Content with Content?

A qualitative study on the implementation, maturity and future of inbound marketing strategies in the Swedish B2B sector

MASTER THESIS WITHIN: Business Administration

NUMBER OF CREDITS: 30 ECTS

PROGRAMME OF STUDY: Civilekonom

AUTHORS: Adam Halldén & Axel Dahlin

TUTOR: Selcen Öztürkcan

JÖNKÖPING May 2018
Master Thesis in Business Administration

Title: Content with Content?
Authors: Adam Halldén & Axel Dahlin
Tutor: Selcen Özturkc
Date: 2018-05-21

Key terms: Inbound Marketing, B2B, Digitalisation, SEO, SEM, Content, Social Media, Buyer-Seller Relationship

Abstract

Background: There is a knowledge gap in the B2B-businesses adoption of inbound marketing strategies. The B2B sector has a substantial economic impact on the society and their marketing activities need to adapt towards the digital era. In the Swedish market, this has not yet been sufficiently researched up until this point.

Purpose: This study serves to provide insight in key issues and problems when B2B businesses incorporate inbound marketing strategies. The maturity in the Swedish B2B market aims to be investigated and implementation problems to be highlighted. This information could aid Swedish B2B businesses in the future by becoming aware of issues beforehand. Also, this can give B2B businesses beneficial insights when the sector is increasingly adopting inbound marketing in the future.

Method: In order to achieve in-depth understanding on the subject, a qualitative study with an exploratory design was conducted. By judgemental sampling methods, the research incorporates insights by knowledgeable industry professionals. Empirical findings were conducted through semi-structured interviews in which participants were encouraged to discuss inbound marketing in a B2B context in both detailed and broader terms.

Conclusion: This study show that digital marketing is widely adopted in a B2B context, but inbound marketing strategy maturity is difficult to measure on a scale from this type of research. Key issues to implementation are organisational issues within a business, difficulty to determine goals, lack of knowledge in management about digital channels and possibilities, in addition to changing behaviour by B2B sales representatives. The future is looking bright for inbound marketing strategies even after the GDPR takes effect in May 2018, this study has shown.
Acknowledgements

The authors would like to place their sincere appreciation to all people who, either directly or indirectly, contributed in the development of this thesis. A special acknowledgement is directed towards tutor Selcen Öztürkcan who, with her guidance and support, helped the authors in their journey towards finalising this thesis. Adele Berndt at Jönköping University is also greatly thanked for providing the authors with inspiration and knowledge, in addition to always being available when questions needed to be asked. Appreciation is further expressed to all of the participants who took part in the interviews of this study. Without your participation, it is not farfetched to say that this study would not have been possible. Also, the authors would like to place their gratitude to the participants of the seminar groups who provided the authors with valuable and insightful feedback which enabled the authors to make this thesis the best it could be.

Adam Halldén
Jönköping International Business School
May 2018

Axel Dahlin
Table of Contents

1. Introduction .............................................................................. 1
   1.1. Background and Problem Definition .................................. 1
   1.2. Purpose and Research Questions ...................................... 2
   1.3. Delimitations .................................................................... 3
   1.4. Contributions .................................................................... 3
   1.5. Key Definitions .................................................................. 4

2. Frame of Reference ................................................................. 6
   2.1. B2B Buyer-Seller Relationship and Digitalisation .................. 6
   2.2. Digital Inbound Marketing ................................................ 8
   2.3. Content Marketing ........................................................... 10
   2.4. Search Engine Optimization .............................................. 11
   2.4.1. Search Engine Marketing and Pay-Per-Click .................... 12
   2.5. Mobile Marketing ............................................................ 13
   2.6. Social Media Marketing .................................................... 14
   2.7. E-mail Marketing ............................................................. 15
   2.8. General Data Protection Regulation ................................... 16

3. Method .................................................................................. 18
   3.1. Research Philosophy ....................................................... 18
   3.2. Research Approach ........................................................ 19
   3.3. Research Design ............................................................. 19
   3.4. Semi-Structured Interviews .............................................. 19
   3.4.1. Pilot Interview ............................................................ 21
   3.4.2. Execution and Handling the Data ................................... 21
   3.4.3. Interview Questions .................................................... 23
   3.5. Sampling ......................................................................... 24
   3.5.1. Participants ................................................................. 25
3.5.2. Sample Size...........................................................................................................25
3.6. Data Analysis and Interpretation ........................................................................26
3.7. Quality Assessment ............................................................................................27
3.7.1. Integrity of The Data.........................................................................................27
3.7.2. Balance Between Reflexivity and Subjectivity.............................................28
3.7.3. Clear Communication of Findings.................................................................28

4. **Empirical Findings**............................................................................................29
4.1. Interview Information.........................................................................................29
4.2. Topic Themes ....................................................................................................30
4.2.1. Buyer-Seller Relationship............................................................................30
4.2.2. Digital Strategy Decision Making ...............................................................35
4.2.3. Communication Channels............................................................................41
4.2.4. Content in Marketing Communications......................................................46
4.2.5. Inbound Marketing and Future ....................................................................50
4.3. Summary of Empirical Findings......................................................................60

5. **Analysis** ..........................................................................................................62
5.1. Buyer-Seller Relationship................................................................................62
5.2. Digital Strategy Decision Making ....................................................................63
5.3. Communication Channels................................................................................64
5.4. Content in Marketing Communications............................................................67
5.5. Inbound Marketing and Future .........................................................................68
5.6. Connecting the Dots and Theoretical Suggestions ............................................70

6. **Conclusion and Discussion** .............................................................................74
6.1. What are the perceived key aspects and challenges when implementing inbound marketing techniques in a B2B context? ................74
6.2. How mature are B2B companies in their inbound marketing development? ............................................................................................................75
6.3. To which extent will inbound marketing techniques be part of future marketing strategies for B2B companies? ......................................................... 76
6.4. Relevance of the Study and Managerial Implications ...................... 76
6.5. Further Research Suggestions.................................................... 77
6.6. Societal and Ethical Effects ......................................................... 78

7. **List of References** ........................................................................... 79

8. **Appendix 1** ................................................................................... 83

Interview Guideline, Semi-Structured Interviews ..................................... 83
Table of Tables

Table 1. The main differences between traditional marketing and digital inbound marketing as defined by Opreana & Vinerean, (2015, p 30.)..........................9

Table 2. Information concerning the conducted interviews. ..............................................29

Table 3. Key points identified in Empirical Findings. ..........................................................60

Table of Figures

Figure 1. Zipper Alignment. Visualisation of the necessary connection between the sales and marketing departments within the organisation. .......................71

Figure 2. Cogwheel Interaction. Visualisation of the importance of engaging the customer during all stages of the marketing activities conducted by the organisation........................................................................................................72

Figure 3. The Inbound Marketing Organisation. Visualisation highlighting the importance of having all the relevant departments of an organisation involved in the inbound marketing strategy. ...............................................................73
“People are not rational creatures, we are emotional creatures. The way we act and what we feel all stem from emotions. The people who find the keys to where our emotions are created and what they lead to will be the successful marketers of the future.” – Participant 7
1. Introduction

In the introductory chapter, the authors aim is to provide the reader with an insight to the topic at hand and explain the relevance and motivation of conducting the study. Firstly, the background and definition of the problem are presented, followed by the purpose and the research questions that will guide the study. Next, delimitations of the study are presented, and the chapter will conclude with an outline of the key definitions used in the study.

1.1. Background and Problem Definition

Lilien (2016) claimed that the business-to-business (B2B) sector worldwide in 2010, according to the most recent numbers available at the time, involved 50 trillion USD in transactions. It is not farfetched to suggest that this number has most likely increased since. In a field that creates vast amount of transactions, Lilien (2016) argued that the amount of research being conducted in the B2B sector is lacking in magnitude.

B2B firms have historically relied on their superior technology to give them an advantage in the market. The norm in the marketplace used to be showing the logic behind using the product since B2B buyers are more rational than consumers in their purchasing decision (Balkhi, 2017; Lake, 2017; Lilien, 2016). Thus, emphasis on how the product for example saves time and money for the client is more effective. The technical barriers that have been in place for a long time have, in more recent years, diminished due to rapid technological advancements and innovations. What matters more today is to have greater understanding of the customer needs and how to best fulfil the customer demand (Lilien, 2016; Wiersema, 2013).

In a B2B context, the norm used to be talking to rather than with the customer, about the company offering. However, this is no longer the case. With increased understanding and usability of the Internet, B2B-buyers now search for information themselves to a larger extent which has opened up a new way of thinking about marketing in the B2B context. With customers being more certain about their needs, it can be argued that pull marketing strategies are more efficient. (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). Therefore, brands have adapted a pull strategy, which is called inbound marketing (Chaffey & Smith, 2013).

Inbound marketing is mostly digital marketing strategies which serves to draw the customer towards the company, instead of the company going out to find their customer (Zilincan, 2015). With inbound marketing strategies, the communication between buyer and seller now goes both ways and circle more around customer needs instead of the product. Tools and channels to shorten the knowledge gap between seller and buyer that are available for brands have increased in number. Social media channels, such as company blogs and LinkedIn, are available to everyone and are often used to provide product information and generate brand awareness (Holliman & Rowley, 2014).
Wiersema (2013) suggested that the business-to-consumer (B2C) marketplace has been an earlier adopter in terms of customer need focus than the B2B marketplace. As aforementioned, the explanation to why this is the case is suggested to be due to B2B firms being more focused on keeping their competitive advantage in terms of technology (Wiersema, 2013). It is not farfetched to suggest that the fast advancements made in technology and innovation in the last years has allowed smaller firms to catch up to the larger firms. Arguably, this is part of the reason to B2B firms putting more emphasis on the customer needs to keep their market position.

1.2. Purpose and Research Questions

As previously mentioned, inbound marketing strategies have been further implemented in the B2C industry. However, in a B2B context, literature suggests that these techniques are still somewhat unexplored or used in a different manner compared to the B2C industry (Wiersema, 2013). Consequently, previous research regarding inbound marketing strategies and its maturity in the B2B sector is scarce in general. In the Swedish market, the authors suggest that research is virtually non-existent.

With the aforementioned background in mind, the purpose of this study will be to gain understanding about implementation issues that may occur when B2B companies incorporate inbound marketing strategies. In addition, the authors will investigate the maturity of these strategies and how B2B companies can utilize the associated advantages with inbound marketing in their future endeavours.

As a result of this study, the authors intention is to understand how inbound marketing strategies could be implemented in the B2B context. The authors hope to achieve insights in key issues regarding implementation of inbound marketing strategies in the context of Swedish B2B organisations. Furthermore, the aspiration is to provide insight on how B2B companies best can adopt these strategies in the future, in order to succeed with their marketing efforts. Finally, the authors hope that the findings of this study will contribute to further consideration and future research on the topic at hand in order to diminish the aforementioned knowledge gap.
In order to connect to the presented purpose, the authors aspire to answer the research questions presented below:

**RQ1:** What are the perceived key issues and challenges when implementing inbound marketing strategies in a B2B context?

**RQ2:** How mature are B2B companies in their inbound marketing development?

**RQ3:** To which extent will inbound marketing techniques be part of future marketing strategies for B2B companies?

### 1.3. Delimitations

The purpose of this study is to explore the implementation and maturity of inbound marketing strategies in the B2B sector. Consequently, the following thesis will exclusively focus on B2B companies located in Sweden who are currently using, or are planning to use, inbound marketing strategies in their marketing efforts. Furthermore, the empirical data in this study will solely be gathered from B2B business professionals and industry experts who possess extensive knowledge and insight on the subject at hand. As for the various tools encompassed by inbound marketing, the authors have chosen to somewhat limit the tools examined in order to better fit the purpose of this study. Consequently, the tools that will be included in this study are content marketing, search engine optimization, search engine marketing, e-mail marketing, social media marketing and mobile marketing.

### 1.4. Contributions

This thesis aims to contribute with deeper knowledge and understanding regarding how B2B companies can implement inbound marketing strategies and the associated effects with these strategies. Also, this study will try to highlight the maturity of inbound marketing amongst B2B companies. The findings provided in this thesis could be of beneficial use in decision-making processes for companies in the B2B sector who are currently using or are planning to implement inbound marketing strategies as part of their marketing strategies. In addition, the theoretical contribution of the thesis could work as an insightful reference point for future academics who wishes to investigate the researched topic further, or from a different perspective. As mentioned in Section 1.2,
research on inbound marketing in the Swedish B2B market is virtually non-existent. Therefore, this thesis aims to begin filling this obvious knowledge gap.

1.5. Key Definitions

Definitions of key terms, as interpreted by the authors of this thesis, presented in alphabetical order.

**Business-to-business (B2B):**

Business-to-business refers to the relationship between two businesses. Thus, a B2B company can be described as a company that specializes in selling products or services to other businesses rather than directly to end consumers (Harrison, van Hoek, & Skipworth, 2014).

**Content Marketing:**

Pulizzi (2012) defined content marketing as “the creation and distribution of educational and/or compelling content in multiple formats to attract and/or retain customers”. Furthermore, content marketing could be described as a strategy that is focusing on creating a valuable experience for the customers (Rose & Pulizzi, 2011).

**Customer Relationship Management (CRM):**

Customer Relationship Management could be referred to as “a cross-functional organisational process that emphasises establishing, maintaining and enhancing relationship longevity with core customers of the organisation.” To handle the knowledge and organisation around the CRM process, companies can incorporate CRM-based technology and software in their operations (Bhat & Darzi, 2016).

**Digitalisation:**

Digitalisation is referred to as the way that many domains of our social life has been restructured from traditional channels to digital communication and media infrastructures (Brennen & Kreiss, 2016).

**Inbound Marketing:**

The act of setting up marketing strategies which enables companies to be found by their customers rather than the companies trying to find customers themselves. In other words, inbound marketing can be referred to as the opposite of traditional outbound marketing which is the process in which a company actively seeks to find new customers through for example print and TV advertising (Zilincan, 2015). The inbound marketing strategies that will be covered in the following study includes content marketing, search engine
optimization, search engine marketing, mobile marketing, social media marketing and e-mail marketing.

**Pay-Per-Click (PPC):**

Pay-Per-Click is a method within digital marketing in which advertisements are placed on websites and each time these are clicked, money is generated to the website (Doyle, 2016).

**Search Engine Marketing (SEM):**

Search Engine Marketing can be described as a collection name for all activities companies use in order to raise visibility in search engines, such as Google. The overall objective is the generate more traffic to the company’s website (Moran & Hunt, 2008).

**Search Engine Optimization (SEO):**

Search Engine Optimization techniques refers to the act of making sure that your website is shown as one of the first results in organic search results such as Google. By using a number of various modifications and techniques, search engines can code, index and understand the content of a website which then can lead to an increase in Internet traffic to your website (Zilincan, 2015).

**Social Media Marketing (SMM):**

Social Media Marketing could be described as the usage of social media platforms and websites by companies to promote a specific product or service. The objectives of SMM include increasing brand awareness and sales, improving brand image, generating traffic to the company’s website, and reducing marketing costs. In addition, companies can achieve user interaction with their customers by encouraging them to post and share content (Felix, Rauschnabel, & Hinsch, 2017).
2. Frame of Reference

The aim of this chapter is to present the reader to a relevant and existing theoretical base of the study. Therefore, in order to facilitate the reader’s understanding, a thorough literature review will be presented which will later be used when analysing the findings of the study.

Inbound marketing encompasses a wide variety of techniques that can be used by companies in their marketing efforts (Patrutiu-Baltes, 2016). To give the reader a thorough overview, the authors will start this chapter by explaining the relationship between the B2B buyer and seller, and how they have been affected by digitalisation. Next, the literature available on inbound marketing will be presented, followed by a detailed examination of each technique that are included in this marketing strategy. The examined techniques have been chosen by the authors with the support of previous research on inbound marketing, in addition to their relevance of this study. On a final note, in May of 2018, a new legislation from the EU Council and Parliament acting towards how companies handle customer data will take effect (O’Connor, 2017). Inbound marketing as a marketing strategy is largely driven by customer information and personal data. Consequently, this will most probably have an effect on company’s processes in terms of inbound marketing and could therefore be connected to research question one. To better understand the future effects of the new legislation, called the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the authors deemed it necessary to include it in the literature review.

2.1. B2B Buyer-Seller Relationship and Digitalisation

The traditional view on the B2B buying process is that it can be divided into three phases: information gathering, product evaluation, and purchase (Grewal et al., 2015). Information gathering refers to identifying the need, searching for alternatives, and setting criteria for usage and purchase. Product evaluation involves evaluating different alternatives, setting budgets, and negotiations with potential suppliers. Purchase is the actual purchase and implementation of the product.

Wiersema (2013) stated that the B2B buying process has changed in recent years. A driving force of this change is advancements in information technologies and innovation in communication channels. When considering the first phase, increased possibilities to acquire information about products and services online has resulted in B2B buyers that are well acquainted with offerings before a physical contact with the seller is established (Grewal et al., 2015). Research has shown that 77 percent of B2B buyers stated that they would not meet with a salesperson before they have conducted their own research. This phenomenon has created a shift in the buying journey. Previously the selling party most often took the first step with an offering of a product or service. Now, however, the first
contact between parties is established on the buyer’s discretion, often with the buyer having a clear picture about what the selling party have to offer (Grewal et al., 2015; Wiersema, 2013). This change in status quo puts different demands on the salesperson. Rather than offering products, B2B salespeople need to offer solutions to problems and new perspectives that can give brands an edge in the marketplace (Grewal et al., 2015).

Product and supplier evaluation have also changed with technological advancements. There are numerous communities online, in which buyers can acquire information about potential suppliers and read reviews from previous customers (Grewal et al., 2015). Better communication opportunities enables both the buying and selling party to involve more stakeholders in the purchase decision (Grewal et al., 2015). B2B buyers have changed focus from just purchasing a product towards putting emphasis on co-creating value and exchanging expertise with the seller. This change in focus demands that sellers are more customer need oriented, and customer satisfaction is now key for a long lasting business relationship with the buyer (Grewal et al., 2015; Lilien, 2016; Wiersema, 2013).

The final phase of a B2B buying process is the purchase and implementation of the products. Information technologies have enabled the sellers to give customers easy access to further education on how to make the most of their product (Grewal et al., 2015; Wiersema, 2013). Webinars, blogs and best practise demonstrations are crucial today, in order to ensure that customer satisfaction is high (Grewal et al., 2015).

The B2B buyer-seller relationship has historically relied on the assumption that buying decisions are based on rational reasoning around the product, such as perceived quality, price, perceived risk, and technical specifications (Kaufmann, Wagner, & Carter, 2017; Kumar Pandey & Mookerjee, 2018). Up until recently, there has been a lack of proof that purchasing decisions has dimensions that are based on emotions (Kaufmann et al., 2017). Buying cycles in a B2B context are often long and complex processes where multiple stakeholders are involved. The people involved in the decision might have different agendas and goals with the purchase, which might lead to the longer cycles and thorough negotiations (Kumar Pandey & Mookerjee, 2018). Kaufmann et al. (2017) suggested that, while B2B buying decisions still have the rational aspects, the emotional processes have a critical role to play. Research has provided evidence that customer experiences in the contact between buyer and seller plays a significant role as well. These findings could prove to have significant impact on B2B marketing, since it suggests that marketers could make use of more values in their marketing activities (Kumar Pandey & Mookerjee, 2018). This also suggests that companies should put emphasis on ensuring that customers maintain a positive experience in all touchpoints throughout a full buying cycle (Kumar Pandey & Mookerjee, 2018).
2.2. Digital Inbound Marketing

When it comes to digital marketing, the most common form used today by marketers is inbound marketing. Inbound marketing is an organic marketing strategy which puts the relationship between buyer and seller in focus. It makes use of a pull strategy, which translates into potential customers finding information provided through quality content marketing and then making contact with the seller (Patrutiu-Baltes, 2016). Inbound marketing differs from traditional marketing in the sense that the last-mentioned form is perceived as an intrusive form of marketing which interrupts people in its attempt to market a product or service. In other words, the aim of traditional marketing is to push products towards potential targets or customers, which by many in today’s world is considered being a unsustainable way of conducting marketing (Opreana & Vinerean, 2015).

As previously mentioned, inbound marketing is opposed to traditional marketing and tries to correct the limitations that are evident in the traditional way of doing marketing. Inbound marketing makes use of a pull strategy in the way it is focused on Internet activities that are followed by the potential customer, which eventually will lead them to the source of the message (Swieczack, 2014). In order to get a clear overview, the main differences between traditional marketing and digital inbound marketing are showcased in Table 1 on page 9 (Opreana & Vinerean, 2015, p. 30).

As for the associated advantages with digital inbound marketing, this method gives marketers a direct, permanent and long-term relationship with their customers and can provide them with a fast and accurate profile of their buyers. Furthermore, better results in the form of benefits and costs can be achieved compared to traditional marketing. In addition, this can provide the marketer with a platform to develop high-quality content strategies that are based on specific topics relevant to their targets (Patrutiu-Baltes, 2016). The disadvantages of inbound marketing are related to the fact that it is more complex and demanding in comparison to traditional marketing. Marketers need much insights about their customers to be successful with inbound marketing. For example, they need to understand what the customer need in terms of product and support and what state of mind the customer is in when looking for their kind of product. This situation exemplifies the amount of work a company must put into their marketing efforts in order for an inbound marketing strategy to succeed. An example of this fact is that inbound marketing techniques usually require the use of Internet, which makes individuals who do not use this platform inaccessible as targets. As a consequence, inbound marketing strategies only offers a segmented communication platform instead of a universal one in this situation (Opreana & Vinerean, 2015; Patrutiu-Baltes, 2016).

In comparison to traditional marketing, inbound marketing strategies comes with better opportunities to measure the actual performance. These include; website activity and its nature, source of traffic, responses and outcomes, e.g. return-on-investment (ROI) and
brand awareness. In addition, integrated marketing metrics, such as cost of customer acquisition (COCA), customer lifetime value (CLV), and net promoter score (NPS) can be used to measure the effects that stem from digital inbound marketing (Opreana & Vinerean, 2015). As for the forms of digital inbound marketing techniques available, the main methods include content marketing, search engine optimization (SEO), search engine marketing (Moran & Hunt, 2008), mobile marketing, social media marketing, and e-mail marketing (Opreana & Vinerean, 2015; Patrutiu-Baltes, 2016). These tools will be examined more in detail in the sections that follows.

Table 1. The main differences between traditional marketing and digital inbound marketing as defined by Opreana & Vinerean, (2015, p 30.).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Traditional Marketing</th>
<th>Digital Inbound Marketing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Basis</strong></td>
<td>Interruption</td>
<td>Organic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus</strong></td>
<td>Finding customers</td>
<td>Getting found by potential, existing and aspirational customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aim</strong></td>
<td>Increased sales</td>
<td>Creating long lasting relationships by reaching and converting qualified customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Target</strong></td>
<td>Large audiences</td>
<td>Interested prospects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tactics</strong></td>
<td>Print advertisements</td>
<td>Blogs, E-books, White papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TV advertisements</td>
<td>Videos on YouTube, Vimeo, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Outdoors advertising</td>
<td>Search engine optimization tactics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cold calling</td>
<td>Infographics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trade shows</td>
<td>Webinars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Email lists</td>
<td>Feeds, Rich Site Summary (RSS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Social media marketing tactics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.3. Content Marketing

The original idea behind content marketing stems from the publishing industry where it is said that published words, images and motion graphics need to wake a sufficient amount of interest among consumers. This in order to capture the attention of the target audience (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). According to a report sponsored by the Content Marketing Institute and MarketingProfs, 86 percent of B2B marketers within North America claimed that their organisations are using content marketing as a marketing tool. Out of the respondents, 38 percent also claimed that their content marketing strategy was efficient (Pulizzi & Handley, 2015).

It has been argued that there is still a lack of research conducted on this topic from a B2B perspective which has led to content marketing being still somewhat unexplored in this territory (Lilien, 2016). Even if content marketing is widely used, there is not yet a clear and unified definition of what content marketing actually encompasses. However, there are some authors that have tried to define content marketing in a B2B context.

In their article, Holliman & Rowley (2014) tries to fill this gap and provides the following definition of B2B digital content marketing:

“B2B digital content marketing involves creating, distributing and sharing relevant, compelling and timely content to engage customers at the appropriate point in their buying consideration processes, such that it encourages them to convert to a business building outcome.”

Albeit an open definition, this suggestion by Holliman & Rowley (2014) specifies the key components of content, includes content sharing, mentions the buying process, as well as the potential business outcome.

As for the methods used in digital content marketing, Chaffey & Smith (2013) argued that the most commonly used formats in this area are pictures, videos and animations, e-books or shorter customer guides, white papers, podcasts, webinars, infographics, blogs and social media posts (Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016). Furthermore, from a B2B perspective, the main business objectives with content marketing include the promotion of brand awareness and image, building customer engagement, and increasing sales through customer acquisitions, lead generation, upselling and cross-selling (Holliman & Rowley, 2014; Pulizzi & Handley, 2015). In addition, King (2015) argued that if B2B companies provide relevant and valued content in their channels, an authority within the marketplace can be achieved. This can generate a higher level of trust amongst their buyers and an efficient content marketing strategy can also help B2B companies in their search engine optimization (SEO) efforts.
2.4. Search Engine Optimization

Search engine optimization (SEO) is defined as the art and science of having your company’s website found by prospects through organic search queries, such as Google Search (King, 2015). Google’s Search Engine Optimization Starter Guide also defines SEO as “a series of modifications and techniques, which make it easier for search engines to crawl, index, and understand the content of a website” (Zilincan, 2015).

From a basic point of view, SEO could be divided into two separate groups, namely on-page SEO and off-page SEO. On-page SEO includes the modification of the structure of the website and is directly dependent on the people building and managing the website. Rather than being dependent on the structure of the website, off-page SEO, on the other hand, is dependent on other factors. These include not only readers and visitors, but also other external publishers such as blogs, forums and social networks, which can influence search rankings in a positive way and increase the traffic generated to the website. Usually, it is said that a combination of these two groups are desirable in order to attract traffic to your website and consequently earn a higher ranking in the search engine result page (Zilincan, 2015).

Looking from a B2B perspective, companies use the benefits of SEO to drive traffic to their websites and/or landing pages. In this way, SEO provides the companies with effective tools to attract new customers, in addition to keeping an active conversation with their existing customers (Järvinen, Tollinen, Karjaluoto, & Jayawardhena, 2012). Since B2B-buyers are going online for research purposes, it is beneficial to make sure that the website of the company is at least on the first page of the search results. To acquire this, there are several techniques to use, starting with making sure that the right keywords are in the page titles, descriptions and tags. Furthermore, keeping your website relevant and up to date is necessary since new content is often favoured by search engines, which leads to a higher placement in the search results (King, 2015).

Obviously, there are a lot of factors to consider when it comes to SEO. However, since Google uses over 200 factors when ranking their search results, in addition to constantly updating their search algorithm, it is nearly to impossible to fulfil them all (King, 2015). King (2015) further argued that the best way to optimize your experience when dealing with SEO is to stick to the basics. In other words, the chances of achieving success with SEO depends on the amount of valuable user experience companies create on their website. This could be achieved through thoughtful navigation, functional information architecture, and clear copy and images. Other things to keep in mind include keeping the website operational, structurally sound and fresh, not just in terms of new, but also original content. Finally, and maybe most importantly, it is vital to consider that SEO actually is about the audience rather than the search engines themselves. That is, in order to master SEO, companies have to be successful in creating a positive experience and answering questions for customers, rather than exclusively focusing on the search engines.
Inbound marketing is, in part, about being visible to the customer in online places where the customer looks for information. Therefore, focus should not be on the search engine itself. Instead, the webpage should be designed to provide key words that address the intended customer information need. (Del Rowe, 2017; King, 2015).

2.4.1. Search Engine Marketing and Pay-Per-Click

Moran & Hunt (2008) described search engine marketing (SEM) as a method which consists of all activities that companies exercise to raise their websites visibility in search engines in order to attract more traffic to their site. In other words, SEM encompasses any kind of search optimization technique, including Pay-Per-Click (PPC) (Yang, Shi, & Wang, 2015) and SEO (as previously discussed), which makes SEM a broader discipline than the two aforementioned methods (Aswani, Kar, Ilavarasan, & Dwivedi, 2018). However, in the authors view, SEO generates traffic to a website by organically adapting content to best match key search terms. Therefore, the authors argue that SEO differs from SEM since it is not paid content. Consequently, SEM and SEO are divided into two different sections in this study.

While SEO is based on the online behavior of the end-user, PPC is more dependent on the amount of time each user spend on a company’s website, in addition to the number of page hits by the end-user (Yang et al., 2015). Hence, PPC was defined by Doyle (2011) as “a model of digital advertising in which advertisers place an advertisement on websites that are paid each time one of them is clicked.”

It has been argued that PPC is dependent on several components in order to work as an effective tool for a company in their marketing efforts (Szetela & Kerschbaum, 2010). These components include keywords, ads, bid prices, landing pages and conversion path.

Keywords could be specified as either keyword in search campaigns or in content campaigns. In search campaigns, words and phrases that the advertisers think that a prospective customer would use in their search query are listed. These words or phrases could range from being very general to more specific. Looking at content campaigns, the keywords used here differs in the way that they rather describe the kind of website pages on which the advertiser want their ads to be displayed (Szetela & Kerschbaum, 2010).

In order to persuade a prospective customer to take action and click through their website, companies use ads, which are the words and images that are used to influence their audience. The price that the advertiser is willing to pay for each ad-induced visit to their website is known as bid prices while the pages that the prospective customers land on when they click on an ad are called landing pages. Finally, the conversion path is described as the steps that the website visitor has to take in order to achieve the website’s objective. This can be everything from a sale or a newsletter sign-up, to a simple donation or a submitted lead (Szetela & Kerschbaum, 2010).
Going back to SEM in general, the main objective with this method is to promote sales by increasing the specific keyword exposure. This is one of the reasons why this marketing technique has become increasingly popular among companies of today (Aswani et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2015). Moreover, the associated advantages with SEM include increased brand equity, in addition to helping form the brand perception of the company among customers. Further, companies have realized that a high ranking in the search engine result page helps them in their quest to being more visible for their prospective customers. In turn, this can have further impact on brand equity, in addition to higher offering visibility and revenues from sales. Finally, it has been shown that search engines have become gatekeepers of information which naturally affect customers in their decision-making process (Aswani et al., 2018).

The aforementioned situation can also be connected to a major disadvantage with SEM. As a consequence of the high amount of information that can be generated from search engines, the race for dominance is intense between search engine operators which results in a rather high difference in price for SEM services. Therefore, it can be argued that SEM is not as profitable as it seems and that companies sometimes do not get value for their money when investing in SEM services as a marketing strategy (Aswani et al., 2018). Lo, Hsieh, and Chiu (2014) further suggested that people consciously avoid clicking on website links that are ad-induced in an obvious way. This stems from that people perceive ads as clutter, which are disturbing and interrupting, rather than providing value in their everyday lives.

2.5. Mobile Marketing

Mobile devices are today a natural element of our everyday lives, which has led marketers using this as a tool in their digital marketing portfolio (King, 2015). Looking from a B2B perspective, mobile marketing is becoming an increasingly important strategy for companies to use. However, a common misconception about mobile marketing is that the strategy is focusing on the device itself, when it is actually about the user journey. Today, individuals use their mobile devices for various tasks such as reading and sending e-mails, browsing through social media, and booking tickets. However, individuals are also searching for information about a company’s products and services. For example, this information search involves innovative product solutions, comparing features and reading reviews (Wiersema, 2013). Therefore, marketers must understand how the technologies that are part of mobile marketing can be utilized in order to help individuals achieve their objectives (King, 2015; Rowles, 2013).

Shankar and Balasubramanian (2009) defined mobile marketing as “the two- or multi-way communication and promotion of an offer between a firm and its customers using a mobile medium, device, or technology”. Furthermore, the Mobile Marketing Association notes that mobile marketing is “a set of practices that enable organizations to communicate and engage with their audience in an interactive and relevant manner.
through any mobile device or network” (Ström, Vendel, & Bredican, 2014). As for the platforms used in mobile marketing, both social media search optimization and e-mail marketing could be used when applying this strategy (Rowles, 2013).

Mobile devices, may it be phones, tablets or portable media players, entails three important characteristics, which have key marketing implications. These are location-specificity, portability and the wireless feature (Shankar & Balasubramanian, 2009).

Starting with location-specificity, many mobile devices have GPS capabilities built-in the device, which allows marketers to offer not only location-specific, but also personalized marketing messages to their audience. Portability refers to the small size of mobile devices, which allows them to be carried with the user at all times. On one hand, this situation makes it possible for marketers to quickly reach out with their message (Shankar & Balasubramanian, 2009), but it has also been noted that sending generic marketing messages in this way could have a rather poor effect in comparison to other marketing channels. This is because people, when they are on their mobile device, usually have less time, are more focused on a specific goal and are “in the moment” which evokes the possibility of the message being ignored (Rowles, 2013). The aforementioned situation could also be connected to the third and final characteristic of mobile devices, namely the wireless feature. Since mobile devices usually do not require a physical wire to function, it increases its usability and is therefore more frequently used compared to other devices, such as the desktop PC. This situation creates further opportunities for marketers to communicate with their audience. However, it is also important to note that the conveyed message should be short and concise, in order to capture the attention of the audience in the relatively short time frame that they are actually paying attention (Rowles, 2013; Shankar & Balasubramanian, 2009)

### 2.6. Social Media Marketing

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) argued that social media should be described as a group of applications, which are Internet-based and allow creation and exchange of user generated content. As for social media marketing, this term is used to describe the act of using social networks or social media in general for marketing purposes (Keinänen & Kuivalainen, 2015). In the last couple of years, the usage of social media by B2B companies has significantly increased, and according to a study conducted by the Content Marketing Institute, 87 percent of B2B marketers are claiming that they are using social media as a content marketing tool (King, 2015). As for the main ways B2B companies can benefit from this strategy, social media gives companies an effective tool to promote themselves, participate in conversation, as well as listening to prospects, customers, competitors and influencers (King, 2015). Furthermore, it has been shown that this strategy could enable B2B companies to identify and attract new business opportunities and partners since this two-way online interaction builds a perception that the company is close to its target market and customers (Lacka & Chong, 2016). In addition, a unique brand identity and
higher brand awareness could be further contributions of a social media marketing strategy for the B2B company (Michaelidou, Siamagka, & Christodoulides, 2011; Van den Bulte & Wuyts, 2007).

In their article, Constantinides and Fountain (2008) provided a classification which was based on the various forms of applications that could be used when using social media as a marketing strategy. These channels include blogs, social networks such as Facebook and Instagram, content communities, which are websites organising and sharing specific types of content, e.g. YouTube, forums and content aggregators. The latter could be described as applications that allow the user to customise the content they wish to access (Keinänen & Kuivalainen, 2015).

It has been suggested that social media marketing could bring many benefits to B2B companies, however, evidence has been found concerning some hesitation and scepticism towards the importance of this strategy among certain B2B marketers (Lacka & Chong, 2016). Even though social media marketing has been commonly used to a great extent in the B2C sector, there remains a sense of struggle for B2B marketers to be successful with their social media strategies since these somewhat differ from the B2C strategies (Swani, Brown, & Milne, 2014). In addition, there is a common perception that social media marketing is more suitable for the B2C sector and that B2B companies cannot reach their marketing objectives with this strategy (Järvinen, Tollinen, Karjaluoto, & Jayawardhena, 2012). It is true that social media marketing differs from traditional B2B marketing efforts previously used. For example, social media marketing requires a more interactive and conversational approach that could appear problematic when trying to create relevant content connected to the B2B industry. Since B2B companies generally have lower numbers of customers who are less enthusiastic in comparison to B2C companies, difficulties may arise when trying to achieve viral and word-of-mouth marketing effects (Järvinen et al., 2012).

### 2.7. E-mail Marketing

E-mail marketing is “a form of direct marketing which uses e-mail as mean of communicating commercial or fund-raising messages to an audience” (Fariborzi & Zahedifard, 2012). Furthermore, e-mail marketing could be described as the way companies promote their products and services through e-mail, in order to develop relationships with potential clients and customers (Ward, 2017). Companies use e-mail marketing to share information and direct potential customers to their website, which in turn could strengthen their brand and enhance the loyalty from their customers (Merisavo & Raulas, 2004).

As for the ways to use e-mail marketing, there are primarily three ways in which companies can engage in this method. Firstly, there is in-house to the company’s opt-in database. Secondly, to a rented list provided by a third-party e-mail service. Thirdly, for
example, through publishers who allow companies to use their newsletter subscription base (King, 2015). It should also be noted that e-mail marketing, from a B2B perspective, differs in its execution in comparison to the consumer market. To provide an example, B2B companies usually require more sophisticated email lists including names, job titles, and company names of their recipients (Goddard, 2003).

E-mail marketing has, in the last couple of years, emerged as the preferred method of choice for businesses to use in their communication processes. This because of its multiple advantages, including being inexpensive, fast to implement and much easier to adopt, in comparison to direct mail (Fariborzi & Zahedifard, 2012; King, 2015). Other advantages with e-mail marketing include the possibility to customize the messages to customer preferences, which makes it more meaningful to the audience. Also, the effects of e-mail marketing could be easily measured, while it is also easy to create the messages through automatic tools, which makes the process fast and efficient. Finally, according to the Direct Marketing Association, it has been shown that e-mail marketing has a higher return-on-investment (ROI) in comparison to other marketing methods (Fariborzi & Zahedifard, 2012).

E-mail marketing could be a very effective tool for B2B companies in the way that cross-sell and up-sell opportunities stemming from marketing are usually influenced by e-mail (Leake, Ginty, & Vaccarello, 2012). However, there are also some disadvantages associated with this method. It is usually said that e-mail is the most abused method used by marketers because of the tendency to overuse it to the point of spam. This may result in the audience applying spam or junk-mail filters to their addresses, which in turn leads to the e-mail not reaching the target audience. Consequently, such a situation could lead to an e-mail marketing strategy not bearing a positive return-on-investment (Fariborzi & Zahedifard, 2012; Leake et al., 2012). On a final note, it could also be challenging to keep e-mail subscribers actively engaged with the company in the long run. This could be a consequence of the content not being sufficiently interesting, or that the intended creativity is not displayed in the different e-mail reading systems used by their subscribers (Fariborzi & Zahedifard, 2012).

2.8. General Data Protection Regulation

In order for inbound marketing to work efficiently as a marketing strategy, it requires companies to have access to personal data and information in order for them to acquire leads that they can focus their marketing efforts on (Patruitiu-Baltes, 2016). As a consequence of personal data being essential to inbound marketing, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) adopted by the EU Council and Parliament, will most probably have an effect on companies opting to use inbound marketing as a marketing strategy. With its potential impact on inbound marketing in mind, the background to this legislation will be presented below.
In April 2016, the EU Council and Parliament adopted the so called GDPR. The legislation, which will be taken into effect in May 2018, will concern every state that is a member of the European Union. More specifically, the legislation will affect customers and organisations within Europe, in addition to external organisations around the world who are conducting business with companies based in Europe (Calder, 2016; O’Connor, 2017).

The aim of GDPR is to “harmonise data privacy laws across Europe and create a level playing field” (O’Connor, 2017). By looking closer at what the legislation encompasses, article 5 of GDPR outlines six principles that organisations must apply when collecting or processing personal data. These principles can be described as the heart of the legislation and are listed as follows by Calder (2016):

- “Personal data must be processed lawfully, fairly and transparently.
- Personal data can only be collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes.
- Personal data must be adequate, relevant and limited to what is necessary for processing.
- Personal data must be accurate and kept up to date.
- Personal data must be kept in a form such that the data subject can be identified only as long as it is necessary for processing.
- Personal data must be processed in a manner that ensures security.”

In addition to the six principles, the legislation will bring more control to the data subject which is the living person to whom the personal data is related to. Under GDPR, the data subject will have the right to full erasure of the data that organisations have about them, in addition to data portability. This is related to that the data subject can obtain and reuse the personal data that organisations possess and use that data for their own purposes, such as for different services. Furthermore, organisations must make data easily accessible for data subjects who require additional information, and provide them with a comprehensive response within a month upon request (O’Connor, 2017).

For organisations failing to meet the requirements of GDPR, administrative fines will be the consequence. These fines can amount up to 20 million euros or four percent of the organisations global annual turnover. However, GDPR also states that the intention of these repercussions will be to work as a dissuasive example in order for data controllers and data processors to comply with the regulation (Calder, 2016).
3. Method

In the following chapter, motivation and justification for the applied research philosophy, research approach and research design are presented. This is followed by an outline of the data collection technique and analysis procedure for the empirical findings. At the end of the chapter, the means of ensuring quality and trustworthiness to the research is presented.

3.1. Research Philosophy

A research philosophy, also known as a paradigm, involves guidelines to how the researchers study and interpret what they see. The research philosophy also indicates how the research should be conducted and provides a clear understanding of how the researchers will obtain the necessary information of the research. As for the perspective chosen as a suitable one for the research paradigm, it is dependent on the research topic (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), the context of the study as well as the assumptions of the researchers (Malhotra & Birks, 2007).

The two main philosophies usually applied in the paradigm are positivism and interpretivism which are two approaches that differ in the sense of what kind of information the researchers should be looking for and how they should obtain it (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The main objective for a positivists is to establish rules which, in turn, enable the researchers to provide explanations of a certain phenomenon using reliable facts and objectivity (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Usually, the positivist approach is suitable for statistical studies, experiments, and surveys, in which measurements are achievable and relationships can be extracted from the results. The positivist approach can also be used to test theories and if the topic is suitable, high-quality work can be achieved (Malhotra & Birks, 2007).

The contrasting philosophy to positivism is interpretivism, which rather than seeking laws that applies uniformity to a context, emphasizes a dynamic reality in which there exist a broad range of interpretations and an evolving nature. Instead of predicting and extrapolating an outcome from a larger population, the main objective for interpretivists is to gain a deeper understanding from the perspectives of the participants (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Interpretivism can also provide guidance to in-depth and semi-structured interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). With the purpose of this study in mind, the authors argue that the interpretivist philosophy is the most suitable. Considering the aim to understand where B2B businesses are in their adoption process of inbound marketing, the best fitting research technique is to use interviews and find patterns in answers. Therefore, the interpretivist philosophy is arguably the best option according to the authors of this study.
3.2. Research Approach

Researchers can achieve legitimacy to their research through either a deductive or inductive approach. The deductive approach is commonly used by positivists since it makes predictions, test hypotheses and measures specific variables. In order to achieve this, a broad theoretical framework is said to be required (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). As for this study however, a deductive approach is not applicable since the authors do not seek to make predictions or measure variables.

Interpretivists usually adopts an inductive approach, as it tries to draw conclusions, although no established theoretical framework is present (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Since the authors will conducted semi-structured interviews and tried to generate meaning by identifying patterns in the collected data, an inductive approach was applicable for this study.

3.3. Research Design

A research design can be classified in a broad way as either conclusive or exploratory. With a conclusive design, the researchers often aim to examine or measure specific relationships or describe a certain phenomenon. The design is often formal and structured, which requires the information provided to be clearly specified. Since this design is often used on subjects where much theory is present, hypotheses are often tested (Malhotra & Birks, 2007).

In contrast, an exploratory design is often adopted in situations when not much information on a specific subject is available, or if the subject at hand is difficult to measure. Further on, as its name suggests, this design is appropriate to use when the researchers’ objective is to explore a certain subject, in order to provide insights and a deeper understanding. An exploratory design is also more flexible in its nature in comparison to the conclusive design in which the process is more structured (Malhotra & Birks, 2007).

Since the authors conducted their research in an area which there exists a limited amount of previous research, an exploratory design was deemed appropriate. Furthermore, the authors were looking to provide insight and achieve a deeper understanding towards the implementation and effects of inbound marketing strategies in the B2B sector, which further reinforced the use of an exploratory design.

3.4. Semi-Structured Interviews

Using in-depth interviews as a mean of data collection involves having a personal and direct discussion with a participant. The personal discussion could be used to probe the participant for deep and underlying motivations for the investigated topic (Malhotra &
In this case, interviews served as a mean to discover attitudes towards the adoption of inbound marketing strategies along with the expected effects of implementing these strategies.

In-depth interviews could be conducted in an unstructured or semi-structured manner (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Since inbound marketing strategies incorporates multiple techniques which are interesting for this research, some structure to the interview were desirable. Therefore, the authors chose to conduct semi-structured interviews to ensure that all areas of digital marketing strategies would be addressed by the participants (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). For the purpose of this study, one of the biggest arguments to use semi-structured interviews was the flexibility. Flexibility in the interview is vital to acquire the in-depth understanding on a diverse issue. Malhotra and Birks (2007) argued that unsuspected and interesting answers may occur in interviews which might help to achieve deeper insight. In such cases, it could be fitting to ask probing questions to further understand the underlying meaning. The reliability of the data that is collected in the interview is, in general, partly dependent on the theoretical knowledge that interviewers possess on the subject beforehand (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). However, this was especially important in this case, since this study collected data from business professionals and industry experts.

Theoretical knowledge on the subject discussed might also have an effect on the level of trust between the interviewer and participant. This trust is vital to ensure that the conversation flows smoothly and will also make the participant more open to questions of a more sensitive nature (Malhotra & Birks, 2007; Saunders et al., 2009). The participants in this study were, as previously mentioned, professionals which meant that the questions were to be answered, not only from the participants’ view, but also from the companies at which the professionals worked for. Therefore, trust played a crucial role in acquiring answers regarding companies marketing strategies and processes. Additionally, marketing professionals who could express their opinions without being influenced by a company to the same extent were interviewed. This to enable a nuanced and objective view of the matter at hand. When choosing participants, the authors attempted to contact people that had knowledge about inbound marketing. Posts on LinkedIn generated responses from people that worked with incorporating these strategies who were interested in participating. Also, B2B businesses were approached by e-mail with the aim to connect with professionals who worked with B2B marketing on a daily basis.

In Chapter 2, the frame of reference was discussed to make the complexity of inbound marketing more comprehensible. This further highlighted the importance of having knowledgeable participants who were able to provide insight, which could be used to answer the research questions. Focusing on the B2B sector is not without complications and challenges. Consequently, the authors found it essential, for the sake of this study, to also get the opinions of marketing professionals who were not employed by a specific
company, but rather acted as consultants. These participants could contribute with a more holistic view on the marketing landscape in the B2B sector in general.

3.4.1. Pilot Interview

The initial interview was supposed to serve as a pilot interview, in order to determine if there were any problems with the interview guideline constructed by the authors. This to ensure that the interviews were structured in a way which was efficient and made the participants speak freely and reason around the issues that the authors were looking to investigate. However, the first interview was very successful in both the authors and the participant’s view, and therefore no changes needed to be made to the interview guideline. Also, the participant in the first interview held an employment as an inbound manager within a manufacturing company. Consequently, the participant chosen as a test object possessed great knowledge on the research subject and, as a result of the successful interview, the participant could be incorporated in the finished sample.

3.4.2. Execution and Handling the Data

Before conducting the interviews, the authors created an outline for what should be discussed. The goal of the outline was to ensure that all important factors, for this study, would be discussed by the participants. The outline was used during the interviews to keep track of all the subjects that was covered by the participants. The authors deemed it necessary to have this guideline to ensure that all participants were asked to cover the same topics. Arguably, it was necessary to give all participants the opportunity to discuss the same issues to ensure that the reliability of the study was as high as possible. When this work was conducted, the authors ensured to have the purpose and research questions in mind.

The interviews all started with a few minutes of small talk which mainly circled around what spiked the participants interest in marketing. It was important to start the interviews this way since it gave the authors opportunity to build a sense of trust with the participants. By discussing marketing in general, the authors could show their theoretical knowledge on the subject, which created credibility and trustworthiness. Saunders (2009) argued that trust is vital to obtain reliable answers from participants. Therefore, the authors used a few minutes to accomplish this.

During the interviews, the authors used probing techniques to probe the participants for more knowledge on the subjects. Probing could be a very effective way to acquire deep information that might not always be present at the top of the participants’ mind (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Throughout the interviews that were conducted, the authors were successful in their efforts to keep the discussion flowing smoothly. All participants contributed with both real experiences they had themselves, as well as thoughts considering why situations had played out the way they did. The research has in many cases given the authors deep insight in how organisations think about their marketing
efforts, which in multiple cases touched upon information that was sensitive from the perspective of the companies. These insights would not have been possible to obtain unless probing questions would have been used.

The interviews were conducted both over the telephone and face-to-face. To ensure that the authors would not miss anything important, all interviews were recorded with the participants’ consent. Before each interview started, the participants were briefed on what would be discussed in the interviews and that they would be recorded. Interviews conducted over the telephone were recorded with the help of an application called ACR, which was purchased on Google Play. ACR was chosen with regard to good reviews and the ability to make back-up files, which uploaded to Google Drive automatically. The face-to-face interviews were recorded with QuickTime Player, which was chosen with regard to functionality and convenience to the users. All participants of this study were informed that both recordings and transcriptions would be handled with confidentiality, and when the recordings were of no more use to the authors, with regard to this thesis, the recordings would to be deleted. All files containing information about the participants were named to safeguard the anonymity of the participants. For example, transcriptions have been named ‘Notes Nr1’ and the interview recordings ‘Interview Nr1’.

When all questions from the interview guideline (Appendix 1) had been discussed, the participants were asked if they had something to add or if they felt that there was any topics that the authors, as interviewers, had misinterpreted or missed to discuss. Also, the participants were asked about their opinions on the authors as interviewers and if they felt that any questions were unclear or made them feel uncomfortable. This in order to ensure the quality of the study and to make sure that the questions asked followed the ethical standards of the study.

The participants were all Swedish. To ensure that language would not be a barrier for participants in making their point clear, the interviews were held in Swedish. Afterwards, the interviews were transcribed and translated into English. The authors put emphasis on the transcription process to ensure that not only the words that were said were translated, but also the underlying meanings. With both authors being involved in the transcription process, the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings could be seen as high. With both authors present and involved in both the interviews and translation process, the risk for misinterpretations and researcher bias were lower than if only one single researcher would have performed the task. To be certain that the risk of misunderstandings was minimised, the authors asked control questions during the interviews. These control questions served as a safety net for the authors, in order to ensure mutual understanding on complex issues which arose in the interviews. The control questions were also used as a way to reduce interviewer bias. By giving the participants the opportunity to clarify and elaborate on their statement, the researchers could reduce the risk of bias in the response (Williams & Morrow, 2009).
3.4.3. Interview Questions

As for the questions asked during the interviews, these were constructed to enable an open and flexible discussion with the participants. The authors wanted to facilitate a discussion around the given topic, rather than the participants answering a specific question with a yes or no answer. The interview guideline in its full format can be found in Appendix 1.

When starting of the interviews, the authors gave the participants a short introduction to the research, in order to make them feel familiar with the topic at hand. The authors then went on to ask questions concerning the participants experience within marketing, in addition to questions related to the company in which the participants held their employment. The purpose of these questions was to acquire information about the experience of both the participants and the companies. Also, the intention was to get a clear picture of how mature the companies were in terms of digitalisation in general, and inbound marketing specifically. Additionally, by allowing the participants to start the interviews by talking about themselves and the companies, the interviews got a smooth start which facilitated a good discussion throughout the rest of the interview.

Next, questions related to the customer relationship and the customer journey were discussed. The aim of these questions was to find out if the companies had experienced any difference in how they contacted, as well as how they were contacted by customers as a consequence of digitalisation. Furthermore, the authors wanted to find out how the companies followed up the customer journey, in order to get a clear picture of the touchpoints between the companies and their customers.

The questions that followed concerned the different channels the companies used in their marketing efforts. By asking questions related to the channels, the authors wanted to examine which channel they experienced to be the most efficient one, the associated advantages and disadvantages, and how they measured the results of their marketing processes. The answers to these questions were also meant to guide the authors in their understanding of how companies had developed their marketing efforts as a consequence of the digital tools that were available in the marketing landscape.

Questions related to the marketing strategies of the companies naturally followed, and the aim of this part was to ensure deeper knowledge of how companies set up strategies, and goals with their marketing. The authors also wanted to find out how the different departments within the companies executed their work, and if the separate departments were integrated in their respective processes, or if they worked independently of each other. These findings proved to be vital to uncover challenges and problems that were associated with implementing an inbound marketing strategy.

Heading towards the end of the interviews, questions concerning what type of content the companies tried to reflect towards their audience were discussed. Also, inspiration in terms of marketing were touched upon, in addition to the participants’ view on selling
products in contrast to selling customer value. The intention with these questions was to identify to what extent companies used inbound marketing techniques, either intentionally or unintentionally, and what their main focus was when engaging in marketing communications.

To conclude the interviews, the authors brought up the question concerning GDPR and asked the participants to share their views on how they thought that this legislation would affect companies in the future. Further, questions regarding the future in general for companies’ marketing operations, in addition to that of inbound marketing, were asked in order to clarify how the participants viewed the marketing development of the future.

3.5. Sampling

When gathering information about behaviour in a population, researchers often take a sample of the population which is invited to participate in the study (Saunders et al., 2009). The sampling process generally starts with identifying the target population, which should be somewhat representative of the purpose of the research in question (Malhotra & Birks, 2007; Saunders et al., 2009). In the case of this study, the purpose was to gain deep insight about attitudes and thought processes in B2B inbound marketing strategies. Therefore, the authors chose to focus on inviting individuals who had extensive knowledge about the subject to act as participants in this study.

Non-probability sampling was chosen for this study due to the fact that targeted participants have to meet certain criteria to be relevant for the study (Saunders et al., 2009). To acquire insight about inbound marketing in the B2B sector, it was important for the authors to interview people that actively worked with inbound marketing every day since they were the ones who possessed the greatest understanding. Since the ideal participant needs to hold a certain amount of knowledge, the authors decided to use a judgemental sampling method to acquire participants for the interviews. Judgemental sampling gives researchers opportunity to identify people with the desired expertise on the subject that is being explored (Saunders et al., 2009). This type of sampling technique is especially useful when researchers are using a small sample, where the participants are supposedly more informative (Malhotra & Birks, 2007; Saunders et al., 2009). Judgemental sampling is highly subjective and the quality of the sample relies heavily on the knowledge of the researchers (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). To ensure that the sample quality was high, the authors conducted extensive research before contacting potential participants. Information was gathered online to find companies that used inbound marketing techniques. Thereafter, the companies were contacted and asked to participate in the study by e-mail.

The authors acknowledge that the type of sample that judgemental sampling leads to cannot be viewed as representative of the entire population (Saunders et al., 2009). However, since this study was aimed to provide deep insight on a specific issue, the
sample could be viewed as representative of the population of interest, which were B2B professionals and industry experts in the Swedish market (Malhotra & Birks, 2007).

3.5.1. Participants

The participants of this study all had experience from working with marketing tasks in the B2B sector. The participants were active in different companies and organisations of different sizes. All the people that have participated in this study are geographically located in Sweden, but in different cities. The cities which the participants were located in was Stockholm, Linköping, Borås, Ulricehamn, Jönköping, and Gothenburg. The companies that the participants worked for were active in the B2B sector and sold a diverse set of products and services. Since this study was not focused on specific products or industries, the authors argued that a diverse sample with marketing experience in common would be the most representative with regard to the purpose of this study. To show the diversity of the companies the sample represented, the largest company was manufacturing and selling products to governments, and the smallest was a marketing agency which focused on helping firms to implement digital marketing in their everyday activities. The sample consisted of both men and women with an age span between 25 and 60. Therefore, the authors argue that the research consisted of insights about how B2B business cycles has changed, drivers for inbound marketing, and knowledge about how digitalisation has affected the B2B sector.

3.5.2. Sample Size

When determining the sample size, the authors original intention was to interview 12 participants. 12 is the number of participants that Saunders et al. (2009) suggested to be sufficient for a homogenous sample. However, the authors could see signs of data saturation as soon as after four interviews. Saunders et al. (2009) also suggested that researchers should keep adding interviews to the research until clear evidence of saturation is visible. At the point of four interviews, the authors had two more interviews confirmed. Hence, it was decided that if saturation continued to grow during the two scheduled interviews, the authors should organise two more. The reasoning was that 8 interviews would be sufficient for the authors to feel confident that the results would be reliable and generalizable to a broader population. The shortest interview lasted for 44 minutes, while the longest interview went on for 120 minutes. The average length of the interviews in total was roughly 71 minutes, while the total length of the 8 conducted interviews amounted to 570 minutes. During this time, in-depth discussions on inbound marketing, guided by the interview guideline (Appendix 1), was held. The authors argue that this was enough to ensure a reliable data set with regard to the purpose of this study.
3.6. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Throughout the analysis of the findings, the authors took great care to try to avoid incorporating their own thoughts and feelings on the subject. The authors acknowledge that it was probably close to impossible to not be at all biased when analysing qualitative research. This was one reason why it was important to use an established and tested analysis method. When analysing the data collected from the semi-structured interviews, the authors used the data display and analysis approach based on Miles and Huberman’s (1994) research. Analysis of qualitative data using their technique divides into three sub-processes: data reduction, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions. This technique was chosen based on its simplicity and lack of complexity. During the interviews, the authors could see certain patterns emerging, which led to adopting this analysis method the preferred choice. Early on in the interview process, the authors could identify the most important sub-topics. It was concluded that these sub-topics would serve as the main findings of this study due to the frequency of similar discussions among the participants, and the explained importance of these findings. Therefore, a network method was deemed fit to analyse the findings of this study. Furthermore, Miles and Huberman’s (1994) technique had no technical requirements and was arguably a fast and comprehensible technique, which made it suitable due to the limited resources and time-frame for this thesis.

Data reduction involves summarising and somewhat simplifying the data to make it more comprehensible. The first step was to clean the findings from data that was deemed as irrelevant with regards to the purpose. Thereafter, the data needed to be organised for it to be possible to see patterns (Saunders et al., 2009). To aid in this process, the authors used visual displays where they divided statements, comments and meanings derived from the transcriptions into groups. These groups were created with the research questions in focus and the different areas the authors deemed important to discuss to understand the state of inbound marketing in a B2B context. These groups were:

- Buyer-Seller Relationship
- Digital Strategy Decision Making
- Communication Channels
- Content in Marketing Communications
- Inbound Marketing and Future

Data display is organising the data into the groups in a way which makes them visually comprehensible, which is an important aspect of the network analysis used in this research (Saunders et al., 2009). Miles and Huberman (1994) described a number of different ways to display data. However, they suggested two main families of displaying data; matrices or networks. A matrix has clearly defined lines and comes in a tabular form. Data is entered into cells based on the subjective opinion of the researchers (Saunders et al., 2009). A network divides the data into boxes, which individually contain data that is
similar. Between these boxes, the researchers can draw lines to visually show relations between different groups of data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). During the interviews, some trends and patterns soon appeared. Hence, the authors argue that using a network to organise the data was the most effective option for this study.

After the data had been divided into groups, which the authors named sub-topics, a network soon emerged, after discussions amongst the authors about how the sub-topics were affecting each other. Between these sub-topics, the authors were able to identify important factors that had not been found in previous research, as well as clear connections to previous academic research findings. While connecting the empirical findings of this study to previous research, the authors took great care to ensure that as little personal opinions as possible affected the decisions. The authors acknowledge that complete subjectivity would be difficult to reach. However, all decisions that was made in this stage of the study were thoroughly discussed and elaborated on between the researchers. Therefore, the authors suggest that the analysis could be seen as credible as possible considering the time frame and resources.

3.7. Quality Assessment

Williams and Morrow’s (2009) article on achieving trustworthiness in qualitative research has served as a foundation for this research. They suggested that there are three categories which needs to be addressed to conduct trustworthy qualitative research. These are: integrity of the data, balance between reflexivity and subjectivity, and clear communication of findings (Williams & Morrow, 2009). In coming sections, the authors will explain these categories and motivate how they related to this research, as well as how these have aided the authors in conducting the research.

3.7.1. Integrity of The Data

Integrity of the data refers to how adequate the data is, as well as its dependability (Williams & Morrow, 2009). This is accomplished by a thorough and clear description of the research methodology the researchers have used when conducting the research. This serves to ensure that the study can be replicable in the future, which further strengthens the trustworthiness of the study (Williams & Morrow, 2009). Another aspect is the quality and quantity of the data which has been collected. The quality is affected, in part, by the researchers’ previous knowledge on the research subject. Quality is also determined with regard to diversity of the sample. Diversity can add richness to the data (Williams & Morrow, 2009). In terms of quantity, the sample size is usually referred to. This has to do with saturation of data (Saunders et al., 2009; Williams & Morrow, 2009), which in this study was reached early on. The authors suggest that this had more to do with the length of the interviews than the mere subjective opinion of the authors. To ensure that the research was trustworthy in terms of quality, the authors cross-referenced the statements between the participants, as well as confirmed that the statements made sense considering
secondary data (Williams & Morrow, 2009). The secondary data was collected from marketing industry media channels like Forbes and LinkedIn.

3.7.2. Balance Between Reflexivity and Subjectivity

Balance between participant meaning and the researchers interpretation of what the participant is really saying is an issue that has been acknowledged by the researchers. It is vital for research quality that the authors are reflexive. Reflexive in this context means that the authors are aware of their own role in the research. In all qualitative research, bias is an issue that has to be considered (Williams & Morrow, 2009). Therefore, the authors took, throughout the execution of the interviews and data analysis, great care to ensure not to involve their own thoughts. During the execution of the interviews, the authors asked control questions, which ensured that the answers were correctly understood. This also aided the authors when transcribing the interviews. Since the transcriptions were made some time after the interviews were conducted, the control questions enabled the authors to be as certain as possible of the meaning behind the participants’ words. Therefore, in addition to the researchers correcting each other’s transcriptions, the findings presented in this study can be perceived as trustworthy. Control questions also had an impact on the relationship between the researchers and participants. Asking for feedback and clarification could give the sense of the researchers thoroughness, which possibly had further positive impact on the level of trust (Williams & Morrow, 2009).

3.7.3. Clear Communication of Findings

For research to matter and to be relevant, it should be to be clearly communicated and comprehensible. Williams and Morrow (2009) argued that any research can be as well performed as possible, however, if the researchers does not succeed in explaining their process and findings, trustworthiness and credibility will diminish. This does not only involve the findings and results. It is equally as important in terms of method. Without transparency and detail in the method, the research will be difficult to duplicate and confirm. Williams and Morrow (2009) argued that a research paper should supply evidence that a research question has been answered. This to build credibility and trustworthiness through transparency. The authors of this thesis have supplied information about the findings from the interviews in Chapter 4, empirical findings. The findings were summarized and interpreted to make them more comprehensible. The authors chose to illustrate their findings and interpretations by using longer quotes from the participants, which allows the reader to gain deeper understanding about the participants’ view. In attempting to ensure that this thesis was smooth and easy to read, the participants were labelled as ‘he’ or ‘they’ in places where this were deemed necessary.
4. Empirical Findings

In the following chapter, the empirical findings from the conducted interviews will be presented. The findings are presented as a summary of the conducted interviews and are divided into groups based on the discussions that occurred during the interviews. The chapter will start with Table 2, presenting the reader with information regarding the interviews. Subsequently, the data obtained from the interviews will be presented in groups divided by sub-topic. Finally, a summary of the key findings, divided into the sub-topics uncovered, will be presented in Table 3.

4.1. Interview Information

Table 2. Information concerning the conducted interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Format</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>Inbound Manager</td>
<td>2018.03.21</td>
<td>90 min</td>
<td>Telephone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>Marketing Director</td>
<td>2018.03.22</td>
<td>44 min</td>
<td>Telephone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>Social Media Consultant</td>
<td>2018.03.23</td>
<td>78 min</td>
<td>Telephone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>Marketing Director</td>
<td>2018.03.26</td>
<td>47 min</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>Online Communications Manager</td>
<td>2018.03.26</td>
<td>56 min</td>
<td>Telephone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>Senior Management Consultant</td>
<td>2018.03.28</td>
<td>75 min</td>
<td>Telephone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>Brand Development Consultant</td>
<td>2018.04.05</td>
<td>120 min</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>CEO/Marketing Strategist</td>
<td>2018.04.13</td>
<td>60 min</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2. Topic Themes

The findings have been divided into topic themes that were based on the interview guideline, and slightly adopted due to patterns, which emerged during the interview process. Originally, the topic themes intended for discussion by the authors were: customer, marketing strategy, inbound marketing, channels, and content. However, the discussed themes were after the interviews re-designed into: buyer-seller relationship, digital strategy decision making, inbound marketing, communication channels, and content in marketing communications. This because the previously mentioned topic themes were deemed too narrow by the authors. In addition, the re-designed themes better fitted the research questions of this study, which would make the analysis and discussion more comprehensible for the reader.

4.2.1. Buyer-Seller Relationship

One apparent key driver for B2B companies’ digital presence needing to evolve, was the customers adapting their way of gathering information from a physical contact to using the Internet instead. The participants of this study suggested that when contact between buyer and seller were established, their customers knew more about their offerings today in comparison to previously.

“It varies a lot. But I can see that, generally, the customer knows more about the products, when they contact us now compared to when I started working at the sales department.” – Participant 1

When asked if Participant 8 had experienced any changes in how customers make contact with companies and where they were at in their purchase journey, he provided an answer that well summarised what all participants more or less described during the interviews.

“Well, there is academic research that shows that 70 percent of a decision is made before you take contact with a seller, and then HubSpot’s statistics say that now more purchases are initiated on the buyer’s initiative. Like, we do insight research and in-depth interviews for customers and ourselves. What we can see is that customers don’t want interrupting advertisements and phone calls from sales representatives. Instead they want to follow their own process. They want to look for themselves to see ‘what is our real problem’ and then look for solutions to that problem, how others have done it, look at references and such. Then, in the next step, they want the right information, at
the right time. They have higher expectations to have everything served to them so to speak.” – Participant 8

This statement suggests that, nowadays, the B2B customer is searching for information themselves to a greater extent, before contacting a supplier. It also shows that suppliers have realised the change in behaviour with the customer, as well as acted upon this change. However, from the probing questions on this issue, it became apparent that the customer might not always have a thorough understanding of the problem they are facing. The suggestion that customers search for information themselves but may not be right about their need, was also discussed by several participants.

“The customer is more knowledgeable and knows more about what they want. Then they’re not always right about what they need, that’s another thing, but they believe they know. That’s really the trick as well. It’s your knowledge that you want them to need. You want them to make decisions on your knowledge. You need to be part of their journey in that sense instead of being there as a sales representative. So, in that way, the customer has definitely changed.” – Participant 8

The information a customer is looking for when contacting a supplier is not what the product or service is, per se. The customer is looking for the value of the product or service. A customer make contact when they have realised a problem they have in their organisation, which they need help solving. Therefore, they are no longer searching for products to the same extent. Instead, they are searching for solutions to problems.

“We know so much and we’re very guided by our personal values. We are pack animals and will do what everybody else is doing. If someone says ecological products are good, then we will buy ecological. In the B2B context, I think that we have to sell the value of the solution instead of the product itself.” - Participant 3

“In the end, it’s about working with customer benefit and value, but that is built up by a combination of products and services where we today work with something called knowledge consulting (…) Increasingly, it goes towards that you need a combination of a product and service that creates this value. The product is an important complement which enables you to stay connected to a customer for a longer period of time.” – Participant 6
“It’s more about service than product today, really.” – Participant 2

In B2C purchasing behaviour, high versus low involvement products have been discussed. It has been argued that a customer demands less information for a purchase of a product with low involvement, in contrast to a high involvement product. The same thing applies for B2B products. However, there is a difference between how certain information can be acquired with relation to the type of product and the company size. This affects how the customer makes contact with suppliers. Participant 5 represented a company that sold products that sometimes were developed over several years, and his view stood out from the other participants.

“Customers to companies who sell, for example CRM systems, can educate themselves more before they take the first contact with the company, whereas in our case, our customers need more information from us in the first place.” – Participant 5

An issue described by Participant 7 was that people avoid advertising. One problem is that there is an overload of information on the Internet, which may result in the customer tending to ignore messages that are obvious advertisements. Moreover, in a not too distant future, a new generation of people will be in decision-making positions in B2B companies. These people are digital natives and are naturally avoiding advertisement that is not interesting to them. This would also have an impact on the B2B customer journey in the future, according to the findings of this study.

“People are giving companies the deaf ear because there is an abundance of information.” – Participant 7

“It’s a new customer with a lot of money on the way now. These people are very digital and most of all pickier about what they choose. We’re not responding to commercials the same way as the previous generation and our generation is also the one that are getting B2B jobs. Or at least will get them.” – Participant 3
In terms of the buyer-seller relationship, the participants emphasised the importance of understanding who the customer is. To be successful with inbound marketing, a company needs to identify the customer and understand the state of mind the customer is in when he starts to search for information. By understanding the needs of the customer, the company has better possibilities to direct more valuable and relevant content towards the customer, according to the participants.

“The biggest challenge is to understand to whom companies are selling to and why. Who’s the customer?” – Participant 3

“It becomes more interesting to have a supplier who understands what we are doing out on the field, than someone who just delivers a product. It feels more like you are becoming a partner if you understand that. I think that you need that kind of reasoning if you are to be a good subcontractor. I cannot sit as a subcontractor and just sell products. I must also understand the customer and their needs and how they perceive the brand of the company.” – Participant 6

By understanding the customers and their need, the marketing side can address the customer with the right content at the right time. The participants suggested that this could play a crucial role in future inbound marketing processes. An interesting aspect when this occurs, is what this phenomenon will do to the role of the sales representative. Most of the participants acknowledged that the sales representatives focus should shift from mainly closing deals to a more customer service-oriented approach.

“The dilemma that we forget to talk about sometimes is that we now have to educate sales representatives on how their role is changing, and why. Sales representatives now have to focus more on how to create added value in forms of being a person to talk to. It can be something as easy as being a fun character, to ensure the customer gets more value through education and expertise.” – Participant 1

The foundation for purchase decisions in the B2B sector seemed to have shifted from rational decisions, to involving more emotional aspects. The participants of this study suggested that buyers were more affected by emotions than they realised in their professional decision-making processes. Multiple participants referred to research on the subject when highlighting the importance of understanding that the B2B purchasing
decision is not driven entirely by rational values. Participant 2 spoke about studies that had shown that when a B2B customer is searching for alternative suppliers, he most often go with the first supplier he visits, as long as the content is relevant. Many participants also discussed the importance of a personal relationship with a sales representative that can provide expertise and aid when needed. However, Participant 6 contradicted all other participants, and claimed that B2B decisions still are made by rational thinking.

“In addition, there is a lot more rational thinking in the decision-making process amongst B2B companies. There are longer lead times and breakthrough times, which leads to more people being involved. Consequently, I don’t think inbound will have the same impact.” – Participant 6

“People are not rational creatures, we are emotional creatures. How we act and what we feel stem from emotions. Those who find the keys to where our emotions are created and what they lead to will be the successful marketers of the future.” – Participant 7

“That depends on who you ask. If you ask a purchaser at a company, then he will say product at a certain price and abilities. But if you ask a researcher at Lund’s University, he will say that the purchaser will make a choice out of prestige and community, so to speak. Same thing when you buy consumer goods like cars, clocks or clothes. There’s apparently no difference when you buy 500 tons of steel plate. So, we’re coming back to understanding what drives a purchase. You have to understand what the customer actually wants, more than he does himself (...) We can see daily that B2B is not guided by the rational values anymore. They go with their gut feeling in its positive aspect, such as trustworthiness and security. There’s an old saying stating that nobody got fired for buying IBM. You’ll have as many problems with IBM as you would with Compaq, but you can lean on the knowledge that you went with the best option.” – Participant 8

Participant 8 suggested that provision-based salaries for sales representatives should be re-evaluated to better match the buyer-seller relationship in the digitalised environment. All participants discussed, to some extent, marketing value instead of products. The provision system could therefore be adapted to better fit the offering. However, what this system should look like is a far too difficult discussion to elaborate on.
“If the provision system is the old system, I think it might be a problem. But provision is also a motivational factor, but that should be if you sell the right way instead of just closing as many deals as possible. So, the criteria for getting the provision should probably change. Then you will get to the point when you start thinking about if marketing also should have provision. That will be tricky to measure though. But what you get provision for should probably change.” – Participant 8

According to the majority of the participants, to be successful in managing customer satisfaction, it is important to continuously work with the customer after the purchase is completed. Providing ongoing education and workshops is seemingly a popular strategy, especially with companies that sell, for example, software services. By following up on the customer journey, companies also gain valuable insights into their own processes, which allow them to perform better in the long-run.

“Well, from the marketing side we follow the inbound methodology, which means that when a customer is in the delight phase, then we work with delight content so to speak. For example, if a customer has implemented a software system for e-commerce, then we invite them to user groups where they get to meet other customers working in the same system, so they can discuss technical and organisational aspects for example. So, we’re giving them knowledge and networks through blog posts, where we discuss effects that you can have from working with e-commerce, for example. It can also be webinars, in which you get suggestions on how to improve your performance.” – Participant 2

“It’s always important to find out what you can do, what you have done, and what experience you take with you in new procurements. The knowledge and how you use it is the actual product.” – Participant 6

4.2.2. Digital Strategy Decision Making

During the interviews, the researchers discussed with the participants how their adoption processes towards inbound marketing had started, and which positions that have been involved in the decision. It is not farfetched to believe that decisions of this magnitude stems from management. However, what became obvious was that this is not always the case. For example, Participant 1 explained that he was driving the change, more or less, by himself. Participant 1 had a past working within sales, now inbound manager, and had seen a need to move away from traditional sales channels and shifting towards a digitalised customer journey. Participant 2 suggested that management often do not have
the necessary knowledge about digital marketing to fully understand the benefits. Participant 2 were further along the implementation of inbound marketing methods than, for example Participant 1, and had started to change the company’s attitude towards sales and marketing altogether.

“When we’re talking about digital marketing, where I am, then people don’t really know anything about that. But as soon as we start talking about sales figures, then there’s a lot of people that are interested. Most often when we’re talking about sales figures, we talk about what do they have to do within the next period and then we move on to what we (marketing) need to produce to support them so they can do what they have to do. In B2B, marketing is supposed to be support to sales and management. What I can see is that we do just that. We provide support in terms of relevant content throughout the entire purchase process.” – Participant 2

The case of Participant 1, where he himself drove the implementation of inbound marketing, was supported by Participant 6. From his experience, the drive for changes in activities comes from employees that are affected by the activities in their daily work processes. Participant 6 was also touching on the same issue as Participant 2 when he described a new up-coming generation with deeper understanding about digital technology.

“I do think that the work with trying to digitalize the marketing process comes from below, from employees who are working within these specific roles. That’s my general understanding of it. They are the ones who sees the opportunities. In smaller companies, I do think that it is the owners themselves who makes that decision. The expectation is at a management level, but I do not think that the knowledge is quite there. Managers today may be a little bit older and haven’t had IT so close in their daily work. The new and younger ones who come in and have IT with them have a different view on the matter and can take this with them in their work. However, the ownership of these questions should always be on the marketing or sales department.”
– Participant 6

Participant 3 had the view that the lack of understanding about the B2B customer journey may result in unnecessary spending on print advertisement, which is hard to measure and derive benefit from. The underlying reason for this occurring were, in the participants’ views, lack of understanding about possibilities and opportunities with inbound
marketing. Participant 1 shared the view that there was a lack of understanding but claimed that the reason for resistance might be different. For example, fear of new technology which they lack understanding about.

“In the manufacturing industry, the lack of interest is often due to them thinking that this is very complicated. As I said, everyone realises the need to work with digital marketing, but they lack the necessary knowledge, so they just do what they know. So, they end up buying ad-space in Aftonbladet for 120000 SEK for one day and think they did a good deal. I don’t really agree with that thinking, so to speak. Then the worst part comes when I ask them how many people clicked the link and the answer is ‘no, but this is in print’. That’s where we start.” – Participant 3

“Within the manufacturing industry in general, I think it’s very common with people who are afraid to try new things. People are afraid that they will lose their jobs because they don’t know anything about the new digital stuff.” – Participant 1

The shared view of the sample was that when adopting inbound marketing strategies, it is crucial that the organisation works in the same direction, especially marketing and sales departments. The participants explained that inbound marketing cannot function unless the marketing and sales department integrate more than they have done historically.

“In my view, you will need an entire organisation that drags in the same direction, in order for inbound to work. Today’s working flow is very much “corporate” in the way that you deal with an organisation rather than people. I think this will be a key challenge, to turn this around so that you are dealing with people rather than an organisation. The idea behind content is to create credibility and you don’t do that with a brand, but with people. The brand can obviously tag along to create awareness and a stronger brand, but it’s the individual who is the important factor to create credibility.” – Participant 5

“To be successful with inbound marketing, sales have to provide information to marketing for inbound marketing to be as successful as possible. These departments have to get married for everything to be effective for real.” – Participant 3
By selling the company’s content for customer information, another purpose of inbound marketing is fulfilled, which is to generate warmer leads to the sales department. At this stage, the importance of integration might be at its peak. Participant 8 enlightened the importance of sales representatives taking care of the warm leads that are produced. One function of inbound marketing is that it enables you to keep track of what information the potential customer already has and where the customer is in their customer journey. The participants shared the view that this is powerful information to have as a sales representative, and if the information is handled correctly, it can increase the number of closed deals in the long run.

“I would say that it’s crucial because the problem is that when marketing is creating qualified leads which are not taken care of, the effect is lost. The same thing if these leads are taken care of poorly, you will lose that business also. In 9 out of 10 cases you need someone from sales to close the deal and then you have to get them on board. What I’ve identified is that customer service is the bridge from this aspect in terms of shifting your sales. You won’t be able to change all these sales representatives out there in the country and get them to work in a new way. Customer service is often an underestimated resource in this that have a good relation both with marketing and with sales. But most importantly they have a very tight relationship with the customer. They also have insight in if it’s worth to pursue a certain lead or if they need to be nurtured a bit longer. This will be even more important in B2B because of the long cycles.” – Participant 8

Participant 1 suggested that there has, for a long time, been the view of sales departments, that marketing people are mostly spending money and not adding value to the company. With traditional advertisement channels, like print in newspapers and product catalogues, this might have been the case. Print advertisement is hard to derive value from since it is hard to measure the actual return on investment. However, with digital channels this is no longer an issue. Companies now have the possibility to both measure and follow every step a customer takes along the customer journey. The insights that can be drawn from such information can then be used to expose prospecting customers to relevant content at the right time, which serves to nurture the potential customer towards closing a deal. Increasing possibilities to measure and learn from the marketing activities also gives management the ability to set different kinds of goals. The better part of the participants of this study agreed that management were more interested in figures than soft values.

“The problem for us, and I think many other companies in manufacturing industries, is that management sends two contradicting messages to sales and marketing. They tell
sales to close as many deals as possible and marketing to establish a good digital foundation that delivers in the long run. That doesn’t really work. You need both departments on the same page.” – Participant 1

With inbound marketing strategies, which have higher measurability, companies have better possibilities to set clear goals for both marketing and sales departments, according to the participants. This ties into the previous statements about aligning the organisation to an inbound marketing methodology.

“Something that is also good to think about is not just having goals for the sales department. Sales have always had goals really, and they may also have taken a bit more credit for achieving those goals than they should. If you can have goals for marketing as well, it can strengthen their position in the company as well. After all, as we talked about earlier, 70 percent of a purchase is done before you take contact with a sales representative. Then who should actually get most of the credit for the sell?” – Participant 8

Participant 8, acting as inbound marketing strategist, had experience from aiding companies in starting their inbound journey. From his experience, he acknowledged that setting goals for marketing activities is where companies struggle the most. Participant 8 suggested that this is due to lack of understanding about the abilities of new technology in management.

“What I can see from our customers is that setting goals is the part that they think are the hardest. They think back to the days when print was the only way to go and have a hard time quantifying what they need now. What I usually tell them is to think like the old Electrolux vacuum salesmen. 100 knocks, 10 talks, 1 thanks. You have to think backwards in steps. How many new sales do we need, then how many sales qualified leads do we need to achieve that. And then how many people do we need to come in contact with to get the right amount of leads. That’s how you should get your goal.” – Participant 8

With Participant 8’s claims about thinking backwards when setting goals in mind, the goals of other participants’ organisations became more comprehensible. The goals marketing departments have set are starting with how the traffic is driven to their website
and what page the customer lands on when he has found the company. Most often, according to this sample, the landing page is the blog. From there, the customer should indulge in, and learn from, the content the company has created and hopefully want more. To be able to access more content the customer is asked to “pay” for it with his details.

“What we try to do is to get people that visit our website to give us their details and follow the inbound methodology (attract, convert, close, delight). This could be like they Google something and end up on our blog. There we want them to download a guide or something after which they get an e-mail where we thank them and recommend something else that they might be interested in and in the long run we establish a contact and hopefully close the deal.” – Participant 2

When measuring inbound marketing activities, it is important to understand what, and why you are measuring. According to Participant 1, management in the manufacturing industry is getting more involved in the inbound marketing activities, but they still lack understanding about how to strategically plan the processes. When discussing the industry in general terms, Participant 1 stated that management usually have strong ideas about what they want to happen in terms of marketing, but the understanding why they should start certain processes are often lacking.

“A huge question for us is that management often ask me if we can make certain things happen on the webpage. My response is usually: of course we can, but what do you want to accomplish with that? So again, it’s evident that not everybody is entirely on board with inbound thinking (...)” – Participant 1

According to the participants of this study, one of the most important things in terms of measuring customer interaction was to evaluate what the company was doing. To succeed with inbound marketing, it is key to have relevant and high-quality content. Therefore, it is important to understand what content works for the typical customer.

“It’s always important to find out what you can do, what you have done and what experience you take with you in new procurements. The knowledge and how you use it is the actual product.” – Participant 6
Participant 8 discussed this learning process as a step-by-step process. Companies should attempt to define what they would like to accomplish and work backwards. Along the way, they should constantly evaluate their content and processes to learn over time and eventually have a strong perception of who their customer is, and how to best attract them to the company.

“What you should focus on (when measuring your marketing activities) in terms of inbound is to constantly evaluate what you’re doing, successively learn from it and don’t have too big ambitions in the beginning. It is hard. It’s hard to know what you should measure. But take a step back and figure out what you want the outcome to be in the end, then measure and learn from that.” – Participant 8

4.2.3. Communication Channels

In each interview, the participants were asked questions regarding what marketing channels their respective company used to reach their target audience. Participants 1 and 3 initially stated that the landscape of marketing had somewhat shifted due to the audience not responding to traditional channels to the same extent as they had previously done. As a consequence, companies needed to adapt their channels to this new situation, in their view.

“The feeling I get is that people in general don’t really trust advertisements. People will avoid advertisements just because it’s advertisement.” – Participant 1

“We are not responding to commercials the same way as the previous generation and our generation is also the one that are getting B2B jobs. Or at least will get them.” – Participant 3

As for the most successful and most frequently used channels by the companies, the answers varied. Social media networks were seemingly not the most important channel. The participants argued that LinkedIn was the most important in terms of creating business opportunities and sharing content from the company. Facebook and Instagram were suggested to mainly serve as a mean for employer branding. Participant 1 stated that the blog format was where they wanted their customer to end up, and that they were on their way to adopt an inbound marketing mentality in their marketing activities. However,
Participant 1 went on to discuss that the company cannot just switch mentality, but that it rather needs to be an ongoing process which requires time. While Participant 1 was in the middle of changing the organisation, other participants stressed, and confirmed, that they were shifting towards an inbound marketing methodology. Meanwhile, Participants 2 and 4 stated that they had more scattered channels, which together attracted customers.

“Our blog is where we want people to end up. We want the customers to read our posts, so that they can see the value of our products so to speak (...) However, those leads are colder than the ones we generate from our inbound marketing strategy, and they are also less cost efficient (...) We are not ready to completely cut the ties to our traditional channels, but we have to adapt it a bit. We have to become more modern in our communication to be successful.” – Participant 1

“We do very little in print and very little is paid. We do a little bit in AdWords, but we need to consider our strategy there. Also, we are working a bit with sponsored content on LinkedIn. LinkedIn is our biggest social media channel. We also use Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, but it’s usually very quiet there. We still post content but there is rarely a good discussion about the content on those platforms.” – Participant 2

“We use SEO, there’s a lot going on there and the conditions changes all the time. We have also bought search terms on AdWords (...) Facebook is our most successful channel. We are only sending e-mails to leads where we already have an accurate target audience since they want to be contacted.” – Participant 4

E-mail was also a favoured channel to work with. Some of the participants (1,2,3,8) worked with workflows, which was started when the company acquired a buyer’s contact information. The potential buyer receives an e-mail with content that serves to educate the buyer about the value that the product or service could deliver to the buyer’s organisation. The workflow continues with additional content as the buyer learns more about the possible value, until a designated point in the workflow, when either the buyer or supplier makes contact. This was an example of e-mail automation when it is the most effective, according to Participant 2.

“In terms of e-mails, we work a lot with establishing workflows with the customers. The different links they click triggers different responses in following e-mails that is meant
to give them more information about products and services. Also, a big part leads back to the blog and in the end, we establish contact with a bit warmer leads on the phone.” – Participant 1

Participants 5 and 6 stated that their companies were also engaging in digital channels to reach their target audience. However, in contrast to the other participants, they also argued that the human element played a significant part as a marketing channel for their respective companies. The participants of this study suggested that, in the B2B sector, it will be increasingly important to have a physical contact with a supplier as well. In their view, the human aspect generates trust and a contact which can supply expertise.

“The most successful channel is the human one, that is being a good partner, so that customers want to come back to us. Printed ads are starting to die out more and more and move towards digital channels such as LinkedIn (...) We are also working a little bit with SEO in terms of employer branding, but we are primarily trying to be present at fairs and such in order to present ourselves as an attractive employer (...) The events are one of our most important channels since this is where we can meet potential clients and customers. Also, I do think it’s vital to be visible digitally since it’s important to make a general good impression.” – Participant 5

“We are trying to be more visible on LinkedIn and that type of networks (...) Our external web is also a marketing tool. We are working in a very focused way to profile ourselves as a company who creates societal benefit. In the end though, it is the actual result with a customer which creates new opportunities for us (...) It’s still the physical meeting in the forums and networks in which we are actively engaged that are our most successful channels. In that sense, we are more physical than digital.” – Participant 6

As seen in the quote above by Participant 5, it was further suggested that digital channels were preferred over traditional channels in today’s marketing environment. However, both Participant 5 and 6 stressed that the individual meeting between humans still played a key part in the B2B landscape.

Participant 7 also stated that cold calls and the human element was an important marketing channel for his business. In addition, this participant also mentioned that the use of digital channels was quite inadequate at their company, and that networking rather played a significant role as a marketing channel. Participant 7 stated that he worked with an inbound methodology, however, he did it in real life and not online. With the
inadequate website and lack of knowledge about the digital world in mind, it is not farfetched to suggest that Participant 7 had seen the need to move away from traditional marketing. The company had realised the need for new communication channels and started to reach out through LinkedIn. Participant 7 was aiming to attract customers through social media, even if the company was at an early stage in adopting these methods.

“We are quite bad at using digital tools, although we could do it, for example by recording more videos. I try to write a couple of articles which I publish on LinkedIn and then we also have our website which, quite frankly, is rather bad (...) What I see as my most vital channel is actually cold calls, or I wouldn’t call it cold calls because I don’t call people furiously. For example, if I am in Gothenburg working, I usually think about what other clients there might be there and then I contact them over the phone to ask if they have seen what I have done or if they have read my articles. There is a lot of networking going on, basically (...) I can also work with targeted marketing. I ask customers to go in to my LinkedIn profile to act as a reference. I am working with trying to get people to recommend me. Networking is vital (...) Media and different channels are used to reinforce a message. You need to think about what channel, and at which point of consumption the customer is as most susceptible in order to identify what channel you should use to best reach out with your message to your customers.” – Participant 7

Further on, in order for the authors to get a broader view on the participants’ views on digital marketing, each participant was asked to give examples of the associated advantages and disadvantages with this strategy. Participant 2 argued that digital channels can generate better leads for companies, while at the same time stressing that developing an inbound strategy with digital channels takes time.

“I think there’s a big misconception that marketing is much cheaper and much quicker in digital channels. It’s not. It’s more granular, you can segment more and pinpoint your content in digital channels. But that it’s quick work and cheap is complete bullshit, I would say (...) You can definitely get better leads since you can analyse them in more ways to understand what they already know, and if they are worth pursuing. If you can see that a certain activity is working, then you can add a little bit on that investment and generate even more leads. You have an opportunity to constantly follow and evaluate what is working and where the customer is at in their journey.” – Participant 2
Participant 5 shared the view of Participant 2 when it came to the value that an inbound marketing journey can create through the digital channels that are incorporated in this strategy.

“The biggest advantage with digital marketing is that you can measure the real benefit it actually does. In addition, digital marketing enables better spread and we can direct our message in another way, customize our message and decide our target audience (...)” – Participant 5

Participant 7 argued that digital channels had enabled companies to reach niche target groups that previously had not been of much interest to companies. This participant also touched upon the fact that digital marketing can challenge the integrity of people since it requires information about the audience. Today, most things people do online can be monitored and measured by companies. This does not depend on if the communication channel is e-mail, LinkedIn or the company blog on the website. What customers are searching for, and finding, is their desired information. What they are using to pay for this information is their details and data.

“The thing that I find most interesting about the digitalisation is that you can reach very small target groups all over the world. You have not been able to do that before, since smaller target groups haven’t been interesting enough from an economic perspective. Now however, since we have opened up the whole world, a small target group can be a very big one all of a sudden (...) As for the challenges, I think that people are giving companies the deaf ear because there is an abundance of information. The integrity is challenged as well because people doesn’t know what information companies have about them. People do not want to be identified.” – Participant 7

Participant 6 agreed with Participant 7 on the integrity aspect of digital marketing and argued that the security of information was vital for digital marketers.

“Everything is online today, and you have also seen the downsides to it now with, for example, Cambridge Analytica. However, this is not a new phenomenon since people have warned us about it. I have earlier worked as an information responsible which has enabled me to see the downsides of it. Security of information is vital.” – Participant 6
Participant 5 argued that traditional channels would still have a function in the future, traditional in this sense is referring to the human, physical interaction. However, this participant also mentioned that they were trying to digitalise the physical experience as well and implement inbound strategies in the physical meeting.

“We are heading towards an inflection point. Our industry is still characterized by events and fairs. Therefore, it is vital that we are still present at events and fairs but since the emergence of digital tools, we have tried to digitalise that experience as well.

We have an online stand which puts our stands in front edge since they are quite advanced compared to our competitors because of digitalisation. We are also trying to work digitally around the events (...) When people are visiting our stands, we are trying to create value in the form of lectures and presenting new technique which is a hybrid of both digital and analogue tools. We think that the analogue aspect is vital, the human meeting, and that you can feel and squeeze a product and test the ability of it.” – Participant 5

On the question regarding if traditional marketing channels would still play a part in the future, Participant 7 gave a convinced answer and once again pinpointed the function that humans have in the marketing environment. Worth noticing is that all participants, when discussing traditional marketing channels, referred to the human meeting and not printed marketing.

“I think so, definitely. The seller is a person and you do not want to take away the personal meeting. We have been developed for ages in that we think it’s rewarding to meet other people and that will not disappear. If that disappears, we will disappear as humans. The question is if you can programme an AI robot to reflect the values that a company wants to reflect. I think there is where a person still fills a function.” – Participant 7

4.2.4. Content in Marketing Communications

The area of discussion concerning content sought to provide the authors with knowledge regarding what type of content the participants used in their marketing efforts. Further, the authors wanted to find out if the content that the participants used could be connected to those of inbound marketing, and if this was an intentional decision. To start off the discussion on the topic, the question concerning what type of content the participants used
was asked and naturally, the answers varied across the sample. Participant 5 stated a lot of thought was put into the content that they wanted to produce.

“We are working a lot with how we format and present our content so that our customers can consume the content in an easy way and so that it is relevant for them. People have a short attention span, so we are working a lot with how we format our headings and so on (...) We have a good combination of videos and pictures. We need to work with how we format our content because of the “goldfish syndrome”. We need to clarify that this is not just a marketing tool, but that it is also something that provides value for them. The way you present your content is key in order to attract people.” – Participant 5

All participants thought that video would be a popular and effective type of content in B2B marketing in the future. How far the participants had come in their video creations varied, but all saw the same advantages. Something that Participant 1 and 3 pressed upon was that the videos should not be sales oriented, but that they should serve to educate the customers. Participant 2 summarised their company’s video content creation, and also suggested that they wanted to work more with video as a content tool because of its associated advantages. In addition, Participant 7 highlighted that videos not only could work as a very effective tool for B2B companies to educate the customers, but also to promote an emotional message.

“We want to do more in video but it’s very time consuming. We want to do more explainer videos where we can explain something that is happening and what we can do, but so far, we’re very much textual. The key is to create videos with the purpose to keep the viewer on the social media channel. It’s worked fairly well so far, and our customer does like the content we’re posting. And for the text we produce in the blog, the key is to keep everything short. Short, short, short.” – Participant 2

“It’s superb as a tool. It can be used to mediate the emotional. Videos mediates emotions more than an article. Can B2B companies use videos to mediate the emotional? Maybe. Perhaps they can also use videos to explain complicated things in an easy way. People use videos today to learn new things, for example to play the piano, and that can also be used by B2B companies to educate customers, but also to highlight the emotional.” – Participant 7
Several participants also mentioned that their blog was where they wanted their customers to end up, since it was in the blog format they provided relevant content that would capture the attention of the audience. Participant 1 discussed their thinking behind the blog format, while Participant 7 stated that both blogs and podcasts could be a good tool to reflect valuable content. Multiple participants also explained that they did not want to use the term blog. Instead they used terms such as ‘knowledge bank’ or ‘school’.

“Our blog is where we want people to end up. We want the customers to read our posts, so they can see the value of our products so to speak (...) We have our blog where we provide customers with knowledge about how to use our products in the most effective way. What I want to do is to send out an industry magazine to the traditional customers, with roughly the same content that will kind of “lure them in” to the digital version on the blog. Then we want to further develop the blog to contain videos and make more easily comprehensible content in the future (...) The key issue is to adapt the customer to, slowly but steadily, understand that there’s more value online than it is in the analogue stuff we send out.” – Participant 1

“We are using a combination of blog and e-mail, but I would like to see more of the blog format, although this format can be a little bit dangerous, since some people view the blog format in a negative way. Maybe we can use a different term, such as ‘knowledge bank’ where we then can create new contacts through e-mail subscriptions. People are greeted by a page which presents what they are looking for, and then you can go on from there to fill up their knowledge.” – Participant 5

Several participants also discussed the mounting importance of using customer cases as a tool when providing content. By showing new and existing prospects the opinions of people that has used the product or service, credibility and trust can be achieved.

“Collecting customer cases to use as content in advertising will be very important to create trust in the future. Customers in general want to know about you and your product from people that has used your product or service. Advocates for your brand and products will give you an edge in the future, I think. Or at least you might lose at least part of your customers if you don’t have this information (...) The best campaigns have actually been before and after pictures which was intended to be both a pat on the back to the people that installed the product, and a way to show what it does for a room. We could see that it gave a lot of credibility and trust to the company, which
resulted in sales that we could lead back to the campaign (...) We know so much and we’re very guided by our personal values. We are pack animals and will do what everybody else is doing. If someone says ecological products are good, then we will buy ecological. In a B2B context, I think that we have to sell the value of the solution instead of the product itself. To have customer cases and references will be the best content in the future probably. It creates a lot of trust.” – Participant 3

Another type of content that was brought up by several participants during the interviews was storytelling that could work as an effective tool to get the customers interested.

“We are publishing interviews and stories. This increases credibility. We have also talked about having reviews on our pages, which can be a little bit risky if someone is dissatisfied. However, we are trying to give an honest picture (...) Credibility is such an important factor today and you cannot fool anyone anymore. People have gotten so used to being exposed by marketing that they can see through the attempts. You must sell value rather than a product or service.” – Participant 4

Participant 7 continued on the line that companies should provide value in their content. In his opinion, their vision should show in the content, so that people can identify themselves with it and join in on that vision.

“A lot of companies make the mistake of creating different “personas” for different target groups, when they rather should think: Why do we exist? Why are we doing this? Rather than: What do we do? You should look at yourself, on your vision, and see if more people share that vision and want to join in on that vision (...) You have to think about what knowledge that you are giving away for free, since this knowledge will be connected to the brand and the company, and in the longer run, form the general picture of the organisation.” – Participant 7

The authors also asked the participants about their inspiration when it came to content creation. The general view was that many participants looked at other industries and organisations for inspiration in order to implement, in their view, the best and most suitable tools into their respective operations.
“It’s a great advantage that other industries are ahead of us when it comes to digital marketing. They pave the way for us so that we can look at how they do it and then pick the raisins out of the cake and see what’s a good fit for us. We are also working with internal and external educations, which enables us to learn from each other.” – Participant 5

Other inspirational factors mentioned in the interviews were books, websites, podcasts, magazines and competitors and, as Participant 6 put it, a combination of all these factors worked as inspiration.

“I’m an omnivore (...) We are looking at how our competitors and others work with their profile, you take impressions from that all the time. You look at what sticks out from commercials etcetera, and there are both good and bad examples that you look at. Everything that is good and that creates value for the customers is something to build upon in the long term. In that case, it is vital that you can communicate this in various ways. Essentially, it’s about knowledge and ability in combination that can create good deliveries and these deliveries are not sufficient if the customer cannot absorb it and reap the rewards of the effects for what it was intended for. If we can, through both ourselves and through the customer, demonstrate this in marketing purposes, I think we have succeeded. A satisfied and happy customer will always come back, while dissatisfied customers will turn their back on us.” – Participant 6

4.2.5. Inbound Marketing and Future

Participant 8 started off the discussion regarding inbound marketing by reasoning around the forces that have driven the emergence of this strategy. The participant summarized the journey that inbound marketing has taken and argued that the entire digitalisation has laid the foundation for its progress.

“Well, that’s the entire digitalisation. It really started with e-mail newsletters, and then social media came along. The website has later gone from being a product catalogue to a selling competence. In all this buzz, it gets increasingly important to find the effect of the marketing. That is, when you get sick of measuring likes and opened e-mails, and care more about what leads you get and how much quality that are in those leads. That’s when it gets interesting and while the technology goes forward, this also becomes manageable. Now, you can follow a customer which visits your site all the way
“from interest to closed deal. Then you add CRM to this and there you go!” – Participant 8

When asked about how far their respective company had come in their inbound marketing implementation, the responses were similar across the sample. Most participants argued that they had come a fair way along the journey, although they did understand that they still had a long way to go in order to have a fully developed inbound marketing strategy.

“I think we are in a fairly good position. We are in a strong position compared to our competitors, which isn’t that far actually if you look at other industries. We are in the starting pits with regards to inbound marketing. Trends from the B2C sector creates opportunities for us within B2B in the long run.” – Participant 5

“We’ve come a pretty long way with inbound marketing in comparison to our competition. We’ve been working with this for about two and a half years and we can see the results of it, both in terms of actual closed deals, return-on-investment, and our digital maturity in how we’ve moved in the buying cycle of our customers. We’ve gone from just implementing an IT system with our customers to participating in developing digital strategies.” – Participant 2

To get a broader picture of the maturity amongst B2B companies in terms of inbound marketing, some participants discussed the subject in general terms within the industry. The view that the maturity had come a fairly long way was also evident here, although Participant 6 argued that B2B companies were not that mature when it came to inbound marketing. However, Participant 6 also mentioned that this was an area that companies were eager to explore.

“On our part, we have a long way to go. Generally, I don’t think that companies are that mature when it comes to inbound, but they are looking at the surrounding environment and individuals in their network to see how they are working with these tools. To sum it up, the maturity is not large, and there is a lot more to do on that front.” – Participant 6
Participant 3 agreed that B2B companies were quite mature when it came to inbound marketing, but that they needed help in driving the process forward. On the other hand, Participant 4 argued that most companies had gone digital but that it was difficult to measure the general maturity.

“In general, I think that Swedish companies has come pretty far in their digital thinking. They want to use inbound marketing and are aware of the value. What they need help with is the tools and tying the knots together.” – Participant 3

“It’s hard to say how far companies have come because no one stands out from the rest. Basically, everyone has gone digital but there’s no one who is outstanding.” – Participant 4

Participant 8 also discussed inbound marketing in general terms and argued that companies did not just use inbound marketing strategies today. The participant also mentioned that companies were in the starting pits of the journey and that this phase usually took some time. However, the participant also suggested that inbound marketing almost sold itself when suggested as a strategy.

“With some of our customers we’ve worked with this for a couple of years, but few are doing just inbound if you say. Many are in the starting phase, which is long, but hopefully we can hit the gas soon. It takes time before our customers gain speed with this, but now we can see that we’re getting closer. We can see that inbound marketing is getting more attention as well. We don’t have to preach for it ourselves as much anymore since people, both in-house and other marketing agencies, talk a lot about it.”

– Participant 8

While a majority of the participants agreed that inbound marketing had a quite high level of maturity among B2B companies, some participants also discussed the challenges associated with implementing such a strategy. Participant 1 mentioned that resistance had been experienced when suggesting an inbound marketing strategy to the organisation and went on to say that companies must dare to try new things in order to grow.
“What I have to work hardest with is to get people on the same track as me with inbound. I’m working by myself and try to get other people in the organisation to help me out. Within the manufacturing industry in general, I think it’s very common with people who are afraid to try new things. People are afraid that they will lose their jobs because they don’t know anything about the new digital stuff (...) We’re in a phase where we test a lot. We’re not sure what will work yet so we have to try, which is a huge plus for digital channels.” – Participant 1

Participant 2 mentioned that a challenge that many companies might not be prepared for is that an inbound marketing strategy takes time to implement and although the benefits are appealing, patience is key for it to work.

“I think there’s a big misconception that marketing is much cheaper and much quicker in digital channels. It’s not. It is more granular, you can segment more and pinpoint your content in digital channels. But that it’s quick work and cheap is complete bullshit, I would say. Because it takes really long time to develop and create really good and valuable content if you’re trying to work with pull marketing instead of push marketing. This shift has changed our whole organisation in terms of thinking about these things, which is fascinating.” – Participant 2

Participant 6 went on to suggest that there was a difference between companies who operated in the digital world to those that did not, when choosing to adopt digital strategies. However, the participant also mentioned that there existed an ambition among companies to explore it further.

“The companies who are working in the digital world with digital products looks upon it as a natural way of doing their business, and that will continue. Companies who are working with both hardware and digital products probably looks upon it a little bit different. They are probably a bit more grounded since they also have their physical products. Service companies are probably implementing digital tools more and more, so I do think there is an ambition, generally speaking.” – Participant 6

When asked about what role inbound marketing would play in the future, the participants all somewhat agreed upon that it would play a part, albeit they all had different views to what extent it would be implemented. For instance, Participants 2 and 8 firmly believed
that inbound was the only way to move forward. Inbound marketing is a strategy that attracts the customer towards the company instead of the company coming to the customer. The participants argued that this strategy will be more feasible in the future mainly due to customers’ opportunity to take control of their own information input. Also, the classic sales representative, in the role of visiting and presenting products and offerings to customers, needs to change. Mainly due to the information a sales representative previously delivered to customers, they now gather online themselves to a greater extent at a time that is suitable for them.

“To be honest, I don’t really see any other way to work in the future. As I said to you when we scheduled this interview, I don’t answer my phone if I don’t know who’s calling. So, if I want information about something, I simply Google it or talk to someone I know that have knowledge about it. It’s really about seeing everything from the customer’s problem and not think about what I’m trying to sell.” – Participant 2

“I would say that the future is bright for inbound marketing. Right now, I think it’s the only way to go. There’s nothing out there that is better right now for B2B businesses. I think that more companies should adopt this philosophy since this will also separate the companies that are serious from the ones that aren’t. Companies that are happy to provide something extra to the customer will win in the long run, because that’s what the customer wants now. A product is not enough, we also want education on how to best use it among other things.” - Participant 8

Participant 5 also predicted a bright future for inbound marketing, whilst at the same time pointing out that there are obstacles along the way that companies must overcome in order to successfully implement this strategy. The content that is created for digital medias comes with slightly different demands. Traditional print advertisements are exposed to almost everyone, whereas content in terms of inbound marketing, is relevant for a specified customer only.

“We are in the starting pits with regards to inbound and are very curious about the subject. I haven’t faced any opposition to it internally and it’s very convenient to get people on board. Inbound does almost sell itself and there is no one who doesn’t want to be part of the journey. I believe in inbound (...) Depending on where your company is operating, I think that you will probably need a mix of traditional and inbound
marketing. In our case, I’m convinced that we will still have a mix for a foreseeable future with an increasing focus on digitalisation.” – Participant 5

Although inbound marketing to a great extent encompasses digital tools, Participant 4 argued that traditional tools, such as print and the personal meeting at fairs, would still fill a function in the future. He stated that he had seen studies that strengthened this claim, which also suggested that people enjoy receiving traditional mail. However, it is unclear if the study referred to by Participant 4 had any relevance in a B2B perspective.

“I don’t think everything will be digital in the future. I believe in a hybrid. We have also seen investigations who strengthens this claim. People get happy when they receive post in their mail boxes and they don’t experience that as disturbing, so we believe that printed advertising will fill a function also in the future. It can even be that traditional mail can stand out from the clutter in the future since digital marketing is the norm today (...) Fairs will also live on, it fills an important function, but other standards will be required of this format.” – Participant 4

Participant 6 continued on the line that the personal meeting between individuals would still play a part in future marketing operations. Furthermore, the effect that inbound marketing would have on different industries were discussed and it was suggested that this strategy could work as a kick start to many companies’ operations.

“In some industries, I think inbound will have a great impact whereas in others, I think it will be limited. I think it will be needed in order to arouse interest and start a sales process, especially among the new generation. However, when you move towards more complex issues, I do think that relationships between individuals will need to be built. Inbound can work as a kick start to increase a business volume but the actual business is made between individuals and it always will be done between individuals within B2B. You can apply inbound for simple services in a longer linkage but for the core business, where it is crucial if you will succeed or not, I think human relationships will be key. To generate leads, I do think that inbound can play a part though (...) I do think that there will be challenges with inbound in the future but if you can find a smart way forward, I think that inbound can play a part. You have to avoid the “flooding of ads” that can be created by AdWords because in the end, you get “ad blind”. That is also the reason to why I don’t think AdWords have a bright future, because if it’s too much targeted
advertising, you will drown in it. You have to be able to find what you are looking yourself, in an easy way.” – Participant 6

The human aspect of inbound marketing was also touched upon by Participant 5, who argued that the mind-set needed to be switched from organisation to people. In addition, the importance of having an organisation that were heading in the same direction was highlighted.

“In my view, you will need an entire organisation that drags in the same direction in order for inbound to work. Today’s working flow is very much “corporate” in the way that you deal with an organisation rather than people. I think this will be a key challenge, to turn this around so that you are dealing with people rather than an organisation. The idea behind content is to create credibility and you don’t do that with a brand, but with people. The brand can obviously tag along to create awareness and a stronger brand, but it’s the individual who is the important factor to create credibility.”

– Participant 5

The importance of involving the customer in the inbound journey was brought up by Participant 7 as an important factor for the future. Since the essence of inbound marketing is all about creating content that addresses the customer, the participant argued that they should also be part of the journey, in order to create customised and valuable content.

“You can think of it as we are heading somewhere. People talk a lot about inviting the customer rather than just giving them stuff. That you are inviting the customer in the production process. As a customer, I can sometimes feel that if I buy a certain brand, I will become part of a tribe, which makes me involved. Then you can ask yourself if I can contribute to that tribe as a customer. I think that will become the next step, that you get the customers involved in both the production, and directly in to the product development. You need to make the customer feel part in the development of the company. This is where it becomes interesting for customers, when they feel that they actually can contribute. I think there is where the future lies within B2B.” – Participant 7

As mentioned in the frame of reference, GDPR will be taken into effect come May 2018, and naturally effect inbound marketing as a strategy, and also the companies that are
choosing to adopt it. Personal data and information is, to a large extent, the essence of inbound marketing as it acts as currency when a potential customer is asking to gain access to relevant and high-quality content. When asked about GDPR’s impact on companies’ future operations, the participants all agreed that it would present challenges, albeit arguing that it was a necessary legislation to put into execution.

“GDPR is the best thing that can happen really, especially for inbound marketing. The problem is that it will be a speed bump in the beginning, but we need to have this legislation and we need to use it as guidance to see what customers are relevant to us as a company (...) Managing the CRM system with information security in mind is not something you should do just because of GDPR, you have to do that either way. You shouldn’t wear a seatbelt because the police might pull you over, you wear it because you might be in an accident.” – Participant 1

Participant 3 further suggested that companies should keep in mind that there would not only be e-mails and phone numbers that would be covered by the legislation, but also pictures and other visual tools. Apart from that, the participant argued that the situation would be somewhat similar to previously, although the fines for breaking the legislation would be higher.

The participants continued to discuss more in detail how the new legislation would affect them in their role. For instance, Participant 2 provided an in-depth view on the necessary steps his company must take, in order to tackle GDPR. Generally, the participants in this study had the same view on how their processes would be affected when the new legislation takes effect. Where the participants differed the most, was in terms of how much they actually knew about what would be demanded of their organisations.

“Nobody knows what it’s about. It’s just a bunch of consultants going around making money so far. We’ve had a consultant here that is supposed to help us figure this out, but I haven’t received any feedback from him. As far as I understand, it’s very complicated with big fines involved and what I feel is that we need to inform our customers that we have information about them and what we will use that information for. It’s a bit like the Swedish Data Protection Act, a bit of cookie policy and stuff like that. I think that we have to be entirely transparent and entirely honest in what we aim to do with the information. The other side is that the customer has the right to know what information we have, and they also have the right to acquire all that information within 24 hours, so that’s a pretty big thing. What we’ve done is to start looking at how we are planning to communicate this to our customers. Then we must also clean the
inactive clients we have in our CRM system and then in HubSpot, which is our information system. We have to make it a routine that we every month clean the CRM system from customers that haven’t returned to our website within 18 months. Then we delete all their information. So, I think the cleaning function, who’s in charge of the process, and the ability to delete information about people and that if a customer wants to know what information we have about them. We have to be able to get that information out to them easily. Those are the biggest challenges as I see it.” – Participant 2

Participant 4 stated that they simply had to adapt to the new situation that GDPR would bring. He further acknowledged that the company would no longer be able to save peoples’ information in lists. This could present difficulties to them in their everyday activities, in terms of prospecting customers.

“GDPR will affect us. We must make it clear what the personal details that our audience gives to us are going to be used for, the purpose of it. It makes it a little bit more difficult for us because we can no longer save lists about target audiences and their interests who tracks back several years in time etcetera. You just have to adapt to it really.” – Participant 4

Participant 8 elaborated from a different angle. He suggested that, as people in general will become more and more aware that this technology exist and how it is used, the higher the demands on high-quality content will be. When a B2B customer is searching for information on a supplier’s webpage, the customer will expect to be delivered high-quality content in return for his details. What this could mean for inbound marketing, is that companies that continuously deliver content which is relevant and timely, will have an edge over companies that fails, or does not perform as well, in this aspect. Participant 8 suggested that, in a B2B context, the customer’s ability to withdraw the consent of collecting information might serve as a quality measure for the content which a supplier is providing.

“GDPR will have the effect that more customers will become aware that this technology exists, and the people that handle this the right way will benefit from GDPR over time (...) You must realise that if you give a supplier your details, you expect relevant and high-quality content. If you expect to get crap content, you won’t give a company your details. What a buyer pays with online is his information. Then, as a supplier you have
to give him valuable content in return for his information. What GDPR also does is
giving the customer the ability to withdraw the consent of a supplier using his
information. Therefore, we have to create better content to stay relevant, and through
that deserve the information we want so to speak (...) This legislation will put the
serious companies ahead, I think. The companies that aren’t managing their customers
fairly will have a harder time acquiring information. It will become tricky for the super
sales representative who has a killer CRM to succeed because he doesn’t take time to
maintain customer satisfaction, if we’re generalising a lot.” – Participant 8
4.3. Summary of Empirical Findings

To sum up the findings and to facilitate for the reader, the key points covered in the interviews will be presented in Table 3 on the next page. These key points will be further examined in coming chapters of this thesis.

Table 3. Key points identified in Empirical Findings.

| Buyer-Seller Relationship | - Customers search for information themselves.  
|                          | - Customer has more information when contacting a supplier.  
|                          | - Customers prioritise value over products.  
|                          | - Buying decisions are driven by rational and emotional reasoning.  
|                          | - Sales representatives’ roles have changed. They should not only close deals, but rather focus on providing expertise and education.  
| Digital Strategy Decision Making | - General lack of understanding about digital strategies in management.  
|                          | - Digital channels are not handled as a holistic strategy, but rather as separate strategies.  
|                          | - Lack of understanding about measurability.  
|                          | - Difficulty defining marketing goals.  
|                          | - Contradicting goals for sales versus marketing departments.  
|                          | - Aligning entire organisation around inbound marketing is vital for success.  
|                          | - Constantly evaluate and learn from online activities.  
| Communication Channels | - Customers are avoiding obvious advertisement  
|                          | - Misconception that digital marketing is cheap  
|                          | - Preferred social media channel in B2B is LinkedIn.  

60
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Channels cont’d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- SEO is more important than SEM/PPC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Blogs are often favoured in B2B.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- E-mail drives traffic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Providing value and education for the customer is vital.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Inbound marketing generates warmer leads.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Measurability throughout the buyer’s journey enables learning and valuable insights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Human interaction will stay important, but with changed demands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Integrity of generated data is, and will be, an important aspect of B2B business.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content in Marketing Communications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- E-mail automation plays a big role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Customer cases are popular and improves credibility and trust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Format content for recognition and attractiveness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Video is time-consuming but effective in creating emotions and promoting storytelling since it is comprehensible and educational.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inbound Marketing and Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- B2B has come a long way in adopting inbound marketing strategies but has a long way to go.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Inbound marketing strategies will play a big role in B2B business in the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Important to involve the customer in processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- GDPR will have an impact in the B2B sector, but there is a lack of knowledge about the direct effects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- GDPR will demand clean CRM systems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Serious, transparent companies will succeed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Analysis

The analysis chapter will provide the reader with a discussion comparing the empirical findings with the frame of reference. Also, the authors will provide further discussion of the results from the analysis, with the intention to propose additional areas to existing theory.

The following chapter serves to provide more detailed insights into the empirical findings, as well as to compare the findings of this study to previous academic research. The first part of the analysis will show similarities between the findings of this study and previous research, divided in the topic themes presented in Chapter 4. Aspects in terms of challenges when implementing inbound marketing strategies has not been sufficiently researched prior to this study. Hence, the findings that were uncovered in the interviews on this subject cannot be analysed, nor compared, with regard to previous research. The authors have chosen to show these findings briefly in Section 5.2, in order to maintain a good structure in the presentation of this thesis. The effects these findings might have will be further elaborated on in the discussion, presented in Chapter 6.

5.1. Buyer-Seller Relationship

Previous research has shown that the buyer journey in a B2B context has somewhat changed with the buyer’s possibility to acquire information by himself online (Wiersema, 2013). Connecting this statement to the empirical findings about the B2B buyer, the authors observed that an overwhelming portion of the sample’s claims, strengthened Wiersema’s findings. The buyer has conducted extensive research himself before making contact with a supplier. The participants explained that the B2B business cycle are relatively long, and that the information search stage is extensive. Measurements made by Participant 2’s company showed that their customer first visited their website about 6 months before they made contact with the company. Participant 2 also stated that he had taken part of research that had suggested that 70 percent of a buying decision is made before a buyer comes in contact with a sales representative. Grewal et al. (2015) suggested that as much as 77 percent of B2B buying decisions are made before contact, which were higher than the figure suggested by Participant 2 in this study. However, the relatively high percentage suggests that B2B buyers does extensive research themselves. The participants (1,2,3,4,6,8) argued that the information search buyers do themselves have driven a pull marketing strategy in the B2B business. The outcome was inbound marketing, according to the sample, which lies in line with the discussion by Patrutiu-Baltes (2016).

The aforementioned phenomenon will probably have the effect that the sales representative should adapt his processes. Grewal et al. (2015) suggested that B2B sales representatives should focus on providing solutions to problems and sell value instead of
products. Grewal’s et al. (2015) suggestions are strengthened by the findings of this study. The participants all agreed that sales representatives need to adapt their offerings to become more value-oriented. Participant 1 described that he had seen the change in buyer’s behaviour first hand, and that this change had driven his business towards inbound marketing, which led to the sales department needing to adapt the way they sell. The findings of this study suggest that the effect of buyers sometimes having access to an abundance of information prior to contact with a sales representative, could often lead to the customer misinterpreting their actual need. With a need that is not accurately described, or based on false pretences, the demand on a sales representative should be guiding the buyer, rather than selling to him. The idea is that the customer will be educated on what he really needs and, in the long run, be more satisfied.

Another aspect of this phenomenon is that B2B buyers are not solely acting on rational reasoning anymore. The findings of this study suggest that relationships and personal contact with a sales representative is highly valued in the B2B sector. The participants (1,2,3,7,8) suggested that the relationship is important since it can give the buyer access to expertise and solutions that might not be apparent in their own information search. The personal contact and emotional aspect that plays an important role in B2B buying decisions according to the participants, differs from the traditional view that B2B decisions are made from rational reasoning. However, recent studies by Kumar Pandey and Mookerjee (2018) and Kaufmann et al. (2017), have shown that the emotional aspects play a bigger role than previously assumed. The participants of this study strengthened these claims and suggested that the relationship in B2B business is important. For example, Participant 8 described that most B2B decisions has some level of ‘gut feeling’ involved. This factor is often established and affected by the personal relationship between the buyer and sales representative. Kumar Pandey and Mokerjee’s (2018) findings suggested that the customer experience is also an important aspect in B2B business. They presented that B2B sales representatives should work to maintain a positive relationship with a buyer throughout all touchpoints in a buying cycle. These claims were strengthened by the findings of this study. The personal relationship was highlighted by all participants as an important factor to maintaining a good and profitable business relationship. It was concluded by multiple participants that rational reasoning simply cannot be the only foundation in B2B buying decisions, since the actual decision is made by human beings who are driven by emotions.

5.2. Digital Strategy Decision Making

Academic research on the subject on implementing inbound marketing strategies in a B2B context is scarce. The authors acknowledge that research, most probably, has been conducted on this issue. However, since this research was conducted for thesis purposes, the authors have had a restricted amount of time. Additionally, the authors have not had access to all academic resources that otherwise could have provided further depth in the frame of reference.
Since the amount of research available does not consider implementation issues, the findings in this section cannot be analysed with regard to previous research. In this section, the key findings which have been deemed significant and important by the authors, will be briefly presented. Further thoughts and insights from these findings will be discussed in more detail in the discussion which can be found in Chapter 6.

All participants of this study have discussed meeting different levels of resistance when attempting to implement inbound marketing strategies in their organisations. Most organisations have an online presence, however, the participants suggested that there was a lack of holistic understanding about how the digital channels co-exist. Therefore, inbound marketing as a strategy might not be fully adopted by the Swedish B2B sector. It was suggested by multiple participants that the resistance might stem from lack of knowledge. Participant 1 discussed that management often are senior in their role and might not have taken enough interest in the digital changes that has affected all parts of society to some extent. Participant 2 argued along the same line, however, he discussed that management might need to be persuaded with proof that a change in marketing activities will be positively backed up by measurements.

All but one participant discussed the importance of aligning the sales and marketing departments, in order to be successful with inbound marketing. This has been briefly touched upon in previous research (Holliman & Rowley, 2014), however, the understanding of why has not been sufficiently discussed. The findings suggest that lack of alignment in the organisation could lead to high quality leads being poorly managed. It was suggested that B2B companies have adopted digital channels in their marketing endeavours. The problem that many companies experience is that they do not have the necessary knowledge, nor understanding, to use the channels effectively. Most companies have e-mail newsletters, but many do not understand the metrics that is obtained in terms of opening rates and the meaning behind links that are clicked.

Insights in inbound marketing implementation from multiple participants (1,2,3,6,8) suggested that the hardest part is setting, and defining, goals for inbound marketing activities. Participant 8 claimed that setting goals is a very important aspect of inbound marketing, since the learning outcomes from inbound marketing can be valuable for an organisation, if managed effectively.

5.3. Communication Channels

The communication channels most frequently used by the participants varied among the sample, although there were some common denominators that could be connected to theory. First of all, a majority of the participants argued that SEO was a more important channel for them in comparison to SEM in general, and PPC in particular, because of its more organic form and associated advantages. Furthermore, as suggested by King (2015), SEO depends heavily on the amount of valuable user experience a company can create.
on their website. This statement was something that the participants agreed upon and took with them in their work to user optimise their website. It was apparent among the participants that their intended focus was on the customer rather than the search engine itself, when dealing with SEO. This included making sure that the information the customer was looking for was easily accessible and that the webpage was designed so that key words that fulfilled the customer’s need were present. Once again, it was shown that the participants had come a fairly long way in their inbound journey with this shift in focus towards customer need (Del Rowe, 2017; King, 2015).

According to the participants, the blog format is often favoured within B2B due to its usefulness in providing value and educational content towards the potential customer. In that sense, blogs can be viewed as both a useful content tool, as well as an important communication tool for B2B companies in their quest to provide value towards their customers. The fact that the participants often chose the blog format, lies well in line with Järvinen and Taiminen’s (2016) claims about blogs being amongst the most popular formats for content distribution. King (2015) argued that an efficient content marketing strategy can also aid B2B companies in their SEO efforts. Hence, by integrating valuable content in the blog, additional advantages to providing the actual content can be derived from such actions, in the B2B context.

Providing content through e-mail automation workflows is an important strategy which is adopted by the organisations in this study that had come the furthest with their inbound marketing. The method most commonly used by the participants in this study begun with attracting the buyer to their website by having interesting, valuable content in, for example, their blog. If the information is relevant to the potential buyer and leaves him wanting more, the buyer will give his contact information. This is how the buyer converts from a possible customer to a more solid lead. Thereafter, the lead is nurtured with more quality content via e-mail, until he contacts the supplier with a problem that needs solving, or the company establish a relationship, which can lead to a closed deal in the long-run. The participants’ views on how to handle e-mail as part of their inbound marketing strategy laid well in line with the frame of reference. The claims about using e-mail to provide valuable content to maintain a relationship and educate the customer was similarly argued by Ward (2017), as well as Merisavo and Raulas (2004). Earlier research have also shown that e-mail is a preferred method of digital marketing strategy (Fariborzi & Zahedifard, 2012; King, 2015). Fariborzi and Zahedifard (2012) argued that e-mail marketing is the most abused channel in terms of advertising. In terms of B2B, that does not hold the same relevance however. Since the buyer gives his information details in exchange to acquire the content to his e-mail, the abuse aspect somewhat disappears. Participant 8 used the buyer’s information details as something that could be seen as a security factor, in the sense of the buyer being able to withdraw his details from the supplier if the content does not meet the buyer’s quality demand.
Lacka and Chong (2016) described that there were resistance and uncertainty towards that social media channels were not a feasible alternative in B2B marketing. The empirical findings of this study somewhat confirmed this statement, since the participants claimed to not use social media networks to its full potential. Facebook and Instagram were mainly used for employer branding purposes and LinkedIn was used to spread content as part of a business creation strategy. King (2015) suggested that social media networks can be used to identify and nurture new possible business relationships. Considering the empirical findings in terms of buyer-seller relationship alongside suggestions by Kaufmann et al. (2017), they argued that B2B business decisions takes emotional reasoning into concern. Hence, the authors suggest that social media can play a larger role. The findings show that buyers value the personal relationship to a large extent and that social media networks may well be an important channel to use to nurture that relationship.

The general view amongst the participants when it came to communication channels were that B2B companies, both themselves and others, gradually have shifted towards digital communications. While some participants pinpointed that they still communicated in print, the overwhelming view from the sample was that this type of communication was losing its importance and would soon be fully replaced by digital tools. By looking at Table 1 presented by Opreana and Vinerean (2015), the shift becomes clear in that companies are moving away from the more intrusive traditional form of marketing, towards a more organic and inviting model. An important aspect however, which was touched upon by several participants (1,4,5,6,7,8), was the human interaction, being present at trade shows for example, that they still viewed as a key factor in future B2B operations. The participants argued that one of the objectives with inbound marketing was to create long lasting relationships, which was in line with the suggestions by Opreana and Vinerean (2015). Hence, the participants argued that you cannot build these relationships solely on digital channels. Instead, you should have a functional combination between the human aspect and the digital aspect, in order to reach and convert qualified leads. Consequently, in the participants’ view, the human interaction would live on and, more importantly, fill a vital function within B2B, albeit the relationship evolving towards value creation rather than strictly transactional.

The human aspect can also be connected to the view that B2B processes has traditionally been driven by rational reasoning (Kaufmann et al., 2017; Kumar Pandey & Mookerjee, 2018). The participants argued along the same line, but further suggested that emotions will play a larger role in B2B decision-making and communication in the future. Participant 7 even went on to state that people as individuals are not rational creatures, but rather emotional creatures. Consequently, this would also affect the people involved in B2B to a larger extent than previously assumed.
5.4. Content in Marketing Communications

As for the content used by the participants’ companies in their marketing communications, the different tools used naturally varied within the sample. Since content should evoke a sufficient amount of interest in the target audience’s eyes, the companies examined in this study were aware of the effort needed in order to succeed with creating content. Several participants (1,2,8) discussed the importance of formatting your content in a satisfying way in order for it to be recognisable and attractive in the eyes of the viewer, which quite clearly connects to the original idea behind content marketing, which lies well in line with the claims by Holliman and Rowley (2014).

Of the various methods within content marketing proposed by Järvinen and Taiminen (2016), a few stood out as the most important ones for the participants in this study. To start off with, videos was mentioned as an effective tool, albeit a time-consuming one, to create emotions and promote storytelling. These two aspects were said to be vital since people are no longer paying the same attention towards marketing efforts as before. By playing on people’s emotions and telling them engaging stories, an interest can be awakened, and in the longer run lead to the audience associating the feeling or story to the company or brand. Another aspect concerning videos that was brought up by the participants was the fact that videos can be used as an effective tool to produce easily comprehensible educational motion graphics. To not only sell products and services to the customer, but also to educate them, was something that was held in high regard by the participants and can also be connected to the level of trust that can be achieved through relevant and valued content. King (2015) discussed the importance of creating content that is valuable to the customer, which holds high similarity to the suggestions made by the participants.

Customer cases and reviews were other types of content that was used amongst the participants because of their popularity and effects, including higher credibility and trust among the customers. Participant 4 especially highlighted this as an important tool in their marketing efforts, arguing that customers might not take the company’s word for it when being recommended a product or service. Instead, the opinions from previous users played a significant role in their potential customers decision-making process, although it was argued that this might also be a risky step to take. However, regardless of the potential event of poor reviews from dissatisfied customers, the participants argued that it was important to give an honest picture in order to appear transparent. Hence, by encouraging customers to take part in these cases and reviews, stronger customer engagement could be built, which obviously is an important business objective for B2B companies in their content marketing efforts (Holliman & Rowley, 2014; Pulizzi & Handley, 2015).

The blog format was another popular content tool for many of the participants and a majority of them said that it was at the blog in which they wanted their customers to end
up. By redirecting the customer to the blog, the participants stated that it was there in which they educated their customers and provided them with valuable information, which in the longer run would attach them to the company’s offerings. Clearly, this type of reasoning could be connected to another one of the business objectives associated with content marketing by B2B companies, namely promotion of brand awareness and image (Holliman & Rowley, 2014; Pulizzi & Handley, 2015).

Although many participants touched upon the fact that they took inspiration from the B2C sector in their content marketing endeavours, a few also mentioned that they wanted to distinguish themselves from that sector. For example, rather than calling it blogs, some participants (1,2,3,6,8) mentioned that they would rather call it knowledge banks or educational channels. They argued that the term blog was negatively charged in a business context as a consequence of the abundance of blogs in today’s world, and that calling it blogs would promote the wrong image in the minds of their customers. The participants also agreed with the objective of content marketing in terms of increasing sales through customer acquisitions, lead generation, upselling and cross-selling. Therefore, it can be argued that the participants somewhat adjusted their content strategies to better fit the B2B customer, in order to reach the aforementioned objectives of content marketing (Holliman & Rowley, 2014; Pulizzi & Handley, 2015).

5.5. Inbound Marketing and Future

By analysing the empirical findings, the authors found evidence that the participants had started to embrace the idea and adopt the strategies associated with inbound marketing, although several participants also mentioned that they had a long way to go. In addition, the participants agreed with the associated advantages and disadvantages with this strategy that was brought up in the chapter concerning frame of reference. According to Patrutiu-Baltes (2016), an inbound marketing strategy can bring a direct, permanent and long-term relationship with the customer, and provide the company with a fast and accurate profile of their audience. This situation was touched upon by a majority of the participants when they discussed the advantages with inbound marketing and can consequently be connected to previous theory. Also, according to previous findings, the fact that better content could be created with an inbound marketing strategy in order to capture an audience, was mentioned by several participants.

Several participants in the study also discussed that the relatively deficient implementation of inbound marketing among B2B companies could be as a consequence of lack of knowledge, uncertainty whether it would work, or fear of the unknown. Inbound marketing requires more profound work in comparison to traditional marketing in terms of customer segmentation, identifying their need and supporting them along their journey (Patrutiu-Baltes, 2016). Linking this to the empirical findings of this study, this can be viewed as one of the underlying reasons to why inbound marketing has not reached the same level of maturity in the B2B sector in comparison to the B2C equivalent. Since there
previously has been a rather high level of rationality involved in B2B business, people may view the traditional way of conducting B2B operations as sufficient. Furthermore, by applying a new method which people have little or no knowledge about, B2B professionals may view this new method as uncertain, which might not work in a desirable way.

The fact that inbound marketing enables the user to better measure the actual performance in terms of website activity, source of traffic, responses and outcomes, was also mentioned by a majority of the participants. Inbound marketing further enables integrated marketing metrics, including cost of customer acquisition, customer lifetime value and net promoter score (Opreana & Vinerean, 2015). This aspect of theory can be connected to the fact that several participants mentioned that they wanted to involve the customer more in their processes. Since companies can follow the customer in their journey to a greater extent with the aforementioned metrics, a higher level of customer involvement can be achieved and in the long run enable companies to create high-value content together with their customers. The higher level of involvement could also be achieved within the organisation itself. As Participant 2 put it, when people are talking about digital marketing, a lot of people do not have that much knowledge and somewhat lack interest. However, as soon as figures and measurements come into the discussion, a lot of people within the organisation are showing a great deal of interest. This situation highlights the fact that an inbound marketing journey does not only involve the marketing department, but also the rest of the organisation that can make use of the strategy. The insights which can be drawn from measurements about, for example, what type of content that is most appreciated by potential customers, could prove important for multiple departments, sales not the least.

To sum up the empirical findings related to inbound marketing, it was clear to see that the participants acknowledged the advantages that comes with it and that they were eager to exploit it further. They argued that the future looked bright for inbound marketing in general, and that it probably would be seen as the norm within marketing activities in the nearby future. However, some participants also mentioned that the traditional way of conducting marketing would still fill an important function in the future. The aspect of traditional marketing that they highlighted was the personal meeting between individuals, which could even be used as a mean to stand out from the clutter in future marketing endeavours. Since it was argued that digital marketing in general, and inbound especially, would continue to be exploited further by B2B companies, some participants argued that their customers might find it satisfying to deal with a human as well, rather than just with a screen.

As for the discussion related to GDPR, the general view among the participants was that the legislation was necessary in order to create transparency between company and customer. The aim of GDPR, as mentioned in the frame of reference, is to harmonise data privacy laws and create a levelled playing field (O’Connor, 2017), which can be linked
to the views of the participants in this study. The participants further argued that no one was quite sure what it would eventually lead to, nor the direct effects of it, but that they, as an organisation, must look over their routines and operations in order to comply with GDPR. The legislation also states that the repercussions of the legislation will work as a dissuasive example (Calder, 2016) and by analysing the answers of the participants, it was clear to see that companies were starting to look over their routines in order to comply.

Some participants also mentioned that, in order to follow the guidelines of GDPR, clean CRM systems would be required. This to facilitate the handling of the data for the companies, but also to make the data easily accessible for the data subjects. This was another important aspect of the new legislation as explained by O’Connor (2017).

To sum up the reflections by the participants, the predominant view was that GDPR was necessary, although it would present challenges for companies. Furthermore, it was also mentioned that the legislation could work as a divider between the serious and transparent companies, to those that are less so. In the end, it was argued that it is the first mentioned type of companies that will succeed, and that the new legislation could only work as a tool for them to highlight the fact that they are serious, transparent and honest towards their audience.

5.6. Connecting the Dots and Theoretical Suggestions

In this section the analysis will be summarised and the connections between findings in the sub-topics will be highlighted. Inbound marketing should be seen as a holistic strategy which incorporates multiple departments of a company, which makes the strategy rather complex. The authors have attempted to connect the dots between the identified sub-topics with the help of visual aids, which will facilitate the description and clarification of how an inbound marketing strategy affects the organisation. Also, the effects that should stem from the strategy will be described.

The analysis of the empirical findings shows that Swedish B2B companies have adopted a digital marketing strategy to a great extent or have at least identified the need for it. Most companies have started to incorporate inbound marketing in their marketing processes but have a long way to go before they can be perceived as fully mature in their endeavours.

To visualise the importance of the connection between marketing and sales departments, the authors suggests that one should consider the departments as two sides of a zipper. Each pin of the zipper could be seen as knowledge possessed by that department. For example, every individual sales representative holds knowledge about the customer, which can help the marketing department in their content creation. The marketing department, in their turn, can provide the sales representatives with insights about how
far the potential customers has come in their buying journey, due to capability to backtrack cookies back in time. The marketing department holds information about what the buyer finds most interesting about the company’s offering and how much information they collect about the company before making contact. All this is information that could be acquired through well thought out inbound marketing strategies. However, if there is no alignment between departments, the knowledge could go unused, and the leads will be lost. This is reasoning that has been uncovered in the interviews conducted in this study. Participant 1,2,3,8 were the participants whose organisations had come the furthest in their inbound marketing journeys and can therefore be perceived as trustworthy with regard to this discussion. The aforementioned situation is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Zipper Alignment. Visualisation of the necessary connection between the sales and marketing departments within the organisation.

The empirical findings, uncovered in this study, suggests that inbound marketing is probably the best way to work for B2B companies in the future. All participants reasoned that the B2B buyer’s changed behaviour concerning how he searches for information, is what will drive the future of inbound marketing strategies. With support from the empirical findings, the authors argue that a large reason to inbound marketing being developed is that change in buyer behaviour. Buyers are not responding as well to the traditional sales representative as they previously did. The reason for this might be the ability to find information themselves. Consequently, the sales representative might become somewhat redundant, unless he changes his processes to better fit the changing business environment. The buyer does value the personal relationship to a great extent, as long as he can derive value from that relationship. The findings considering the personal relationship in this study have also been shown in previous research by Kaufmann et. al (2017) and Pandey & Mookerjee (2018). Inbound marketing is a way for suppliers to engage in valuable knowledge exchange with their customer. In the long run,
this could lead to lasting profitable business relationships. As shown in Figure 2 below, the marketing activities and the customer journey could be seen as two slowly spinning cogwheels. The cogwheels illustrate the slowly moving business relationship in the B2B environment where the customer journey and marketing activities are moving together throughout the business cycle. The pins of the cogwheel are the different touchpoints between the two areas. Touchpoints, in this case, should be seen as every point of contact between buyer and supplier. These contacts could be, for example, downloaded content in terms of whitepapers, blog posts, or articles on LinkedIn.

![Figure 2. Cogwheel Interaction. Visualisation of the importance of engaging the customer during all stages of the marketing activities conducted by the organisation.](image)

In Figure 3, the necessary involvement across the organisation when dealing with inbound marketing is shown. The participants of this study stressed that, in order for an inbound marketing strategy to fully function, the company should be permeated by the thinking that is inbound. In addition, the participants stated that the entire organisation should be involved in the strategy, and the decisions that comes with it, in order for it to have a successful outcome. However, the four departments that are shown in Figure 3 were those that were specifically mentioned by the participants. In the authors view, these are also the departments that are directly involved in the marketing operations of a company. With that said, it is also important to note that the authors agree with the participants concerning the importance of involving the whole organisation. Therefore, it could be argued that departments such as finance and HR, to name a few, should also be included in Figure 3. However, the authors have, in their view, chosen a more specific and understandable interpretation connected to the marketing activities of an organisation, in order to visualise the essence of the issue.
Figure 3. The Inbound Marketing Organisation. Visualisation highlighting the importance of having all the relevant departments of an organisation involved in the inbound marketing strategy.
6. Conclusion and Discussion

The aspiration of the following chapter is to answer the research questions provided at the start of this thesis. Further, the relevance of this study will be discussed, and the chapter will continue with a presentation of managerial implications and suggestions for future research opportunities. Finally, a section with a discussion about societal impact of inbound marketing will be discussed. This discussion will take integrity of customer information and GDPR in regard.

6.1. What are the perceived key aspects and challenges when implementing inbound marketing techniques in a B2B context?

The first research question has served as guidance to uncover key aspects and challenges that are present for B2B companies when implementing an inbound marketing strategy. Empirical findings have uncovered multiple key aspects that has been deemed important and convincing enough to be described in this section.

It is perceived by B2B professionals that there is a general lack of understanding about digital strategies from management in the B2B landscape. Obviously, inbound marketing encompasses digital strategies to a large extent which makes it problematic for those companies who wish to implement such strategies and lack the sufficient knowledge. If there is an insufficient amount of knowledge concerning the approach and effects within the organisation, problems could arise when trying to implement new techniques. This because it is seen as vital that everyone within an organisation have the required knowledge when embarking on an inbound journey. The involvement aspect could also be connected to the situation concerning strategies within the organisation. From the findings of this study, it has been shown that digital channels are not handled as a holistic strategy within the company, but rather as a separate strategy which only affects certain departments within the organisation. In order to succeed with inbound marketing, it is important to note that not only knowledge is required, but also that every department is fully inserted. An inbound journey is not something that affects only separate areas of an organisation. Instead, the whole organisation should be permeated by the thinking that is inbound marketing in order for its effects to be fully utilized and lead to the desired outcome.

The incoherent structure in terms of inbound marketing could also be connected to other challenges that became evident during the course of this study. Once again, a lack of understanding was identified, but in this instance with regards to measurability of the effects of inbound marketing. Also, the definition of marketing goals was something that was identified as a challenge for companies. It was suggested that the reason to why companies struggle with defining their goals may be that management often lack the knowledge about what could be measured online, as well as what the certain
measurements suggests and what these could mean to the organisation. In many cases, sales and marketing departments have different, or contradicting, goals which creates a sense of the departments moving in two different directions. For example, the sales departments have a goal which dictates a certain amount of closed deals every month, while the marketing department’s goal is to create warm leads on a different timescale. The effect could be that leads that are not yet ready for an offer, that are still early in the buyer journey, are applied with pressure from sales. The result could be that the company lose the business altogether. The aforementioned situations were, again, suggested to have its roots in that the organisation was not moving as a single unit throughout the inbound journey. To tackle these issues, this research suggest that the entire organisation need to be aligned around the inbound marketing process in order for it to succeed. In addition, it was stressed that constant evaluation and learning from online activities was vital to minimize the experienced challenges associated with the implementation of inbound marketing.

This study highlights the importance of changing the behaviour of the B2B sales representative. In a digital environment, where the buyer dictates the tempo of the business cycle, the sales representative need to move away from only closing deals to act as a supplier of expertise, education, and solutions. The buyer has access to all the information he could possibly need to make his decision. However, what he needs is guidance through all this information, so the buyer can make the best possible decision. That need is what the sales representative should aim to fulfil by providing insight and expertise.

6.2. How mature are B2B companies in their inbound marketing development?

The general maturity of inbound marketing in the B2B sector is difficult to put on a definite scale. However, what this study has shown is that B2B companies has started to embrace inbound marketing as a concept, and that they can see the associated advantages that comes with it. The findings have suggested that the B2C sector has come further in their inbound marketing adoption compared to the B2B sector. However, this cannot be confirmed with this study. What has become evident throughout this study is that B2B companies are taking inspiration from other areas, including the B2C sector, to further develop their own inbound marketing processes. In that sense, B2B companies have come a fairly long way and are following the developments closely with regards to inbound marketing. An inbound marketing strategy, as previously mentioned, takes time to fully implement. Considering the longer business cycles that are present in a B2B environment, it is not farfetched to suggest that implementing an inbound marketing strategy is more complex and time-consuming in the B2B sector, in comparison to the B2C sector. However, since proof has been found that the wheels are in motion with regard to inbound marketing, together with the overall view that the strategy is here to stay, it could be argued that the maturity will soon prosper even further.
6.3. To which extent will inbound marketing techniques be part of future marketing strategies for B2B companies?

As for the future of inbound marketing in the B2B sector, this study has shown that the future looks bright. Inbound marketing strategies will play a large role in B2B businesses strategies in the future and there is a general ambition to learn more about it. As previously mentioned, it does take time to see the actual benefits of an inbound marketing strategy in the B2B sector, due to the longer business cycles. Therefore, with the findings of this study as support, it is not farfetched to assume that additional B2B companies will embark on the inbound track when the results will be more evident from the companies that has already started to implement it. Consequently, with support of the empirical findings, it can be concluded that inbound marketing strategies will play a significant part in future marketing strategies for B2B companies.

This study has also brought up the fact that B2B operations, for a long time, have been permeated by rationality, and that many people within B2B view the traditional way of conducting operations as the only way to move forward. However, with support of this study, it has been shown that emotions, together with rationality, will play a significant role in the future B2B landscape. People are, as previously mentioned, emotional creatures in their nature. Hence, the results of this study have shown that emotions, with inbound marketing as a springboard, can play a larger role in the future of B2B companies operations. This should have the effect that the human interaction in the buying decision will possibly be the tip on the scale if a deal is closed or not.

6.4. Relevance of the Study and Managerial Implications

As discussed in Chapter 1, this study serves as a beginning to closing the knowledge gap that is present in B2B inbound marketing. Not enough studies have, up to this point, been conducted on the subject of key issues, which needs to be taken into account together with challenges that comes with implementing an inbound marketing strategy. The empirical findings have confirmed previous research about favoured channels and strategies in digital marketing, as well as highlighted issues that are present in the Swedish B2B sector in terms of inbound marketing strategies.

The empirical findings have shown that the B2B buyer has somewhat changed with the digitalisation. Buyers have access to more information through the Internet and do conduct more research before they establish contact with a supplier. This means that B2B companies need to adapt their content to be as relevant as possible for the buyer. Not only in terms of highlighting abilities of the product but, more importantly, what the actual value is to the buyer. B2B companies should also ensure that they adapt to the state of mind the buyer is in when searching for information. This due to findings suggesting that B2B buying decisions are not only made from rational reasoning but are also influenced by emotional aspects. This phenomenon has been shown by previous research as well.
(Kaufmann et al., 2017), however, not in the Swedish B2B environment. With the insights about how the buyer has changed, B2B companies can better prepare for a digital way of doing business, which according to the empirical findings, is here to stay.

An important aspect that has been discussed in this study is the effects of the European Union’s new legislation, GDPR. When the research for this thesis was conducted, the legislation had not yet taken effect. Hence, the findings have highlighted expected consequences for B2B companies, and not realised consequences. B2B companies have prepared for GDPR taking effect, which suggests that the sector has realised that they will be affected by the legislation. The most important aspects are arguably the demand to have information about customers, existing as well as potential, in good order.

6.5. Further Research Suggestions

As aforementioned, the findings have identified the importance of having alignment within the organisation as a factor to be successful with an inbound marketing strategy. This study has merely scratched the surface on an aspect that may have a great organisational impact on B2B companies in the future. Hence, the authors suggest this area as being of great importance of further investigation in the future. Results of this research argue that greater insight in the organisational aspect within a given B2B company could provide enough material to create a best practice model for implementing an inbound marketing strategy. Such a model could prove practical for companies by supplying solutions for the knowledge gaps that has been identified in this study. For instance, the lack of knowledge about measurements, which could be acquired through digital channels, as well as the importance of a holistic strategy.

The authors have suggested that the role of the sales representative should be adapted to better fit an inbound marketing strategy. This research highlights the problem that lies behind this suggestion. However, to more accurately define what need to be changed, more research is required. It may prove to be important in the future to deepen the knowledge on this issue, since the sales role need to be efficient to be able to ensure that warm leads are not lost.

As mentioned throughout the study, the maturity of inbound marketing amongst B2B companies still has a long way to go if you compare it to the B2C sector. Therefore, it would be desirable to measure the level of maturity in the nearby future to see if the development has further evolved, and if B2B companies have decreased the gap between themselves and B2C companies with regards to inbound marketing. Also, a quantitative rather than a qualitative study, providing statistical evidence on the maturity of inbound marketing in the B2B sector, could be a suggestion for future academic research.
6.6. Societal and Ethical Effects

The societal effects that inbound marketing may have are somewhat difficult to account for with certainty. Throughout this thesis, the authors have argued, with support from earlier research, that an important outcome of inbound marketing is to educate the customer and supply him with valuable content. With this in mind, the authors suggest that the customer will be able to make more educated decisions. The effect may be that the business environment, in the long run, becomes more efficient. The buyer-seller relationship is often built on personal values and a sense of trust, according to empirical findings from the interviews conducted. Inbound marketing strategies involve supplying the potential buyer with content that he needs, when he needs it. What the buyer gives in return is his details, information, and consent to the supplier using this information. This information should be handled with care, or the consequences may be grave due to the new legislation, GDPR. The legislation, which comes into effect in late May 2018, will enable B2B buyers to more easily receive information about how their information is used by a supplier. GDPR will also ensure that companies will be transparent with their activities towards the customers, which may have a positive effect on the buyer-seller relationship in terms of trust. It will also assure that companies handle their customer’s information with respect and have the customers’ integrity in mind. Participant 8 suggested that GDPR will serve to keep businesses honest and transparent towards their customers, and even went so far to suggest that the serious companies are the ones that would survive in the long run. It is very difficult to attempt to foresee the future with regard to the outcome of GDPR. However, the winners from this legislation will probably be the people that browse the Internet for information. In the B2B environment, this study suggests that GDPR will ensure that companies focus on creating content that buyers are interested in. If they do not succeed in this, the buyer may think there is no reason why he should be present in the supplier’s database and withdraw his consent.
7. List of References


8. Appendix 1

Interview Guideline, Semi-Structured Interviews

General questions related to the company and the respondent

- For how long have you been working with marketing?
- Tell us a little bit about the company. What is the size of the company? What is the turnover? How many employees do you have? Who are your company clients?
- As of today, how many people are involved in the marketing process at your company?
- Which departments within the company take part in the decision-making process?
- Who are the ones who sets guidelines within the company?
- Would you say that the executed strategies are set by management or is the marketing department more independent in their work to set goals?
- How developed are your company with regards to digital marketing in comparison to your competitors?

Questions related to the customer and the customer journey

- When you get in contact with a customer, both new and current, at what stage of the buying process do they find themselves in?
- How does the contact look like?
- Have you experienced any difference in how you contact and how you are contacted by customers recently?
- How are you following up the customer journey?
- Are you using customer cases as references for future assignments?

Questions related to the marketing channels

- How does your company market itself today in terms of digital and analogue tools?
- In your view, what are the associated advantages and disadvantages with digital channels in comparison to analogue channels?
- How have you changed your way in which you work with marketing as a consequence of the digitalisation that the world has experienced?
- How do you measure the results associated with your marketing efforts?
- Which are the most successful marketing channels for your company?
- How and how often do you follow up and evaluate the progress of your marketing efforts?
Questions related to the marketing strategies

- How are you setting up goals with your company’s marketing?
- How do you follow up these goals?
- What other strategies than inbound strategies do you use?
- How does the cooperation between the marketing and sales department work? Are they integrated into each other or are they independent?
- How does the communication work between these two departments?

Questions related to the content in marketing communications

- What type of content are you trying to spread towards your customer and what type of content would you like to exploit in the future?
- Where does your inspiration stem from when it comes to inbound marketing?
- What are your thoughts about selling products in comparison to selling customer value?

Concluding questions concerning the future of inbound marketing

- What are your thoughts about the GDPR in general? How do you think it will affect companies in their operations?
- What do you think the future holds for inbound marketing?
- What will be the most important aspect of marketing in the future, for example with regards to channels?