Online Marketing at Universities

A comparison between private and public educational institutions in Sweden

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Abstract

In recent years, traditional media has been challenged by the digital media, especially social media and there has been a great audience shift towards social media. Thus, many marketing professionals has realised the importance of implementing social media as a marketing tool for promotional purposes. The aim of this research is to characterise the use of social media as a marketing tool and compare our findings between private and public universities.

This research is exploratory in nature and both qualitative and quantitative data has been collected. The quantitative study was performed by observing and characterising the content of the universities’ posts, while the qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews of respondents in private and public universities respectively.

Results: According to our researches, the universities all use social media for marketing in many aspects and their methods differ. We have found both similarities and significant differences in how private and public universities in Sweden use social media as a marketing tool.

Keywords: Marketing, public, private, university, social media, Facebook, Twitter.
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1. INTRODUCTION

The first chapter presents the background of the subject studied in order to introduce the reader and provide context to the problem discussion and research questions. Next, the limitations of the study are discussed, and finally the outline of the dissertation is presented.

1.1 Background

Internet is today one of the most popular mean of communication and since the use of Internet around the world skyrocketed in the beginning of the 90’s new innovations are made every day. Today, peers and companies use internet to communicate both externally and internally and it allows us to stay globally connected every second of the day. As this has become the primary tool of communication in society, it is also becoming a part of our culture. Ellis-Chadwick, F., and Johnston, K. (2009)

In the early years of 2000, blogs and so called social media became popular among private users. Social media started out as peer to peer communication platforms and blogs, but as technology developed, the use of social media has become something much more. With the wider use of Internet and the emergence of “Web 2.0” the internet and social media has become an important tool to be heard and seen on internet.

Web 2.0 is a term that was first used in 2004 to describe the new way of which software developers and end-users started to utilize the World Wide Web. That is, as a platform where content and applications are no longer created and published by individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion (Kaplan & Haenlain, 2010). Through Web 2.0 and social media the companies can reach their customers on a new level and are able to interact with them easier than before. As the use of internet and social media offers a unique opportunity to reach target markets with exceptional speed as well as accuracy, researchers argue that social media platforms are becoming the most powerful tools for marketing. During the past 10 years the marketing through internet has blossomed and social media has become a big part of a company’s marketing mix.

Sweetser and Weaver Lariscy (2008, p. 179) defines social media as “centred on a concept of a read-write Web, where the online audience moves beyond the passive viewing of Web content to actually contributing to the content.” Furthermore, “the term social media describes a set of technology tools that are just as they sound—mediated opportunities for bringing people together and encouraging social networking and dialogic communication” (Sweetser & Weaver Lariscy, 2008, p. 180).

The adoption of social media practises for marketing purposes is rapidly growing within businesses around the world today and due to globalization and user standards the importance of social media is increasing. The application of social media for marketing and advertising is now well established in many commercial organisations. Politicians and celebrities are well aware of the promotional benefits of social media can facilitate. Therefore, it is not surprising that universities are exploring new opportunities and levels to engage with prospective students, alumni and other stakeholders (Kowalik, 2011). Within social media no clear standards are set, a wide range of models is applied and changes are made both rapidly and often. The rapid growth and variety of social media networks suggests that prospective university and college students will be open and positive to institutions adopting these technologies as methods of recruitment (Roach, 2006).

The most frequent used platforms for social media today is Twitter, Facebook, blogs and forums (Culnan, McHugh and Zubillaga, 2010) and the social networks that started at the universities as student projects such as Facebook has now become a marketing tool for the universities themselves.

The emergence of Internet-based social media has made it possible for one person to communicate with hundreds or even thousands of other people about products and the companies that provide them. Thus, the impact of consumer-to-consumer communications has been greatly magnified in the marketplace (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).
The universities use of marketing to attract students is no longer limited to the area of the campus, adjacent cities or the country. Most of the bigger universities use a wide marketing mix to attract their potential students on a national and international level.

1.2 Problem
During the past years the use of social media has exploded and not just for personal use, companies use social media as a marketing and PR tool with huge success (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Companies create accounts on Twitter, groups and communities on Facebook etc. to reach out to their customers and potential customers. To be active in social media and to find new and alternative ways to communicate with customers, partners and suppliers has recently become more and more important for the companies’ marketing strategies (Miles, 2009). The social media as a marketing tool creates value for the B2C enterprises and the variety of companies that enters the realm of social media is currently widening (Culnan, et al, 2010). The rapid growth and variety of social media networks suggests that prospective students will be open and positive to institutions adopting these technologies as methods of recruitment (Roach, 2006). The application of social media for marketing and advertising is now well established in many commercial organisations. Politicians and celebrities are well aware of the promotional benefits social media can facilitate. Thus, it is not surprising that universities are exploring new opportunities and levels to engage with prospective students, alumni and other stakeholders (Kowalik, 2011).

Merrill (2011, p. 26) states that university admissions and marketing departments could use social networking sites to promote themselves, distribute information, enhance their brand, engage future students, and gain insight into target audience needs and competitor practices. But he also points out that despite social networks popularity among staff, resources on best practices in higher education remain sparse.

Researchers highlight that companies are increasing their use of social media technologies (Bughin, 2008; McAfee, 2010). However, Reuben (2008) shows that the extent to which these tools are applied differs largely between countries as well as industries. Previous research has been largely focussing on the extent of which universities have adopted social media as a promotional tool, in general marketing efforts and in student recruitment efforts. It has also been explored which social media platforms are most frequently used. However, we have identified a gap as no deeper understanding of the universities’ application of social media has been provided by previous research. Additionally, no research specifically exploring private sector universities social media use for marketing has been identified.

Based on the gap identified in previous research, the aim of this research is to answer the following questions:

RQ1: How can the use of social media as a marketing tool by private universities in Sweden be characterised?
RQ2: How can the use of social media as a marketing tool by public universities in Sweden be characterised?
RQ3: Is there a significant difference in the way private and public universities in Sweden use social media as a marketing tool?
1.3 Purpose and hypotheses
The purpose of this thesis is to first explore how private and public universities use social media as a marketing tool activities and then identify the similarities and significant differences between the two.

To achieve this purpose, the thesis is complemented with five hypotheses:

H1: Private universities are active on a wider range of SNS than the public universities are.
H2: Both private and public universities use Facebook to a higher extent than Twitter in terms of quantity of posts.
H3: Both private and public universities prefer Facebook over Twitter when promoting events.
H4: Private universities produce own content to a higher extent than the public universities do.
H5: Private universities are generally more active on social media than the public universities are.
H6: Private universities are more direct in their marketing message on social media than the public universities are.
H7: There is no significant difference in terms of message-type distribution between the private and public universities.

1.4 Delimitations
This dissertation is limited to a few established theories concerning social media, marketing mix, promotional tools, communication, and integration of marketing communication. As there are several conflicting theories in some of the fields, we choose the ones we believed would be most suitable, and then adjusted models whenever required in order to fit our research better.

Theories used as foundation for this dissertation are Kaplan and Haenlein’s definition of social media, Zarrella’s categorisation of social media, McCarthy’s “4P” marketing mix, Rowley’s promotional mix, Boone and Kurtz’s integrated marketing communications, and Mangold and Faulds’ new communication paradigm.

1.5 Outline
This dissertation consists of seven chapters. The first chapter, Introduction, presents the background, problem, purpose, and delimitations. The second chapter reviews existing literature and theories. The third chapter contains the empirical method, including: research strategy, research approach, research design, data collection, data analysis, validity and reliability. The fourth chapter presents the collected data, divided into two parts: quantitative, and qualitative. In the fifth chapter, the data is analysed, both for private and public sectors individually, and in comparison to each other. The sixth and final chapter contains our conclusions from the research. It begins with a summary of the dissertation followed by practical and theoretical implications, limitations, and our suggestions for further research.
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter contains the theoretical framework. Here we present theories connected to our study as well as previous research performed on related topics.

2.1 Social Media

There is a lot of confusion regarding the meaning of social media and related concepts. When searching for definitions in academic journals, there is a new definition in nearly every paper you will find. According to Walaski (2013), there is no simple answer to what social media really is, while Andzulis et al. (2012) claim social media will be different for different companies and customers. And B&C (2010) confirms this by saying that, the term “social media” is widely used nowadays. In The Definitive Guide to B2B Social Media, Marketo (2010) describes social media as “the production, consumption and exchange of information through online social interactions and platforms.” Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as a group of Internet-based applications which build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allows for user-generated content to be created and exchanged. Boyd and Ellison (2008) define social networks as web-based services that allow users to build a public or semi-public within a system, and to manage own and observe others relationships within the service.

The number of social media sites has shown a tremendous increase over the past 10 years. However, some have shown more success, in terms of attracting users, than others. Walaski (2013) divides social media into six generally accepted categories: blogs, micro blogging, social networking sites, professional networks, video sharing, and content-driven communities.

Meanwhile, Zarrella (2010) adds a few categories in his definition, claiming social media should be divided into eight categories: blogs, micro blogs (Twitter), social networks (Facebook), media-sharing sites (YouTube), social bookmarking and voting sites (Digg, Reddit), review sites (Yelp), forums, virtual worlds (Second Life).

French new media consultant Cavazza (2008) also believes in a more detailed categorisation as he divides the various types of social media into ten categories in his “Social Media Landscape”: publication tools, sharing tools, discussion tools, social networks, micro publication tools, social aggregation tools, live cast, virtual worlds, social gaming and massively multiplayer online gaming. Solis (2008) provides a more visual categorisation by introducing “The Conversation Prism” (fig 3.1), which he describes as “the art of listening, learning and sharing.”
While there is a smorgasbord of social media and social network sites to choose from, there are a few that has managed to excel the others in terms of frequency of use. The biggest names in the industry are currently Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn (Greenwood, 2012). Despite being the biggest social networking site by far today, Facebook was launched several years after the first networking sites were introduced (Moubarak et al., 2011). Opening up to the public at 2004, Facebook offered a service where users could not only share content with others, but also “friend” other users, creating a community with a sort of belonging. The site also allows for the user to manage their own profile page where they can choose pictures and videos to represent them. According to Walaski (2013), Facebook has expanded onto new ground during recent years as more and more corporations have joined the networking site. Companies join to take advantage of the websites popularity among potential customers and consumers. Companies then set up pages representing the organisation and use tools provided by Facebook to market their products or services efficiently (Megen, 2011).

Social networking sites have attracted so many users over the years that they have become hot topics for discussion not only within the context of private life but also within business life. Zauner (2012) explains that through this, the research on social media has become multidisciplinary with neuroscientists, anthropologists, sociologists and marketers extensively researching this phenomenon.

As the earliest form of Social Media, blogs are a type of personal website where date-stamped entries are displayed in a reversed chronological order (OECD, 2007). While most blog entries consist of text, some focus on the use of pictures, videos or audio entries (Murugesan, 2007). Further, Murugesan (2007) explains that a blog entry typically consists of a title, body, permalink, and date of posting, comments-section, and a category tag. Blogs are used in a wide range of ways; some use
them as an online diary where readers are allowed to follow the author’s life, while some are focused on updating the readers with relevant information within a specific content area (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In addition to blogs, there are micro blogs which are distinguished from blogs through their limitations in terms of content size. The most popular among micro blogs is Twitter where each entry is limited to 140 characters, a so called “Tweets”, and where the user can link to additional online content to their followers (Zarella, 2010). However lately there has been a discussion whether Twitter is a micro blog, a SNS or an informational network and the conclusion is different depending on how you look upon it (Lapowsky, 2013).

Twitter also introduced a system of searchable “hashtags” that adds another dimension to the tweets. A “hashtag” can be created for a specific things, events, phenomenon etc. and can be shared, or “retweeted”, in order to spread that message (Forkosh-Baruch & Hershkovitz, 2012; Gallaugher & Ransbotham, 2010).

Online social networks have become a vital tool for people in order to connect with others and share information. Social networks allow people to create an online profile and maintain a personal online presence by sharing information about them, however personal they desire (Wilcox & Stephen, 2012). The SNS that came to grow the most during the past years by doing exactly this is Facebook. The user register and creates a profile will be able to send “Friend requests” and join groups, communities and follow organisations profiles. The users can then exchange messages, share photos, videos and status updates on their timeline and friends and followers will be able to like, comment and share.

Media sharing sites can be describes as websites that enables users to create and upload the multimedia content that they wish to spread. With the upswing of cheap, user friendly digital cameras and video cameras and the increase of high-speed Internet connections, media-sharing sites have increased as well both in number and popularity. Marketers can with little effort create videos and upload them to YouTube to reach millions of users. YouTube is currently the largest video sharing site on the web and the third most visited site on the Internet but competitors are growing fast, such as Vimeo. According to Zarrella (2010), the evolution of media sharing sites has changed the web, and there is hardly any marketing campaign that would not benefit from using media sharing sites.

2.2 Marketing Mix

In the current body of research on marketing, several classifications of the instruments of the marketing mix exist. However, the most widely accepted classification is that of McCarthy (1960). McCarthy’s 4P classification comprise of: Product, Pricing, Place, Promotion. These P’s contain a number of sub-mixes described by Borden (1964): Product planning, Pricing, Branding, Channels of distribution, Personal selling, Advertising, Promotions, Packaging, Display, Servicing, Physical handling, and Fact finding and analysis.

McCarthy’s marketing mix has through its wide adoption by managers and academics become a key element of marketing theory as well as practise (Dominici, 2009). According to Grönroos (1994), the majority of practitioners in marketing believe this mix is an effective toolkit for marketing and planning. Several academics suggest the diffusion of McCarthy’s mix can be explained by that it is easy to learn, understand and apply, making it an effective tool not only in marketing but also in the classroom (Yudelson, 1999; Jobber, 2001). Bennet (1995) even suggested the 4Ps have become somewhat a synonym to marketing. However, while this version of the marketing mix has inspired many, it has also divided the marketing academia (Lauterborn, 1990).

2.2.1 Promotion

Kotler (1975) defined promotion as the persuasive communication about a given product or service offered by the seller to the buyer. The use of promotion can increase the awareness of a product or service that a company is offering and is one of the key 4Ps in the marketing mix (Rowley, 1998). The promotion mix comprises of various tools and has been listed by (Kotler & Armstrong,
as advertising, direct marketing, sales promotion, public relations, personal selling and sponsorships. Advertising can be described as a non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods or services by any identified sponsor. Direct marketing is the use of mail, telephone or other non-personal contact tools to communicate with, or solicit a response from specific customers and prospects. Sales promotion is the short-term incentives to encourage trial or purchase of a product or service, such as discounts for access to a database over a limited time period. Public relations is characterised by programs designed to promote and/or protect a company’s image, or those of its products, including product literature, exhibitions and articles about organizations’ products in professional or in-house newsletters. Personal selling where face-to-face interactions with one or more prospective purchasers, for the purpose of making sales; and finally Sponsorship financial or external support of an event or person by an unrelated organization or donor, such as is common in respect of the arts, sports and charities.

Rowley (1998) described the promotion the same way but included Publicity as a part of its own in the Public relationship. Additionally, he defined the promotional mix as the composition of the promotion channels used to deliver a promotional message. It is crucial, when creating a successful promotional strategy, to assemble an appropriate promotional mix in order to meet the promotional objectives (Rowley, 1998). The promotional strategy can be described as the promotional action guidelines set up towards a given goal and vision (Mintzberg et al., 1998).

Kotler and Armstrong (2008) states that a company’s promotional mix most likely consist of a specific blend of the tools which the company uses to persuasively communicate customer value and build customer relationships. Advertising can reach a vast number of geographically dispersed buyers at a good cost per exposure ratio. Personal selling is the outmost effective tool in some stages of the buying process especially when it comes to building up buyers’ preferences, convictions and actions. With the use sales promotions such as coupons, contests, price reductions, premium offers, etc. Public relations create reputation with news stories, features, sponsorships and events in order to become more real to the customers than what can be done with advertisement. Direct marketing is better when it comes to interact with the customer. It allows a dialogue between the communicator and the consumer and to alter with the information depending on the response given by the consumer.

2.3 Branding

The concept of a complete branding dates back to more than a 1000 years BC in China (Wang 2008; Zuo 1999). However, Greenberg (1951) gives proof that indicates that manufacturing marked potter was produced as early as 2700 BC in China but Wengrow (2008) has provided archaeological evidence that it might be as early as 9000 BC.

In modern time branding has been defined by the American Marketing Association as “a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination them, to identify the products of one company and to differentiate them from those of competitors” (American marketing association Dictionary 1995).

However, brand is more than just names and symbols. The value of branding, such as: identification, higher brand loyalty and trust, perceived quality etc. ascends from the consumer’s perceptions and feelings about a product and its performance and exits in the mind of consumers (Stein, 1990; Armstrong et al., 2000; Kall, 2001; Toma et al., 2005). Brands can also help consumers by signalling a certain level of quality (Erdem, 1998)

Armstrong et al., (2000) mentions that branding can be used to convince the consumer to believe that a product is superior to its competitors even though this might not be the reality, for example the famous case of Coca-Cola and Pepsi where the consumers preferences of taste of unbranded cans came down to a tie while the branded cans was preferred to 75% in favour of Coca-Cola. Other examples where long lasting relationships has been created through branding are Harley Davidsson and Apple which connects with its followers and customers on an emotional level (Simms and Trott, 2006).
2.4 Social Media as a Marketing tool

Schlinke and Crain (2013) claim social media provides a manageable way for organisations to reach, inform and educate their audiences. Further, they explain there are many misconceptions of what social media can and cannot do in terms of aiding overall marketing practises, but that ultimately, social media tools should be considered a means of communicating and marketing to an audience and should thus be approached with the same careful planning and consideration prior to commitment as any other important business decision. This is supported by Lanz (2010), who explains that social media is not just about choosing a range of tactics that have shown to be effective in other businesses, but that prior research is essential to determine what tools and approaches could be effective in the specific industry, organisation and type of business.

Andzulis et al. (2012) explain that the purpose of integrating social media into the marketing mix is not to replace the traditional methods, but rather to complement them or increase the value of the interaction with customers. Further, they conclude that despite the dozens of practitioner articles on the subject, there is no agreement on best practise. However, there are a few agreements in the literature, the first being the fact that social media is important in the marketing context. The second is that the power is moving from the companies to the consumers (Baer, 2010; Andzulis et al., 2012).

Many researchers agree that in order for social media to add value for the organisation, the sales unit has to be seamlessly integrated with the wider marketing unit (Cespedes, 1993; Guenzi & Troilo, 2007; Rouziès, 2005; Slater & Olson, 2001). They also agree on that this is one of the most common reasons organisations fail in their social media efforts, as they do not put this integration into practise.

2.5 Integrated Marketing Communication

Integrated marketing communication (IMC) can be described as the guidelines and concept that companies use to communicate with the target market. With the use of ICM, companies aims so to coordinate and manage the six parts of the promotional mix (advertising, personal selling, public relations, publicity, direct marketing, and sales promotion) in order to create a combination of customer-focused messages that sees to the different organizational objectives (Boone & Kurtz, 2007).

The way in which integrated marketing communications is applied varies largely between organisations and a wide range of concepts, approaches and methodologies exist around the world leading to a theoretical confusion among academics. Despite this, they claim a large number of marketing organisations and agencies continue to deploy “integrated marketing” or “integrated marketing communication” programs accomplishing various companies’ objectives (Schultz et al., 2008).
The elements that have to be managed by the marketers in order to communicate with the customers are described in the traditional communication model as follows (see Figure 1). The “source” is the first of the elements from traditional communication model where the communication is originally initiated. The second element is the “message” itself, which can be transmitted via the medium (television, radio, magazines etc.). The third element of the traditional communication model is one or several “receivers” that interpret the message according to their own experiences and beliefs and the message reaches its “destination” (Solomon, 2009; Shannon & Weaver, 1998).

**Shannon-Weaver Communication Model**

![Shannon-Weaver model of communication](Figure 3.2: Shannon-Weaver model of communication. Shannon, Weaver (1948). A Mathematical Theory of Communication, pp. 379.)

Countless aspects of customer behaviour including awareness, information search, opinion sharing, purchase and post-purchase behaviour, has been influenced and altered by the use and expansion of the social medias (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). With the rise of the social media followed remarkable changes in the tools and strategies used when communicating with the customers (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2004 as cited in Mangold & Faulds 2009). Therefore, a new form of communication paradigm, that includes all forms of social media as potential tools for planning and applying integrated marketing communications strategies, has to take form to replace the out-dated traditional communications paradigm, which was based on the classic promotional mix (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

### 2.6 New communication paradigm

Mangold and Faulds (2009) have developed a model for a new communication paradigm (see figure 3.3). In the era of social media, marketing managers are losing control over content and timing of the content while information about products and services originates in the marketplace.
The new communication paradigm intends to display the increasing power and the impact the discussions between the customers interacting on social media can generate. According to Mangold and Faulds (2009), there are several points that describes the critical influences of the consumers’ interactions in social media and other medias on integrated marketing communications strategies. Internet has grown into a mass media platform for consumer-sponsored communications (Rashtchy et al., 2007). Traditional sources of communication and advertisement has declined and customers turn to the newer sources. Customers desire on-demand and instant access to information on their own terms (Rashtchy et al., 2007; Vollmer & Precourt, 2008). It is becoming more and more common that the consumers use different types of social media to manage their information searches and to consider their purchasing decisions (Lempert, 2006; Vollmer & Precourt, 2008). Consumers comprehends social media as more trustworthy source of information when it comes to products and services than corporate-sponsored communications addressed through the traditional components of the promotion mix (Foux, 2006).

Mangold and Faulds (2009) stress the importance of using both traditional and internet based promotional tool in order to engage with the customers. Social media enables two linked roles in the marketplace. Primarily, social media enables companies to communicate with their customers, and second, it enables customers to communicate with each other. This enables companies to interconnect with customers via blogs, Facebook and other social networks of the same characters, at the same time as it empowers the customers. With traditional marketing, customers may discuss a service or product with around ten people about the product, but now social media enables the customers to rapidly spread their opinions and thoughts to thousands and millions in a blink of an eye (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

It is crucial that social media is included and unified in the promotion mix when the companies develop and execute their integrated marketing communication strategies in order to create a broad and efficient customer focused promotional message.

The new communication paradigm and the expanded knowledge about the benefits of social media ultimately gives an understanding how companies are and should be using social media as a promotional tool (Boone & Kurtz, 2007; Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

### 2.7 Social media in Universities

A survey conducted by Harvard University (2014) showed that the use of most social networking sites had increased from 2013 to 2014. The percentage of 18-29 year olds who had a:
• Facebook account grew from 79 percent to 84 percent;
• Google+ account growth expanded from 37 percent to 44 percent;
• Twitter growth increased from 35 percent to 40 percent;
• Instagram from 30 percent to 36 percent.

Additionally, research on how prospective students go about choosing which institutions to apply to showed that social media have great potential as a marketing tool for universities (Gibbs, 2002; Helgesen, 2008; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006).

With the knowledge that their target audience are active on social media, and that social media is a channel which prospective students turn to in the assessment process, universities have over the past few years increasingly adopted social media as channel for communication. Asderaki and Maragos (2012) explain that nearly every market-driven post-secondary education institution in the world is practising some form of social media marketing activity. Davis et al. (2012) explain that while universities use social media to build a campus community, strengthen student-to-student interaction, student involvement and engagement in campus life, the prime use is for marketing efforts and communicating information about the university to students.

Linvill, McGee, and Hicks (2012) performed a study of content in order to explain the way colleges and universities use Twitter as a communicational tool. In total, 1130 tweets from 133 US universities and colleges were analysed. This study showed that the main use of Twitter among HEI’s is as news feed for the general population, rather than a channel to engage students.

Bélanger et al. (2013) explored what social media marketing strategies are applied among Canadian universities by collecting data from 106 Canadian universities’ Facebook and Twitter pages. Results revealed that Twitter is generally more used to carry conversations, while Facebook is preferred for university-initiated posting. Further, they found that most of the university-led postings, whether on Twitter or Facebook, were related to campus/student news and events. Additionally, their study discovered that universities use Twitter for posting tweets from a live event, such as convocations, university games, etc. For example, one university tweeted Getting ready for ABC Conversations. Follow along with [#EventName]. This way the followers can simply follow #EventName to get the live feed from an event. Such live feeds can dramatically increase the number of total tweets accumulated for universities.

2.8 Branding in Universities

Bennett and Ali-Choudhury (2009) defined a university’s brand as a display of its features and a reflection of its capability to meet students’ needs, create trust in its ability to deliver certain type and quality of education, and thus help prospects make their decisions. Additionally, they suggest that a university brand consists of three components: (1) a collection of promises presented to the outside world concerning the brand’s benefits (high-calibre faculty, post-graduation job and career prospects, opportunities for in-campus socialization); (2) a set of distinctive features which define the brand’s inherent nature and reality (university’s market positioning, research and teaching orientation, module and programme range, campus safety etc.); and (3) an assortment aesthetic designations and external communications that describe the brand (name, slogan, logotype design).

Khanna et al. (2014) identified five branding touchpoints which have a high influence on prospective students’ admission decision: Soft and hard infrastructure; Alumni and student recommendation; Media influence; Placement opportunities; Fees and location.
Additionally, they stress the importance of enhancing these pre-admission touchpoints through communication, especially on social media, where alumni and current students can display the brand value with emphasis on work placements and campus infrastructure, thus building positive perceptions and expectations of the university among prospective students.

2.9 Conclusions

Research shows that higher educational institutions are increasingly adopting social media sites for marketing purposes as the use of social media is expanding among their target group.

This expansion and wide spreading of social media as a marketing tool has attracted many researchers to investigate more closely. Extensive research has been performed exploring how the adoption of social media as a marketing tool among for-profit organisations is characterised. Less research has explored the case for more specific types of organisations, such as universities.

While statistical research shows that the use of social media is increasing globally, the few papers produced from research specifically on Universities’ use of social media as a promotional tool are geographically focused mainly on US and Canada. These are ranging from exploring strategies of implementation to analysis of content on specific SNS’. No research has been identified investigating similar topics in Sweden specifically.

This gap has led us to investigate more closely how the application among Swedish universities is characterised and whether there is a difference in use between private and public universities. Inspired by previous research we will conduct analysis of content as well as extension of use in quantitative terms, and complement with qualitative data in form of interviews.
3. METHOD

This chapter presents the selected methods used to execute this study. Specifying research strategy; research approach; research design; data collection; and data analysis.

3.1 Research strategy

Saunders et al. (2009) point out the importance of a clear research strategy. There are seven categories for the research strategy: (1) experiment, (2) survey, (3) case study, (4) action research, (5) grounded theory, (6) ethnography, and (7) archival research. Yin (2003) explains that each of these categories can be applied together with any of the earlier mentioned research designs. Additionally, Saunders et al. (2009) stress the fact that these strategies are not mutually exclusive. For example, it is possible to use the survey strategy as part of a case study.

For this research, the survey design is applied. Saunders et al. (2009) explain this to be a common strategy in business and management research and is frequently used when trying to answer questions such as “who?”, “what?”, “where?”, “how much?”, and “how many?”. It is therefore suitable for exploratory research. In this research we aim to answer “what?” when exploring what social media sites the selected universities are active on in their marketing efforts. Additionally, we aim to answer “how much?” when exploring the extent to which the universities adopt the different social media sites.

While the use of questionnaires is predominant for the survey design, this research will be performed using the structured observation technique with a high level of structure. We will perform a pre-study which will allow us to generate a set of categories representing the different types of social media posts made by the universities. We then use this categorisation when measuring and comparing the activity between universities. Observing the social media channels allows us to collect primary data in the natural setting of which the communication occurs. Additionally, the nature of social media allows us to record the data a while after it occurred, as everything is logged, assuming the editing and removal is infrequent and thus of low significance. A potential disadvantage of this technique is data being slow and expensive to collect.

3.2 Research approach

This study employs a combination of the inductive and deductive research approach. The inductive can be identified in the qualitative data collection based on the interviews, while the deductive can be found in our quantitative data collection and in creation and testing of our hypotheses.

This study will aim to explore differences in how public and private universities in Sweden adopt social media in their marketing efforts and develop theories with help from the collected data.

3.3 Research design

The purpose of this study is to explore the differences between how public and private universities in Sweden use social media as a marketing tool. Therefore the exploratory research design is applied.

3.4 Data collection

When deciding the method for collecting data, one should base the decision with regards to the study’s research question and objectives. The choice of method will affect the validity of the data depending on the purpose of the research. Saunders et al. (2009) divide data collection into two main categories: primary, and secondary. Primary data collection can be executed through observations, questionnaires, and interviews, and assume the data collected is new. Secondary data collection on the other hand, is data which has already been collected by someone else. Secondary data collection is divided into three categories: documentary, multiple source-based and survey-based data (Saunders et al., 2009).
As this research is performed with aim to gain deeper understanding of phenomena through an exploratory research design, a primary data collection will be performed. Quantitative data was collected through observation of the universities’ social media pages and feeds. We observed and categorised all the content posted by 10 Swedish universities on Twitter and Facebook between 1 October 2014 and 31 March 2015. We also examined the universities official websites to identify which social media they advertised themselves as active on.

Additionally, qualitative data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews (see appendix 1), which are according to King (2004), commonly referred to as ‘qualitative research interviews’. In semi-structured interviews the researcher has a list of themes and omitting questions to be worked over (Saunders et al., 2009). However, these may vary between the interviews with the different respondents. This means the researcher will adapt the conversation depending on the organisational context as well as to the flow of the conversation. Additionally, questions may be altered, and added in a particular interview, where deemed necessary in order to further explore the research question (Saunders et al., 2009). The interviews are performed over telephone, and as recommended by Saunders et al. (2009), the interviews were recorded with the help of an audio-recording device and complementing notes were taken during the course of the interview to allow for revision of thought-process after the interview.

The reason for performing the interviews via telephone is due to the convenience, speed and cost-efficiency it allows for. The respondents were professionals who worked in a very busy environment and often located at remote universities. While it allows for a potentially more relaxed interview for the respondent by letting them answer from a comfortable environment there may also be losses in terms of non-verbal communication compared to if face-to-face interviews where performed instead (Saunders et al., 2009). However, as the study aims to explore a more factual relationship between variables, non-verbal communication should have little relevance.
4. EMPIRICAL DATA

The fourth chapter includes a presentation of empirical data collected for the research. The first part contains data from quantitative research, and the second part contains data from qualitative research.

4.1 Quantitative data

The sample consisted of 10 Swedish universities, of which three are active in the private sector. Data was collected from the universities’ official Twitter and Facebook pages from October 1, 2014 – March 31, 2015. A total of 3156 Twitter and Facebook posts was collected and categorised.

The criteria for the categories were as follows:

- Faculty (Posts related to the university’s faculty, staff, and alumni)
- Research (Posts regarding any research and/or innovation)
- Correspondence (Correspondence between the university and stakeholder)
- Campus (Needs to be related to Campus, not only happening on campus)
- Events (Posts regarding events where the university is a stakeholder)
- Retweets/Shares (Any content posted via the share or re-tweet function)
- Prospectus (Posts regarding admission, available courses and programmes)
- Student (Any information regarding students and their endeavours)
- Others (Those which cannot be categorised in any of the above)

The categories are not mutually exclusive, with exception for the “Other” category. This category was created as the main categories are not entirely exhaustive. The category “Retweets” (and “Shares”) only describes whether the content of the post was produced by the university or by an external part. Thus, every post categorised as “Retweet” and “Shares” is also put in at least one more category in order to also describe the content.
4.1.1 Private universities

4.1.1.1 Chalmers University of Technology

Facebook

Chalmers University of Technology joined Facebook in 2009, have 16,000 likes and a 4.5 rating.

![Chalmers University of Technology - Facebook](image)

Posts with content related to “Events” reached 33% of the total posts during the time period. On second place came research 21% and close followed by “Student” 16% and “Prospectus” at 15%. Something that stands out is the lack of posts surrounding “Faculty” which just reached above 5%. The amount of posts that came from “Shares” was 14%.

Twitter

Chalmers University of Technology joined Twitter in 2010 and have 3,000 followers.

![Chalmers University of Technology - Twitter](image)

Here we can see a difference in the posts regarding “Research” that reaches 47%, “Events” came down to 24%, “Faculty” has gone up to 13% while “Others” stay around 17%. The “retweets” reached 34%.
4.1.1.2 Stockholm School of Economics

Facebook

Stockholm School of Economics joined in 2009, have 10.000 likes and a 4.6 review rating.

![Facebook Chart]

Stockholm School of Economics use Facebook first and foremost for “Events” (26%) yet close followed by “Prospectus” on 23% and “Faculty” and “Research” at 16% and 17%. “Shares” summed up to only 3% of the total 87 posts. “Others” reached 21%.

Twitter

Stockholm School of Economics joined 2009 and have 2.300 followers.

![Twitter Chart]

At Stockholm School of Economics the posts on twitter talks about “Research” which climbs to 36% followed by “Events” and “Prospectus”. “Faculty” only comes to 1%.
4.1.1.3 Jönköping University

Facebook

Jönköping University joined in 2010, have 3,000 likes and a 4.1 review rating.

There is no doubt that Jönköping University favours Facebook when it comes to posts of “Events” as it reaches 61% of the 77 total posts. “Prospectus” and “Student” related posts follow on 17 and 13%. No “Correspondence” has been done at all.

Twitter

Jönköping University joined in 2009 and have 2,400 followers.

The number of “Event” related posts lands on 60% followed by “Campus” related at 25% and “Prospectus” at 13%. “Correspondence” finishes lasts at 3%. During the half year period we analysed, the total posts only resulted in 68 posts. Something that stands out is the amount of “Retweets” on 46%.
4.1.1.4 Private universities aggregated

**Facebook**

Looking at the private universities’ Facebook usage aggregated, we can see that posts regarding “events” are the most frequent (39%), followed by posts categorised as “Prospectus” (18%), and “Research” (14%) and “Student” (14%). Only 9% of the total posts were shared, meaning 91% of the content was produced by the universities themselves.

![Facebook usage chart](chart)

**Twitter**

Looking at the private universities Twitter usage aggregated, we can see that “Sharing” someone else’s content is more frequently occurring than on Facebook (38% against 9%). On Twitter, 37% of the posts are related to “Research”, 30% are related to “Events”.

![Twitter usage chart](chart)
4.1.2 Public universities

4.1.2.1 University of Gothenburg

Facebook

University of Gothenburg joined in 2011, have 5,000 likes and a 4.7 review rating.

![Facebook Post Categorization](chart1.png)

University of Gothenburg use Facebook mainly for “Events” (25%), followed by “Prospectus” and “Student” related that reaches 17 and 14%. What stand out are the mixed posts that cannot successfully fit into any of the main categories and therefore categorised as “Others” reaches 34%, which is very high.

Twitter

University of Gothenburg joined in 2009 and have 3,700 followers.

![Twitter Post Categorization](chart2.png)

The posts linked to “Research”, finishes at 48% followed by “Events” on 20% the others come behind except for retweets and others. What strikes us is that both “Student” and “Campus” related posts have been left out completely. Retweets finished at 17%. The total posts only reached 46 and “Others”
4.1.2.2 Royal Institute of Technology

Facebook

The Royal Institute of Technology Joined in 2008, have 27.000 likes and a 4.7 review rating.

While reviewing the Facebook page of the Royal Institute of Technology the “Correspondence” reaches an impressive 44% during the period of time and “Research” 31%. All the other categories are fairly low. Note that the total posts on Facebook only reached a total of 71. Their “Shares” only reached 1%.

Twitter

The Royal Institute of Technology Joined 2009 and have 5.000 followers.

The Royal Institute of Technology’s posts on Twitter was to 70% related to “Research” followed by “Events” on 13% and “Faculty” 11%. No “correspondence” was made and tweets about “Prospectus” very low. Their posts coming from others, or “Retweets”, reached a 47%.
4.1.2.3 Linköping University

Facebook

Linköping University joined in 2008, have 26,000 likes and a 4.3 review rating.

The 3 bigger categories from Linköping University’s Facebook are “Student” related at 25%, “Events” 19% and “Research” 16%. What is interesting is that their content seems to be very balanced and mixed. Also no “Shares” has been made at all out of the 114 total posts.

Twitter

Linköping University joined 2009 and have 3,100 followers.

When it comes to twitter none of the categories “Correspondence”, “Campus”, “Prospectus” and “Student” posts reaches over 3% while “Research” related post landed on massive 65% and “Faculty” on a slightly higher 8%. Retweets landed on 12%.
4.1.2.4 Lund University

Facebook

Lund University joined in 2010, have 18,000 likes and has disabled the review rating function.

![Lund University - Facebook chart](chart)

With the low amount of total posts Lund University focused on prospectus (45%) and events (25%). It was also important to post about their “Campus” and “Student” (both on 10%). The rest are very low except for the “Other” category on 20%.

Twitter

Lund University joined 2009 and have 7,300 followers.

![Lund University - Twitter chart](chart)

“Research”, “Student” and “Events” related posts reach 36%, 24% and 22%. “Correspondence” just reached 1% and “Campus” related 0%. Out of the 147 posts 11% was “Retweets”.
4.1.2.5 Stockholm University

Facebook
Stockholm University joined in 2009, have 37,000 likes and a 4.4 review rating.

![Stockholm University - Facebook](image)

34% of the posts are “Event” related followed by “Research” on 18% and “Campus” related on 16%. The posts are balanced yet “Faculty” related posts only reached 2% and out of the 134 posts just 5% was “Shared” content.

Twitter
Stockholm University joined 2009 and have 6,500 followers.

![Stockholm University - Twitter](image)

Stockholm University Out of the impressive 506 total posts (2.78/day!) that we have categorized 57% was related to “Faculty”. “Research” ended at 27% and “Events” 15%. “Correspondence”, “Campus” and “Student” related posts just reached over 1% and the “Retweets” 11%.
**4.1.2.6 Umeå University**

**Facebook**

Umeå University joined in 2009, have 18,000 likes and a 4.3 review rating.

![Umeå University - Facebook](image)

Umeå University uses Facebook to post about “Events” to a great extent and finishes at 57% for that category followed by “Prospectus” on 13% and “Research” on 8%. The others are on a steady low level. “Shares” finally reached 13%

**Twitter**

Umeå University joined 2009 and have 5,500 followers.

![Umeå University - Twitter](image)

“Research” landed on 38%, “Faculty” 23% and events 15% of the total 402 posts. “Retweets” and “Others” were relatively high, 32% and 16%, and the rest quite low. Something that is impressive is the amount of tweets that landed on 402 and therefore an average post per day at 2.21.
4.1.2.7 Uppsala University

Facebook

Uppsala University joined in 2010, have 42,000 likes and a 4.5 review rating.

Uppsala University had a total of 80 posts on Facebook within the period where “Events” adds up to 34% and “Correspondence” close second on 33%. The rest are on a balanced level but “Faculty” ending on a low 3%. The shares summed up to 8%.

Twitter

Uppsala University joined 2009 and have 9,900 followers.

On their Twitter page, the majority (56%) of posts were related to “Research”, followed by “Events” (20%) and “Faculty” (9%). 20% of the content was posted through “Retweets”.
4.1.2.8 **Public universities aggregated**

**Facebook**

Looking at the public universities’ Facebook usage aggregated, we can see that posts regarding “Events” are the most frequent (29%), followed by “Correspondence” (15%), “Prospectus” (14%), and “Research” (13%). Only 4% of the total posts were “Shared”, meaning 96% of the content was produced by the universities themselves. “Others” landed on a total 15%.

![Public universities aggregated - Facebook](chart)

**Twitter**

Looking at the public universities Twitter usage aggregated, we can see that sharing someone else’s content is more frequently occurring than on Facebook (23% against 4%). On Twitter, 40% of the posts are related to “Research”, 29% are faculty related, and 15% are related to “events”. “Others” landed on a total of 13%.

![Public universities aggregated - Twitter](chart)
4.1.3 Comparison of private and public

**Facebook**

Below we see the distribution of the categories of the posts from both the private and the public universities on Facebook.

**Twitter**

Below we see the distribution of the categories of the posts from both the private and the public universities on Twitter.
Public: Facebook and Twitter combined

Following graph shows the distribution of the categories of the posts on Facebook and Twitter in the public sector.

Private: Facebook and Twitter combined

Following graph shows the distribution of the categories of the posts on Facebook and Twitter in the private sector.
Private and Public with Facebook and Twitter aggregated

In the following graph we show the differences in the distribution of the categories between the private and the public universities when combining Facebook and Twitter.

4.1.4 Range of social networking sites adopted

Observing the universities webpages we counted how many of the SNS they refer to.

The public universities have adopted an average of 7 SNS per university while the private ones reach an average of 6.67 SNS per university.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University name:</th>
<th>Public/Private</th>
<th>Nr. of SNS adopted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stockholms University</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunds University</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Göteborgs University</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uppsala University</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linköpings University</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umeå University</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal Institute of Technology</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average public</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chalmers University of technology</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockholm school of economics</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jönköping University</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Private</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2 Qualitative data

We conducted two Semi-structured interviews with representatives working with Social media marketing at the institutes in order to try to see if their thoughts on the topic match our research. We had an introduction of ourselves and a few backup questions; the rest of the interview was as open as possible in order not to affect their answers in any way. The respondents have requested to remain anonymous.

4.2.1 Public

“I am a communications strategist working with all the communications at international affairs that includes Social media etc. I have been at this position at the university for 6 years, before that as webmaster since the late 90s”. We continued by asking him to briefly tell us which social media they have and how it started out:

“We use many different social media sites since years back. It started out with blogs then Facebook as an experiment, Twitter and Instagram has been reinstated after some downtime.”

How do you use Facebook?

“Facebook is used mainly for branding but also for events and student recruiting etc. It is also the easiest to use since everyone knows about it and how it works. We have totally left the traditional ads except for the catalogue for student recruiting. The rest is made through personal meetings or Facebook and other social media sites.”

How do you use Twitter?

“Twitter has been used for some time but the use has been fluctuating, Instagram as well. LinkedIn is being used for their alumni activities and for those who are active in working life. Twitter has gone up and down since it demands a lot of commitment and time. It is a lot of work involved to keep it running but the potential to rapidly reach out with news, research, press-releases and information is huge.”

The respondent also explains that “YouTube is used as a storage place for the movies they have. Most of the times the movies are made for a purpose and then distributed on our other social media sites.”

What is your thought of social media as a marketing and publicity tool? Is there any difference since you are a public institute?

“Attention is a word to explain the activity that best suited on social media sites but it goes hand in hand with publicity etc. Everything that can make our work easier and more efficient has to be tested but we need more resources. Higher up in the organisation they have support for Social media but at his level they are a bit tied as a public institute. We already use social media more than traditional media when it comes to recruiting students although we would like to do more. I think we will use social media more and more but we have to be careful. Social media and its trends are constantly evaluated and we bring it up every year during our planning. Adjustments are made along the way but not always according to trends. Sometimes it’s better to wait and see until it’s more established.”
4.2.2 Private

Could you please tell us about your background at the university and your role?
“I am the Marketing coordinator here since 2002 and works with both marketing and student recruitment.”

We continued by asking him to briefly tell us which social media they have and how it started out:
“Well first of all, we use a diversified marketing portfolio including both traditional and social media marketing. We started early but I doubt we focus much more than other universities. We see an on-going shift from traditional to digital media but have some doubts letting go completely. Although we have not used much traditional advertisement lately part from the prospectus. It is a bit safer and easier for the family to go through together at home. We have about 7 years of experience of modern social media. We started with Facebook but today we also have twitter, Instagram, YouTube and more. It came spontaneous as something fun and new but today it has become more strategic and thought through. We started early, however the trend is that you arrive a bit late. When we are established it feels like there has been 5 new trends and the kids are moving faster than we can handle.”

Do you use LinkedIn?
“Good question, I am not sure if we use it or not for student recruitment. It is not as developed in our strategy as the others. As far as I know we use it for alumni.”

The respondent continues talking and gives following examples:
How do you use Twitter?
“Twitter should be used more. We try to be as active as possible but we have some difficulties to manage the workload it requires. We use it to post about news and research. To reach out with a message, fast. Like everyone else I guess.”
And how do you use Facebook?
“Facebook appears for us as the most effective one and it is extremely fast. We have used it mainly for events and some student recruitment but of course in many other ways too. We do also have the possibility where with the students through Facebook can ask questions and we answer all of them but we do not contact students directly, they have to come to us.”
“For example, we had an open seminar and missed the last day to put in an ad in the paper. We started and Facebook campaign and got a great hit rate. Many showed up and since this was our only channel used to promote the seminar we could really measure the traffic and its result. It is hard to say if it is cheap or not but it works!”
“We compare the statistics for every program and course for every semester. If we see a dip in some results or if we would like to expand some parts we have done campaigns for this as well with great result.”

What is your though of social media as a marketing and publicity tool? Is there any difference since you are a public institute?
“Social media is a bit different. It is not used for direct marketing; I do not see that there is a possibility to do it in a reasonable way. It is too hard to reach the right persons, feels far-fetched.”
“Publicity in general via Social media is a bit different. It is much wider in its possibilities and the spread is in another league when it comes to send out news and information. Twitter, for example, is used to spread information and news regarding open positions, news, research related and to create a positive feeling.”
“As a private institute we can devote our time and resources toward what we appear the most effective and easiest and we have seen great results to a low cost. We will expand our social media department and probably leave our traditional marketing behind in the future but we take it step by step.”
5. ANALYSIS

This chapter contains an analysis of the data presented in the previous chapter, connecting them to the theoretical framework and providing answer to our hypotheses.

5.1 Year of entry

The private universities have all been active on both Facebook and Twitter for several years, joining during 2009 and 2010. However, considering Facebook launched in 2004 and Twitter in 2006 none of the private universities were early adopters in a global perspective.

Observing the public universities, we saw strong similarities to the private in terms of when Facebook and Twitter was adopted. The earliest entries were by Linköping University and the Royal Institute of Technology, which both joined Facebook in 2008. However, most entries were made in 2009.

The findings of these relatively late entries support Palmers (2013) findings in his characterisation of the use of Twitter by Australian universities. He concluded that higher educational institutes were generally new in social media relative to other organisations.

Our findings in the qualitative data help us get an idea of why both the private and public universities are late adopters. The respondent from the private university explained he perceived an entry in 2009 to be early, but that the trend is to be a late adopter of new media. The respondent of the public university explained they adopted Facebook more as an experiment, and explained that they frequently revise their social media strategy, but not always according to trends. Additionally, he acknowledged that there may be a value in being a late adopter, after a media has become more established.

5.2 Social media adopted

The Public universities has adopted between 4 to 8 different SNS used right now. The university that has the lower adoption rates has focused on the 4 biggest SNS in Europe for their target group (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn). In average the public universities are active on 7 SNS. Continuously we see that the private universities are present on several social networking sites and they are all present on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube. In addition to that the private universities are active on 6.67 SNS in average. All the universities, both public and private, are active on social media while some are very active and both public and private universities are all active on the 4 bigger SNS. The averages differ with 0.33 in favour to the public universities but we cannot see no clear difference. Asderaki and Maragos (2012) explain that nearly every market-driven post-secondary education institution in the world is practising some form of social media marketing activity and Palmer (2013) observed a wide range of uses of social media while researching universities. This is supported by our qualitative interview where the respondents from both the public and private universities confirm use of Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and Instagram among others.

One of the reasons why the universities appear on the same base of SNS might be that they copy each other and basically cannot afford not to be there. The respondents mention that they review the trends on social media and then make a strategy built on that.

5.3 Volume

The public universities reached a total of 648 and therefore an average of 92.6 posts per institute on Facebook while the total posts on Twitter reached 1773 and a total of 253.3 post per institute. The private universities reached a total posts on Facebook of 263 leaving the average of posts per private institute on 87.67 while the use of Twitter reached a total of 472 posts with an average of 157.33 per public institute.

While analysing the data from universities in our observation we can not only see a big difference in the total amount of uploads between Facebook and Twitter but also a difference between the private and the public universities. Bélanger et al., (2013), mentions that one of the reasons why
universities use more Twitter postings, when compared to Facebook posts, could be attributed to Twitter posts being limited to only 140 characters, which makes it perfect for short or live feeds. In our observation we have seen examples where the universities have used Twitter when posting live from an event with a specific hashtag. This generated up to 20 posts within just a few hours which is something we have not observed on Facebook. Further we have also observed a high upload rate on Twitter when a university held a competition where a shortlist of nominated students were encouraged to promote the university in their own way on Twitter, tagging all their posts with a contest-specific hashtag. Through retweets, this generated conversation also on the university’s Twitter page. The respondents from our interview both stress the potential of Twitter when it comes to rapidly reach out with news, research and information is huge. These characteristics of Twitter use could be a contributing factor to the significantly higher volume of posts on Twitter, compared to that on Facebook.

5.4 Content

Observing the private universities’ Facebook traffic, we saw a wide range of content being posted. We saw significant volumes (>5%) of posts in most of our applied categories, the lowest being campus related posts with 4%. The types of content most frequently posted were related to events, prospectus, students, and research. The private universities produced a wide range of content also on Twitter. Similar to that on Facebook, we saw high volumes of posts related to events, prospectus, students, and research.

Among the public universities there were significant differences between how Facebook and Twitter was used. On Facebook we identified a wide range of content posted, similar to that of the private universities, with high volume of posts related to events, prospectus, students, and research. However, on Twitter the public universities only produced a significant amount of posts in three of the applied categories: Research, Faculty, and Events. In addition, content related to events occurred in only 15% of their posts, which is low relative to how they use Facebook, and how the private universities use both Facebook and Twitter.

Our findings support what Palmer (2013) found in his observation. He found that higher educational institutes apply social media in a wide use, including student recruitment, alumni communication, student services and communication. Davis et al. (2012) found a similar range of usage, but they also saw that universities’ prime use of social media was for communication information about the university to students. While we found a relatively high volume of posts related to student recruitment, categorised as Prospectus, the most prevalent type of content in our observation was related to events.

Linvill, McGee & Hicks (2012) performed a study of content in order to explain the way colleges and universities use Twitter as a communicational tool. In total, 1130 tweets from 133 US universities and colleges were analysed. This study showed that the main use of Twitter among universities is as news feed for the general population, rather than a channel to engage students. This is congruent to our findings that both the private and public universities had a significantly smaller portion of posts related to students and student recruitment on Twitter relative to Facebook. Additionally, our qualitative data support this. The respondent at the private university explained that they use Twitter mainly for posts regarding news and research, and that they perceived this to be the case at other universities as well. The respondent at the public university explained that even if their own usage is very fluctuating they have acknowledged Twitter to have great potential to rapidly communicate news.

Bélanger et al. (2013) explored what social media marketing strategies are applied among Canadian universities on their Facebook and Twitter pages. Their results revealed that Twitter is generally more used to carry conversations, while Facebook is preferred for university-initiated posting. This is supported by our observation as we saw that both the private and public universities share others content to a greater extent on Facebook, compared to Twitter. The averages of the private universities show us that 9% of the Facebook posts are shares, compared to 38% on Twitter. For the public universities, a slightly greater difference was observed, as only 4% of the Facebook
posts were shared, compared to 23% on Twitter. This shows us that the private universities share content to a significantly higher extent on both Facebook and Twitter.

5.4.1 What is being said?

In our empirical findings we can see that the neither the private nor the public universities are using their social media pages as a channel for direct marketing. While we could identify some variance between universities in terms of what was being said in the different categories no general difference between private and public universities was observed.

The universities rarely publish posts where they simply say they are a great university to study at, but rather showcase it. They communicate the success of their faculty, being elected for various awards, or contributing in important global discussions. They inform about their students’ success and achievements in projects and competitions. They showcase the success of their alumni, posting information about their esteemed work placements. When their internal research team make interesting discoveries, the universities publish information and links for their audience to take part of. The universities do not tell their readers what a wonderful campus they have, but rather demonstrate it with elegant pictures. This is the pervading theme throughout the universities’ social media communication, concluding that a lot of their social media communication can be classified as branding.

Bennett and Ali-Choudhury (2009) defined a university’s brand as a display of its features and a reflection of its capability to meet students’ needs, create trust in its ability to deliver certain type and quality of education, and thus help prospects make their decisions. They suggest three components adding up a university’s brand: (1) a collection of promises presented to the outside world concerning the brand’s benefits (high-calibre faculty, post-graduation job and career prospects, opportunities for in-campus socialization); (2) a set of distinctive features which define the brand’s inherent nature and reality (university’s market positioning, research and teaching orientation, module and programme range, campus safety etc.); and (3) an assortment aesthetic designations and external communications that describe the brand (name, slogan, logotype design).

In our empirical findings, we can identify posts relating directly to both the first and second of these components. We observed posts where the universities demonstrated the brand’s benefits (1), by showing the audience how competent the members of their faculty are, and communicating the success of their alumni. Additionally, we observed posts where the universities demonstrated their research orientation (2) by continuously providing information about their current internal research efforts and success. While no direct link to the third component (name, slogan, and logotype design) were made in the content of posts, the universities automatically display their university logo next to every posts they make, connecting their brand logotype to every point of communication on social media.

The findings of Khanna et al. (2014) show us there are five branding touch points which have high influence on students’ admission decisions: Soft and hard infrastructure; Alumni and student recommendation; Media influence; Placement opportunities; Fees and location. We can connect our empirical findings of what is being said among the universities to several of these touch points. To the first touch point, “Soft and hard infrastructure”, we can connect all the posts related to campus, and posts demonstrating the endeavours and success of the members of the faculty. To the second touch points, “Alumni and student recommendations”, we can connect all the posts with links to blogs where current students share their experiences from studying at the university. Relatively few posts can be connected to the third touch point “Media influence”, and most of these intertwine with touch point one and two. We identified a significant quantity of posts which can be connected to the fourth touch point, “Placement opportunities”, namely all the posts where the university demonstrated the success of previous students by posting information about their endeavours in business life.
5.5 Complementing traditional media

In our interviews the respondent from the public university said: “We already use social media more than traditional media when it comes to recruiting students although we would like to do more. We have totally left the traditional ads except for the catalog for student recruiting. The rest is made through personal meetings or Facebook and other social media sites”.

The respondent from the private university mentions: “We see an ongoing shift from traditional to digital media but have some doubts letting go completely. Although we have not used much traditional advertisement lately part from the prospectus. It is a bit safer and easier for the family to go through together at home. For example, we had an open seminar and missed the last day to put in an ad in the paper. We started and Facebook campaign and got a great hit rate. Many showed up and since this was our only channel used to promote the seminar we could really measure the traffic and its result. It is hard to say if it is cheap or not but it works!” Additionally, we have observed a high amount of posts directly linked to student recruitment (“Prospectus”) which indicates that social media in fact is used for student recruitment.

Both respondents mention social media when it comes to promoting events and gives indications that few traditional ads are being used. We have observed that posts related to events are one of the largest types of posts on Twitter and the largest on Facebook. We therefore see clear sign that social media plays a big role when it comes to promoting event for both the private and the public institutes and complementing the traditional marketing tools.

The respondents agree that social media, especially Twitter, has huge potential when it comes to reaching their audience with news, research and information of any sort. Further, we have seen similar indications in our observation as “Faculty” and “Research” reached high and very high amount of the total posts.

We see many indications that Social media is complementing and on its way to possibly replace the traditional marketing media all together. Many researchers agree that in order for social media to add value for the organisation, the sales unit has to be seamlessly integrated with the wider marketing unit (Cespedes, 1993; Guenzi & Troilo, 2007; Rouziès, 2005; Slater & Olson, 2001).

Andzulis et al. (2012) explain that the purpose of integrating social media into the marketing mix is not to replace the traditional methods, but rather to complement them or increase the value of the interaction with customers.
6. CONCLUSION

This final chapter provides answers to the research questions with aid of the empirical findings and analysis. This chapter includes conclusions and the implications of the study. At the end, suggestion for further research in this area is presented.

6.1 Conclusions

Social media marketing has been a controversial topic for several years, in research as well as in business life. It has been widely discussed what is the right approach for marketing different organisations in this modern media. Researchers find that the mode of application varies largely between different types of organisations and sectors. We identified a gap as no research had been performed exploring the ways in which Swedish universities adopt social media in their marketing efforts. Hence, this study was performed with aim to answer the following questions:

- How can the use of social media as a marketing tool by private universities in Sweden be characterised?
- How can the use of social media as a marketing tool by public universities in Sweden be characterised?
- Is there a significant difference in the way private and public universities in Sweden use social media as a marketing tool?

A smaller pre-study of a few universities’ social media practises allowed us to limit our study and explore characteristics of usage from a set of aspects. This resulted in the six following hypotheses:

H1: Private universities are active on a wider range of SNS than the public universities are.
H2: Both private and public universities use Facebook to a higher extent than Twitter in terms of quantity of posts.
H3: Both private and public universities prefer Facebook over Twitter when promoting events.
H4: Private universities produce own content to a higher extent than the public universities do.
H5: Private universities are generally more active on social media than the public universities are.
H6: Private universities are more direct in their marketing message on social media than the public universities are.
H7: There is no significant difference in terms of message-type distribution between the private and public universities.

In our study we found that there is no significant difference between private and public universities activity in terms of amount of social media sites adopted. The private universities averaged 6.7 social media sites, and the public universities 7. We consider this difference to be low enough to reject our first hypothesis.

With regards to our second hypothesis we saw similarities between the private and public universities in that they both post more frequently on Twitter than on Facebook. The private universities had a Facebook – Twitter post-ratio of 1:1.8, and the public universities 1:2.7. With this, we can reject also our second hypothesis.

When promoting events, both the private and the public universities use Facebook to a higher extent than Twitter. As Facebook has better built-in functions to support management of events, the acceptance of our third hypothesis is not surprising.

In this study, we learn that there is a significant difference between the extents to which public and private universities produce their own content rather than sharing that of others. The public universities produce 96% of their Facebook content themselves, and 77% of their Twitter content. However, the private universities self-produce only 91% of their content on Facebook, and 62% on
Twitter. With this, we can reject our fourth hypothesis, as the public universities are the ones which create the most of their uploaded content themselves.

Our collected data show us that the public universities publish an average of 0.51 posts/day on Facebook and 1.39 posts/day on Twitter. The private universities publish an average of 0.48 posts/day on Facebook and 0.86 posts/day on Twitter. It is evident there is a comparable level of activity on Facebook between the private and public universities. However, on Twitter, the public universities display a higher activity than the public. Aggregating the activity on Facebook and Twitter, we see that for every post the private universities publish, the public universities publish 1.41. This means the public universities are 41% more active in terms of quantity of published posts across Facebook and Twitter combined. With this significant difference, we can conclude that our fifth hypothesis is rejected.

In our observation, we have identified a mutual trait among the universities studied. We can see that all the universities are indirect in their way of marketing themselves, meaning they do not publish posts claiming they are a great university to study at, directly encouraging prospective students to apply, but rather showing their audience they have something good to offer. This is done through showcasing the success and achievements of their alumni, current students, researchers, and faculty members. As no difference in terms of directness between the private and public universities’ marketing efforts on social media was identified, we can determine our sixth hypothesis rejected.

When it comes to what type of content is being posted by the universities, we see that both the private and the public universities publish a wide range of content on their social media pages based on our pre-set content categories. Similar levels of width are observed between the public and private universities on Facebook. On Twitter however, the public universities only published a significant amount of posts in three of the categories, meaning they focussed their Twitter activities on publishing content related to their faculty, research, and events. Overall, we can see that the public universities are more focussed on faculty and research related posts than the private universities are, while the private are significantly more focussed on posts related to campus, events, prospectus, and students. In conclusion, there is a significant difference in distribution of message-type observed between the private and the public universities. With this, we can reject our seventh and last hypothesis.

Through the findings of this study, we have been able to test our hypotheses and answer our research questions. We have characterised both the private and the public universities’ use of social media as a marketing tool and identified several significant differences: The public universities tend to create more of their published content themselves than the private universities do; Public universities publish content with a higher frequency than the private universities do; public universities are more focussed on posts related to faculty and research than the private universities are, while the private focus more on posts related to campus, events, prospectus, and students.

Additionally, the extensive research already performed exploring the use of social media in other types of organisations allowed us to compare the findings of our study to what other researchers had found. Through this, we could confirm many of the findings in previous research to be true also in our study.
6.2 Limitations

This study was focussed on exploring how public and private universities in Sweden adopt social media as a marketing tool. The fact that only Swedish universities were studied limits the degree to which we can generalise our results to a global marketplace.

While the sample of posts observed and analysed was relatively large (n = 3156), only 10 universities were studied. In addition, only three of the universities studied were active in the private sector. This was due to a lack of universities active in the observed geographical area and given sector. Hence, the conclusions made concerning differences between private and public universities have a limited level of reliability. While the period of observation was extended to six months, there may still be seasonal factors, influencing the way in which the universities market themselves on social media. However, the six-month period was strategically chosen to represent a full academic year, including application and admission periods as well as holidays.

Additionally, we have only observed the universities’ behaviour on two social media sites. While Facebook and Twitter are the largest ones in terms of active users, there might be universities which are more active social media sites we did not study.

Furthermore, the content of the 10 Swedish Universities were observed and analysed based on a specific set of categories, resulting in possible significant characteristics being left unidentified.

With limited possibilities for wider generalisation, this study is expected to act as a support in further research in the field of university marketing on social media.

6.3 Further research

Based on previous research, reviewed literature and our performed study, we identified several areas which could benefit from further research:

- Performing the same study, on a wider range of social media than just Facebook and Twitter.
- Performing the same study on a different type of organisation, examining whether general differences between private and public sector marketing can be identified.
- Performing a more qualitative study through in-depth interviews with the universities social media marketing practitioners exploring the underlying factors to the differences identified.
- Performing a study exploring the prospective students’ views on the information communicated by universities via social media.
- Performing the same study, but on universities in a different country.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX

1 Interview guide

1.1 Interview guide English

1. Introduction
   a. Presentation of ourselves and the purpose of the thesis.
   b. Confirmation of consent to record the interview.

2. Background of the respondent
   a. Could you please tell us about your professional background at the university and your role?

3. The range of social media used by the university and the history
   a. Which social media are you actively using and how did it start?

4. Use of social media
   a. How do you use Facebook?
   b. How do you use Twitter?
   c. How do you use LinkedIn and other social media?

5. Social media as a marketing tool and difference between private and public.
   a. What is your thought of social media as a marketing and publicity tool? Is there any difference between private/public universities?

1.2 Interview guide Swedish

1. Introduktion
   a. Presentation av oss själva samt uppsatsens syfte.
   b. Bekräfta samtyckte om inspelning av intervjun.

2. Respondentens bakgrund
   a. Hur ser din bakgrund ut inom arbetslivet och din roll på universitetet?

3. Sociala medier vid universitetet och historian bakom
   a. Vilka sociala medier använder sig universitetet av och hur började det?

4. Universitetets användande av sociala medier
   a. Hur ser ert användande av Facebook ut?
   b. Hur ser ert användande av Facebook ut?
   c. Hur ser ert användande av LinkedIn och andra Sociala medier ut?

5. Sociala medier för marknadsföring och skillnader mellan private och publika universitet
   a. Vad är din uppfattning om Sociala medier som marknadsföringsverktyg? Och tror du det skiljer sig mellan privata/publika universitet?