In a deeper analysis of week 49 2019, one post with a high number of engagement was identified. The post by PlayStation with 125748 number of engagement is a video promoting a game ([see 5.3](#)). This video shows the game with texts explaining that is a popular product update, this post has a high level of intimacy with the users regarding the familiarity of it as well as a high level of social presence (Short et al., 1976; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The second next high engaged week is week 6 of 2019 ([see 5.3](#)). The post with the highest number of engagement in total was shared this week. It was shared by Nutella and regards the “Nutella day”. This post is a photo and therefore does not have the same level of social presence as a video, but it engages with the customers through text, with the caption “Happy World Nutella Day! How are you celebrating and in which part of the world? Comment here with the name of your city!”. This post engages directly with customers by asking a question and decreasing the physical distance between brand and customer (Short et al., 1976) and motivating users to interact with the post (Su et al., 2015). An interesting observation is that Nutella is the 14th most liked brand on Facebook, second last in the sample of this research, but still has the most engaged post.

Lastly, an interesting finding regarding the 10 most engaged posts ([see 5.3](#)) is that no link or status is on the list. Emotional and cause-related were the posts that received the highest engagement but were not among the top 10 most engaged posts.

6.3. Implications

The results show that higher engagement was received in photos than in videos, in contrast to the social presence theory (Short et al., 1976). This can be adopted by brands that aim to have higher engagement. The study also shows that the most engaged categories are not greatly shared. If a bigger sample size would confirm these findings, then brands should focus more on posting these kind of posts. That is, cause-related, emotional and current event posts. Brands should also consider the different purposes of the categories of posts. Sales promotion posts, for example, aim to sell products whereas the cause-related post promotes a cause. A heterogeneous approach to posts can be followed to achieve the company’s goals and customers’ varied preferences (Felix et al., 2017) and posts from all the categories explored can be exposed to the social media audience. Further, through the light of the social presence theory (Short et al., 1976; Osei & McLean, 2018), the relationship created between the brands and the customers is an influence on customers’ buying decisions, and therefore, companies might consider balancing their sales promotions posts with posts that generate higher engagement. This study indicates that the researched companies utilize different strategies for their social media communication based on their customers and offerings, in line with the findings of Swani & Milne (2017). Companies with less frequent product releases or smaller product lines may, for instance, focus on other categories such as current-event as an alternative for sales promotion to maintain the relationship with the consumers online.

7. Conclusion

The continuous growth of social media usage and its increasing impact on business success, points to the importance of studying how businesses can benefit from using social media to communicate with their customers. This study had the purpose of determining which type of content that companies share on social media, and to identify possible approaches to keep and increase customer engagement. To achieve this objective, the 15 most liked brands on Facebook were investigated to analyse which content they share and how they engage with their customers through the lenses of social presence theory (Short et al., 1976) and through applying a framework for categorizing social media posts (Tafesse & Wien, 2017). This research provides insights and understanding of how social media can serve as a tool for brands to generate higher engagement among customers through an explorative, descriptive approach.

The findings suggest that video is the most shared type of post, followed by photo, link and status. This study further divided the content of the posts into ten categories, of which sales promotion posts were the most shared, followed by customer relationship, current event and experiential posts. An analysis of the results indicates that brands focus on sharing different categories of posts according to their product and service lines, which seems to be an important factor for brands when choosing which social media strategy to pursue. The results also show that photo is the type of post that creates the highest engagement, in contrast to the social presence theory that states that video is a richer medium and therefore has higher social presence. The post categories that promote higher engagement were found to be cause-related, emotional and current event. Further empirical research with larger sample sizes in the cause-related and emotional categories might still be needed to ascertain this finding. Using different categories of posts, through for instance combining sales promotion posts with current event or other categories that generate higher engagement, seems beneficial to achieve the brands' goals and satisfy customers' varied preferences.

7.1. Limitations

Certain limitations to this research need to be addressed. The framework proposed by Tafesse & Wien (2017), which was used to categorize the content of posts in this study, considers posts as belonging to merely one category. In this research, many posts belonging to more than one category were found. The central idea of the posts, as perceived by the author, was then used to categorize them. This might have affected the research results. Additionally, cultural and geographical aspects were not taken into consideration, which regards pages that had the Swedish global page activated and shared content to the Swedish market. Different content may be found on these global pages in different locations.

7.2. Future research

This study contributes with knowledge in the social media field. There is, however, still a lot to explore within the area. Further research is necessary regarding the timing of posts, such as analysing seasonal trends, as this aspect can have an influence in engagement. Additional research regarding the cause-related and emotional posts is necessary to be able to conclude their efficacy to achieve higher engagement. The brands investigated are also not necessarily the brands with the highest engagement, but the most liked brands overall on Facebook. Future research could for instance focus on analysing the brands with the highest engagement per follower. Also, this study does not distinguish between positive and negative engagement, which for instance might occur when customers complain through comments. Further research is necessary to conclude which

social media strategies influence these two types of engagement. Lastly, brands' activities and engagement on social media can be further analysed based on which branch or industry they belong to. The potential and possible topics for future research within the field of social media communication are many.

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Appendice

Appendix A. Codebook – Posts categories

Post categories	Definition
Emotional	Brand posts that stimulate emotions to customers through inspiring stories aiming customers' response. E.g. storytelling
Educational	Brand posts that aim to educate customers to acquire knowledge and skills regarding a product or service
Brand resonance	Brand posts that show the identity of the brand such as brand logo, slogan or character
Experiential	Brand posts that stimulate sensory and behavioral responses. E.g. musical or sports events, sponsored events
Current event	Brand posts that comment actual events such as holidays, weather/season, anniversaries
Brand community	Brand posts that encourage the online brand community by encouraging fans to become members and share brands' content
Customer relationship	Brand posts that ask feedback and customers' participation by asking for feedback, reviews and testimonies
Cause-related	Brand posts that promote social causes and encourage customers to support them
Sales promotion	Brand posts that encourage the buying decision on customers. Common topics are sales, free samples, and product promotion
Photo/video update*	Brand posts with photos or videos update, usually cover photo or video or profile photo
*Note: author's category	

(source: based on Tafesse & Wien, 2017)