

TALLINN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

School of Business and Governance

Department of Business and Administration

Helmer Kalevi Helén

**BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING IN  
SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZED ENTERPRISES IN FINLAND**

Bachelor's thesis

Programme TVTB, specialisation Marketing

Supervisor: Wolfgang Dieter Gerstlberger, PhD

Co-supervisor: -

Tallinn 2022

I hereby declare that I have compiled the thesis independently and all works, important standpoints and data by other authors have been properly referenced and the same paper has not been previously presented for grading. The document length is 8983 words from the introduction to the end of conclusion.

Helmer Kalevi Helén .....

(signature, date)

Student code: 186355TVTB

Student e-mail address: helmer.helen1@gmail.com

Supervisor: Wolfgang Dieter Gerstlberger

The paper conforms to requirements in force

.....

(signature, date)

Co-supervisor: -

The paper conforms to requirements in force

.....

(signature, date)

Chairman of the Defence Committee:

Permitted to the defence

.....

(name, signature, date)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	4
INTRODUCTION .....	5
1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	8
1.1 Social media marketing .....	8
1.2 Business-to-consumer social media marketing .....	9
1.3 Business-to-business social media marketing .....	11
2. METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH .....	14
2.1 Research method.....	14
2.2 Research design .....	15
2.3 Expectations of the study.....	16
3. EMPIRICAL PART: RESULTS .....	18
3.1 Interview results .....	18
3.1.1 Challenges in business-to-business social media marketing .....	18
3.1.2 Platforms.....	19
3.1.3 Metrics .....	21
3.1.4 Improvements .....	22
3.2 Thematic analysis .....	24
3.3 Recommendations .....	27
CONCLUSIONS .....	30
LIST OF REFERENCES.....	33
APPENDICES .....	36
Appendix 1. Interview questions .....	36
Appendix 2. Interview transcripts .....	37
Appendix 3. Figures .....	50
Appendix 4. Non-exclusive licence.....	53

## **ABSTRACT**

Social media marketing is one of the key elements of today's marketing for companies. Most of the previous researches and studies have been focusing more towards the business-to-consumer segment. This thesis focuses on the business-to-business segment of social media marketing. The subject was researched using qualitative research methods. The chosen method for the study was expert interviews. The interviews were then analysed using a thematic analysis. All of the ten interviewees that participated in this thesis, work in or own companies that are classified as small and medium sized enterprises, they operate in Finland and use social media as a key part of their marketing strategy. To avoid bias in the conclusions all of the ten interviewed companies operate in different fields of businesses. Due to the ongoing pandemic, Covid-19, the interviews were carried out via Microsoft Teams, or by email. The interviews contained relevant questions about the chosen companies' social media marketing, mainly about the platforms that they use, the challenges that they have occurred and their ideas and suggestions about how business-to-business social media marketing could be improved.

Keywords: Social media marketing, Business-to-business, Business-to-consumer, Small and medium sized enterprises

## **INTRODUCTION**

Social media is one of the key elements of today's marketing. It is a rapidly changing environment that allows companies to communicate with their customers at a lower threshold than before. This thesis will be focusing on the business-to-business segment of social media marketing. The thesis will go through small and medium sized enterprises that operate in Finland.

The research problem behind the thesis is that quite a lot of Finnish small and medium sized enterprises that are operating in the business-to-business segment are constantly trying to find ways to utilize social media marketing up to the point that the business-to-consumer segment is benefitting from social media usage. The challenge that these business-to-business companies are facing is the ability to communicate to their target market, due to the size of the market being quite a lot smaller when compared to the business-to-consumer market and the difficulty to stand out from the competition in their field of business. The platforms that they are currently using, not one of them are designed with the business-to-business market in mind from the outset.

In order to fully understand the social media marketing in the business-to-business sector, we must firstly look at social media marketing as a whole, then introduce the differentiation between the business-to-consumer and the business-to-business sector. There are multiple amounts of literature and researches made about the business-to-consumer social media marketing, unlike the business-to-business organizations and their use of social media marketing receive less attention (Järvinen et al. 2012). The Business-to-business sector aims to build long lasting, fruitful business relationships and one way of maintaining this relationship is by communicating with businesses through social media.

One of the fundamental components of social media marketing are platforms and the different behavioral conducts they use. Companies need to adapt their marketing style to suit the used platform in order for them to engage with their set target market. Moreover, this brings an additional challenge with business-to-business usage of social media marketing, as they need to be aware of the professionalism and the behavioral aspects of each platforms.

The reasoning behind the choice of small and medium sized enterprises as a focus on this study is the size of the segment. The small and medium sized enterprises is the largest segment of companies in Finland, as it is in Europe. Even though, this is the largest segment in Finland the amount of literature and research about their usage of social media in the business-to-business market is still rather adequate, when compared to the business-to-consumer market.

One of the key platforms for businesses to control their relationship with new or existing customers are different customer relationship management platforms. These platforms are dedicated towards keeping track about the communication, sales processes, open tasks, and other pre-determined variables to keep track of the relationship and communication with other businesses. These platforms can usually be integrated with other social media platforms. However, usually most of these platforms are rather expensive to run, require training for the employees, and require personnel in charge of running the program to correctly utilize these dedicated platforms. Since quite a large majority of these businesses do not have the resources or do not want to invest in proper customer relationship management tools, social media has a lot of options to stay in touch and communicate with their business customers.

This thesis aims to answer reoccurring problems and challenges that the predetermined companies face in business-to-business social media marketing. This thesis uses qualitative research methods by interviewing experts in the subject. The interview consists of ten open ended questions and the interview follows a semi-structured construction. The interviews will then be analysed using thematic analysis, to find out about the common themes that the interviews brought out. In order to avoid bias in the interviews, all of the companies chosen to be interviewed operate in different fields of business. In the interviews there are businesses from the automotive industry, plastics industry, printing industry, media company, advertising agency, an importing company and finally a housing investment company.

This thesis aims to answer the following research question and sub-questions:

RQ: How are small and medium sized enterprises utilizing business-to-business social media marketing in Finland?

1. What are the main challenges of business-to-business social media marketing?

2. How can Finnish small and medium sized enterprises improve their business-to-business social media marketing?

The first chapter of theoretical framework will bring background to the subject and provide additional information for the research. The chapter is divided into three main parts them being social media marketing, business-to-consumer social media marketing and finally business-to-business social media marketing. The second part of the thesis provides the methodology of the research and used research methods. It provides the chosen research method, the design of the research as well as the expectations of the study. The third and final part of this thesis is the empirical part of the study that opens up the interviews and opinions from the interviewees. The interviews will be analyzed using a thematic analysis to find out trends and similarities that occur in the businesses, despite their different operating segment. Moreover, the interviews will provide recommendations and open discussion about the challenges that the interviewed companies have faced and the recommendations for improving business-to-business social media marketing. From all of these three parts, conclusions towards the study will be made.

# **1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical part of the thesis will be focusing on an introduction about social media marketing and then to fully understand the business-to-business social media marketing segment, we must first look into the more traditional and common business-to-consumer social media marketing. Last of the theoretical part will be focusing solely on business-to-consumer social media marketing and it's positive and negative aspects as well as the previous literature and researches on the topic.

## **1.1 Social media marketing**

Social media marketing is an everchanging environment. New platforms, strategies, key metrics, channels, content et cetera are introduced to companies and customers almost daily. In order for companies to remain lucrative in this volatile environment, companies need to adapt their knowledge, know-how, and activities according to the trends in the market. Different era's has brought new methods of communication, for us to express our ideas and beliefs. Social media has become the method of communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Companies have realized that without a plan and strategy, they have no chance competing in this rapidly changing digital freedom (Saravanakumar, SuganthaLakshmi 2012). In the technology driven environment that we live in, social media has brought an important informational aspect to marketing. As information is easier to acquire now than it has ever been before, this has opened a lot of possibilities for companies to spread information in social media as a part of their marketing strategy. Users of social media have acknowledged social media as more than just a place to share their photos or important parts of their lives, companies can benefit from this shift in the fundamentals of social media. Even if companies have been slow to adopt this shift in their social media marketing strategy, they can spread valuable information about the company, products or services (Andzulis et al. 2012).

When comparing social media marketing to the more traditional marketing like television advertisements, radio advertisements, events, sponsorships et cetera to social media marketing, social media can add value to these traditional marketing styles at a cost-effective and efficient way. Moreover, when comparing traditional marketing to social media marketing, social media



marketing can bring synergistic effects to traditional marketing. When it comes to marketing, consistency is the key to success. When building a company's marketing mix, it is important to combine the traditional marketing with digital marketing, in order to remain consistent and gain synergistic effects (Kumar et al. 2016).

One of the most important part of marketing is the communication between a company and it's customers. The more traditional ways of communicating with your customers is by talking on a phone or by email communication. Social media marketing does not seek to replace these traditional behavior's, but it's aim is to complement and add value to both the customer and the company. By actively participating in social media marketing, the company can communicate with its customers much more than by telephone or via email (Andzulis et al. 2013).

Web 1.0 is focused more in the publication of information, as opposed to web 2.0, that has brought new elements to it by brining conversation, interaction and user generated content to itself. Web 1.0 was geared more towards a person, company or entity publishing information on their websites and updating it when the information was deemed old. Web 2.0 was introduced, giving users the possibilities to publish an efficient online service, that other users can either modify, discuss or interact with the content in the internet service (Heino 2010). The shift from web 1.0 to web 2.0 was a natural process, since the possibility of interaction has always been possible, but only later it was utilized (Mäki 2016). The same applies in social media marketing, customers want content they can interact with, they want content that wakes emotions in them, and they want content that brings communities closer rather than just information from a company about their services or products.

## **1.2 Business-to-consumer social media marketing**

The aim of business-to-consumer social media marketing is to communicate, draw attention, cause emotion, inform and find new customers. Nowadays social media is used quite a lot as a communication platform between the company and it's customers. Social media has rightfully earned its place in the marketing strategies and marketing mixes of different companies. Social media allows for easy access for new companies to penetrate the market and reach their target markets.

Business-to-consumer social media marketing has allowed for companies to communicate with their customers, in a much more cost-effective way that has never been possible before. Especially nowadays, since the usage of different social media platforms have shifted rather heavily from just consuming content to reposting, sharing and discussing. This has opened possibilities for companies to further their brand awareness from their target market to a wider audience at a cost-effective level (Kietzmann et al. 2011). This effect has been seen in the platforms, as usually the platforms with higher interaction between the different users are more popular and tend to lure users in them. For example, twitter probably would not be such a successful platform, without the ability to retweet the tweets.

One of the most challenging parts of traditional business-to-consumer marketing is the actual preceding of the desired outcomes. The analytics companies can follow in the more traditional marketing, are more costly and harder to access, than the analytics in social media. In the data-driven environment that we live in, simply the number of persons who have seen a company's advertisement is simply not enough, companies need more information about the reception of the message from their customers. Social media has brought a great aspect to itself, by the possibilities of different analytics to follow the success of campaigns. Unfortunately, although companies can follow the overall reception of the campaign, they cannot yet follow the consequences of these campaigns, such as brand loyalty (Ashley, Tuten 2014).

One of the key elements of successful social media marketing, lies in the ability to adapt to the different platforms. Companies need to adjust their styles to fit the platform. The content needs to be tailor made towards the platform, for the companies to receive the desired outcomes (Lad-Khairnar 2021). New platforms are constantly born, which allows users for different stimulants in multiple platforms. If wise, companies can benefit from these different communication platforms. The platforms are generally speaking divided into three different types, Images and blogs, videos and streaming services and Informational channels. By being involved in these three types of platforms, companies can reach higher levels of visibility and a wider target audience, all by receiving synergies in the published content from the different platforms (Kuivamäki 2021). When utilizing similar content to different platforms, companies can reach new potential customer segments with marginally higher costs.

### **1.3 Business-to-business social media marketing**

The business-to-business sector of social media marketing has been researched a lot less than the more traditional business-to-consumer social media marketing segment. Recently, the business-to-business sector has been studied more, and the studies suggest that there is still a lot of unexplored areas and utilization of social media marketing in the business to business sector for companies (Cartwright et al. 2021). The marketing teams of companies have seemed to be reluctant in embracing digital and social media in their marketing strategies in the business-to-business marketing. Even tough, companies can benefit widely from the communication and marketing in social media (Enyinda et al. 2020).

The sales process of business-to-business defers widely from the process of business-to-consumer. The relationship between business-to-business customer is quite often more direct and intense (Enyinda et al. 2020). The buying process of business-to-business sector is most often quite more complex than when compared to the business-to-consumer purchasing process. The business-to-business buying process sometimes even require a team and heavy analysis behind the decision making, which leads to a longer negotiation process due to the amount of persons involved and since the business-to-consumer purchasing decision seldom has a negotiation phase. A one-time purchase in the business-to-business sector is usually much bigger and lucrative than it is in the business-to-consumer segment, hence it requires more time, effort, people, and analysis (Eck, Johansson 2020). There are fewer business-to-business clients than there are business-to-consumer clients, which narrows down the target group significantly (López-López, Giusti 2020). On the other hand, the relationship between the communication is a lot more personal in business-to-business than it is in business-to-consumer marketing.

As the business-to-business segment of social media marketing is a lesser studied segment of social media, managers of companies often tend to mitigate the importance of active social media presence. However, as social media is a fast shifting environment, marketers views change rapidly, business-to-business managers have started to open up for new social media marketing technologies (Vella et al. 2019). It has been shown that with active social media presence, companies can benefit from this and that the traditional communication does not have to always be face-to-face. However, social media does not aim to change the traditional communication, it aims to support it. Marketers from companies can support their communication with existing customers, find new customers or suppliers and build brand awareness with successful strategies

in business-to-business marketing (Andersson, Wikström 2017). By implementing social media as a part of a companies marketing strategy, companies can help overcome their sales process limitations. As studies suggest social media marketing affects whole sales process. The prospects phase, sales phase, closing the sale and the post-sale process can all be alleviated with proper presence and strategy in social media (Buratti et al. 2018).



Figure 1: Honeycomb of social media marketing

Source: Vella J.M., Diba H., & Abratt R. 2019 Social media influence on the b2b buying process. *Journal of business & Industrial marketing*, 1483.

The honeycomb of social media marketing was first introduced by Jan H. Kietzmann et al. In “Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media.” (2011, 243). Which was later modified by Joseph M. Vella et al. In “Social media influence on the b2b buying process” (2019, 1483) to fit in the requirements of business-to-business social media marketing. The honeycomb sums up perfectly the different sections needed for a profitable social media marketing presence. The honeycomb consists of seven fundamental parts of social media

marketing, them being presence, relationships, reputation, groups, conversations, sharing and identity as the middle block. Vella introduced new meanings to these blocks and modified them to fit the business-to-business sector, without changing the key blocks of the honeycomb. This describes the differences in business-to-business and business-to-consumer social media marketing, the fundamentals are the same, but different approaches are needed.

## **2. METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH**

This part of the thesis will focus on the methodology of the research, the chosen research methods used for the study as well as the design and expectations of this research. This part will also focus on the limitations this study encounters and the positive and negative aspects of the chosen research methods.

### **2.1 Research method**

Due to the complexity and the need of expertise towards the subject, the chosen method for the research was qualitative research methods, in particular expert interviews. The interviews allow to discuss about the researched subject with experts of the field. All the experts have multiple years of experience in marketing and specifically the business-to-business social media marketing segment. The interviewees timetables and the ongoing pandemic, forced to move the interviews towards distance interviews or as email communication. Some of the interviews were conducted via Microsoft teams meeting. Some of the interviewees could simply not fit the interview in their schedule, so they had the questions sent to them via email and the responses as written emails.

As business-to-business is a reasonably lightly researched topic and lacks moderate amount of theorem, interviews is a qualitative research method that can be used to research a newer topic. Semi-structured interviews were chosen due to the study not being a longer-term study and the need of optimum time usage in the interviews (Jamshed 2014). The interviews, that were conducted face-to-face lasted for about 30 minutes to one hour. The interviews were conducted in Finnish, as this is the native language of the interviewees and after the interviews the interviewer translated the interview to English and wrote a verbatim transcript. All of the interviews were recorded using two recording applications on two separate mobile phones, for the assurance that no interview would have gotten lost. The interviews that were done in written form in email, followed the same pattern for the interviewees to answer with their native language and later translated. If there was a need of reassurance or some questions came unanswered, the interviewer conducted a second interview, where the unanswered or unsure answers where recited.

## 2.2 Research design

The research consisted of ten expert interviews. Each interview consisted of ten open ended questions. The target was to get ten experts from different industries to an interview to discuss their represented company's social media marketing as well as the challenges and successes they have faced in their social media marketing endeavors. Moreover, some recommendations and improvements that the interviewee's would suggest for companies to succeed in business-to-business social media marketing. All of the interviewees work in or own the companies and all of them respectively operate in the business-to-business segment. For getting different views and opinions involved, the research focused on having a lot of differentiation in the field of business without losing the professionalism and expertise of the interviewee in the specific field.

The aim of the interviews was firstly to get an overall understanding of the company's operations and their industry. Social media marketing is quite dependent on the industry, meaning some industries tend to use more social media as others. With knowledge of the company's industry, we can better draw conclusions about the overall activity that the industry is visible in social media when compared to the company's activity, this to get an understanding of the activity in social media of the company in question. Naturally progressing from the industry, secondly to the activity and the budget that the company operates with, in social media. This was designed to give an understanding about the operative ability that the company runs with in terms of budget, headcount, and activity in social media. The final part of the interviews focusses directly on the future of business-to-business social media marketing. Both the company's future in terms of social media marketing as well as the interviewees recommendations and development ideas to improve social media marketing in the business-to-business segment.

The interview consisted of ten open ended questions, the researcher wanted to keep the opportunities for a naturally flowing conversation, which was the reason for the selection of semi-structured interviews. The positive aspect of a semi-structured interview is, that it allows for the interview to take a different turn than expected, while this can lead to a positive turn, it can also shift the interview towards an undesired path. Moreover, it can bring new ideas and perspective to the interview. Semi-structured interview allows for an open two-way communication, due to the possibility to go more in-depth in the answers the respondents give. Semi-structured interview has a more relaxed atmosphere, which is a crucial element for a successful interview and gives security to the interviewee to open about more sensitive information. Some of the challenges of a semi-

structured interview, is the ability for the interview to get an unexpected turn into a more negative side. With the example of the interview not going deep enough, more just of a conversation. The nature of the interview must be truthful and avoid the interview questions to be leading towards an aspired answer. This is one of the key elements for a successful, truthful, and open interview. One of the challenges in interviews lies behind the time-consuming nature of interviews. Most of the marketing managers are rather busy, so it is sometimes difficult to find the time to conduct the interviews. Moreover, to get enough interviews and deviation in the answers to properly draw conclusions and recommendations.

The companies involved in this study are all categorized as small and medium sized enterprises. Small and medium sized enterprises are one of the most interesting segments of businesses in Finland. European commission set guidelines for defining small and medium sized enterprises in the EU recommendation 2003/361. The definition of small and medium sized enterprises can be determined by either the number of staff working in the company, by the overall turnover that the company turns in during a fiscal year or by the amount of total assets in a company's balance sheet. The headcount of the company needs to be more than 10 persons and less than 250 persons and the turnover needs to be within more than 2 million euros per fiscal year and less than 50 million euros in a fiscal year or the balance sheet total to be in between 10 to 43 million euros, in order for the company to be classified as a small and medium sized enterprise. Small and medium sized enterprises are a very interesting segment of today's business world especially in Finland, where most of the companies are classified as small and medium sized.

### **2.3 Expectations of the study**

As business-to-business social media marketing is quite heavily less studied and researched topic compared to business-to-consumer social media marketing, the expectations of the results and conclusions of this study are rather difficult to draw. The lack of studies bring a positive challenge to this research as well as the an importance for the topic and an importance for forthcoming studies in the same field. Nonetheless, the lack of research challenges this study with the ability to rely information on previous studies or models.

As an expectation, the companies involved in this study are all active users and content creators in social media. A prerequisite for the companies involved and the interviewee's was that social



media is a part of their marketing strategy and that the company mostly involves itself in the business-to-business field. This was crucial for the study since the research method is expert interviews. In order to draw conclusions and give recommendations, the research needs experienced marketers and their view and understanding about the business-to-business social media marketing.

Challenges that this study has, is the ability to formulate justified recommendations, since social media is an everchanging industry and a very time-oriented platform. Some of the successes in campaigns, platforms or activities that have worked in the past, are not directly applicable to forthcoming ones. Limited time towards the study and the amount of interviews can also bring challenges to draw justified recommendations. The research methods were chosen for this research to be as closely related to real life practices as possible. Moreover, to have experiences in real life practices rather than solely relying on theories and previous studies.

### **3. EMPIRICAL PART: RESULTS**

This chapter provides the information from the interviews. Firstly looking into the interview results, which is divided into four sub-categories them being the challenges in business-to-business social media marketing, the different platforms that the interviewed marketers use, some of the metrics they follow and improvement ideas that the companies in question can do in the future to improve their social media marketing. Finally, there is an analysis part of the interviews, from all of these parts, recommendations are drawn.

#### **3.1 Interview results**

##### **3.1.1 Challenges in business-to-business social media marketing**

The most reoccurring answer in the interviews when questioned about the challenges of business-to-business social media marketing was time. As small and medium sized enterprises usually run with as little staff as possible to remain profitable, which leads to the employees simply not having enough time that they would desire to put into social media marketing. Moreover, most answers indirectly applied time-management as one of the biggest challenges.

Interviewee 4: The biggest challenge for us right now is limited resources. We have a shortage of staff and it reduces our social media activity quite heavily. So in short, our challenge lies in limited time to put into social media marketing.

Interviewee 3: One of the other challenges we are facing is that we cannot right now post in the schedule that we want or that would be ideal due to limited time, it is hard to get the algorithms to work in your favor.

Most small and medium sized enterprises are being run with a rather tight budget. This naturally means that companies do not have large budgets for marketing. Operating in social media with paid advertisements, is a great way of building brand awareness, but it is not as a sustainable way

when compared to organically growing different social media sites. One of the reoccurring challenges that Finnish small and medium sized enterprises are facing, is the limited budget to use towards social media and how to grow the company's social media sites organically.

Interviewee 7: To reach business owners and our target market with reasonable budget

Interviewee 3: If we would increase our budget towards paid advertisements in any of the platforms, that would bring more engagement towards our posts, but the ideal situation would be that the content itself would be so interesting, that it would gather engagement. We can see certain trends occurring, but unfortunately these trends do not mimic on what we would like for others to see us as.

Differentiating from the competition has always been difficult in social media marketing. This doesn't change in business-to-business social media marketing, moreover it gets even harder due to the business-to-business market being smaller and a fewer number of potential customers. Creating content that is at the same time both interesting as it is engaging is one of the key difficulties in business-to-business social media marketing as was seen in the interviews.

Interviewee 3: The hardest part is to separate from the mass, because everyone makes social media content and especially in our industry as we are an advertising agency, everyone in this industry is struggling with the same problem of getting attention of the same groups. Especially in the organic side of social media, engaging the customer is one of the biggest challenges.

Interviewee 2: Lack of interesting content and the difficulty of creating it.

### **3.1.2 Platforms**

In order to remain interesting in social media, continuous posting on different platforms are vital. Some of the interviewees pointed out that one of their biggest challenges in operating different platforms is the ability to reiterate content to different platforms without repeating itself. Quite a lot of similarities can be seen in the different platforms that companies are using. This is rather straight forward since companies need to follow the market and the people. The most used and the best platform for business-to-business social media marketing is LinkedIn.

Interviewee 4: We are in the process of remodeling our brand and it has brought us quite a lot of hits in LinkedIn.

Interviewee 3: LinkedIn is the best channel for us in customer acquisition. We have done a lot of really targeted account based marketing and overall industry based paid advertisements, so we have found out this to be the best platform for us, since it is a place where most of the users are finding interesting things with work in mind.

Although, LinkedIn is a great platform, it follows the same problems as all the other social media platforms, it being the amount of followers that the companies account has. If the account does not have a large follower base, the results are often quite modest. Moreover, if the follower base is not the company's target market, posting can seem rather unnecessary, or the message that the company wants to send out can be misunderstood, or against their values as Interviewee 1 had the case of using plastic as a packaging method.

Interviewee 1: Our target group is very narrow and hence rather difficult to reach by mass media applications. We have received in Social Media context a great deal of followers who are not actual purchasing customers but rather general public interested in flexible packaging, sustainability or recycling of plastic materials. Also we find it rather difficult to direct the content/substance of the message to our prime customers only, as the general public will not like such comments at all and will provide us with massive amounts of negative feedback. For example plastic is in many cases the only possible solution for Flexible packaging (due to hygienic issues etc.) and supporting the Plastic as an ideal material results straight ahead negative feedback from the general public.

Interviewee 2: Due to our lack of road map and consistency, also the results are next to nothing. Mostly it's our friends who leave a comment or like our posts.

Seeing as LinkedIn was the most reoccurring platform in the interviews, it is not nearly the only platform that most companies are active in. They participate in loads of other large social media platforms, them being Instagram, Facebook and some in TikTok and Youtube. When building strategies for social media marketing, it is necessary to think about the targets and benefits that participating in different platforms can bring to the company.

Interviewee 3: Instagram is probably the best at feeding the image that us as a company want to bring out, since the material is quite a lot “lighter” than in LinkedIn. Of course we have google advertisements supporting our social media marketing.

Of course, different platforms have their challenges. From the interviews, the most common con for LinkedIn was the professionalism of the platform. It was described as being rather “stiff” on the content side of the platform, as users generally want to give a professional view of themselves or their companies. Instagram and facebook has the issue of the users being individuals rather than companies, so hitting the target market is more challenging than in LinkedIn. Youtube and TikTok require quite a lot more of quality in the content, which then again leads to the limited time in hand the interviewed marketers have.

Interviewee 3: Sometimes we have made content to Youtube and thought about TikTok, but they require more resources than available right now. Especially Youtube, should have high quality content, not anything that comes to mind and although tiktok is a more relaxed platform, it requires time and effort to put into posting.

### **3.1.3 Metrics**

It is indifferent whether it is social media marketing or traditional advertising, all of the companies and the marketers want to know the results of their marketing strategies. In social media, different metrics allow for companies and marketers to follow how their campaigns, posts etc. have performed. The interview consisted of a part about the metrics that the companies or the marketers follow.

Interviewee 4: In our company’s page we are monitoring the amount of followers we have and in our posts we are following the amount of views.

The metrics that companies follow is also dependent on their follower base. If the account does not have a lot of followers, it does not require to look at sophisticated analytics, it is more important to grow the accounts follower base. When the follower base starts to become larger, companies can introduce new metrics to follow in their social media marketing channels.

Interviewee 3: We are mostly following impressions and engagement. These two work quite closely hand in hand, since if we have lot of engagement, we get more views. We are also doing

expert content, so we are following the call to action, so has the customer found its way from the post to our websites. As well as the follower base, which is the one thing that warms the marketers hearts the most as you can see the achievements from our strategies really clearly.

Since all of the marketers that were interviewed work in companies that are in the small and medium sized sector, the accounts are still quite small due to the limited amount of resources and time to put into social media marketing, so the metrics that these companies and persons follow tend to stay in the more easily accessible analytics to follow such as engagement rates and account follower base.

Interviewee 3: since our follower base is still quite small, so it is not important yet to think about conversions. So we are mostly following engagement rates, amount of followers and our visibility, which we have gotten upwards with really small adjustments.

### **3.1.4 Improvements**

It comes as no surprise if one of the most reoccurring point when asked about the challenges of business-to-business social media marketing was time, that the improvements for this would be to put more time or resources into improving their companies social media marketing. One of the interviewees even jokingly said that we would need a more active managing director, implying directly to herself. Even though, intended as a joke, it has some truth to it. When time and effort are put into social media marketing, companies can grow their most important side of social media marketing, their organic growth.

Interviewee 3: Improvement from us would be found from time since we have found improvement in our business-to-business social media marketing when we put more time into it. So if we would really put time and force to our account based marketing and start to modify our content to fit certain accounts, that would be the biggest improvement point for us. If we would have time to for more social media marketing, we could almost reach our targets with organic growth.

Interviewee 1. Increasing the budget is the starting point. With that we need to increase the level of activities drastically to become the best-known Brand in our segment.

From the interviews, it was quite clear that Finnish small and medium sized enterprises are actively looking for new platforms, opportunities and ways to stand out from the competition. Some of the

interviewees saw that there is a need of a new platform, that would be directly designed and built for the business-to-business segment of social media.

Interviewee 6: New platforms directly designed for b2b marketing

Interviewee 8: We would directly benefit from the addition to our marketing budget, but probably if we would have more time to put into social media marketing, it would bring us the best results. But generally speaking for the topic it would be quite nice if someone comes up with a new platform to compete against LinkedIn, but more directed towards b2b.

One of the most important asset for a company is it's employees. It was clear from the interviews, that companies are not fully utilizing their employees personal social media sites to communicate in parallel with the companies targeted brand image. One of the interviewees stated that they have found great benefits, from employees using their personal branding to increase the companies social media accounts.

Interviewee 3: We have increased our organic visibility in LinkedIn by personal branding with our employees inviting their connections to follow our companies page.

Organic visibility is one of the most important parts of social media marketing. In order to increase organic visibility, the content needs to not only be interesting, but it needs constant activity in the account. By continuous posting, engagement towards content and likeing and sharing content increases the chances of more organic visibility. A few of the interviewees saw that they would need more activity in their account as an improvement for their social media marketing.

Interviewee 9: More active posting and more targeted content in all of our social media channels.

It was quite clear to see from the interviews, that most of the Finnish small and medium sized enterprises that operate in the business-to-business segment, are struggling with available resources to put into social media marketing. Time and resource management seems to be the one of the main challenges., which then leads to a lack of content creation. Most of the interviewees are active in most social media platforms, with the difficulty of reaching their target market and their accounts follower base being both rather small as well as it not being their target market. The improvement ideas that the interviewees pointed out were mainly to do with more resources

towards social media marketing. This will then lead to more activity in their accounts and in the optimum case grow their follower base.

### 3.2 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a widely used method for analysing qualitative data. It is a method for identifying common themes in the qualitative data set (Maguire, Delahunt 2017). Thematic analysis will be used to analyze the interviews and to find out the common themes and patterns that occurred in the interviews. The thematic analysis will be focussing on the two sub-questions of the research questions. The first part of the thematic analysis will focus on the challenges of business-to-business social media marketing and the second part of the analysis will be focussing on the improvements that the companies suggested to improve their business-to-business social media marketing. From the interviews basic codes will be forganizing themes and the themes of the interviews will formulate the main global theme, in this case they are the two research sub-questions.

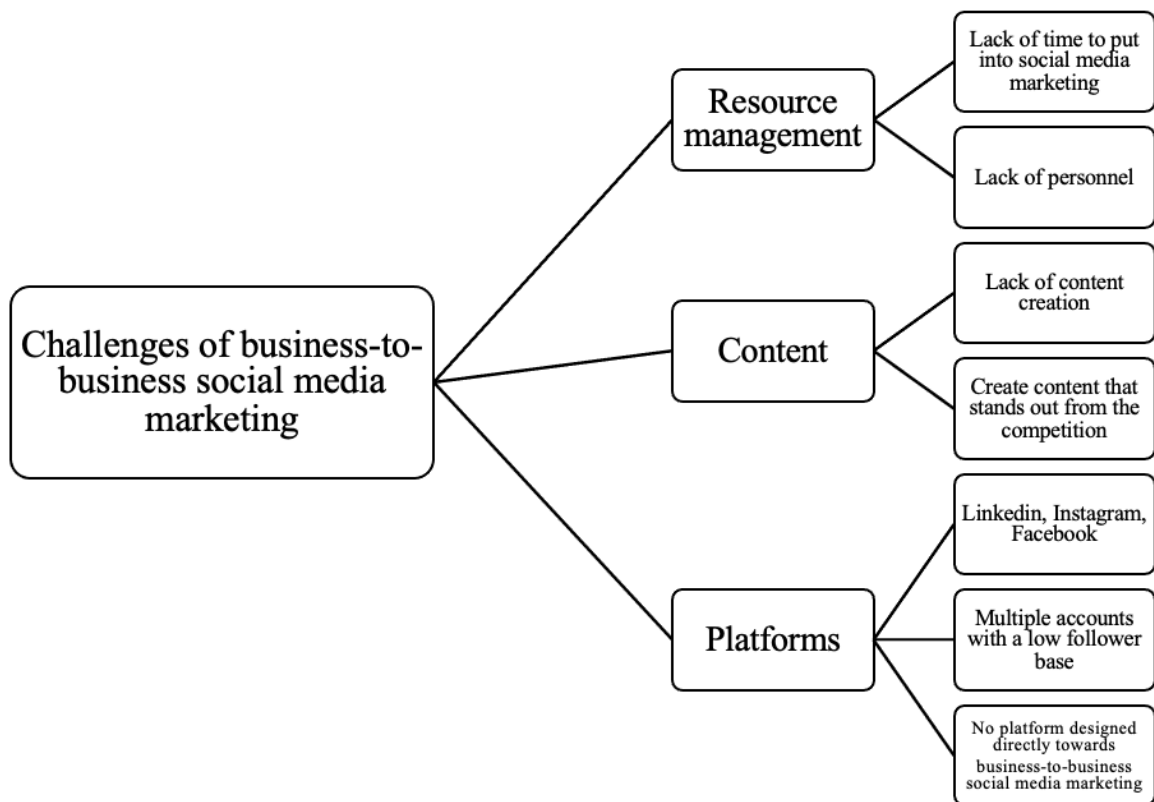


Figure 2. Challenges of business-to-business social media marketing, from the interviews. Compiled by the author from the interviews.



The first part of the interview analysis focusses on the first research sub-question about the challenges of business-to-business social media marketing. In the interviews, when questioned about the challenges in business-to-business social media marketing the most frequent theme that came up was to do with resource management. The interviewees saw that the biggest challenge for them was the lack of time to put into social media marketing, closely followed by limited personnel working directly in marketing and moreover in social media marketing.

The second most frequent theme of challenges in the interviews was the lack of content. Most of the interviewees had issues with lack of content creation and the issue of creating content that stands out from the competition. Most of the companies involved in this study had a strategy of multiple platforms, which then lead to the issue of the ability to reformulate content without actually repeating content in different platforms.

The third most frequent theme that formulate a global theme of challenges in business-to-business social media marketing was the usage of platforms. The most reoccurring platforms in the interviews was LinkedIn, Instagram and Facebook. LinkedIn was seen as the best platform for business-to-business social media marketing. With the issue of a multiple platform strategy, many of the interviewees had the issue of multiple platforms with a low follower base, or a follower base not being the company's target market. One of the frequent answers towards platforms was the lack of a platform directly designed towards business-to-business segment of social media marketing.

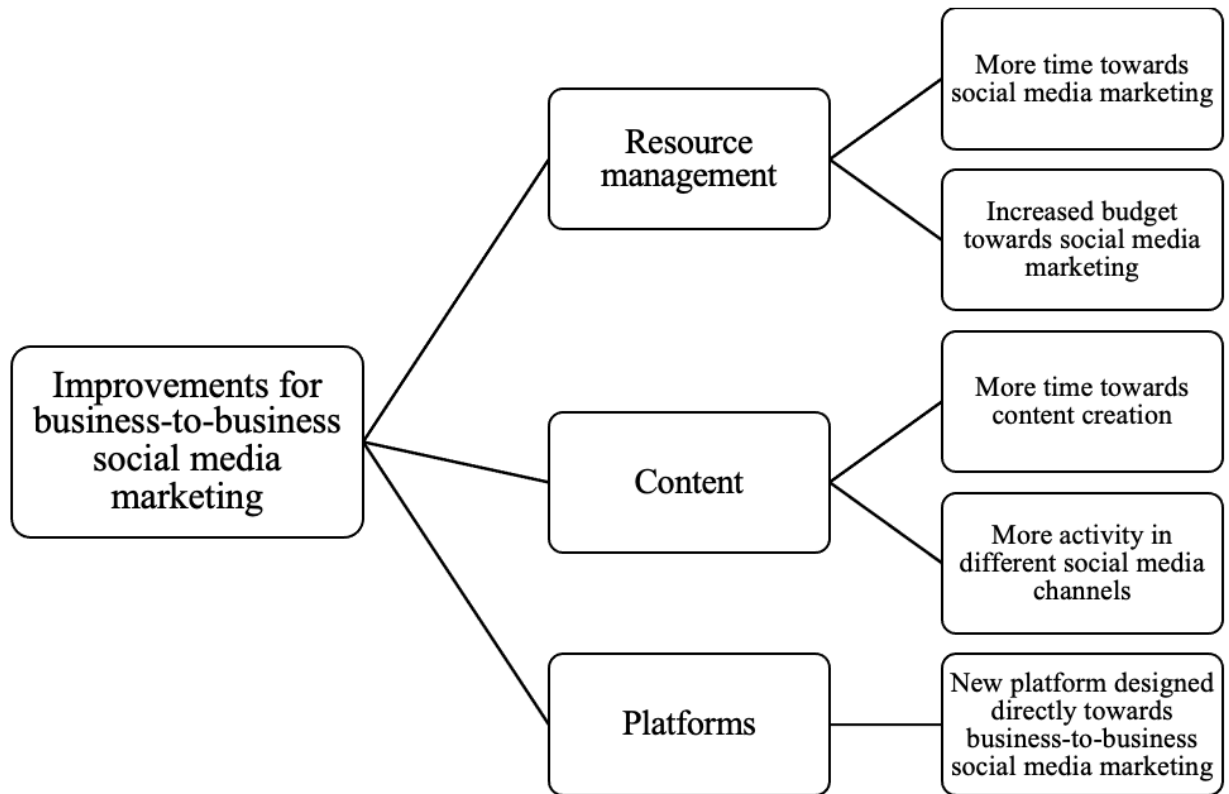


Figure 3. Improvements for business-to-business social media marketing, from the interviews. Compiled by the author from the interviews.

The second part of the interview analysis focusses on the second research sub-question about the improvements for business-to-business social media marketing. It comes as no surprise if the most reoccurring challenge of business-to-business social media marketing for the businesses interviewed was resource management, that the improvements would also be found from additional resources towards social media marketing. The interviewed companies would most of all want more time to put into social media marketing, closely followed by an increase to the budget towards social media marketing.

The second theme from codes from the interviews that create a global theme of improvements towards social media marketing is the content side. Companies would want to put more time towards content creation. One common code in the interviews was also the ability to be more active in different social media channels. Naturally by increasing time towards content creation and being more active in social media, the companies would benefit in their organic visibility, since the algorithms are following activities in accounts.

The third and final part of the interview analysis towards improvements of business-to-business social media marketing was platforms. Although, companies are not in charge of creating a new platform for business-to-business social media marketing, this was one of the most wanted codes towards the theme of improvements in platforms.

### **3.3 Recommendations**

One of the most common point of the interviews was the lack of time or personnel to do the desired amount of social media marketing. This brings up the point that would it actually be beneficial for companies to acquire more personnel to be in charge of the company's social media marketing. In a study made by Maria Teresa Pinheiro et al. in "Digital marketing and social media why bother?" (2014, 703-708) findings suggest that employees are a crucial part of digital advertisement and almost half of the personnel that took part in the study was aiming to increase their digital marketing personnel. Considering that by implementing successful marketing actions this could bring more customer flow to the company, would it actually be beneficial to hire more people. On the other hand, most of the personnel that companies have are rather optimized from the workload side, would the problem be more with the ability to successfully deliver promises for the new companies or is the limited time actually more towards the process of creating new content for social media marketing.

Although, all of the companies that were interviewed are active in most of the largest social media platforms. Would it actually be beneficial to try to invest more into one platform. Seeing as the companies are having difficulties in resource management, by using all of the available resources towards one or a few platforms that serves the company best, could be more beneficial than reaching for overall brand awareness. A study made by Gruner, Powell in "To integrate or not to integrate? Understanding B2B social media communications" (2018, 73-92) studying business-to-business firms social media platform preferences, suggest that having a preference on platform usage where the companies focus on one specific platform is a more effective way of forming organizational relationships when compared to an approach to be visible and noisy in multiple platforms. As some of the companies in the interviews were struggling with their accounts not being big enough in terms of followers, impressions and engagement, would it be beneficial to invest their available resources to a single platform instead of participating in multiple platforms.

There are quite a lot of marketing companies that offer running their clients social media marketing channels. Outsourcing social media marketing would be one possibility to get around the raising problem of time and resources. However, by outsourcing their marketing to be done by a company, there are always risks involved. The marketing company does need to fully understand their clients business model to build successful social media campaigns to reach their targeted market. The cost of these kinds of services is usually the reason for companies not to partake in outsourcing their social media channels. Moreover, the new customer acquisition should be substantial for outsourcing social media marketing to make any sense for the company, and they would need to be prepared to deliver services for the new clients if successful.

Companies can increase their own visibility in social media, by utilizing companies' employees social media accounts. When the employees create content, participate in discussion and perform marketing activities that is in parallel with the companies desired brand identity, the companies' social media accounts can have a positive affect from these actions. This requires either training for the employees or the company to control employee social media behavior (Huotari et al. 2015). As discussed in the interviews, one of the companies had positive outcomes, from using personal branding to improve their companies' social media accounts visibility. This of course requires both parties to endorse this type of social media marketing, but it is a great way to improve companies' social media visibility.

In the interviews, some claims where made that it is not beneficial to monitor metrics if the follower base or the traffic in the sites are not large. Although, it some times may seem that evaluating tiny amounts of data is not worthy its time, by constant evaluation and data analysis, companies and marketers can quite clearly see what activities have been successful and not. A necessary part of managing social media accounts is the analysis of the metrics. A sensible amount of key performance metrics connected to the outcomes is the key to success in managing social media accounts (Peters et al. 2013). Even though, there is a large risk of the data being skewed, there is a good possibility to draw right conclusions of certain campaigns being successful or unsuccessful. This kind of information is crucial for the companies to reflect on their chosen marketing activities and furthermore help to draw new and upcoming activities and campaigns.

Probably the most challenging part, but one of the most important part of social media marketing for a company is organic visibility. Although paid advertisements is a great way to increase visibility in an account, most Finnish small and medium sized enterprises operate with quite a tight

budget, that does not allow for continuous paid advertisements in social media. Organic visibility in social media requires constant activity in the account from both the followers as well as from the owner of the account. By constantly remaining active means that the account should have continuous posting. The posts require to be interesting enough for the followers to engage with the content, such as liking, sharing and commenting. All of these transactions feed the algorithm that determine the organic visibility for the post. Of course, creating interesting enough content for the channel is not easy and there really is not one way to do it, but constant activity and continuous posting from the operator of the account is a great way to start.

One of the more interesting part of the interviews was the last open question about suggestions to make business-to-business social media marketing better. One of the rising points of improving this was the need of a new platform. The platform should be designed solely for the business-to-business market. More than half of the interviewee's had the opinion that there would be a need in the market for a new platform to help companies find new business partners. Of course there is the issue of monetizing the platform, but the market certainly seems open for this kind of service and companies are willing to take part in new ventures to have a competitive advantage over their main rivals.

- Adding resources directly towards social media marketing
- If activity in multiple platforms is not beneficial, invest more in one platform that has been most beneficial for your company
- Either invest in more personnel directly working in social media marketing or outsource social media marketing
- Utilize personal branding to work in parallel with the company's social media accounts
- No matter the size of the account, follow social media's metrics to stay informed about different accounts events
- Being constantly active and continuous posting increase organic visibility

To conclude all of the parts that has been discussed in the recommendations part of the thesis, some recommendations on how companies can improve their business-to-business social media marketing, drawn from the findings of the interviews and by backing up the recommendations from previous studies and researches.

## CONCLUSIONS

There is a primitive difference in social media marketing if the target group is businesses or consumers. The largest differentiation between business-to-business and business-to-consumer social media marketing is the buying process. The buying process is much longer and requires more communication between multiple parties in the business-to-business segment. There is heavy analysis behind the purchase decision and unlike in the business-to-consumer segment, there is quite often a longer negotiation phase in the business-to-business sector's buying process (Eck, Johansson 2020). The second differentiating factor between business-to-business and business-to-consumer is the size of the market. Business-to-business potential customer's market is a lot smaller than in the business-to-consumer. Although, the one-time purchase is usually larger in business-to-business, finding the target market and standing out from the competition is usually more difficult in the business-to-business segment of the market (López-López, Giusti 2020).

The main research question of the thesis was: How are small and medium sized enterprises utilizing business-to-business social media marketing in Finland? All of the companies that were involved in the study mainly use social media for building brand awareness, acquiring new customers and to send a desired message to their customers. All of the companies actively participate in social media as a part of their marketing strategy. They are all actively participating in different platforms for building brand awareness.

The first sub questions of the research was: What are the main challenges of business-to-business social media marketing? The most reoccurring challenge with business-to-business social media marketing was the limited resources of the company to operate in social media with the desired amount. Mostly the issue was to do with limited time, since most of the company's employees workload is rather optimized, which leads to customer jobs taking time out of posting and content creation of social media. Some suggestions were made for the company to either hire more personnel strictly to run their different social media channels or than to outsource their marketing. Of course, these options have their downsides and challenges. Content creation takes time and effort which was one of the challenges of marketing to find time and come up with new content.

Moreover, one of the challenges was the ability to reiterate content without the content repeating itself.

The second sub question was more to do with open suggestions on how business-to-business social media marketing can be improved. Rather unsurprisingly answers to improvements came to the ability to put more time and effort towards social media marketing. Seeing as the issue with time was one of the largest challenge, having more time is the unambiguous improvement. The interesting parts from some interviewees was the immediate response of a need of a new platform. This platform should be directly designed with the business-to-business market in mind and be optimized for businesses to find new clients that operate in the business-to-business segment.

One key part of the interviews was to find out about the existing platforms and how are they utilized and which has brought the most desirable outcomes to companies. All of the companies involved in the study was mostly active in LinkedIn and it seems that for new customer acquisition in business-to-business market, this is the best platform to use. By involving themselves in multiple platforms the companies can build a lot more brand awareness than by being active in only one or a few. As there are platforms that work better for certain objectives, it is important for companies' social media marketing strategy to involve participation in various platforms.

It was clearly seen that small and medium sized enterprises in Finland use social media as an especially important part of their marketing activities. They operate in various platforms with the target of brand awareness and new customer acquisition. The biggest challenges is the limited resources, lack of time and accounts being small from a follower perspective. In the recommendations part, some suggestions were made to companies to improve their business-to-business social media marketing, that appeared in the interviews. Previous studies and researches were utilized to form suggestion proposals. These recommendations are as follows:

- Adding resources directly towards social media marketing
- If activity in multiple platforms is not beneficial, invest more in one platform that has been most beneficial for your company
- Either invest in more personnel directly working in social media marketing or outsource social media marketing
- Utilize personal branding to work in parallel with the company's social media accounts

- No matter the size of the account, follow social media's metrics to stay informed about different accounts events
- Being constantly active and continuous posting increase organic visibility

This subject is clearly in need of more future research, as this is a part of many businesses everyday operations and the amount of studies that have been made in the business-to-consumer market, shows the demand and interest towards social media marketing. Some recommendations for future studies would be, to increase the amount of interviews and have a larger dispersion of industries in the interviews. Additionally, it would be great to compare industry specific researches and their observations to the more general studies about the same subject and see if whether, there is any dissimilarities in the observations. Or by researching the same subject but introducing qualitative research methods to bring data along to justify recommendations.



## LIST OF REFERENCES

- Cartwright, S., Liu, H., Raddats, C. (2021) Strategic use of social media within business-to-business (B2B) marketing: A systematic literature review. *Industrial marketing management*, 97, 35-58. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2021.06.005>, 16 March 2022
- Enyinda, C.I., Opute, A.P., Fadahunsi, A., Mbag, C.H. (2020) Marketing-sales-service interface and social media marketing influence on B2B sales process. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 36(6), 990-1009. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1108/JBIM-01-2019-0053>, 16 March 2022
- Andersson, S., Wikström, N. (2017) Why and how are social media used in a B2B context, and which stakeholders are involved?. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 32(8), 1098-1108. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1108/JBIM-07-2016-0148>, 17 March 2022
- Andzulis, J.M., Panagopoulos, N.G., Rapp, A. (2013) A review of social media and implications for the sales process. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management* 32(3), 305-316. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.2753/PSS0885-3134320302>, 17 March 2022
- Buratti, N., Parola, F., Satta, G. (2018) Insights on the adoption of social media marketing in B2B services. *The TQM Journal*, 30(5), 490-529. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1108/TQM-11-2017-0136>, 17 March 2022
- Vella, J. M., Diba, H., Abratt, R. (2019). Social media influence on the B2B buying process. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 34(7), 1482-1496. Retrieved from [10.1108/JBIM-12-2018-0403](https://doi.org/10.1108/JBIM-12-2018-0403), 22 March 2022
- López-López, D., Giusti, G. (2020) Comparing Digital Strategies and Social Media Usage in B2B and B2C Industries in Spain. *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing*, 27(2), 175-186. Retrieved from [10.1080/1051712X.2020.1748377](https://doi.org/10.1080/1051712X.2020.1748377), 22 March 2022
- Lad-Khairnar, M.D. (2021) Social media marketing: an Overview, *Vidyabharati International Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 12(1), 172-175, Retrieved from [2319-4979](https://doi.org/10.2319-4979), 24 March 2022
- Jamshed S. (2014) Qualitative research method-interviewing and observation, *J Basic Clin Pharm*, 5(4), 87-88. Retrieved from [10.4103/0976-0105.141942](https://doi.org/10.4103/0976-0105.141942), 28 March 2022
- Kietzmann, J.H., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I.P., Silvestre, B.S. (2011) Social media? Get Serious! Understanding the functional blocks of social media. *Business Horizons*, 54(3), 241-251. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2011.01.005>, 30 March 2022

- Ashley, C., Tuten, T. (2014) Creative strategies in social media marketing: An exploratory study of branded social content and consumer engagement. *Psychology & Marketing*. 32(1), 15-27. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20761>, 6 February 2022
- Heino, A. (2010) Sosiaalisen median hyödyntäminen yrityksen markkinoinnissa, *Jyväskylän ammattikorkeakoulu*, Retrieved from [https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/16754/Heino\\_Antti.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/16754/Heino_Antti.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y), 8 February 2022
- Kuivamäki, V. (2021) Sosiaalisen median alustat markkinoinnissa, *Haaga-Helia ammattikorkeakoulu Oy*, Retrieved from [https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/450035/FINAL\\_Ville%20Kuivamäki%20Oopinnäytetyö%20v2.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y](https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/450035/FINAL_Ville%20Kuivamäki%20Oopinnäytetyö%20v2.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y), 16 February 2022
- Mäki, S. (2016) Gaining a competitive advantage through social media marketing in B2C sales. Social media marketing review. *Helsinki metropolia University of Applied sciences*, Retrieved from [https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/105908/MAKI\\_SAARA.pdf?sequence=1](https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/105908/MAKI_SAARA.pdf?sequence=1), 29 February 2022
- Sylvest, J., Sorensen, S.Y., Rzepecka, J., Mobilio, L., Kilic, L., Goubet, M. (2018) Supporting study for the evaluation of the 'SME Definiton'. *European Comission*. Retrieved from <https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/47114>, 7 February 2022
- Eck, J., Johansson, S. (2020) Social media acceptance in B2B marketing. A study exploring the reasons behind the difference in social media usage between B2B and B2C markets. *Luleå University of Technology*. Retrieved from <http://tu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1445204/FULLTEXT01.pdf>, 20 February 2022
- Järvinen, J., Tollinen, A., Karjaluoto, H., Jayawardhena, C. (2012) Digital and social media usage in B2B industrial section. *Marketing management journal*. 22, 102-117. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281117621\\_Digital\\_and\\_social\\_media\\_marketing\\_usage\\_in\\_B2B\\_industrial\\_section](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281117621_Digital_and_social_media_marketing_usage_in_B2B_industrial_section) , 13 February 2022
- Saravanakumar, M., Suganthalakshimi, T. (2012) Social Media Marketing. *Life science journal*. 9(4), 4444-4451. Retrieved from 1097- 8135, 29 March 2022
- Kumar, V., Choi, J.B., Greene, M. (2016) Synergistic effects of social media and traditional marketing on brand sales: capturing the time-varying effects. *Journal of the academy of marketing science*. 46, 268-288. Retrieved from 10.1007/s11747-016-0484-7, 21 February 2022
- Huotari, L., Ulkuniemi, P., Saraniemi, S., Mäläskä, M. (2015) Analysis of content creation in social media by B2B companies. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*. 30(6), 761-770. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1108/JBIM-05-2013-0118>, 3 May 2022.
- Gruner, R.L., Power, D. (2018) To integrate or not to integrate? Understanding B2B social media communications. *Online informational review*. 42(1), 73-92. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1108/OIR-04-2016-0116>, 3 May 2022.

- Peters, K., Chen, Y., Kaplan, A.M., Ognibeni, B., Pauwels, K. (2013) Social media metrics – A framework and guidelines for managing social media. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*. 27(4), 281-298. Retrieved from [https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.09.007#\\_i41](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.09.007#_i41), 3 May 2022.
- Pinheiro, M.T., Cristovao Verissimo, J.M. (2014) Digital marketing and social media: Why bother? *Business Horizons*. 57(6), 703-708. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2014.07.002>, 3 May 2022
- Maguire, M., Delahunt, B. (2017) Doing a thematic analysis: A practical, step-by-step guide for learning and teaching scholars. Dundalk Institute of Technology. 1(3). Retrieved from <https://ojs.aishe.org/index.php/aishe-j/article/view/335/553>, 6 May 2022

# **APPENDICES**

## **Appendix 1. Interview questions**

1. What company do you work in and what is your position in the company?
2. Does your company actively participate in b2b social media marketing?
3. In what social media platforms is your company active in?
4. What are the challenges in business-to-business social media marketing that you or your company has faced?
5. Which platforms have given you the best outcomes (clients, brand awareness etc.)?
6. What are you plans in the near future (approx. 3-6 months) in social media marketing?
7. Does your company use a dedicated crm software?
8. If yes, has the software been worthy of its costs?
9. Which social media metrics is your company following the most?
10. What could be done to improve b2b social media marketing? (posts, budget, new platforms etc.)

## Appendix 2. Interview transcripts

Interviewee 1.

1. I work for a company called Muovijaloste Oy as the Commercial Director.
2. We would like to think so, at least in our rather narrow area of business.
3. We are active in Instagram and Facebook, but the most lucrative media so far has been the traditional direct e-mail –campaigns.
4. Our target group is very narrow and hence rather difficult to reach by mass media applications. We have received in Social Media context a great deal of followers who are not actual purchasing customers but rather general public interested in flexible packaging, sustainability or recycling of plastic materials. Also we find it rather difficult to direct the content/substance of the message to our prime customers only, as the general public will not like such comments at all and will provide us with massive amounts of negative feedback. For example plastic is in many cases the only possible solution for Flexible packaging (due to hygienic issues etc.) and supporting the Plastic as an ideal material results straight ahead negative feedback from the general public.
5. Instagram is easy and useful reminder for our purposes. Direct e-mailings will continue as well.
6. We aim to develop a new strategy how to face our BtB customers as Consumers rather than Business target group. Once we have done it, we are more ready to use social media to our advantage.
7. No, but our ERP-system includes a mini crm-part as well. We are using Oscar ERP-software.
8. So far yes. It is rather limited but suits our needs.
9. So far only the clicks. With the e-mail campaigns we calculate the opening rate vs. the order intake during the following fortnight after the sending
10. Increasing the budget is the starting point. With that we need to increase the level of activities drastically to become the best-known Brand in our segment.

Interviewee 2.

1. Advertising and marketing, Managing Director
2. So and so, we post every now and then, sometimes more frequently, sometimes it takes many months without any post
3. We have LinkedIn and FB-accounts
4. Lack of interesting content, laziness...
5. Due to our lack of road map and consistency, also the results are next to nothing. Mostly it's our friends who leave a comment or like our posts.
6. We have planned to be much more active, but will see...
7. No, our accounting system (Procounter) is also our crm
8. –
9. Facebook has excellent metrics
10. More active MD

### Interviewee 3.

1. Luova arvotoimisto Trust Oy, Head of sales, projects and marketing.
2. Our most important channels in our marketing strategy at the moment are in social media. In social media we do organic and paid advertisements, as well as subscription letters and others, but everyone knows how effective these are especially the business-to-business subscription letters and how many are actually willing to read them is another thing. But in social media our strategy with our content is divided to a few base pillars that we want to highlight. The pillars are formulated towards the type of customers that we want, what expertise we want to highlight in our activity and somewhat to the image that we want others to perceive us, because we see this as an important part in today's social media. Our ambitious goal would be to do a lot more of social media marketing, but our biggest challenge is time. Our goals are set on something happening in our channels at least once a week, but our client works sometimes run over this.
3. Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn is our main channels. Sometimes we have made content to Youtube and thought about Tiktok, but they require more resources than available right now. Especially Youtube, should have high quality content, not anything that comes to mind and although Tiktok is a more relaxed platform, it requires time and effort to post in. So LinkedIn is the most important channel for us, of course when doing business-to-business marketing. Instagram is also a good platform for us, since it is easier to make for a person to person easily approachable and identifiable content, since LinkedIn especially if the marketing posts are made by a company is still a rather stiff platform and we would need to "brake the ice".
4. The hardest part is to separate from the mass, because everyone makes social media content and especially in our industry as we are an advertising agency, everyone in this industry is struggling with the same problem of getting attention of the same groups. Especially in the organic side of social media, engaging the customer is one of the biggest challenges. If we would increase our budget towards paid advertisements in any of the platforms, that would bring more engagement towards our posts, but the ideal situation would be that the content itself would be so interesting, that it would gather engagement. We can see certain trends occurring, but unfortunately these trends do not mimic on what we would like for others to see us as.

One of the other challenges we are facing is that we cannot right now post in the schedule that we want or that would be ideal due to limited time, it is hard to get the algorithms to

work in your favor. Algorithms then need continuous posting and the account to be active in different platforms. So feeding the algorithm is one of our challenges.

5. LinkedIn is the best channel for us in customer acquisition. We have done a lot of really targeted account based marketing and overall industry based paid advertisements, so we have found out this to be the best platform for us, since it is a place where most of the users are finding interesting things with work in mind. Instagram is probably the best at feeding the image that us as a company want to bring out, since the material is quite a lot “lighter” than in LinkedIn. Of course we have google advertisements supporting our social media marketing.

We have increased our organic visibility in LinkedIn by personal branding with our employees inviting their connections to follow our company’s page.

6. We have quite targeted goals for our social media, which are a bit boring from the sales point of view, since our follower base is still quite small, so it is not important yet to think about conversions. So we are mostly following engagement rates, amount of followers and our visibility, which we have gotten upwards with really small adjustments. If we would have time to for more social media marketing, we could almost reach our targets with organic growth.
7. Our crm software is not “integrated” to our social media marketing activities, but we use a different approach to following customer targeted social media activities. We use a project management tool to follow that.
8. In a marketing sense no, but from a sales point of following customer paths, yes.
9. We are mostly following impressions and engagement. These two work quite closely hand in hand, since if we have lot of engagement, we get more views. We are also doing expert content, so we are following the call to action, so has the customer found its way from the post to our websites. As well as the follower base, which is the one thing that warms the marketers hearts the most as you can see the achievements from our strategies really clearly.
10. Improvement from us would be found from time since we have found improvement in our b2b social media marketing when we put more time into it. So if we would really put time and force to our account based marketing and start to modify our content to fit certain accounts, that would be the biggest improvement point for us.



Interviewee 4.

1. Supervisual Oy, CEO
2. Yes, our main business is b2b, so all of our social media marketing is done towards b2b markets.
3. LinkedIn
4. The biggest challenge for us right now is limited resources. We have a shortage of staff and it reduces our social media activity quite heavily. So in short, our challenge lies in limited time to put into social media marketing.
5. LinkedIn, We are in the process of remodeling our brand and it has brought us quite a lot of hits in LinkedIn.
6. Create more and improve content that works hand in hand with our remodeled brand.
7. Yes, but mainly for following the sales process and for following and recording possible marketing activities.
8. Yes.
9. In our company's page we are monitoring the amount of followers we have and in our posts we are following the amount of views.
10. To add a long term plan, which we can follow to build our budget and our operational model with keeping our companies segment in mind.

Interviewee 5.

1. I work as a Sales Manager for a Company called Joutsen Paino Oy
2. BtB marketing is currently built on social media marketing. We actively promote our printing services to possible customers via social media.
3. Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn.
4. One needs to very, very active in all channels. You lose followers easily and the big Question is how much you can do posts before the customers get fed up with the bombarding of information.
5. In our experience LinkedIn is seen as most businesslike channel but also Instagram is easy, fast and reliable.
6. We plan to increase the number of posts from once a week to two posts per week.
7. No, but we have a basic excel-follow up for this purpose.
8. –
9. This is something we should also improve. We mere follow click and likes and also try to follow-up who our likers are.
10. To understand more of all the possibilities that social media and digital data provides, so maybe we need to budget more money to this end.

Interviewee 6.

1. I work in a housing investment company, Marketing director
2. Yes it does.
3. Instagram, twitter, linkedin and facebook.
4. How to stay on track and be faster in social media marketing comparing to our competitors and how to stand out from the crowd.
5. We are really satisfied for our outcomes in Instagram and Linekdin.
6. We are going to invest in our social media marketing and hopefully get some positive feedback from our clients from it.
7. Yes
8. yes
9. –
10. New platforms directly designed for b2b marketing

Interviewee 7.

1. Auto Aatamila Oy, sales and marketing director
2. Our company focuses more on the consumer side, but we are actively participating in b2b social media marketing as well.
3. Facebook / Instagram
4. To reach business owners and our target market with reasonable budget
5. Google, Facebook
6. Testing LinkedIn
7. No
8. –
9. Impressions, reach, clicks, leads, budget
10. More accurate measurement of users.

Interviewee 8.

1. I am the CEO of a company, who's main business is a mobile phone application.
2. Yes we do, most of our customers are businesses or at least the customers that bring us money are businesses, but we also target regular consumers as they are the key part of our business model, even though they do not directly bring us any additional revenue.
3. We are active in LinkedIn, Instagram and Facebook. And we also have Google ads to support our social media channels.
4. I think for us it is mostly to do with time and money. We have limited resources to put into social media marketing, since most of our employees are experts in coding, not in marketing. The other issue is to do with our business model, since it is dependant on businesses that are our main customers, who bring money to the company and users that are the beneficiaries of our application. We cannot have one or the other so it is a constant struggle between which segment are we marketing into.
5. Well in terms of our business clients, LinkedIn has brought us the most customers, but when marketing to our users I think Instagram and Facebook are probably one of the best. But Google ads has brought the largest amount of users to our company web page.
6. We are planning for more activity in all of our channels. We are dividing our marketing strategy, so that we are going to target businesses from LinkedIn and then users of our app in Instagram and Facebook. But mainly more activity in our channels is going to be the change that we are planning in the near future. Oh, and of course to increase our accounts to be one of the largest in our segment!
7. Yes we do. But we do not integrate our social media channels there, so it is more towards staying in track with the communication that we have made with our customers either by a phone or by email, so that everyone in our company sees what has been discussed or promised to our customer.
8. I think so yes, it is not the best one in the market, but it works well enough for us considering the costs that it has.
9. Well it depends. From the business customers that we have point of view, we are not following any metrics that much in social media, since I do not really see the point of following them that closely. But all of the marketing that we do to promote our app to the actual users, general public in this case, we follow mostly views, impressions, likes, comments and shares. And of course the amount of followers that our page has.

10. We would directly benefit from the addition to our marketing budget, but probably if we would have more time to put into social media marketing, it would bring us the best results. But generally speaking for the topic it would be quite nice if someone comes up with a new platform to compete against LinkedIn, but more directed towards b2b.

Interviewee 9.

1. Mediateko Oy, Head of marketing
2. Yes
3. Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn
4. Creating content; to create content that fits every different platform.
5. Facebook drives most customers to our webpage, From LinkedIn we can reach most of our target market.
6. Our main goal is to produce more leads from the previously mentioned channels, and also increase our presence as a whole.
7. Yes
8. Yes
9. Amount of followers, Amount of impressions and converted leads from our advertisements.
10. More active posting and more targeted content in all of our social media channels.

Interviewee 10.

1. I am the owner of a hardware store that is a part of a larger chain
2. Yes we do, We do social media marketing for consumers as well as businesses, but our main focus is in businesses, they are the largest customers that we have. The chain that we are a part of does marketing for the brand in general, but we as a store try to market to local businesses that operate in our area or are otherwise a good fit to be our customer.
3. Well from the more general social media platforms we are mostly active in Instagram and Facebook, but google ads is one of the most important channels for our store. Our parent company seems to be active in I think all of the platforms that people generally use and market our products that most of our stores sell.
4. Most definitely finding our target market. So, to give you an example we have some customers that do not operate in our area, but are still our customers, so it is quite hard to set the limits on, where our target market operates, since similar stores like ours are all over Finland, so definitely finding our target market has been the biggest issue for us. And then probably our other issue is to do with activity in our channels, I think we should need to be much more active in our channels. So, for example some businesses that are in the grocery store business, their owners are really active in social media and apparently has brought a lot of customers to them. So more activity and setting limits to what our target market actually is.
5. Well for sure paid google ads, to pop up as the first option when people are typing in for example Hammers in Tampere area. But we have some minor visibility also in Instagram and Facebook. This has worked for us, but I don't know how our chain's preference on the platform.
6. I think we will try to be more active in general and try to create more content. We don't have any big plans, but overall try to post more actively.
7. Yes we do, but in our store we have billing authorizations for different companies, so their employees can come to pick up what they need and then we are billing the company directly, so it is mainly to stay in track about billing information and orders. So, our crm does not include any marketing in them, it just says for example: invoice sent.
8. Yes for sure, it is a crucial part for us, so that everyone working in here knows if invoices are sent and if some orders are received, so yes its something that we need daily so it is worthy of its costs.



9. It depends, for our google ads we are following the clicks, so how many has clicked through the ad to our web page, and from there has he/she bought anything. But then for our Instagram and Facebook page we are following mainly the likes and comments we get on posts and then of course the amount of followers that our web page has.
10. Well for sure for us, they are mostly in what I previously said, that we should be more active in all of our channels that we have accounts in and then to really discuss with my colleagues about what are the businesses that we want as our customers and to start either setting limits in the geographical location that the business mainly operates in or than the size of the company or something similar to this, you get the idea.

### Appendix 3. Figures

Figure 1, Honeycomb of business-to-business social media marketing



Source: Vella J.M., Diba H., & Abratt R. (2019) Social media influence on the b2b buying process. *Journal of business & Industrial marketing*, 1483.

Figure 2, Challenges of business-to-business social media marketing, compiled by the author from the interviews.

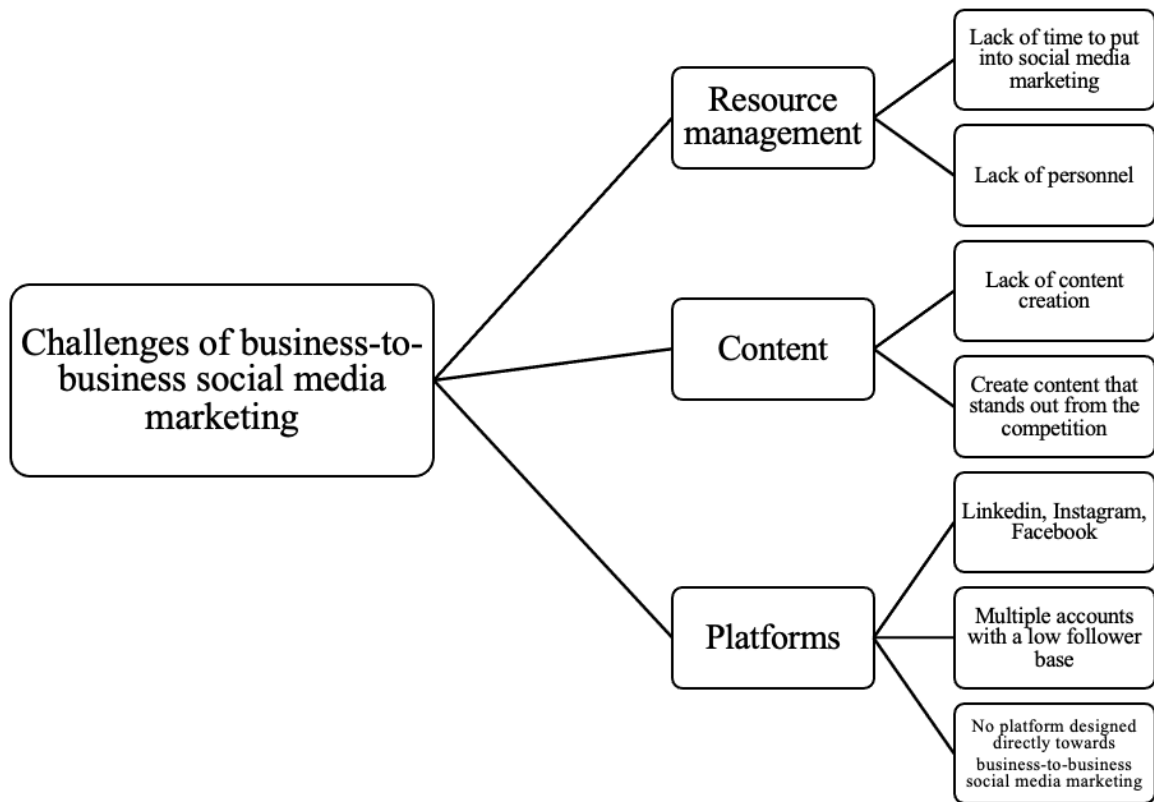
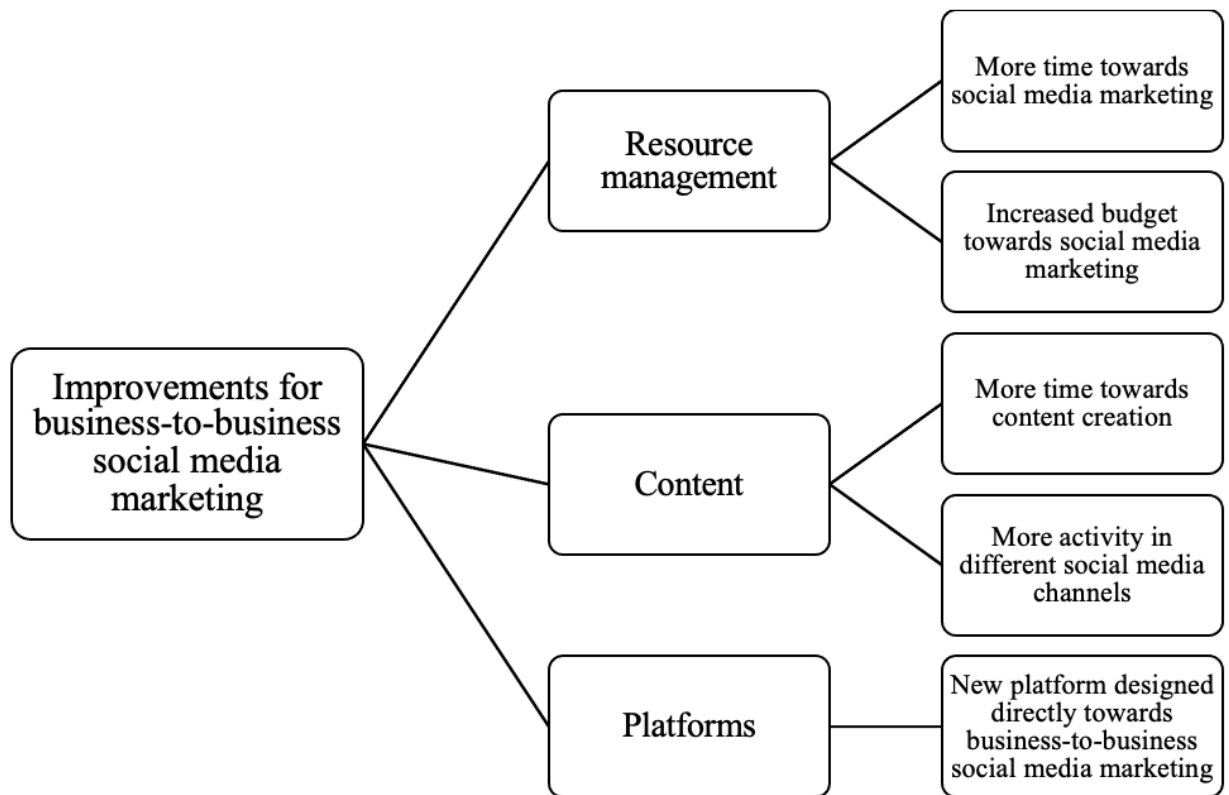


Figure 3, Improvements for business-to-business social media marketing, compiled by the author from the interviews.



## Appendix 4. Non-exclusive licence

### A non-exclusive licence for reproduction and publication of a graduation thesis<sup>11</sup>

I Helmer Kalevi Helén (*author's name*)

1. Grant Tallinn University of Technology free licence (non-exclusive licence) for my thesis  
BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING IN SMALL AND MEDIUM  
SIZED ENTERPRISES IN FINLAND

---

---

(*title of the graduation thesis*)

supervised by\_\_Woflgang Dieter Gerstlberger

---

(*supervisor's name*)

1.1 to be reproduced for the purposes of preservation and electronic publication of the graduation thesis, incl. to be entered in the digital collection of the library of Tallinn University of Technology until expiry of the term of copyright;

1.2 to be published via the web of Tallinn University of Technology, incl. to be entered in the digital collection of the library of Tallinn University of Technology until expiry of the term of copyright.

2. I am aware that the author also retains the rights specified in clause 1 of the non-exclusive licence.

3. I confirm that granting the non-exclusive licence does not infringe other persons' intellectual property rights, the rights arising from the Personal Data Protection Act or rights arising from other legislation.

---

12.05.2022 (date)

---

<sup>1</sup> The non-exclusive licence is not valid during the validity of access restriction indicated in the student's application for restriction on access to the graduation thesis that has been signed by the school's dean, except in case of the university's right to reproduce the thesis for preservation purposes only. If a graduation thesis is based on the joint creative activity of two or more persons and the co-author(s) has/have not granted, by the set deadline, the student defending his/her graduation thesis consent to reproduce and publish the graduation thesis in compliance with clauses 1.1 and 1.2 of the non-exclusive licence, the non-exclusive license shall not be valid for the period.