Social responsibility in the digital era

Digital communication agencies social responsibility in digital channels
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The authors take full responsibility for opinions, conclusions and findings presented.

Examiner: Vladimir Tarasov

Supervisor: Martin Lindh

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ABSTRACT

Purpose and problem discussion: Nowadays, it is crucial to implement social responsibility to business operations to succeed as a business. Companies face increased demands from customers and stakeholders to show their actions regarding social responsibility. At the same time, digital development is shaping the communication industry, creating new communication platforms in the world. The purpose of this study is to explore digital communication agencies role in the production and implementation of digital products within digital channels to best understand digital social responsibility. The study aims to answer the research questions: What social responsibilities does a digital communication agency have in regard to the products and messages they produce for digital channels? and How do digital communication agencies become socially responsible when using digital channels?

Method: An abductive analysis method was applied to semi-structured interviews with digital communication agencies in Jönköping, Sweden. The analysis of the empirical findings has resulted in deeper understanding of social responsibility in digital environments; a study area that has not been explored before. Four digital communication agencies represent the average digital social responsibility mindset and business culture in Jönköping, Sweden. This gave us the possibility to research social responsibility on digital channels.

Results, discussion and conclusions: The results show that the digital communication agencies clients are entirely responsible for the digital material published on their own digital channels. Although, the agencies do need to make sure they produce the best possible material for their clients to avoid bad relationships with stakeholders and a bad reputation. The results also show that social responsibility is not first priority for any company; profitability always comes first. The key to digital social responsibility is to work with the right clients and thoroughly analyse the client's business operations to bring out the best in each case and to be prepared for backlashes. The digital communication agencies could also benefit from a crisis plan, to minimise stress and optimize the problem solving if a crisis would occur. If doing this correctly, the agencies enable genuine and honest digital communication, which minimises the risk of being perceived unfairly on digital platforms. This is especially of importance on digital platforms, where the speed, great reach and two-way communication makes it even easier to receive negativity and face backlashes. A digital communication agency can become socially responsible by working with the right clients, as well as producing and publishing genuine and honest digital communication.

KEY WORDS
Digital Communication Agency, Digital Communication, Social Responsibility, CSR
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1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the background and problem discussion of the thesis topic will be presented. The importance of studying this topic will also be explained, followed by the thesis purpose and research questions that are based on the background and problem discussion.

Social responsibility is a topic that is becoming more popular in today’s society where we face social difficulties daily. Taking social responsibility does increase profitability for businesses and should be a obvious implementation in business operations. With increasing technology advancements as a result of the digitalisation a great deal of the human communication is conducted on digital channels. Online communication is an open environment where people speak freely; an environment where social responsibility should be as important as in any other communication channel. This study has researched how digital communication agencies work with social responsibility within digital channels to best understand digital social responsibility.

1.1 Background

Media has changed drastically throughout history. Media channels such as print, radio and television were once new and the center of information. Today, the flow of information works in an entirely different way because of technology’s development. This is something businesses need to adjust to. Especially communication agencies who stand responsible for businesses to succeed in today’s various media channels.

New digital technologies has opened up a world of opportunities when it comes to sharing information. Communication channels such as websites, social media, blogs, online news outlets etc. have a huge impact on the society today. Media channels of this kind are called “new media”, meaning interactive, two-way communication platforms that involve some kind of computing (Logan, 2016). New media is, according to Logan (2016), “very easily processed, stored, transformed, retrieved, hyperlinked and, perhaps most radical of all, easily searched for and accessed”. Taking advantage of new media creates opportunities for products and services that provide information or entertainment (Neese, 2016). These are opportunities that every company should implement when communicating with their customers. Digital communication is the way to succeed as a business today; it is where businesses will find their customers.

The communication industry has gone through big changes throughout the years because of the constant developments made to technology. The importance of online communication has shaped the communication industry, directing agencies into new communication channels. Even though the technology is changing, the core of digital communication remains the same: information and dialogues. It is a new way of communicating, with a focus on creating strategies that can be applied both digitally and on traditional media. Digital communication brings new views on the world and shape how all communication work (Digitalbyråer, 2019).
At the same time as technology is evolving there are other big changes that are shaping the world. Social sustainability is frequently talked about today, especially within businesses. According to Folkhälsomyndigheten (2018) a social sustainable society is a fair and equal society where people live a good life, in good health, without unfair differences. It is a society with high tolerance, equal values and trust to one another. Everyone should add to the social development. Society should also be able to manage strains, be highly adaptable and willing to change. How is this possible? A social sustainable society needs clear guidelines on how the ideas should be implemented in practice. Folkhälsomyndigheten (2018) advice on three main points to reach social sustainability. A welfare society should firstly assure human rights. Secondly, add to inclusivity to all humans no matter gender, education, income, social status, ethnic belonging, religion, home district, sexuality, age or disability. The welfare society should lastly adapt to the groups in biggest need. These points are overall advice for the society as a whole. However, it is something that should be applied even online in the various media channels we interact with daily.

According to the European Commission (n.d.) Corporate Social Responsibility, CSR, is a type of international business self-regulation, with the intention to help companies take responsibility for how they affect the society. CSR means that businesses actively engage in the social development. It is an active way to strengthen the business relations with employees, customers, owners and stakeholders, as well as the growth and profitability. CSR is divided into three main blocks: economical, environmental and social aspects. Businesses can apply CSR to their business operations to become socially responsible. The thesis will proceed from the European Commission’s (2011) definition of Corporate Social Responsibility with a focus on social responsibility. The European Commission’s define CSR as “the responsibility of enterprises for their impact on society”.

1.2 Problem Discussion

Communication on digital platforms is beneficial for businesses. Although, it can also bring negative consequences. Campaigns that are launched on digital platforms face a higher risk of negative consequences than if the campaigns would have been published on traditional communication channels. This is because of the rapid speed, great reach and two-way communication that digital communication appoint (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). Information can spread faster than ever through digital channels (Jones et al., 2009). According to Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2019), there is an enormous competition online, resulting in successful businesses taking up the majority of the media space. Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2019) also imply that it is getting harder to grab the audience attention on digital channels.

Consumer engagement has become more important than ever with shifting focus on building relationships with consumers (Gummesson, 1994). Consumer Engagement is crucial because it creates conversations and can lead to the message receiving increased exposure through e Word of Mouth. Electronic Word of Mouth is very similar to traditional word of mouth. Electronic Word of Mouth is when consumers share attitudes and behaviors online. The internet is a
favorable place for individuals to spread their strong opinions about brands and companies (Mills & Law 2004). In e Word of Mouth, opinions about products or services are usually from someone that is unknown to the individual receiving the information. Therefore, estimating the credibility of certain opinions and reviews on the internet can be problematic (Bonner & De Hoog, 2011).

Today companies increasingly use digital channels to communicate during a crisis (González-Herrero & Smith, 2008). Therefore, it is of big importance to be prepared for the various obstacles businesses and agencies can face when producing material for digital channels. Do digital communication agencies have a clear strategy on how to confront a crisis? Do they let go of all responsibility once the product is delivered and accepted by their client?

Nowadays, businesses face increased demands from customers and stakeholders to show their actions regarding social responsibility. Consumers are increasingly concerned with taking purchase decisions not only based on themselves but also thinking about future generations (Pedersen, 2015). According to Folkhälsomyndigheten (2018) these demands include human rights issues, basic working principles, biodiversity etc. Therefore, it has become more important for companies to think about how they can implement social responsibilities into their daily work. Companies are slowly beginning to prioritize implementation of a sustainable practice into their business plans today. Corporate Social Responsibility, CSR, is a great standing point for businesses today (The European Commision, 2011). However, CSR has no unified definition and is interpreted differently depending on company. Because of this it can be hard to understand what CSR really is and how companies should approach the self-regulation. How to implement CSR on digital channels can also be unclear and a challenge for digital communication agencies. If the implementation of social responsibility succeeds, the companies will meet the demands from the outside world. This will result in bigger profitability for companies (Christiansson, n.d.).

1.3 Purpose and research questions

The purpose of this study is to explore digital communication agencies role in the production and implementation of digital products within digital channels to best understand digital social responsibility.

- What social responsibilities does a digital communication agency have in regard to the products and messages they produce for digital channels?
- How do digital communication agencies become socially responsible when using digital channels?

1.4 Delimitations

The present thesis will focus on the social responsibilities for digital communication agencies within digital channels. When talking about CSR, the focus will be on social sustainability only.
Information about the economical aspect is hard to retrieve when approaching companies. Environmental aspects are few when it comes to digital communication. Environmental impacts at a digital agency are for example electricity use, purchases of electronics, recycling at the office etc. Both the economical and environmental aspects will be left out of the present thesis.

The present thesis is based on interviews with digital agencies in Jönköping, Sweden. It is therefore a representation of how agencies work with digital communication in this part of Sweden. We have chosen to delimitate geographically to create a focus and make sure the report will not be too extensive. Jönköping is a central city in the south of Sweden and therefore a reliable delimitation that suits the topic. Within Jönköping there are many digital communication agencies. There were possibilities to analyse a variety of agencies of different sizes and earnings. The thesis will therefore give results of the average digital communication agency in Jönköping.

1.5 Outline

In chapter two the thesis will present the theoretical background. This part includes previous studies and theories. The theoretical background gives the reader a deeper understanding of the fundamental concepts and theories relevant to the thesis topic.

Chapter three presents the methodology. This part includes explanations and descriptions of the method chosen, in this case a qualitative research method including semi-structured interviews with digital communication agencies. This method provides personal viewpoints from the digital communication agencies. In the methodology chapter, the data collection process is explained. The chapter includes an explanation of how the results have been transcribed and organized to be used in the analysis and discussion chapter of the thesis. Lastly, the chapter includes a reflection of method.

Chapter four presents the results from the semi-structured interviews conducted with the digital communication agencies. Four different agencies have been interviewed to get an understanding of how digital communication agencies work with social responsibility on digital channels.

Chapter five presents the analysis of the results. In this chapter, the empirical results will be analysed and compared to the theoretical background with the intention to strengthen the validity. The analysis of the empirical results created opportunities to fulfil the purpose; to understand digital communication agencies role in the production and implementation of digital products within digital channels to best understand digital social responsibility. The analysis of the empirical results opens up for discussion and possibilities to answer the research questions. The analysis gives digital communication agencies a better understanding of how to implement digital social responsibility. The analysis was done without personal opinions. The analysis will be discussed in the following chapter.
Chapter six presents the discussion and conclusions. This chapter presents the findings and evaluates them with regard to our purpose and research questions as well as briefly summarises the main points in a final conclusion. Lastly, thoughts on future research are presented.
2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter contains previous studies and theories that will be used as a base for the present thesis. This is for the reader to gain an understanding of the fundamental concepts and theories that are dealt with in this paper.

2.1 Theories

The following text explains the central concepts and theories relevant to the topic. There are differences in opinions of what a theory truly is. It is highly linked to the choice of research method, meaning what the research should result in. The most common view is that a theory explains how something generally works, a regularity. The present thesis is a qualitative research where theories are unfolding throughout the process, meaning an inductive research method. The search for literature and information has had its base in digital communication and social responsibility. Within these research areas, reacquiring concepts have been found. The most prominent being digital marketing, digital channels and corporate social responsibility. Previous research shows how these concepts are connected and how they influence each other.

2.1.1 Digital Communication

It is several decades ago that Tim Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web (World Wide Web Foundation, n.d.). A lot has happened since the introduction of the browser in the 1990s, where the Internet changed from mostly an email system to the information network it is today (Viterbi & Omura, 2013). The huge developments within digital media and marketing technology has provided businesses with new ways to communicate across the customer lifecycle. Today, over 3 million people across the world regularly use digital channels to find products, entertainment, friends and romance etc. New consumer behaviours and the way businesses are marketing have changed dramatically (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). The Internet continues to expand with social networking applications and is something that affects many business models (Viterbi & Omura, 2013). According to Viterbi & Omura (2013), digital communication is a much-used term with many shades of meaning, widely varying and strongly dependent on the user’s role and requirements. Today, digital communication is still evolving very fast and changing the way we live our day to day lives.

2.1.2 Digital communication agencies

Digitalbyråer (2019) describe a digital agency as a company that combines key aspects from both advertising and web agencies. It is a combination of advertising agencies strategies and insights of building brands, together with the knowledge about digital communication that a web agency possesses. A digital agency “works as a marketer in the digital world, and the areas of service include communication strategies, digital campaigns, web development etc.” (Digitalbyråer, 2019).
2.1.3 Digital marketing

Digital communication agencies use digital communication as a marketing platform for businesses, both for their own brand and for their customers. According to Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick’s (2019) theories, digital marketing has transformed how businesses and other organisations communicate with their audiences. They mean that traditional marketing techniques together with digital marketing techniques will get businesses closer to their audiences than ever before. The expression digital marketing techniques involve the so called “5Ds”: digital devices, digital platforms, digital media, digital data and digital technologies. Following list further explains each digital expression. According to Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2019), digital marketing includes:

1. **Digital devices.** The devices that the audience use when interacting with businesses, for example smartphone, tablet, laptop, desktop, computers, TVs, gaming devices, virtual assistants and other that form the Internet of Things.

2. **Digital platforms.** When audiences interact with previous mentioned devices, they most likely use a browser or app from the major “platforms” or online services, for example Facebook, Instagram, Google, Youtube, Twitter, LinkedIn, Apple, Amazon and Microsoft.

3. **Digital media.** When interacting and engaging with the audience there are multiple communication channels to choose from, for example advertising, email and messaging, search engines and social networks.

4. **Digital data.** Companies collect data about their audience and their interactions with the business. Today, there are laws forcing companies to protect this data.

5. **Digital technology.** This includes the marketing technology, meaning the technology companies use to create interactive experiences on the various digital platforms.

Through the 5Ds, consumers now have access to a much wider range of entertainment, products, services and prices from different suppliers. Digital marketing has made it easier for consumers to select and purchase all kinds of items.

At the same time as consumers have a lot to choose from, digital marketing opens up a world of opportunities for organisations as well. Organisations should take advantage of the opportunity “to expand into new markets, offer new services, interact with audiences in new ways and complete on a more equal footing with larger businesses” (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). Organisations should develop new skills and use these new tools for their advantage, to improve the competitiveness of the company (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

There are some disadvantages with digital marketing that companies should be aware of. According to Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2019), a few of the biggest companies online do take up the majority of the market, making it hard for other, less known businesses to succeed. Also, the fact that social networks now are a huge part of consumers lives with never ending feeds of information, grabbing their attention has become harder than ever. However, if a business does
take advantage of the opportunities digital marketing provides, their chance of interacting with their audience increases. Their reach increases as digital channels make it possible to communicate with people all over the world instantly.

2.1.4 Digital channels

For a company to survive in today's world it is crucial that they have a good digital marketing strategy. For digital communication agencies these digital channels become very important. Their job is to succeed within these channels. There are a few different types of digital channels that are used within digital marketing at a digital communication agency, each with the intention to engage the audience online. They all have their purpose, strengths and weaknesses. The term, digital channels is used frequently throughout the present thesis and in the interview questions. Below follow explanations of the different types of digital channels such as social media, influencer marketing, social media monitoring, search engine marketing, display advertising and email marketing, all included in the term digital channels. There is also an explanation of crisis management on digital channels.

2.1.4.1 Social media

Social Medias are defined as, “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The potential and meaning of social media has become too big for companies to not incorporate them in their communication mix. Social media is a relatively new communication channel and companies can have doubts and feel unsure about how to best use this tool to create consumer engagement. Consumer engagement has become more important than ever with the shifting focus on building relationships with consumers (Gummesson, 1994). In social media, engagement is achieved through consumers interacting with the company, stakeholders or other consumers. This two-way communication consist of comments, likes, follows, shares etc.

Consumer Engagement is crucial because it creates conversations and can lead to the message receiving increased exposure through e word of mouth. Word of mouth can be defined as communication about products/services between people, who are perceived to be independent of the company providing it (Silverman 2001). When getting information from an independent source, consumers tend to trust it more than if it would come from the company itself. A way of making decisions easier for consumers is for a trusted person to leave their opinion on a product or service. This sense of trust can encourage interested consumers into committing to a purchase. This is what word of mouth marketing is aiming to accomplish (Silverman 2001 & Mason 2008). Electronic Word of Mouth is very similar to traditional word of mouth. Electronic Word of Mouth is when consumers share attitudes and behaviours online. The internet is a favourable place for individuals to spread their strong opinions about brands/companies (Mills & Law 2004). In e Word of Mouth opinions about the product or service are usually from someone that is unknown to the individual. Therefore, estimating the credibility of certain opinions and reviews on the internet can be problematic (Bonner & De Hoog, 2011).
2.1.4.2 Influencer Marketing

One way for brands to increase their credibility on social media is to use influencers, so called influencer marketing to promote their product and deliver their message. This strategy originates from celebrity endorsement which is defined as “a form of brand or advertising campaign that involves a well-known person using their fame to help promote a product or service” (Business dictionary, 2019). However, today several researchers argue that information is more credible when it is delivered by a reviewer or blogger than a well-known celebrity (Wiley, 2014; Camahort, 2016). Wiley (2014) argues that celebrities no longer have the power they once had; online bloggers and reviewers are now much more influential as people see them as more accessible and authentic. Since these influencers have more credibility it could be beneficial for digital communication agencies to integrate them in their communication mix when working for clients. One risk with having an influencer delivering the message for the client is if the influencer they have chosen to work with is not showing that they think about sustainability on their social medias. If the influencer delivering the message is seen as having a bad impact on the environment and society, it can negatively affect the company that they are endorsing.

2.1.4.3 Social media monitoring (SMM)

Several studies indicate the importance of companies monitoring what is said about them. By doing this, they can have more control of their reputation and message (Kovoor-Misra & Misra 2007; Baird & Parasnis, 2011). A way for companies to gain valuable insight about what consumers say about them is for them to monitor e-Word of Mouth. Social Media Monitoring (SMM) is a concept that aims to measure the effectiveness of communications distributed through interactive digital media channels (Winer, 2009). SMM can be a tool for companies to organize conversations online (eWOM) so that they can see how conversations are interconnected (Sponder, 2011). It can be valuable to monitor both the company’s or organisation’s own social media channels but also those of their competitors to see what is happening on the market. (Jansen et al., 2009).

Organisations can choose to handle the monitoring themselves and use tools such as google analytics or other software. Today, companies and organisations can also choose between several agencies and softwares that can help companies in applying previously mentioned SMM techniques (Sharma, 2011). Examples of well-known companies providing such services are IBM and Nielsen (Ganim Barnes & L.Jacobsen, 2014).

Technology is constantly evolving. New and improved ways of targeting specific audiences are being utilized today by marketers. The objective of such techniques is to give consumers more personalized advertisement based on their preferences and personal data. One of these is Business intelligence (BI). (Miyazaki, 2008; Chaudhuri, Dayal & Narasayya, 2011). Some of the most common ways for utilizing BI are through big data mining and analytics as well as utilizing web cookies (Chen et al., 2012). These techniques collect personal data from current and potential customers on digital channels. In the year 2020 it is estimated that globally, there will be 50 billion devices connected to the internet; enormous amounts of personal data is already
available and will be available for organisations to collect and analyse in the future (Henke, Libarikian & Wiseman, 2016). For Digital Communication Agencies BI can be a valuable tool in better targeting their clients, customers, and attracting potential new customers.

2.1.4.4 Crisis management

Companies should strive to detect problems which could evolve into a crisis early, before they actually become a crisis (González-Herrero & Smith, 2008). Even though companies actively implement SMM it is important for them to be prepared if a crisis would occur. It is important to respond quickly to a perceived upcoming crisis (González-Herrero & Smith, 2008). Quick responses are possible to apply on social media since information gets delivered instantly and social media allows for two-way communication. Paerson & Clair (1998) state “In crisis if an organization neither confirms nor denies information about critical incidents, rumours may fill the void and amplify the threat”, implying that not acting at all or keeping silence is actually worse than communicating to their stakeholders about a perceived scandal or crisis. Today companies increasingly use digital channels to communicate during a crisis (González-Herrero & Smith, 2008). For digital communication agencies, the responsibility in a crisis could be theirs or their client’s depending on what was agreed on between them. It is still important for an agency to be prepared for crisis, since this lowers the amount of stress and work that must be done if a crisis would occur. It is beneficial to have a designated crisis team that handles the problem as a group. Thus, allowing for decisions to be made quickly since the sum of knowledge and abilities in the team is high (Pearson & Clair, 1998).

2.1.4.2 Search engine marketing

Search engines have become very important for digital communication agencies. According to Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2019) “search engine marketing (SEM) is a key technique for generating quality visitors to a website”. People are using search engines to find products, services, and entertainment. It is also essentially used to shortcut site navigation at brand websites. This is called navigational or brand search. Search engines are of high importance when reaching out to the audience during their consideration process for a product or a brand. Search engine marketing has become a fiercely competitive area of digital marketing (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

2.1.4.3 Display advertising

According to Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2019) the term display advertising involves an advertiser paying for an advertising placement on third-party sites, for example publishers or social networks. The goal of display advertising is to deliver brand awareness, familiarity, favourability and for consumers to purchase. The ad can take many forms. Today, many ads encourage interactions such as hovering over the ad, roll over to play video, complete an online form or clicking on the ad. Many still refer display advertising as “banner advertising”.

The process involves ad serving, meaning that the advertisement is served from a different web server than the site on which it is placed. Ad serving uses a specific software, possibly
Doubleclick owned by Google. In 2008 Google released their own free to use service called “Ad Manager”. According to Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick (2019), Ad Manager is meant to “help site owners sell, schedule, optimise revenue, serve ads and measure directly sold and network-based inventory”.

2.1.4.4 Email marketing

Email marketing involves a marketing communication between consumer and organisation via email. There are two main parts of email marketing that marketers need to plan for: outbound email marketing and inbound email marketing. Outbound email marketing is where email campaigns are used as direct marketing, meaning the organisation wants to encourage trial and purchases over email. It is mainly used to gain consumers interest and recognition of the brand. Inbound email marketing is where emails from customers, such as service enquiries, are managed. It is the management of emails from customers by an organisation (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

2.1.3 Social responsibility

According to Folkhälsomyndigheten (2018), a socially sustainable society is fair and equal where people live a good life, in good health, without unfair differences. The main focus is to assure human rights, inclusivity no matter differences and adapt to the groups in biggest need. When it comes to social responsibility within businesses there are similarities. Corporate Social Responsibility, in short CSR, is a type of international business self-regulation, with the intention to help companies take responsibility for how they affect the society. According to the European Commission (n.d.), companies can become socially responsible by “following the law”, and “integrating social, environmental, ethical, consumer, and human rights concerns into their business strategy and operations”. It affects the society in many positive ways. The European Commission (2011) point out three main points on why CSR is important:

1. **“In the interest of enterprises”** - CSR provides important benefits to companies in risk management, cost savings, access to capital, customer relationships, HR management, and their ability to innovate
2. **“In the interest of the EU economy”** - CSR makes companies more sustainable and innovative, which contributes to a more sustainable economy
3. **“In the interests of society”** - CSR offers a set of values on which we can build a more cohesive society and base the transition to a sustainable economic system

Social responsibility has increased in popularity in the last couple of years, especially at a corporate level. Businesses face increased demands from customers and stakeholders to run socially responsible business operations. Today, businesses use digital communication to reach out to their audiences, especially digital communication agencies whose core operation is digital communication. They need to adapt the product and messages they produce for digital channels to become socially responsible. Motives for companies to adopt CSR can be linked to the previously mentioned global trend that shapes the CSR debate (Pedersen, 2015). The
drivers for adopting CSR vary from one company to another. Some adopt CSR to improve their relationship with stakeholders. Others are motivated by cutting their costs and improve efficiency. A third motive for adopting CSR is the market potential from having a socially responsible image (Pedersen, 2007). To further explain these motives Neergaard (2006) displays the three groups in a figure (See Figure 2.1).

In general a distinction between these three groups of motives for CSR can be made: instrumental, institutional and emotional (Neergaard, 2006). Instrumental motives are driven by business related objectives such as reducing costs and minimising risks (“it pays off”). Institutional motives are driven by the pressure to adopt CSR or because they want to imitate successful organizations that have adopted CSR in a successful manner or because it is considered normal business practice (Pedersen, 2015). Emotional motives are driven by the will to do what is morally right.

Figure 2.1 Company motives for CSR, based on Neergaard (2006)

Companies can be motivated by more than one of these groups or chose to focus on one as their main motivator for working with CSR.
2.2 Previous research

2.2.1 How CSR messages on social media affect stakeholders

Companies should implement corporate social responsibility into their business operation because of its positive outcomes. Does this align with digital social responsibility as well? In 2012, Weber Shandwick did a report on the online engagement activities of the world’s top CEOs. The report showed that CEO sociability increased from 36% to 66% between 2010 and 2012. According to Weber Shandwick (2012), there are three main platforms that organisations and CEOs often use when communicating with their stakeholders, all digital. These are: company intranet, company website and social media. The research showed that coming years would focus on company’s social reputation and their engagement with employees and customers in genuine conversations. According to Wang & Huang (2018), this information aligns with CSR communication principles. A CSR communication affects how stakeholders perceive an organisation, as well as their relationship with the organisation itself. The CSR communication includes CSR messages. According to Brammer (2007) CSR messages can be divided into two types: internal CSR messages and external CSR messages. Internal CSR messages are constructed to improve the employees’ well-being and benefits. External CSR messages emphasizes what the organisation concern about and contribute to the society. Wang & Huang (2018) discuss how CSR messages on digital platforms influence stakeholders’ perceptions. According to Wang & Huang (2018) “by emphasizing different aspects of an organization’s CSR program, internal and external CSR messages on social media may generate different outcomes”. They came to the conclusion that internal and external CSR messages through social media triggered greater behaviour, intended towards the organisation. Stakeholders’ perception of the organisation reached a level of trust, satisfaction, common ground and commitment. When the organisation communicated non-CSR messages, the results did not reach the same positive outcomes. Corporate social responsibility on social media do increase the overall trust, satisfaction, common ground and commitment of a business.

2.2.2 The role of digital platforms during social responsibility backlashes

There are, and has been, many campaigns, start-ups, products etc. whose main focus was to make strong social statements. There are also many companies that provide services and products that go against social responsibility in society. The risk for backlashes is high, especially on digital communication channels where people are more likely to speak freely about their thoughts. It is also a place for many so called “trolls”, whose main goal is to provoke emotional responses, arguments or discussions with no end. A digital communication agency should in this case evaluate if they want to work with the company, service or product that are in the risk zone of negative feedback.

A big concern for digital communication agencies, is choosing which kind of companies to work for. As an example, the online casino industry in Sweden and many other countries has seen a massive growth. Commercials for these gambling companies can be seen and heard today on
almost every information platform, both digital and traditional platforms. Many people have
negative connotations with the gambling industry and working with them can have negative
effects on the reputation of a digital communication agency. It is known that gambling can be
addictive and destroy people's lives. According to Folkhälsomyndigheten (2018) 2% of Swedish
adults have gambling problems, for 31000 of these the problems are so severe that they can be
considered gambling addicts. Since online casino companies offer such big economic
compensations it can be tempting to work with them. The problem for the digital communication
agencies is to measure the pros and cons of working with such companies and then taking a
decision if the risk of their reputation getting damaged is worth the potential economic gains.
The big economic compensations also lead to an overrepresentation of gambling advertising on
all media channels. Casino companies stand as competitors to many other industries when it
comes taking place in media channels. This is a problem digital communication agencies need
to face.

Companies can decide to create their campaigns in house or to hire a digital communication
agency to create the campaign with them. Both ways have their advantages. The in-house
creative department team has more insight about the company's values, strategy and audience.
When working in house there is a risk of the creative department to lose perspective. “When you
walk in every day to the same corporate culture, you cannot help but get swallowed up, to
varying degrees, by that culture. The politics, the worries about job security, the sheer number
of meetings where the brand is necessarily exalted in the extreme—these take a toll” (Mark Ray,
2017). An example of this was the Pepsi commercial with Kendall Jenner, produced in 2017.
The commercial received harsh comments about it trivializing social justice movements. Kendall
Jenner herself, as well as the brand Pepsi, had to face a lot of hate and negative feedback
because of the campaign. According to Törner (2017) Pepsi, before the campaign, made the
announcement that “this is a global advertisement that reflects people from different walks of life
coming together in a spirit of harmony, and we think that is an important message to convey”,
something that obviously reminiscent of recent anti-Donald Trump and Black Lives Matter
protests (Shepherd, 2017). It was something that firstly was meant to make a positive social
impact on the society that instead backfired. According to Törner (2017), the critique on social
media was huge. Many people make fun of how Pepsi chose to highlight the serious social
problem. According to Shepherd (2017) the controversial Pepsi advert trended on Twitter,
where thousands of people expressed their outrage over the company's actions.

2.2.3 The ethical consumer

Consumers today are increasingly motivated to consume in a more sustainable way, taking
decisions beyond their own interest to benefit future generations (Pedersen, 2015). When
describing this expanding social movement of consumers, terms like: “sustainable”, “ethical”,
“conscious” and “green” are used interchangeably (Smith, 2008). When taking decisions on
what product or service to consume, ethical consumers are motivated by various factors.
Examples of these factors are: political, environmental, social or religious (Harrison, Newholm &
Shaw, 2005). What is considered “ethical” for one consumer may not nor another. Consuming
Ethically can be far more complex than to consume “green”. Ethical consumers have a broader range of issues that they are concerned about than green consumers. For example, being an ethically minded consumer can involve everything from only buying free range eggs at the grocery store to avoiding products that have been manufactured with child labour (Harper & Makatouni, 2002, p. 289). The ethical consumer movement has spread widely across western cultures, affecting the consumption routines and choices of mainstream consumers and forcing retailers to widen their product ranges (Pedersen, 2015). This could be due to the current trend of being sustainable and that people are more interested and informed about the issues. In Sweden, the group of consumers who are the most engaged and strongly value driven in social and environmental issues is a smaller group consisting of 5-10 percent of the population. Thereafter comes a bigger group of 15-20 percent who are also interested in these questions and that also are willing to pay more for quality and service in combination with sustainability. These two groups combined make up 30-35% of the Swedish population (Sveriges Kommunikatörer, 2015). The trend of sustainability is strongly linked to food and health. Today it is a popular strategy for companies to communicate to consumers that they produce healthy, locally produced food without additives or the usage of pesticides. The industries with the most sustainable brands in Sweden are: the pharmacy and groceries industries. In 2014 the big food corporations: ICA, Coop and Axfood, increased their sales of ecological products by 40-55 percent (Sveriges Kommunikatörer, 2015). Digital communication agencies can benefit from following trends when producing work for their clients. Since sustainability is such a trending topic today, it would not be favourable for them to ignore the consumers interests and demands regarding sustainability.

A fundamental part of CSR is the idea that companies have certain responsibilities to society, whether it pays off or not. This is illustrated in the classical CSR Pyramid (see figure 2.2) which displays the economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities that the companies have to society (Carroll, 1991).

![CSR Pyramid](image)
In the pyramid of CSR the economic responsibilities are the foundation. Without a profitable business all else becomes impossible to achieve. It can be argued that digital communication agencies in a way contributes to over consumption since their main purpose is to increase their clients sales and economic growth. It is important for the agencies to communicate that they work in a sustainable way and it is important to find ways to compensate for the unsustainable practices of contributing to over consumption.
3. METHOD AND IMPLEMENTATION

In this chapter the thesis method will be presented. This chapter includes: choice of method, semi-structured interviews, interview guide, population and selection, ethical deliberations, reliability, validity and method of analysis. The method of analysis explains how the method was implemented during the analysis. Lastly, the method reflection is presented.

3.1 Choice of method

The chosen method has been used to collect information needed to answer the research questions. Through a qualitative research method, also called empirical research method, the thesis has studied the purpose: to explore digital communication agencies role in the production and implementation of digital products within digital channels to best understand digital social responsibility. To fulfil the purpose the thesis needs personal and profound information. This has been achieved through semi-structured interviews and an abductive analysing method. The reasoning behind the choice of qualitative research method and not a quantitative is to collect personal viewpoints from each digital communication agency. The study has a focus on explanations and implications rather than statistical data. According to Bryman & Bell (2011) a qualitative study is perceived as a research strategy with focus on emphasizing the meaning of words rather than a quantitative collection and analysis of data. A qualitative research strategy is inductive, interpretative and built on constructionism.

3.2 Semi-structured interviews

A semi-structured interview is based on an interview guide that includes open questions and/or topics that the interview is centred around. The interviewer follows the interview guide, not necessarily in order. The interviewer also listens actively and asks follow-up questions. This means that questions that are not in the guide can be brought up depending on the answers from the interviewee. The interviewee has a lot of freedom and possibilities to influence the content of the interview. This method gave the study a collection of new personal ideas and viewpoints from the digital communication agencies. A semi-structured interview process is flexible (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

3.2.1 Interview questions

After examining the theoretical background, interview questions were established with the goal to fulfil the thesis purpose and answer the research questions. A number of interview questions were written down and then narrowed down to 23 final questions to keep the duration of the interview to a reasonable length and to keep the focus on answering the research questions. Three of these questions ensured that the interviewee accepted the terms and conditions set by the interviewers.
3.2.2 Interview guide

According to Bryman and Bell (2011) “the term interview guide can stand for the short memory list including the different areas that will be covered in an unstructured interview, or its somewhat more structured list over what research questions that will be covered or touched in a semi-structured interview”. The interview guide helped the interviewer to stay to the topic but also gave space for the interviewee to talk freely about the areas they personally felt were more important or interesting. It was of big importance for the interviewers to map out the problem and unanswered questions before conducting the interviews. The interviewers knew that the interviews had to answer our research questions and fulfil our purpose. Therefore, the interviewers wanted to be prepared when meeting the digital communication agencies to make sure we got the most out of the interviews. The interview guide helped the interviewers to follow a structure when interviewing but also gave the interviewee possibility to speak freely.

To establish an atmosphere in which the interviewee felt safe enough to talk freely about his or her feelings and experiences (Kvale, 1996) the interviewers structured the interview guide following the funnel technique, meaning beginning with broad questions and funnels into specific questions (Patel & Davidson, 2011).

3.3 Population and selection

To fulfil the purpose, an accurate selection of interviewees was required. The focus of this study is to understand how digital communication agencies work with social responsibility within digital channels. An evaluation was done regarding which agencies to include from different Swedish cities, with the conclusion that the most efficient and personal way to perform the interviews would be to have them all close to where the interviewers were located. Therefore, the interviews have taken place at different digital communication agencies around Jönköping. To collect the most relevant information the focus was to interview one to three persons at each agency, one of them always being the CEO. This was the interviewers goal when approaching the agencies. However, many of the digital communication agencies were very busy. Therefore, the interviewers were only able to interview the CEO at the majority of the agencies. The answers collected represent the average mindset and business culture at the agencies regarding social responsibility. This gave the thesis the best representation of how agencies work with sustainability within digital channels.

For the interviews, four different digital communication agencies were handpicked. These agencies vary in size, number of employees and revenue. All of them are located in Jönköping, Sweden. The number of agencies chosen gave us a good representation of how the digital communication industry works with sustainability within digital channels in the Jönköping area. The selection was made strategically with contact directly to the CEOs of each company. After this the interviewers also got in contact with employees at the same agency, specifically agency one.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Interviewees profession</th>
<th>Digital communication agency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Art Director assistant</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Economy and sustainability</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>CEO</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>CEO</td>
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**Table 1. Information on who was interviewed including their profession and agency.**

3.4 Ethical deliberations

“In research within social science, ethical issues involving voluntarism, integrity, confidentiality and anonymity are important” (Lind, 2014, p. 133). The requirements can be divided into the following:

1. The participators shall be informed about the purpose of the thesis and the interview.
2. The participators shall agree to participate and be able to cancel their participation at any time.
3. The participators shall feel like we take their integrity seriously, therefore confidentiality is important. The personal information of the participators shall be treated with respect.
4. The empirical data shall be stored safely so that no unauthorised people can access the information.

These requirements have been taken into consideration when performing and documenting the interviews with the digital communication agencies.

When contacting potential agencies, they were informed briefly about the purpose of the thesis and what purpose their answers would have for the study. To keep the agencies and participators anonymous they were informed that their occupation would be the only information visible about them. The risk of their identities being revealed is minimal because no sensitive information such as the agency’s’ location, economy, number of employees is shown in the present thesis.

The answers from each interview were recorded with mobile phones as well as some written notes. The audio files were then converted to text and kept as close to the original conversations as possible, only editing out unnecessary chatter and converting spoken language to make it easier for the reader to understand. After the audio was converted to text and there were no doubts about the results, the files and written notes were deleted.
3.5 Reliability

Reliability explains if the results from the research will stay the same if the research would have been conducted again, or if the research has been affected by random or accidental conditions (Bryman & Bell, 2011). It is more important to measure the reliability within a quantitative research. This is because the quantitative research deal with reliability and consistency within facts and data (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The possibility to measure reliability within a qualitative research is not as easy. A qualitative research is more focused on if the measurements are stable or not. Therefore, the focus of the present thesis will not be more on the validity of the research, not the reliability.

3.6 Validity

One of the most important research criteria is validity. The term validity is used throughout the whole research process. Validity in qualitative research means “appropriateness” of the tools, processes, and data (Leung, 2015). This includes if the research question is valid enough to live up to the purpose, if the methodology used is appropriate to answer the research question, if the data is sampled and analysed correctly and finally if the results and conclusions are valid for the sample and context (Leung, 2015). Within qualitative research the term reliability and validity are so intertwined that researchers seldom use the term reliability (Patel & Davidson, 2011). To increase the validity regarding the empirical material retrieved from the interviews, a concept, called triangulation was applied. Triangulation can have various meanings, such as having more than one method for collecting empirical data or to have various data sources (Patel & Davidson, 2011). In the present thesis this is achieved through having various different Digital Communication Agencies interviewed, at different locations and at different dates. The interviewees all worked with similar things, but all had unique expertise and experiences regarding the topic. Triangulation increases the validity of the thesis because it allows the same phenomena to be studied in different contexts and for variations to be interpreted (Patel & Davidson, 2011).

3.7 Method of analysis

To be able to analyse the qualitative information, a strategy and direction was needed; a reference that we as interviewers could use as guidance throughout the analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The interviewers prepared a few steps to be able to analyse the empirical discoveries. Through an abductive analyse method the thesis carried out keywords and themes resulting in concepts, categories, properties, hypotheses and theories that stand as a base in the analysis. Meaning, the interviewers used coding to break down data into components and phenomenons. An analysis like this can only be done when all data and information has been collected and was therefore implemented when all interviews were completed.
3.7.1 Transcript

When conducting qualitative interviews, the material needs to be transcribed from audio to paper or digital text. It is important to be accurate when transcribing the material to avoid personal subjectivity from the researcher (Patel & Davidson, 2011). The present thesis material was deducted from personal meetings with the digital communication agencies. In this case, important perspectives such as body language, tone of voice and hand gestures that are not spoken in words should be included as well. Information like this also needs to be translated into the transcription. Also, the interviews were conducted in Swedish and later translated into English. This is something that can lead to text getting lost in translation and affect the results. However, this is something the researchers were aware of and planned for before the interviews. This was done to avoid personal subjectivity to affect the results. The transcription of the interviews was done directly after each interview, with the intention to learn on how to improve for the following interview.

3.7.2 Abductive analysis method

The present thesis follows an inductive analysing method but is highly influenced by a deductive approach because of its detailed theoretical background, where theories and previous research gives the reader a general view of the topic in today's society. This combination is called abduction.

When analysing qualitative data, a grounded theory is the most common approach (Bryman & Bell, 2011). It is hard to easily summarise what grounded theory truly is. There has been, and are, differences in what grounded theory implies. According to Strauss & Corbin (1998) a grounded theory is “theory that has been proven from data that has been collected and analysed in a systematic way during the research process. In this method, there are close connections between the data collection, analysis and resulting theory”. There are two main sections of grounded theory. Firstly, the method is focused on development of a theory with a base in data. Secondly, the viewpoint is iterative and recursive. This means that the collection and analysis of data is done parallel and in correlation with each other (Bryman & Bell, 2011). According to Bryman & Bell (2011) there are some limitations with grounded theory, such as to wait with explanations of central concepts and knowledge until late in the analysis process. Today, theory neutral observations are rarely acceptable. The present thesis did favour from reflection of theories at an earlier stage. A deductive approach proceeds from theories, information and models used to bring out premises that later will be tested towards general reality (Patel & Davidson, 2011). The present thesis proceeds from an inductive approach with influences from a deductive approach. When doing this, abduction occurred. An abductive approach implies the mix between different theories and research strategies, for example a strict empirical and facts-based approach together with theoretical reasoning (Psykologiguiden, n.d.). The present thesis follows an abductive approach because of the theories and general concepts that were researched before the collection of empirical information. This helped the
researchers to not feel stuck under specific theories and at the same time be able to collect relevant empirical information.

The data from the semi-structured interviews was coded and analysed to develop patterns and categories. To make sure the analysis followed the abductive approach the analysis proceeded from the main parts of a grounded theory. It was important to make sure that the right tools were used when analysing. Following parts in this chapter explains the tools used during the analysis.

3.7.3 Coding

When making an abductive analysis a theoretical selection may occur. According to Glaser & Strauss (1967) a theoretical selection is when the data collection generates a theory. The researcher should at the same time code and analyse the data to be able to decide what information should be gathered next, and where that information can be found. The theoretical selection is an ongoing process. It is not a specific stage in the research. This is done to assure the development of theory and patterns.

Coding is a great option when developing theories and patterns. It is the process where data is being described and broken down into components. It is one of the most important parts of the generation of theories. The analysis of the transcribed semi-structured interviews initiated in putting names and labels on the parts that seemed to have theoretical importance or practical importance for the interviewees. Were there any repetitive indications during the interview? These indications were compared to each other to generate categories (Bryman & Bell, 2011). These names, labels and categories were gathered in separate documents during the coding and are displayed in the results chapter.

The coding process in the present thesis started by transcription of the audio from the semi-structured interviews, collecting data from the interviews. The transcripts were analysed and broken down into key words/sentences. These keywords/sentences were written down on post-it notes. By organising these post-it notes categories started to form, with groups of post-it notes assembled together. These categories were formed and written down after analysis of each interview, resulting in categories from all interviews. When the categorisation of the interviews were finished, the researchers compared the categories from each interview to each other. There were clear similarities in the categories, resulting in possibilities to form headlines from the categories. These headlines are presented in the results chapter along with quotes taken directly from the interview transcripts.
4. RESULTS

This chapter will include the results from the semi-structured interviews conducted with the digital communication agencies. Four different agencies have been interviewed to get a correct understanding of how digital communication agencies work with social responsibility on digital channels.

The following chapter will present the empirical findings that has emerged from the coding of the semi-structured interviews. Categories and themes emerged after implementing the method of analysis to the transcripts. These categories and themes are presented as headings in this chapter. As discussed in the methodology chapter, there were no personal opinions that shaped the results of the coding. The empirical findings goal is to answer the research questions. The results will present new knowledge and a foundation for further studies. The results presented in this chapter will be analysed and discussed in the following chapter.

4.1 Digitalisations effect on the communication industry

During the interviews the digital communication agencies talked about the digitalisations and its effects on the communication industry. According to the agencies, the majority of the material they produce today, is meant for digital platforms. Therefore, knowledge and understanding of how to shape communication for digital platforms is a must. However, there are both advantages and disadvantages with digital communication. According to the agencies, the main aspects of digital communication are speed, great reach and two-way communication.
“The advantage is of course the reach, meaning that you can reach a lot of people very fast. Extremely fast. You also get a lot of feedback very fast. It can be great but also extremely hard when it goes wrong.” - CEO, Agency #1

Another aspect of digital communication is the way the message can be targeted to a specific target group. This leads to increased engagement due to the message being more relevant and interesting to the receiver.

“If you look at digital media today, a lot of things have happened. Today you don’t buy ‘sites’ but instead you buy target groups based on user behaviour. How you navigate the digital world. And that’s an advantage for our customers, you reach a ‘spearheaded’ group. You can target the ones you are interested in reaching.” - CEO, Agency #3

Digital communication is constantly changing, and competition is getting tougher. The CEO at agency number two describes the changes that have happened in only a few years. The CEO also thinks that digital communication will change even more in the future.

“Nowadays there are so many that fight for that spot. Fine, your material can spread fast, but it requires you to produce better material.” - CEO, Agency #2

“I would say that in about two years, there will be big changes too. If we produce the exact same material now as we did a few years ago, and post the same material now it would get a fifth of the response at max.” - CEO, Agency #2

The agency believes it is more important now than ever to put time and effort into the material before posting as this would help it to stand out in today's saturated digital space. The same agency believes that digital is not always the obvious choice, it depends on what the client wants to achieve and what the desired effect is. Sometimes a traditional channel such as print can be the best solution for the client and in that case that channel should be chosen.

“For us it is not about choosing to only be a ‘digital agency’ or ‘we are only working with prints’. But it’s more about: what are the needs of the client?” - CEO, Agency #2

“Sometimes print is better to fulfil the purpose and sometimes digital is better. I don’t think we will end up in a society where everything is digital either, because you will still want to have that tactile feeling.” - CEO, Agency #2

4.2 Digital communication agencies social responsibility

To take strong social responsibility on digital channels is not common for digital communication agencies today. Instead, the agencies focus on the projects, campaigns and materials they are proud of. This content is presented on their digital platforms with the intention to represent what the agencies stand for. What they have done will represent who they are.
The digital communication agencies also describe the difference between them and other business industries. Social responsibility should be of importance for all businesses, no matter the industry. However, they do reach a lot of people with the material they produce, something they have to keep in mind.

“It’s not like a communication or design agency is different from other workplaces really. Everyone has to think about social responsibility in all situations. Maybe we have a bigger platform and we can reach more people, but we are still the same as other companies.” - Economy and sustainability assistant, Agency #1

4.2.1 Digital social responsibility should not differ to basic social responsibility

The agencies also compared social responsibility on digital channels to other, offline scenarios. They imply that there should not be a difference just because it is digital. An agency should always behave the same regards to social responsibility, no matter the media channel.

“I see it as an integrity. There should not be any difference really, on how you work within media channels. [...] There is no difference in how we speak when we meet people, compared to how we talk on social media. I think that the purpose should be the important part, and that this should feel the same no matter which media channel you use. No matter if it is digital or not. [...] Because communication is the important part, really. [...] If you look at social media for example, or another digital channel, I think that the important part is the genuineness. It cannot be unclear why you do something or ‘this is what the agency or organisation really stands for’? Or is it just something you say just because it is good for your business.” - CEO, Agency #2

“We are taught that you should always be careful with what you publish. We question ourselves. Partly for our own sake, but also for our customers sake. If we do not ask these questions, we are not a good partner. It is not that weird that a customer wants to point out themselves as biggest, best and most beautiful in the world. They should think this way. But we have to ground these thoughts and make decisions that are sustainable. No one should be able to tear the produced material apart; to imply that we have been lying or had bad contentions. [...] Social responsibility is important in all contexts. Social channels cannot be a free zone where people do not take social responsibility. It is the same as anywhere else. You check the material you publish.” - CEO, Agency #4

4.2.2 Projects digital communication agencies engage in

When discussing implementation of social responsibility within the agencies, some gave specific examples of projects they have engaged in. The main goal with projects in general, especially with clients, is profitability first. However, there are exceptions in regard to specific projects. These projects did not have economic gain as the objective but rather to have a positive impact on society and to start a discussion. It also shows how the agency works with important
problems in society. Project like these have led to positive results for the agencies, for example increased number of people interested in working at the agencies.

“One campaign we did was a sustainability campaign focused on co-worker engagement. A second example was that we developed a gender-neutral deck of cards. A third example is that we have engaged in a thing called ‘Madhack’. This is an event where you lock yourself in for 24 hours and work for something called ‘Making a Difference Hack’.” - CEO, Agency #1.

“We have engaged in a project with a Norwegian organisation called Choose. Two Norwegian guys started it one and a half years ago and they come from the oil industry and work as lawyers and got tired of destroying the world. So, they figured that carbon credits is something you have to buy if you have a coal plant. If you contaminate the world you have to pay for each ton of CO2 you let out. And the only ones who can buy carbon credits are companies and not individuals. They realised that because they are a company they can buy the carbon credits and then sell subscriptions to individuals. They cost as low as 40 crowns per month and the carbon credits purchased get destroyed. And there is a limited amount of carbon credits available so by purchasing and destroying them it makes it more expensive for companies that contaminate so that eventually it will become cheaper for them to switch to sustainable energy. So, this is kind of a way to ‘hack’ the climate problem.” - CEO, Agency #2

4.2.3 The effects of social responsibility

The effects of social responsibility work within the agencies were varied. Some have seen clear effects, and some thought it was hard to measure if the effects were only due to social responsibility or caused by other factors as well.

The CEO at Agency #1 explained that their engagement for gender equality has lead to more women applying for jobs at the agency.

“Our engagement in these projects made it so that we went from having almost no women applying to work for us to now having plenty of women that noticed what we did. We then asked them ‘How did you hear about us and what have you seen?’ And the answer was that they had become interested in us because we had brought up these issues. So yeah, we have seen a very clear effect.” - CEO, Agency #1

The CEO at Agency #2 also believes that their work within social responsibility has helped in the recruitment of new employees and with their client relationships.

“I cannot say that we have got a specific client because of our engagement but something I can say is that if the client is choosing between us and another agency, and imagine that we are exactly as good on everything as the other agency, the deciding factor I think would be that we are an agency that care and have engagement for different projects.[...] I believe that it has become easier to recruit new employees because we stand for something. I also believe that if
an individual would choose between two agencies as their workplace and one of them has engagement for society and stands for something, well then it makes it much easier to choose that workplace.” CEO, Agency #2

The CEO at Agency #3 explains that the company is relatively new and therefore have not started communicating about social sustainability yet. However, it is definitely something that they want to do in the future.

“We would definitely want to communicate this, when we have come far enough in our process. Specially the social aspects, giving back. Absolutely! Regarding *agency’s name*, we have just got started with social media, it has been so much work with other things right now. But it is definitely a part of our plan.” - CEO, Agency #3

The CEO at Agency #4 did not want to put themselves higher than any other agency. The CEO believes that it should be obvious that they work in a sustainable way.

“I don’t want to exalt myself. I hope that everyone thinks that we work in that way. We want to have clients that we can build long relationships with. We never want to go in and take on project and then say goodbye. [...] We made a big client survey and the three words that clients appreciate the most with us are: ‘knowledge’, ‘availability’ and ‘personality’. To that you can add ‘honesty’. I like that in all situations. I dislike people that lie. That’s why I try to live as I learn. I believe that honesty always wins in the long run.” - CEO, Agency #4

4.3 Working with clients

When the interviewers asked what effects the agencies wanted when working with clients, they all answered that it always depends on the client’s and materials purpose. However, the agencies agreed that the underlying goal is always for the client to gain more back than what they have invested. The focus is profitability.

“Some clients are like ‘We want to push a specific product or service’. Then the focus will be to create engagement with existing customers. So everything is guided by what the client need right now. It can be thousands of different things.” - CEO, Agency #2

“Simply expressed: you can say that you want something to happen with the investment you put in. 100 in shall give more than 100 out.” - CEO, Agency #4

The material can be shaped in different ways depending on what effect the agencies wants to reach. Because of this, the majority of the agencies did not have a clear answer on how they shape the digital communication to specific goals. They imply that it all depends on the client in specific assignments. However, the CEO at Agency #1 describes the three main types of digital posts they publish on social media and what their purpose is:

- **Educational purpose**: to teach the consumers about the product or service.
- **Inspirational purpose:** to inspire the consumer to buy the product by showing it in the context where it would be used.
- **Silly/humour purpose:** to make the consumer laugh and like, comment and share the post.

The agencies also got questioned on the responsibility of the published material. When asked who take responsibility of the digital material, the agencies all agreed on the same answer: the client has all responsibility. Once the client has looked at the finished results, accepted the material and published it, they are the owners of the material. The agencies are no longer responsible for it. However, there is one exception to this; when the agency is given full control of a client's digital channel. In this case, they might still be responsible depending on what was agreed on in the contract between the agency and client. The agencies describe that this scenario is rare and that they mostly hand over the material and the full responsibility to the client. The client publishes and monitors the material themselves. It is often an economic issue for the client, meaning the client handle social media publishing and monitoring instead of paying the agencies for that service.

“If the client has bought the material, then technically they become the publisher. Unless in some cases, when we have an arrangement where we handle everything without the client even needing to look at the content, then we become responsible for it.” - CEO, Agency #2

When it comes to digital communication, taking social responsibility is not the main request from clients. It is rarely even mentioned when buying services from digital communication agencies. As mentioned before, the main focus is money. The clients do not request to look like they take social responsibility on digital channels today. However, a part of the collaboration between agencies and clients is to evaluate what the client stands for. The positive aspects can then be used when creating digital material. According to the agencies, working with the right clients are key to make sure the digital material do stand for something good.

“I don’t think social responsibility is something that really comes up, it’s a little ‘between the lines’ for many of our clients. The majority of our clients take social responsibility and think about it as well.” - Art Director Assistant, Agency #1

4.3.1 Would digital communication agencies work with unsustainable companies?
When asked about which types of companies the agencies think has a negative impact on society, the most common answer was by far was the gambling industry. The agencies explained that they believe the gambling industry is having a negative effect on the society, especially people with gambling problems. The agencies imply that the gambling industry is taking advantage of people that already have personal challenges. The agencies think the amount of commercials shown for gambling companies has become way too high and that they are completely dominating the media space. The agencies explain their knowledge about the amount of money within the gambling industry and that this is making it easy for the gambling
industry to buy marketing space. It is affecting the agencies, and their clients, in the production and implementation of digital communication. They are forced to fight against these multi-millionaire companies, making it more expensive and harder to market digital communication. They are forced to fight for media space against companies that are, through digital media, affecting the society in a negative way.

“Gambling companies earn too much money. There are people that feel very bad, it’s hypocrisy [...] I think they take advantage of people, it’s very sad in my opinion that they get to take over the whole public market space.” - CEO, Agency #1

“It’s the gambling industry. Now that they have removed the monopoly it really overflows. There are such incredible amounts of money in it, so everyone gets bought. Even if it ruins a lot. [...] It makes it harder for other companies to get seen. I think it’s really sad actually.” - CEO, Agency #3

Even though the agencies answered that they would not work with companies within the gambling industry, most of them had not publicly announced it. The agencies do not have specific rules or guidelines to follow in the decision making of whom to work for. They have not been approached by companies within the gambling industry either and has therefore never had to face the question.

“I wouldn’t want to work with them because it ruins people’s lives. It’s hard to say, I will not say we 100% wouldn’t do it because we haven’t taken any decisions for how we would handle it, but for me personally I feel like it feels wrong.” - CEO, Agency #3

“We actually haven’t got any request from gambling companies. Maybe it is because we are pretty firm with what we stand for and then people might not even ask us, because we are annoying.” - CEO, Agency #2

Besides gambling companies, the agencies give some more examples on companies they think have negative effects on society. Tobacco, weapons and fossil fuel industries are examples of these. Furthermore the agencies describe that a reason for not working with a client could be that it just feels wrong. They explain that if a company has bad values it would not feel right to have them as a client.

“I think the weapon industry has a bad impact on society, companies in general that have bad values I think could have a negative effect on society.” - CEO, Agency #2

“Actually, everyone can have a bad impact if they screw up. It’s not really that hard to do. If a company starts harassing or singling out a group of people or if they start to state things, it can have devastating consequences.” - CEO, Agency #4

The CEO at Agency #2 explains that even though some companies, for example candy
producers, have negative effects on society, the agency can still turn it into something good. Instead of turning down a client because of their products or services that may go against social responsibility, they take on the challenge to highlight the positive aspects instead.

“I can give you an example. We work with a candy company. Where we push pretty hard that we want their candy to be gelatine free[...] Sure, we have a client that sells candy which has sugar in it and that’s not good for people really. There we work in that way, but we try to make the best out of it. Because you could see it as ‘This client could go to another agency who doesn't care about producing gelatine free candy, which if you are a vegan you don’t have any options to choose between’. So there I think you can still make a difference.” - CEO, Agency #2

4.5 Problem management

Problem management on digital channels were discussed during the interviews. Most of the agencies do not have a crisis plan if they were to face a crisis online, such as negative feedback, hate comments etc. Few of the agencies had a crisis plan, but it is not very detailed. Despite of this, they all agreed on that a crisis plan is important if they were to face a crisis online. Both for their own sake and their clients.

“No, we don’t have a crisis plan [...] We will have to handle it later. We haven’t actually set a plan, but we would probably need to do it, but at the moment we don't have one.” - CEO, Agency #1

“Yes, we have a strategy but it could probably be better. [...] We are such a small agency, so issues go directly to us that are in charge of the agency, so we can handle it. [...] So, yeah we have a sort of ‘lite’ strategy, but it could be better.” - CEO, Agency #2

The CEO at Agency #3 explains how they as an agency have to handle issues on a daily basis.

“Problem Solving is something we work with daily, to ‘put out fires’. There is always something happening[...] I believe it’s important to take care of problems as soon as possible, with the right person, so that it doesn’t become a bigger problem than it needs to be.” - CEO, Agency #3

The agencies were asked if they could give an example of a campaign they had made in the past, that was meant to have a positive effect on society but was received negatively. None of the agencies could give a specific example of a campaign that had gone wrong for them in the past. Some comment that they probably have made mistakes but that they cannot remember any specific campaign that stood out.

“Yeah, we probably have, it’s just that i cannot think of one right now. Of course we have made mistakes, sometimes you do. I don’t have one that has stuck with me or that hurts.” - CEO, Agency #1
Some of the agencies argue that a digital communication agency isn’t that relevant to people in general. A digital communication agency is only interesting for present and future clients and potential employees. Because of this, the agencies consider themselves as low risk companies when it comes to bigger crises. If they make mistakes, it does not have a big impact on society. Bigger, more famous companies within other industries may have to face bigger crises.

“We as an agency are actually not that interesting for the majority of people. We are interesting for a few that wants to work here. We are interesting for our customers that are working with us right now. Or for a few companies that are looking for change. Otherwise, we as a company are pretty uninteresting if you look at it from a bigger perspective. Unlike Swedbank for example, that have this thing with ‘uppdrag granskning’ right now. Everyone cares about Swedbank, and now they have really messed up. I'm not saying that we couldn't make those mistakes, but we don't have that high amount of interest from people in general.” - CEO Agency #1

When discussing how the agencies handle criticism on their own and their clients digital channels, they explain that it is handled differently depending on what type of criticism is received. Receivers of the digital material often say and post exactly what they think because of the open, democratic environment online. Criticism, negativity and trolls are very common on digital channels today. This is something the agencies do have in mind when planning what material to post online, both for their own digital channels and for their customers. Some of the agencies do remove comments that are purely made to hurt others, always with the approval from the owner of that digital channel, in most cases their customers. Some agencies have the approach to answer the negative criticism instead of deleting the feedback. Negative criticism is often received because the commenter has not been informed enough. This issue can often be solved by providing the required information as an answer to the comment.

“We have people that do remove comments, if they are pure trolls that sit and write awful comments. We then remove the comments with the approval from the customers. But you should let people express their opinions too. We cannot remove a comment just because someone writes that it is bad.” - Art Direction assistant, agency #1

“We produced a deck of cards that was gender-neutral. Then it became a little bit of an issue surrounding gender in particular. And with that we had a huge impact. That resulted in trolls that started commenting. So we had to go in on evenings and weekends to answer. Otherwise we rarely receive these types of comments, but we monitor it 24/7 and answer when we want and choose to remove as well if something is wrong.” - CEO Agency #1

The CEO at Agency #4 argues that if you are honest from start to finish you should not receive much criticism or hate at all.

“I am sure some companies chose to remove comments but i don’t think you should. I think that if you are honest people will tolerate it. Very seldom you will get weird comments on something that is not weird.” - CEO, Agency #4
The CEO at Agency #2 believes that consumers have become harsher on companies that do genuinely good things for the society, especially on digital channels. Consumers nowadays often thinks that the actions agencies and companies take towards a better society is not good enough. If a company does a campaign today where they show that they take social responsibility, it can often get criticism from the public and get accused for being “greenwashing”. The agencies or their clients are facing negativity by trying to do something positive for the society. Consumers may even think they are taking social responsibility to make up for something bad. They mean that the positive actions are not making any difference or big impact in the society. Consumers are very critical to social responsibility.

“Clients can be afraid to show they take social responsibility. To take responsibility can become kind of ‘Greenwashing’. That it gets labelled as that even if it the intention was good. I think that this way of labelling companies can be a bit harsh sometimes from the consumers.”- CEO, Agency #2
5. ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the empirical results will be analysed and compared to the theoretical background with the intention to strengthen the validity. The analysis of the empirical results will create opportunities to fulfil the purpose; to understand digital communication agencies role in the production and implementation of digital products within digital channels to best understand digital social responsibility. The analysis of the empirical results will open up for discussion and create opportunities to answers to the research questions. The analysis will give digital communication agencies a better understanding of how to implement digital social responsibility. The analysis was done without personal opinions. The analysis will be discussed in the following chapter.

5.1 Digitalisations effect on the communication industry

Theories show that new technology has shaped the communication industry and the importance of online communication has directed agencies to new communication channels. It is a new way of communicating with information that spread faster than ever through digital channels (Jones et al., 2009). It is an interactive, two-way communication (Logan, 2016). This aligns with the empirical findings from the semi-structured interviews. Many of the agencies talked about the media channels they produce material for today. According to the digital communication agencies, the main aspects of digital communication are speed, great reach and two-way communication.

“The advantage is of course the reach, meaning that you can reach a lot of people very fast. Extremely fast. You also get a lot of feedback very fast. It can be great but also extremely hard when it goes wrong.” - CEO, Agency #1

5.2 Definition of social responsibility

Nowadays, businesses face increased demands from customers and stakeholders to show their actions regarding social responsibility. Consumers are increasingly concerned with taking purchase decisions not only based on themselves but also thinking about future generations (Pedersen, 2015). This forces digital communication agencies to implement social responsibilities to their business operations to survive, as any other business in any other industry. Sustainability and responsibility is frequently talked about today. However, it is hard for businesses to truly understand how to become socially responsible. There is no clear guidelines on what to do as a business, especially not for digital communication agencies who produce digital communication. This became very clear when addressing the topic to the digital communication agencies. The interviewees felt very unsure about what social responsibility really implicates and they all interpreted it differently. Some of the interviewees were more focused on the environmental responsibilities, such as public transport, electrical use, decreased carbon dioxide emissions etc. Others thought that environmental and social
responsibilities consociate. This aligns with the problem discussion and the explanation: “CSR has no unified definition and is interpreted differently depending on company” (Christiansson, n.d.).

The agencies gave us some examples of their actions towards social responsibility. When it comes to projects for customers, the main goal is always profitability. However, they do also mention smaller projects that were mainly produced to have a positive impact on society and to start a discussion. They do engage in important topics in today's society. Agency number one focuses a lot on gender equality. Agency number two mostly engage in projects that tackle environmental issues. Agency number three does not engage in any projects regards to social responsibility today, but wish to do so in the future. Agency number four focuses mainly on the agencies attitude towards stakeholders. They imply that knowledge, availability, personality and honesty is key aspects in becoming a socially responsible agency. All the agencies agreed on that genuineness and honesty are the core values in being a socially responsible agency. The agencies only work with clients that are not affecting the society in a negative way. They are also focusing on building a genuine, close-knit business culture. This does align with the European Commission’s (2011) definition of CSR, as well as Folkhälsomyndighetens (2018) definition of a social sustainable society. Both of these definitions firstly ensure that the law is being followed, as well as ensure basic human rights. Secondly, Folkhälsomyndighetens imply that a social sustainable society should add to inclusivity to all humans, for instance gender equality. The European Commission explain that “integrating social, environmental, ethical, consumer, and human rights concerns into their business strategy and operations”. This align with the agencies drive to always stay genuine and honest in the materials they produce, to work with the right clients and to have a strong, positive business culture. All the agencies work with digital channels to share their produced materials, where it is even more important to stay honest. Otherwise, there is a bigger risk of receiving negativity online.

5.3 Social responsibility motives

The theoretical background presents motives to why businesses should implement social responsibility to their business operations. According to Neergaard (2006), there are three main drivers for adopting CSR to a business (see Figure 2.1). Companies can be motivated by more than one of these groups or choose to focus on one as their main motivator for working with CSR.
These three motives can be compared to the digital communication agencies thoughts on producing digital communication. According to the digital communication agencies, the production and material produced should always be genuine and honest. Most of the interviewees mentioned these words during the interviews and it became a common answer. To become genuine and honest the agencies made sure they worked with the right clients and stayed informed and on point of the cases they worked with. They also work hard in building a strong, genuine and positive business operation. The digital communication agencies imply that a genuine and honest produced material will form honest digital communication and therefore, most likely, not face negative backlashes. The agencies explain that a genuine and honest digital communication is purely the right thing to do. This aligns with Neergaard’s (2006) triangle that displays company motives for CSR (see Figure 2.1), one of the motives being “Emotional motives”. Emotional motives are driven by the will to do what is morally right. It is a way to stay social responsible of a business operation and material produced.

“I think that the important part is the genuineness. It cannot be unclear why you do something or ‘this is what the agency or organisation really stands for?’. Or is It just something you say just because it is good for your business.” - CEO, Agency #2

Another point in Neergaard’s (2006) triangle is “Institutional motives”. Institutional motives are driven by the pressure to adopt CSR or because they want to imitate successful organizations that have adopted CSR in a successful manner. It is also considered normal business practice (Pedersen, 2015). Nowadays, businesses face increased demands from customers and stakeholders to show their actions regarding social responsibility. Consumers are increasingly concerned with taking purchase decisions not only based on themselves but also thinking about
future generations (Pedersen, 2015). This aligns with the digital communication agencies thoughts on taking responsibility for their customers. For them, it is expected to analyse the material they produce. They are responsible to make the best out of each case.

“We are taught that you should always be careful with what you publish. We question ourselves. Partly for our own sake, but also for our customers sake. If we do not ask these questions, we are not a good partner. It is not that weird that a customer wants to point out themselves as biggest, best and most beautiful in the world. They should think this way. But we have to ground these thoughts and make decisions that are sustainable. No one should be able to tear the produced material apart; to imply that we have been lying or had bad contentions. [...] Social responsibility is important in all contexts. Social channels cannot be a free zone where people do not take social responsibility. It is the same as anywhere else. You check the material you publish.” - CEO, Agency #4

The last point in Neergaard’s (2006) triangle is “Instrumental motives”, meaning businesses are driven by related objectives such as reducing costs and minimising risks (“it pays off”). Taking social responsibilities has created opportunities for the agencies. An analysis of this is presented below, under the heading “Social responsibility creates opportunities for the agencies”.

5.4 Profitability first

The interviewees expressed their thoughts concerning the main goal when producing material, both for themselves and their customers. They all agreed on that the productions of digital communication should firstly result in revenue. This is first priority in almost all cases. Social responsibility always comes second, if even at all. The empirical results regarding profitability first do align with the CSR Pyramid (see figure 2.2). As explained in the theoretical background, a fundamental part of CSR is the idea that companies have certain responsibilities to society, whether it pays off or not. The CSR Pyramid displays the economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities that the companies have to society (Carroll, 1991). The economic responsibilities are the foundation upon which all other rest. This aligns with the digital communication agencies and proven within the interviewee’s answers.
The importance of an economical foundation became very clear during the interview with agency number 3, which is a relatively new business. Agency number 3 were still in the starting phase of their business, something that tends to cost a lot of money. Because of this, the discussion of working with social responsibility had not been started yet. There were still big, more important parts that needed to be finalised before they had the chance to discuss the topic.

“We would definitely want to communicate this, when we have come far enough in our process. Specially the social aspects, giving back. Absolutely! Regarding *agency’s name*, we have just got started with social media, it has been so much work with other things right now. But it is definitely a part of our plan.” - CEO, Agency #3

5.5 Social responsibility creates opportunities for the agencies

When discussing the benefits of working with social responsibility, it was clear that the agencies found it difficult to say if social responsibility on its own has led to benefits such as increased sales, more clients and increased exposure but some of the interviewees had seen clear effects to the recruitment process. The effects were that more people, especially women, applied for jobs at the agencies and the agencies relationships with clients were strengthened. The CEO at agency number four explains that social responsibility has resulted in increased customer interest. From a customer perspective, it is valued that the agencies work with social responsibility in some form.

“I cannot say that we have got a specific client because of our engagement but something I can say is that if the client is choosing between us and another agency, and imagine that we are exactly as good on everything as the other agency, the deciding factor I think would be that we are an agency that care and have engagement for different projects.[...] I believe that it has
become easier to recruit new employees because we stand for something. I also believe that if an individual would choose between two agencies as their workplace and one of them has engagement for society and stands for something, well then it makes it much easier to choose that workplace.” - CEO, Agency #2

“Our engagement in these projects made it so that we went from having almost no women applying to work for us to now having plenty of women that noticed what we did. We then asked them 'How did you hear about us and what have you seen?' And the answer was that they had become interested in us because we had brought up these issues. So yeah, we have seen a very clear effect.” - CEO, Agency #1

This aligns with the European Commission’s explanation of CSR. As explained in the theoretical background, The European Commission (2011) point out three main points on why CSR is important, one being “in the interest of enterprises”. The European commission further explains that CSR provides benefits to companies, some of them being increased customer relations and greater HR management. The empirical results also align with CSR’s communication principles, presented by Wang & Huang (2018) in the theoretical background. They came to the conclusion that internal and external CSR messages through social media triggered greater behaviour, intended towards the organisation. Stakeholders’ perception of the organisation reached a level of trust, satisfaction, common ground and commitment. Their theories concerning that CSR messages on social media generate positive effects do align with the empirical results in the present thesis.

5.6 Agencies do not have a digital crisis plan

According to the theoretical background, companies should have a clear crisis plan to avoid a big scandal or for a crisis to become bigger than it has to be, something that is of big importance when it comes to social responsibility on digital channels. A clear crisis plan does lower the amount of stress and work that must be done if a crisis would occur. This is of high importance for online marketing, where the rapid speed and two-way communication forces companies to respond quickly (González-Herrero & Smith, 2008). Today, companies increasingly use digital channels to communicate during a crisis (González-Herrero & Smith, 2008). The theoretical background even implies that no response at all could damage the company, creating rumours and amplifying threat upon the company. It can damage the relationship to all stakeholders. Therefore, an agency must be prepared. Preparations such as a crisis plan or a crisis team that handles the problem as a group are beneficial for an agency (Pearson & Clair, 1998). After the analysis of the empirical results, it became clear that the digital communication agencies do not have clear guidelines on how to face a potential crisis. The most common response from the agencies was that they have not considered the idea of a crisis plan or crisis team. A few of the agencies had a small crisis plan but did not want to share the details of its content. However, all the agencies did respond to negative feedback online, removed hateful comments and followed up on the digital material they produce. Most of the agencies imply that the digital material they produce is of such high quality, and has gone through enough corrections, that there are very
small chances of facing a crisis at all. This means that the theories surrounding the importance of a crisis plan does not coincide with how the participating digital communication agencies operate in Jönköping, Sweden.

“No, we don’t have a crisis plan [...] We will have to handle it later. We haven’t actually set a plan, but we would probably need to do it, but at the moment we don’t have one.” - CEO, Agency #1

“Yes, we have a strategy but it could probably be better. [...] We are such a small agency, so issues go directly to us that are in charge of the agency, so we can handle it. [...] So, yeah we have a sort of ‘lite’ strategy, but it could be better.” - CEO, Agency #2
6. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Chapter six contains the discussion of method, discussion of findings and conclusion. This chapter presents the findings and evaluates them with regard to our purpose and research questions as well as briefly summarise the main points in a final conclusion. Lastly, thoughts on future research are presented.

6.1 Discussion of method

After applying the method to the empirical findings, the results show that the method used was sufficient enough to answer the research questions. The method used gave the researchers enough empirical findings to be able to analyse and compare the results to the theoretical background as well as make conclusions based on both parts. When discussing selection of interviewees, the researchers wanted to interview 1-3 people at each agency. Although, changes had to be made since the agencies were too busy to let the researchers interview more than one person at each agency, expect from agency number one. This did not affect the results. The researchers realised that the opinions of the CEO aligned with the employees at agency number one. The digital communication agencies had their own values and business culture, something that aligned with the employees mindset regarding sustainability and social responsibility on digital channels. With the amount of people interviewed, the researchers managed to get a broad view of the topic.

The agencies chosen were all from Jönköping Sweden. The results show a generalised view of the agencies opinions regarding the topics in this thesis. It may be that the results could differ if more cities and agencies would have been interviewed. Although, the material collected was sufficient enough to answer the research questions.

When performing the interviews, the researchers followed the interview guide. Some interview questions got changed and removed after the first interview since the researchers noticed that those questions were repetitive or did not add any valuable information to the discussion. The researchers believe that this did not affect the empirical results in a negative way. These corrections helped the researchers to not get stuck to unnecessary questions.

Since the researchers did not have much experience in interviewing before, possibilities to dig deeper into valuable answers was easily overseen. Stress and nervosity were factors that affected the researchers when interviewing. There were also times where the interviewees discussed topics that were not relevant to the research topic. This was a clear effect of using semi-structured interviews as a research method, something the researchers were prepared for. Greater experience in interviewing could benefit the thesis.
All the interviewees' names and the digital communication agencies' names were confidential. This is something they were informed about before starting the interviews. We believe that this gave the interviewees the confidence to answer truthfully without the fear of their identity being known. Some topics were still private for the agencies. In these cases, the agencies chose to give short answers or chose not to give out all the details. This is something the researchers could not control. The researchers had to respect the agencies' privacy regarding those topics.

6.2 Discussion of findings

The purpose of this study was to explore digital communication agencies' role in the production and implementation of digital products within digital channels to best understand digital social responsibility. The research questions that the study is based upon are:

- What social responsibilities does a digital communication agency have regarding the products and messages they produce for digital channels?
- How do digital communication agencies become socially responsible when using digital channels?

We know that technology and digitalisation have shaped the communication industry. This brings great possibilities to businesses, as digital platforms are growing and becoming the main focus for communication. The main strengths and advantages of digital channels compared to traditional channels are their speed, great reach, and that they are interactive, allowing for two-way communication. However, with new technology and advancing digitalisation, negative aspects have emerged and need to be considered when producing and publishing digital material for digital channels. This is especially important for digital communication agencies that heavily rely on digital communication. An interesting observation that can be made from the results of the interviews is that some of the agencies' view of communication does not differ whether it is digital or not. The important thing is the purpose and what is the most effective method of fulfilling that purpose. After the collection of information for the theoretical background was done, we expected the agencies to talk about the advantages and risks of digital communication. Instead, we saw that the channel is not everything and that with an adequate strategy and good values, effective communication can be achieved on any channel. This was a very interesting insight that we got from analysing our empirical data.

The online environment can be very toxic. People are very critical and express their true feelings without filters. The agencies need to understand how to handle facing negative responses and backlashes on digital platforms. Facing these problems are a way of taking social responsibility online. It can be hard to draw the line for what is acceptable criticism and what is just harassment, racism, sexism, or troll behaviour. As long as it is possible an agency should let opinions stay but when they cross over into something that the agency cannot stand for and tolerate, these comments should be removed so that the agency, their clients, and other visitors do not get damaged. The agencies are representing not only themselves, but also their clients in the digital material they produce.
To take social responsibility is a must for all business industries today. It does not only bring positive outcomes but is also expected from stakeholders. When interviewing the agencies, they all displayed uncertainty of what digital social responsibility implies. The expression “social responsibility” itself was familiar but somewhat unclear. The agencies all interpreted it differently. However, we believe that no matter how you view it, the most important part is that agencies understand how digital platforms work, discuss the possibilities to make a difference and always try to improve. Digital communication agencies are professional users of digital platforms and therefore the ones that have the tools to shape the community online. They have the power to make a change; to take social responsibility online. Both Folkhälsomyndighetens (2018) explanation of a social sustainable community and The European Commission's (2011) explanation of CSR are great building blocks. Combine that with the knowledge of digital platforms and you start to find patterns on how to take digital social responsibility.

The empirical findings reveal that social responsibility on digital channels is not different from taking social responsibility in other situations in life. The digital communication agencies think that digital communication should be the same as communication in any other form. What you say online should not be any different to a regular conversation in real life. Does that make the expression digital social responsibility not applicable? However, theories show that digitalisation has shaped the communication industry. Digital communication works differently than offline communication. It is faster, you reach more people and users are able to comment back. It is easier to face negativity and backlashes. Therefore, the approach to social responsibility should be different online compared to offline. The core values and behaviours are the same but the tools to express them are very different. Use these tools responsible and they are a great way for making a difference in society. Use them in inappropriate ways or be careless and they can rapidly cause damage.

6.3 Conclusion

In this part the answers to the research questions will be presented as well as other conclusions that have been made from the empirical data and analysis. Suggestions to further research are also presented.

6.3.1 What social responsibilities does a digital communication agency have in regard to the products and messages they produce for digital channels?

Once digital material is published on digital platforms, the responsibility lies entirely with the owner of the digital material, meaning the client. There are few exceptions to this, depending on what was agreed on in the contract between the agency and the client. If the material would be questioned, the client is entirely responsible of deciding what to do with the feedback. However, digital material not fulfilling its purpose, negative feedback and backlashes will result in a bad relationship with the clients. This will most likely result in losing that client and risking the agency’s reputation. Digital communication agencies do not legally have the responsibility of the products and messages they produce for digital channels, unless it is on their own digital platforms. However, they have to treat all their material as if they still own it to make sure the
quality is always to their standards and that they can act fast if the message would be received poorly.

As presented in the theoretical background, social responsibility is not one of the first priorities for any company. Companies are not legally obligated to take social responsibility. For a company to be successful some aspects have to be prioritised meaning that social responsibility and non-profit projects could be cut in order to stay profitable. However, as our study shows, there are many benefits of working with social responsibility. The main benefit that we could see from the interviews was that it made it easier for the agencies to get people to apply for jobs. We did not see this as an obvious benefit of working with social responsibility and found it interesting to see what the effects really are when communicating that the agency is taking social responsibility in different ways.

6.3.2 How do digital communication agencies become socially responsible when using digital channels?

As the empirical results are implicating, digital communication agencies do not have clear guidelines on how to face possible crises online. As the theoretical background implies, clear guidelines and teams working with issues like these, minimises the stress and makes the process of solving these issues easier. The results from the interviews show that the agencies had overlooked the importance of a good detailed crisis plan. Since none of them answered that they had received any major backlash to a campaign they have not had the need to handle a crisis plan. However, it could turn out to be a very good decision later on if a crisis should occur as everyone at the agency would have a better understanding of how to handle the situation. To minimise the risk of backlashes, the agencies should work with appropriate clients; clients that do align with their own values. The agencies should thoroughly analyse their clients, meaning their core values, positive and negative aspects. It is the agency’s responsibility to bring out the best in each case and to be prepared for counter-questions. If doing this correctly, the agencies enable genuine and honest digital communication, which minimises the risk of being perceived unfairly on digital platforms. This is especially of importance on digital platforms, where the speed, great reach and two-way communication makes it even easier to receive negativity and face backlashes. A digital communication agency can become socially responsible by working with the right clients, as well as producing and publishing genuine and honest digital communication.

6.4 Future research

This study has represented digital communication agencies in Jönköping, Sweden thoughts and actions towards social responsibility within digital channels. The four digital communication agencies participating have given enough information to be able to answer the research question. Due to time restrictions the study had to be focused on only agencies in the city of Jönköping. For future research it would be interesting to see if a bigger spread of locations and more participating agencies would affect the results in a significant way.
Within the present thesis, empirical data was collected through semi-structured interviews. An alternative to improve the study would be to conduct a quantitative focused method. By utilizing a survey as the main collection method more data could be analysed and the results could give a different result than the ones in this study. In the present thesis, detailed answers were prioritised over data collection since we believe that this would give us a good representation of digital communication agencies in Jönköping, Sweden.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Anonymitetskram:

1. Godkänner du att vi spelar in intervjun samt använder dina svar i vår uppsats?
2. Vill du ta del av den slutgiltiga uppsatsen när den är klar?

Dina svar är konfidentiella, bara vi (Emma & Erik) har tillgång till ditt namn och dess koppling till svaren.

Bakgrund

4. Vad har du arbetat med tidigare?

Personliga åsikter angående ämnet

5. Kan du berätta om hur du personligen ser på socialt ansvarstagande?

( lägg in en förklaring på vad socialt ansvarstagande är, om det är oklart )

Inte gå emot mänskliga rättigheter, inkludera alla, förhålla sig till dom i störst behov.
6. Tycker du det är viktigt att ta socialt ansvar? Varför?

Digital kommunikation & digitala kanaler

7. Hur jobbar ni som en byrå med digital kommunikation?
8. Vilka fördelar, eller nackdelar, ser du med digital kommunikation jämfört med traditionella kommunikationskanaler?

Hur en digital byrå jobbar med socialt ansvarstagande
9. Hur viktigt är det, som en byrå, att arbeta med sociala ansvarstaganden i digitala kanaler? Varför?

10. Tar ni socialt ansvar på era digitala kanaler? Ge exempel. Hur kommuniceras detta ut?

11. (om svar ja på #10) Har ert sociala ansvar på digitala kanaler bidragit till synliga effekter? Positiva, negativa? Fler kunder?

12. (om svar ja på #10) Vad har den digitala kanalen & digitala kommunikationen haft för roll vid ert sociala ansvarstagande?

Kunden

13. Vad vill ni/kunden ha för effekter när ni producerar digitala material för era kunder? (svar på både kunden och DCA)

14. Efterfrågar kunder digitala kampanjer där de framstår som att de tar socialt ansvar?

15. På vilken plats i ordningen kommer socialt ansvarstagande? För er själva? Och kunden?

Problemhantering

16. Har ni någonsin skapat en digital kampanj som var menat att ge en positiv effekt på samhället men istället fick negativ respons? Vad var dess effekter?


19. Vem bär ansvaret för materialet när produkten är färdig och har blivit accepterad samt publicerad av kunden?

20. Kan du ge några exempel på ett företag som du anser kan ge negativa effekter på samhället?

21. Har ni jobbat/skulle ni kunna tänka er att jobba med ett företag som kan ha negativa konsekvenser på samhället?
Avslutande frågor:

22. Är det något du vill tillägga?

Anonymitetskrav:

23. Hur kändes intervjun?