

## **Social Media Marketing: Guidelines During a Global Crisis**

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Bachelor's Thesis  
Degree Programme in Business Service Solutions and Languages, Autumn 2020



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| <b>Degree programme</b><br>Degree Programme in Business Service Solutions and Languages   |  |
| <b>Report/thesis title</b><br>Social Media Marketing: Guidelines During a Global Crisis   | <b>Number of pages and appendix pages</b><br><b>33+8</b> |
| <p>Our world experienced unprecedented times in 2020 when the global COVID-19 pandemic started spreading from China. It took only a few months for it to reach Europe and other parts of the world, the pandemic forced societies to find ways to slow down and to stop the virus from spreading many countries ended up in partial or full lockdowns. This resulted in people having to spend more and more time inside their homes.</p> <p>Social media enables fast-paced many-to-many communication. It is an efficient way to reach consumers inside their homes, making it a perfect channel to be used for marketing in digital ages, but especially during a global crisis like COVID-19, which resulted in people having to spend more time indoors. The extraordinary methods countries had to take into force during the pandemic, clearly affected businesses. The objective of this thesis was to create guidelines through existing examples to be used in business-to-consumer social media marketing during a global crisis. This thesis aimed to investigate what type of social media marketing had been done during the start of the viral global COVID-19 pandemic. The example data was collected starting from March to October 2020 from the different social media platforms. The author chose social media marketing examples from different social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube. The examples were analyzed through qualitative content analysis. The analysis allowed finding the recurring themes from the examples; those discovered recurring themes were utilized to make the guidelines to social media marketing during a crisis.</p> <p>The thesis consists of a theoretical introduction to social media and social media marketing as well as relevant marketing and sociology theories. Followed by introducing the research methods used and the presentation of the social media marketing examples, and the analysis of said examples. The thesis ends in a discussion, introducing further research suggestions, and summarizing the whole research process.</p> |  |
| <b>Keywords</b><br>Social media marketing, business-to-consumer marketing, crisis, pandemic   |  |

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# 1 Introduction

Marketing helps determine and satisfy the needs of potential consumers. It is a pivotal function in any business. Businesses rely on their marketing efforts to be useful in order to be successful in their field. The marketing efforts can also be adjusted and tailored to survive through a crisis or a disaster. Marketing is a crucial part of crisis communication, specifically during the long-term recovery stage of a crisis. (Sarpong 2018, 105.) By the start of July 2020, there were 3.96 billion social media users worldwide, meaning that half of the world's population is now using social media. A 10 percent increase to last year's figures was suggested because of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, 40 percent of internet users globally reported spending more time on social media than ever before. (Kemp 2020.)

This research's current relevance is to tie the thesis's crisis theme to the ongoing global COVID-19 viral pandemic and its effects on social media marketing. The COVID-19 pandemic changed consumers' daily lives and their spending habits; generally, spending decreased on all industries, as the preventative measures were taken by governments to stop the spread of the virus increased. Amid lockdowns and quarantine, businesses had to adapt, figure out how to manage to keep afloat as the profits and resources began to shrink. Physical retailers and restaurants were closing, and traveling was suspended; the restrictions forced people to spend more time indoors. (Jones 2020.)

This thesis is a product-based qualitative content analysis of digital business-to-consumer marketing, emphasizing social media platform use. The research focused on social media marketing done by businesses and brands during a global crisis to determine what type of marketing was executed and how it was implemented. The recurring themes discovered from the existing social media marketing examples were used to create social media marketing guidelines during a crisis. As consumers become more information-hungry, the need for direct communication from the brands and businesses they follow grows. Brands that hope to keep their customers and ensure long-term growth should prioritize connections and focus on fostering those connections through social platforms. (Caravella 2020.)

After the introduction, chapter two starts with presenting the key concepts and the theoretical framework allowing the readers to familiarize themselves with the relevant information. Presenting social media, social networks, social media marketing, social media metrics, chosen social media platforms, and the theories about marketing and sociology. Chapter three introduces the research methodology, presenting the detailed research process, research tools, and the reasoning behind their choices. The social media marketing

examples presented in chapter four were chosen from different social media platforms from various business accounts. The author chose examples from different categories of service and from different countries to gain a broader perspective. The thesis ends with chapter 5, forming a conclusion and summary.

## 2 Key Concepts and Theoretical framework

This chapter of the thesis will introduce the key concepts and theoretical framework used in analyzing social media marketing attempts in a crisis focusing on the time of the COVID-19 epidemic.

### 2.1 Social Media & Social Networking

Social media is a computer and internet-based technology that allows sharing ideas, thoughts, and information via virtual networks and online communities. By utilizing computers, tablets, and smartphones, users can engage with social media. Social media has been described as the fastest-growing media in history; it is a continually changing and evolving web-based platform. (Dollarhide 2020; Richardson, Choong & Parker 2016.)

The 2000s were a defining moment in social media history; many social networking sites such as Myspace (2003), Facebook (previously called Facebook Harvard) (2004), and YouTube (2005) were founded and started gaining attraction. Individuals and organizations that shared the same interests were able to interact virtually based on social networks. (Edosomwan, Simeon, Prakasan, Kouame, Watson & Seymour 2011, 3.)

Social media can be divided into a framework of four segmented zones, as seen in the figure below.

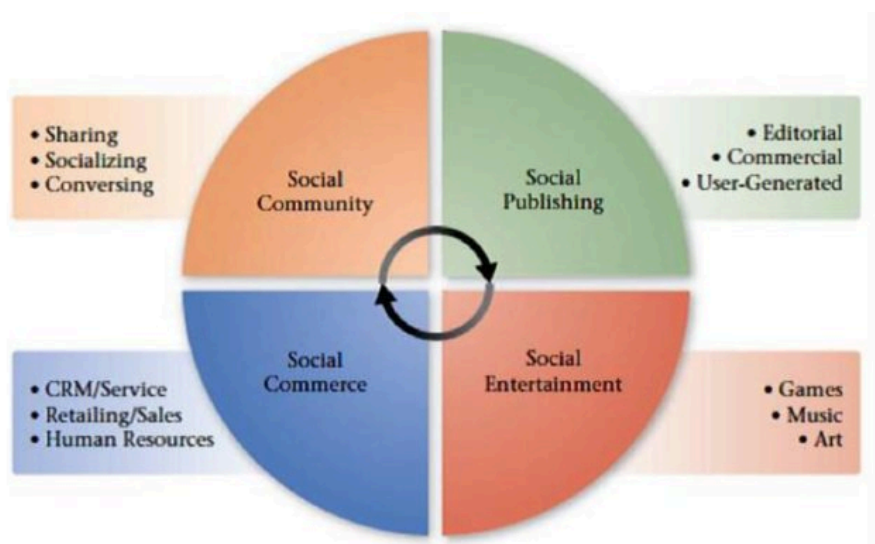


Figure 1. The Zones of Social Media Marketing (Solomon & Tuten 2018, 12.)

The first zone is social communities; these social media channels focus on relationships formed over social networks featuring two-way and multi-way communication. Examples of social communities are social networking sites, message boards, and forums.

The second zone is social publishing, which refers to producing and sharing content via social publishing sites. Social publishing channels include blogs, media sites, and news sites. Social entertainment falls into the third zone and includes social games, social music, video, and social television. Entertainment sharing is the focus of this zone, creating pleasure and enjoyment. The fourth zone is social commerce; the zone focuses on using social media in e-commerce, selling, and buying of products and services. (Solomon & Tuten 2018, 12-15.)

## **2.2 Social Media Marketing (SMM)**

"Social media marketing is the use of social media to facilitate exchanges between consumers and organizations." (Solomon & Tuten 2018, 31.) Social media platforms give marketers the possibility to use many marketing strategies and tactics to push content and have people respond to it. Social networks also provide easy and inexpensively detailed geographical, demographic, and personal information, which helps marketers customize their marketing messages to suit the customers' needs and wants. (Kenton 2018.)

As a crucial part of digital marketing, social media marketing is based on audience contribution and giving control of the content to the public; in most cases, marketers cannot fully control the conversation about their brand. As social media marketing involves many-to-many communication with brands and marketers being only one participant, it is vital to keep the audience interested and keep the conversation going. Successful social media campaigns emphasize building trust with the consumers; being real and authentic in all communication is of the utmost importance. (Baker, Barker, Bormann, Roberts & Zahay 2017, 14.)

To gain space in the media to share brand messages, marketers can utilize three core types of media: paid, owned, and earned. Paid media is defined as the paid placement of promotional messages through channels that can reach a more considerable amount of consumers. Owned media includes channels that the marketer controls fully; corporate websites and e-commerce sites serve as owned media. When it comes to earned media, it involves messages created at no direct cost to the marketer, such as shared social media posts, user reviews, and ratings. (Solomon & Tuten 2018, 20-21.)

### **2.2.1 Social Media Metrics**

Metrics are means used as a tool for marketers to analyze and compare results that relate to particular set goals. Using metrics, a marketer can find out if a marketing strategy has been successful. Without metrics as a tool, marketers cannot discover and assess the

usefulness of their marketing campaigns. When metrics are used in social media marketing, it is important to create them according to the marketing effort's objectives. Applying a framework to manage qualitative and quantitative metrics is beneficial; the three types of metrics used in social media marketing are activity metrics, interaction metrics, and return metrics. (Solomon & Tuten 2018, 352-355. 367.)

**Activity metrics** measure the courses of action taken and how much input the marketer set in the social media marketing activity. This allows the marketer to witness how the marketing tactics have fulfilled themselves and how they can be utilized in the future. Examples of activity metrics include quantitative measures such as summary views of content type mix and post rates, qualitative measures such as the resonance and appeal of the marketing campaign, and social media involvement. Activity metrics can also be used in assessing the role of paid media and how it is performing against the organic brand activity.

**Interaction metrics** display how the target market engages with the created social media content. This measures how social media users interact, form, and maintain a relationship with the marketed brand. Interaction includes quantitative measures like the number of followers, comments, "likes," and posts or content shared. Qualitative measures like engagement buzz about the brand, recommendations.

**Return metrics** are focused on the performance outcomes and results that support the brand's success rate, including return on investment, average new revenue per customer, and earned media values. (ibid. 352-355.)

According to Atherton (2020, 138.), the most used key social media metrics are as follows:

- Impressions: the number of times created content is displayed
- Reach: quantity of users that have seen the created content
- Engagement: user interactions such as views, comments, shares, and likes
- Click-through rate: quantity of clicked links leading to a website or other downloaded content by the brand
- Conversions: the number of users that have fulfilled the desired step (following a page, subscribing, or buying a product or service)



### **2.2.2 Social Media Platforms**

This subchapter will introduce the four social media platforms (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter) the author has chosen to include in this thesis. The platforms have been chosen because of their popularity and content versatility.

#### **Facebook**

Facebook was founded as a social networking service specifically for Harvard students in 2004; students could post photographs of themselves and personal information about their lives. The social networking service became very popular, and students from other American universities were allowed to join. In a few months after its launch, 250,000 students from 34 universities had signed up; that kind of engagement started to attract major corporations to pay for exposure on the site. In 2006, Facebook decided to open its membership beyond students to anyone over the age of 13. Facebook provided a new kind of direct consumer engagement on a larger scale that had never been seen before; more and more companies began using the social network for marketing and advertising. (Hall 2020.)

Facebook is the market leader in all the social networks; it was the first to surpass 1 billion registered accounts and currently has more than 2.6 billion monthly active users. Facebook competes with many other social channels; its features such as Facebook Live, Marketplace, and Campaigns make it a powerful contender to other e-commerce, news source, or advertising media channel sites. Facebook also has acquired ownership of the top two social messaging services in the world, WhatsApp, and Facebook Messenger. (Clement 2020; Solomon & Tuten 2018, 5.)

#### **YouTube**

YouTube was founded in 2005 based on the idea of ordinary people being able to share their so-called home videos to other users on the web site easily. YouTube gives its users a possibility to discover, view, and share videos and other content, making it a forum for users to connect, inform, and inspire others across the world. YouTube is also acting as a distribution platform for original content creators and advertisers. (Hosch 2020; YouTube 2019.)

YouTube currently has 2 billion active users monthly, making it the second most popular website globally. YouTube is available in more than 100 countries and 80 languages. According to YouTube data, one billion hours of video content is being watched through their site daily. On mobile devices alone, YouTube reaches more people in the US audience than any television network, in the 18 to 34 year old demographic. (Statista 2020;

YouTube 2020) The first YouTube video to hit a million views making it viral was a Nike ad clip of Brazilian football player Ronaldinho receiving a pair of Nike's Golden Boots. Nike was one of the first brands noticing YouTube's promotional potential. Since then, commercial brands and companies have been utilizing YouTube's platform for marketing purposes; YouTube has even played a part in hosting the US presidential election debates. (McFadden 2020; Iqbal 2020.)

### **Instagram**

Instagram is a photo and video-sharing social media application; it was first launched in 2010 for Apple devices. Later in 2012, it also became available for Android devices. The initial focus of the app was to feature regular photographs, specifically those taken on mobile devices. On the day of Instagram's launch, 25,000 users had created accounts; by the end of the first week, the app was downloaded 100,000 times. (Blystone 2020.)

After noticing Instagram's popularity, Facebook made a proposition to acquire it, reaching a final purchase agreement in April 2012. This acquisition turned out to be a marketers' dream; due to the close ties with Facebook, ads can be published simultaneously on each network using either of their ad manager programs. (Facebook 2012.)

Instagram currently has over 1 billion active users monthly, making it the sixth most popular social network worldwide. According to Instagram's internal data, over 500 million accounts are active daily, and over 200 million users visit at least one business profile per day. Also, sixty percent of users have said they discover new products on Instagram. (Statista 2020; Instagram 2020.)

### **Twitter**

Twitter is an online microblogging service for sharing short messages containing a maximum of 140 characters. The brief messages called "tweets" are to be shared with groups of recipients via mobile devices. Twitter describes itself as what is happening in the world and what is happening right now. The service was founded in 2006 but did not take off until the year 2009 when amateur journalists started using it to deliver instant news to the public about current incidents. After this development, Twitter quickly rose to become a valued communication tool in media strategies used in marketing and political campaigns. (Twitter 2020; Britannica 2020.) Twitter currently has 326 million active users monthly, making it the 15<sup>th</sup> most used social network globally. Daily, 145 million users use the service sending out roughly 500 million "tweets," almost 6 thousand "tweets" per second. (Statista 2020; Lin 2020.)

## 2.3 Social Marketing and the 4 P's

A sociologist named G.D. Wiebe (1951, 679), raised the question, "Why can't you sell brotherhood like you sell soap?" This proclamation referred to the marketing and sales of tangible products or services being more effective than the marketing of intangible social causes. Wiebe (1951) concluded in his research that the more a social campaign was similar to a traditional marketing campaign of a product or service, the more popular it was. Social marketing became a more known commercial tactic when Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman introduced it in the 1970s. According to Kotler and Zaltman (1971, 5), social marketing in the following way, "Social marketing is the design, implementation, and control of programs calculated to influence the acceptability of social ideas and to involve considerations of product planning, pricing, communication, distribution, and marketing research."

According to Huhn (2019), the focus of social marketing is a theory that focuses on marketing behavioral and social change in people using traditional marketing methods. The purpose is not to benefit financially but instead to raise awareness of current issues and causes. Instead of selling a product, social marketing pushes forward lifestyles and behaviors that endorse the common good in societal standards. Social marketing is commonly used to raise awareness in matters involving health and safety (anti-drug/anti-smoking campaigns), environmental causes (climate change, reducing the use of plastic), and social activism (anti-bullying, anti-racism campaigns). Social marketing campaigns are usually run by government organizations, non-profit organizations, and charities. (Huhn 2019.) As in traditional commercial marketing and social marketing, the focus is on the consumer, digging deeper into what the consumer needs and wants to see. In the planning process of a social marketing campaign, the elements referred to as the "marketing mix" and the four P's are commonly used as the basis of the marketing effort. The marketing mix is a term created by Neil Borden (1984, 7-12); the mix includes numerous focus areas as part of a broader marketing plan. Over the years, marketing professor and author E. Jerome McCarthy cultivated Borden's ideas of the marketing mix into the four P's: Product, Price, Promotion, and Place. (Weinreich 2006; Twin 2020.)

The four P's commonly used in social marketing campaigns are introduced in detail below.

### **Product**

When analyzing social marketing, in most cases, the product is not a physical object or offering. A large variety of products exists, ranging from tangible products to services, practices, and intangible ideas. The idea is to formulate the social change or cause as the

physical product to be sold. To have an applicable social marketing product, there has to be a current issue perceived as an actual problem by the public; the product offers a solution or means to create a solution eventually. In a social marketing campaign, the payoff to the public of the change or cause needs to be presented clearly and easily understood. (Weinreich 2006.)

### **Price**

When referring to the price of a social campaign, it is more subjected to what the consumer must do to gain access to the product. The consumer most likely will have to give up intangible emotional or psychological costs such as time, effort, or risk of criticism from others. Suppose the cost-benefit ratio is low for a participating individual. In that case, the social marketing campaign is more likely to fail, so it is important to keep the benefits more significant than its costs. (ibid.)

### **Place**

The place is how the presented product reaches the consumers. It is the whole cycle of distribution for a palpable product, where it is sold or places where it is distributed free of charge. When it comes to intangible products, the place aspect is harder to define. However, it refers to the decision-making process through which marketing channels the consumers are reached. In social marketing, it is vital to think of how and when the product or service will be conveniently available to the consumers. (ibid.)

### **Promotion**

The promotion aims to create and continue the demand for the product or service. Making it possible by using an integrated form of advertising, public relations, promotional strategy, and personal selling. In social marketing, it is important to do market research to determine the proper channels and activities that will promote the benefits of the social campaign and its hoped impact. (ibid.)

## **2.4 Social Exchange Theory**

When discussing social media and social media marketing, it is important to realize that users provide and create organic content. Social media users tend to want to receive information instead of creating it themselves. The users can be divided into four categories: watchers, sharers, commenters, and producers. This divided segmentation helps businesses to target the categories one by one. (BusinessTeacher.org 2018.)

Understanding social media users' behavioral reasons and thought process is crucial in finding the right path to marketing a service or product to consumers. Social exchange

theory introduces a framework that mainly uses a cost-benefit ratio to explain how humans communicate and how relationships are formed. Sociologist George C. Homans (1958, 606.), best sums up the theory by stating, "Social behavior is an exchange of goods, material goods but also non-material ones, such as the symbols of approval and prestige."

Reasons for engaging in social exchange have been hypothesized as the following: a gain in reputation and influencing possibilities on others, unexpected reciprocity of positive outcomes from others, straightforward altruism, and full-on direct reward. The first three reasons mentioned especially seem to hold importance in the social media presence of users. (Pan & Crofts 2012, 8.) The reciprocity phenomena are fundamental in social exchanges because humans tend to remember and give meaning to social exchanges and base the balance of their interactions on reciprocity. Substantial empirical evidence has been found through research that the reciprocity phenomenon especially exists on social networks, in this case, using Facebook as a study subject. Facebook users have interacted in the framework lines of the social exchange theory: the users have maximized the strength of their relationships and have been able to diminish the communication cost. Using Facebook's "liking" feature as an example, it is a very low-cost activity, making the social cost-benefit ratio of the social network very user friendly. (Surma 2015, 5.)

## **2.5 Brand Awareness**

Brand awareness is a marketing term that refers to consumers' familiarity with a particular product or service by its name. Brand awareness campaigns seek to introduce and familiarize consumers with new and revised products or services. Ideally, awareness of the brand may create aspects that differentiate the product or service from its competitors. By obtaining high brand awareness levels, sales are more prone to increase, and customers tend to choose a known product instead of an unknown one. (Kopp 2020.)

Aaker states (1991, 61), "Brand awareness involves a continuum ranging from an uncertain feeling that the brand is recognized, to a belief that it is the only one in the product class." The figure below is representing the four different levels of brand awareness, known as the awareness pyramid. The different levels of the pyramid help brands to establish brand awareness amongst consumers.



Figure 2. The Awareness Pyramid (Aaker 1991, 62.)

The pyramid shown above (figure 2) starts from the consumer being unaware of the brand and not recognizing it. The next level of the pyramid is brand recognition, meaning the consumer recognizes the brand from a selection of other brands. Brand recall refers to consumers having to name brands without any suggestions, just the brands coming to their minds without any aid. The brands that come to consumers' minds first using the brand recall technique have reached the pyramid's last level, top of mind status, meaning they are ahead of other brands in a consumer's mind completing high brand awareness status. (Aaker 1991, 62.)

## 2.6 Crisis

The World Health Organization (herewith, after referred to as "WHO") classifies a crisis as an event or series of events forming a threat to health, safety, security, or wellbeing of a community. Examples of issues leading to crises: armed conflicts between nations, epidemics, famine, and natural catastrophes. The word crisis in itself means disorder; a crisis is not normal or stable. When a crisis occurs, it usually is sudden, and it breaks the routines of any party involved. (WHO 2006a; Göksel 2008.)

### 2.6.1 Crisis Management

Crisis management involves identifying and dealing with possible threats to an organization, its stakeholders, and the means taken to deal with the possible threats. Sudden changes can occur rapidly globally; organizations tend to have to make important management decisions as the crises are about to happen or happening. Unforeseen crises such as terrorist attacks, data breaches, natural disasters, and pandemics can start a chain of loss in tangible and intangible costs to a company. Leading to decreasing sales, losing customers, and an eventual decrease in the net income of companies. Planning for the unexpected holds great importance in any social media strategy; in crisis, brands and

companies have the possibility to notably enhance or injure their reputation on social media. Crises have a big part in successful business planning; understanding how to deal with them and manage through one is a core leadership necessity. (Hayes 2019; Atherton 2020, 183, 187.)

### **2.6.2 COVID-19 & Pandemic**

WHO officially declared the outbreak of COVID-19 a pandemic in March of 2020, after there were 118,000 cases in 114 countries and 4,291 people lost their lives. At this point, thousands of people were also in critical condition in hospitals fighting for their lives. COVID-19 virus and the disease it causes were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. The virus spreads through human-to-human transmission. The most usual symptoms of COVID-19 are listed as fever, dry cough, and tiredness. (WHO 2020b; WHO 2020c.)

The Merriam – Webster (2020) dictionary defines a pandemic as “an outbreak of a disease that occurs over a large geographic area and typically affects a significant proportion of the population.” Pandemics happen when new viruses appear and reach around the world, and most people have not yet built an immunity to them. Most of the past viral pandemics have originated and started from animal influenza viruses.

To stop the spread of the pandemic, WHO recommended people to quarantine in case of virus exposure, isolate when ill with symptoms, and practice physical distance to avoid getting the virus from others. (WHO 2010d; WHO 2002e.)

### **3 Research Methodology**

This chapter will outline the research process of the thesis, as this thesis follows a mostly qualitative approach using online desktop research as the primary method. The author hopes to reach a deeper understanding of the sourced social media marketing material through content analysis and the theoretical framework used.

This thesis aims not to reinvent a social media marketing strategy or gather quantitative evidence; it aims to develop an understanding of what type of business to consumer social media marketing has been done during a crisis, hence the use of qualitative research. Only secondary data has been used in the research steps because the author believes that all the needed material for this research already exists and is available online and on the social media platforms that the research involves. The secondary data involves marketing theories used in the theoretical framework, literature, online articles, and interviews that the author has found about the discussed topics.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This thesis' research aims to observe and analyze the examples of social media marketing done during a crisis, focusing on the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic created unprecedented times for consumers and marketers; there are no existing specific social media marketing guidelines during a global pandemic.

The research questions were defined below to be used in business to consumer social media marketing.

1. What similarities and recurring themes were found in SMM campaigns or posts during the pandemic?
2. In what ways did the business-to-consumer (B2C) social media marketing efforts change during the crisis?

The thesis research project has been divided into three steps to reach a conclusion and a final product. Below are the research steps and overlay matrix defined and presented in detail.

##### *Step one*

Identifying key concepts and studying existing information and gathering relevant information about the subject to gain more insight, using social media marketing literature, and supporting online resources.



### *Step two*

Collecting examples of social media marketing done on chosen social media platforms from different brands and companies during the pandemic. Analyzing the recurring themes and patterns in order to create relevant and current guidelines.

### *Step three*

Combining all the gathered insight to create social media marketing guidelines during a crisis, analyzing the outcome, and further research possibilities.

Table 1. Overlay matrix

| <b>Research step</b>   | <b>Theory &amp; knowledge base</b>  | <b>Methods</b>  | <b>Outcome</b>   |
|--|---|---|--|
| Gathering and building the theoretical framework               | SMM literature, online research articles, statistics, former studies                              | Desktop study and secondary research                  | Theoretical framework  |
| Analyzing the SMM examples collected (from March 2020 onwards) | Social media posts on chosen platforms, applying the theoretical framework of SMM to the analysis | Content analysis, desktop study, social media metrics | Finding recurring themes, building guidelines through examples |
| Combining all the analyzed data                                | Analysis of outcomes  | Content analysis outcome                              | Creating the guidelines for SMM marketing during a crisis      |

## **3.2 Data Collection Methods & Data Analysis**

Data collection methods refer to the process of gathering information and observations from different sources to find solutions and different perspectives on a research problem. The collected data is utilized in testing hypotheses and outcomes of the research. The methods of data collection are divided into two categories: primary methods and secondary methods. (Dudovskiy 2018a.)

In this thesis, the chosen data collection method is secondary data collection. The author has chosen the four specific social media platforms and focused on gathering different social media marketing posts from them. The social media marketing data collecting process

began in March 2020 when the COVID-19 virus was declared a pandemic. Brands and companies quickly began reacting to the pandemic, informing their consumers about how the pandemic influences their services and creating new marketing tactics to still be able to reach consumers during difficult times. The most active time for posting on social media about the COVID-19 virus and its effects was through March to May 2020, so most of the collected SMM data is from during that time.

The author tried to choose the SMM data from different brands and companies, selecting data from different service fields and possibly having different targeted demographics. The selection criteria of the SMM data examples were thorough. The author only chose examples from legitimate, well-known brands or companies from all over the world to broaden the perspective. The most important part of the analysis was to find recurring themes, patterns, and overall similarities. To create a marketing guideline to be utilized in the future possible crises. Early on in the research and data collection, it became clear that finding SMM data with positive resonance from consumers was far easier than finding the negative. Usually, SMM posts that generate negative feedback and attention are taken down instantly, leaving little original traces on the platform used to post it. For the sake of research reliability and validity, the SMM data is only collected from the marketers' verified accounts. Brands and companies closely follow each other when dealing with crises, so the collected data was expected to be very similar, having only slight differences in the marketing messages. Hence, the research will focus more on the successful SMM data and building the guideline through the existing example SMM posts created.

### **3.3 Content Analysis & Secondary Data**

Content analysis is a research method used to discover the purposes, messages, and effects of communicated content of systematically collected data. (Luo 2020.) This thesis is focused on identifying and analyzing the patterns recurring in business to consumer (B2C) marketed web content and social media posts during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In content analysis, quantitative and qualitative data can be used by categorizing the themes and concepts from the collected research materials and analyzing the results. Content analysis can be used as a research method in a wide range of fields because of its many possible goals; it can be used in marketing, media studies, anthropology, psychology, etc. (ibid.)

Advantages of content analysis include (ibid.)

- Unobtrusive data collection
- Transparency and replicability
- High reliability

- Low cost
- Easy access

Data that has already been published in previous research is called secondary. The common sources to collect secondary data are books, research journals, online materials, and newspapers. Secondary data allows the researcher to gain insight and understanding without performing their own time-consuming data collecting, surveys, interviews, or experiments. So much secondary data is being produced and available around us that it is important for researchers to find the relevant and current data to study. The secondary data selection to be used in research acts as an important factor in reaching high levels of research reliability and validity. (Dudovskiy 2018b.)

Regarding this research, secondary data gave more insight and perspective and a wider scope of knowledge than primary data. Primary data would have little impact and possibly compromise the research with a level of subjectivity. Secondary data was more cost-effective and a way to access a vast amount of information in an instance. The secondary data was collected widely from the selected social media platforms, giving more overall input than collecting data primarily by individual interviews or surveys. The idea was to set a wide perspective with many gathered SMM examples and build guidelines by the set examples.

### **3.4 Reliability & Validity**

Research reliability refers to the consistency of getting the same answers and conclusions more than once, so if the research has high reliability, it means other researchers should be able to reach the same results using the same research methods. (Dudovskiy 2018c.) The author believes that this thesis research has high reliability because of the chosen methods, the use of content analysis, and secondary data. The data involved in the research has been carefully selected from current, relevant, and reliable sources, coming from online sites and platforms that the author uses in normal daily life too. Only the author's possible subjectivity as the only observer can pose a risk and cause the research to be compromised. The author believes that this research's point of view was very objective, so the risk of subjectivity was minor.

The validity of research refers to how consistently and how, in detail, the chosen research methods measure what they are meant to measure. Measuring validity is believed to be a mandatory part of any type of research. (Dudovskiy 2018c.) The measures taken to ensure this thesis research's validity include choosing an appropriate timescale to collect the SMM data; the data is collected from the time the author believes businesses were the

most active about posting and creating content related to the COVID-19 virus and the pandemic it caused. The single appropriate way to analyze the SMM data was through the desktop study and content analysis; this allowed a deeper understanding of the created SMM material. As the SMM data was gathered from the original source as secondary data, there was no risk of influenced or corrupted data.

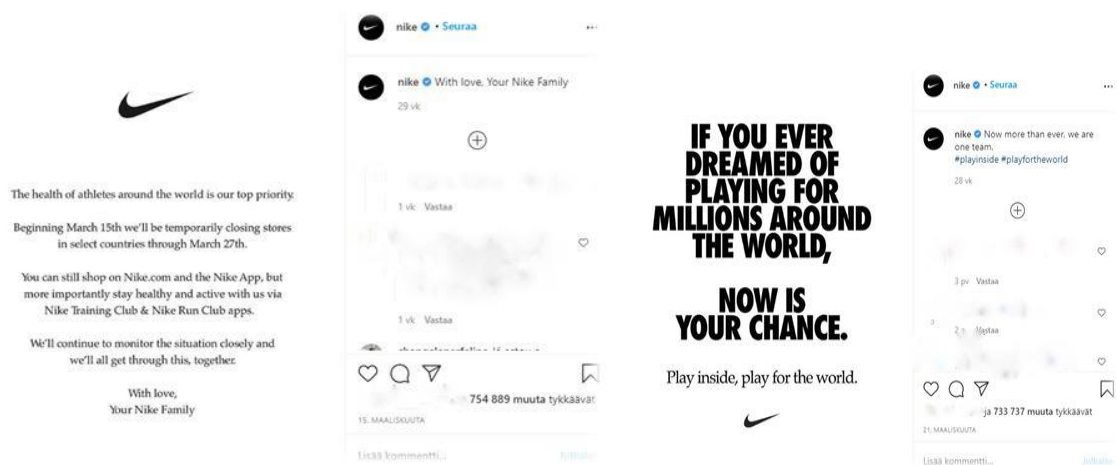
## 4 Research Findings and Analysis

This section will discuss and evaluate the research findings by presenting the selected SMM examples and dissecting their recurring themes and patterns. The examples are from different service fields, from brands and companies that work in the food industry to producing luxury items. Tracking and going through the social media presence of big and small businesses from various backgrounds gave a selection of different examples having contrasting approaches. Marketing and advertising are considered a crucial and obvious step in introducing and keeping a brand in the top of mind status to its consumers. This thesis research focused on discovering how marketing efforts were executed when the world turned upside down unexpectedly because of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

### 4.1 Case Examples on Instagram and Facebook

In this part of the SMM case examples, Instagram and Facebook were presented together because of their linked ad program, making it possible to post the same content on both platforms simultaneously.

#### Posts on Instagram



Picture 1&2. Nike 15 March 2020 & Nike 21 March 2020.

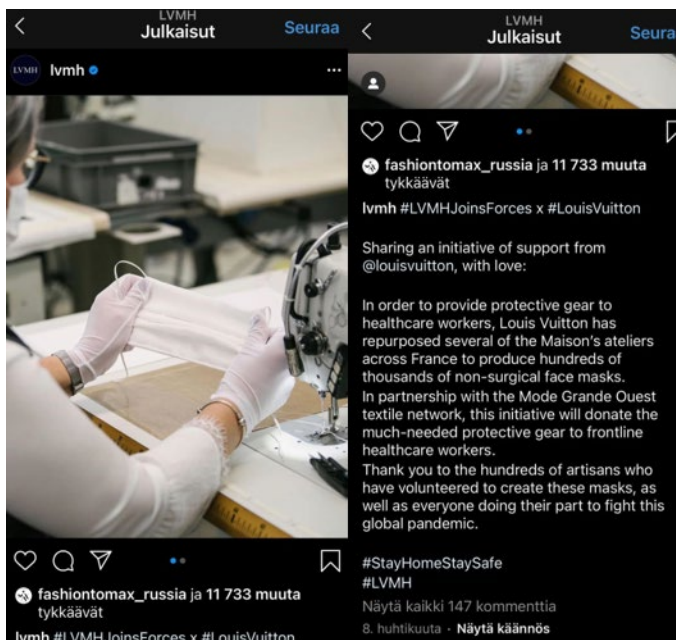
Sporting equipment corporation Nike chose a very traditional informative stance on letting their customers know what was happening, addressing themselves as "Your Nike Family." Nike's physical retailers were closing amid the pandemic, but it was business as usual in online retail. Nike still wanted to promote "staying healthy" and using its Nike Training Club and Nike Run Club apps as a tool to maintain health. Following up with a post roughly a week later with an inspiring, supporting message of social distancing using their signature fonts and the famous Nike "swoosh" logo. Nike's message is simple, but it suits

their brand and is leaning on the community building aspect, saying that by staying home, their customers can make a change in the course of the pandemic.



Picture 3. IKEA USA 20 April 2020.

Furniture retailer IKEA's post shows a clever way to spike up user engagement and social exchanges from their followers. Knowing that their customers have been spending more time home practicing social distancing apart from their friends and distant family due to the pandemic, a hopeful message of planning a future dinner party taps into emotions and leaves a positive connection to the company. A follower sees the post and tags more users from his or her circle, acting as a social exchange to show appreciation and, in this case, showing how much the user misses their friends or family.

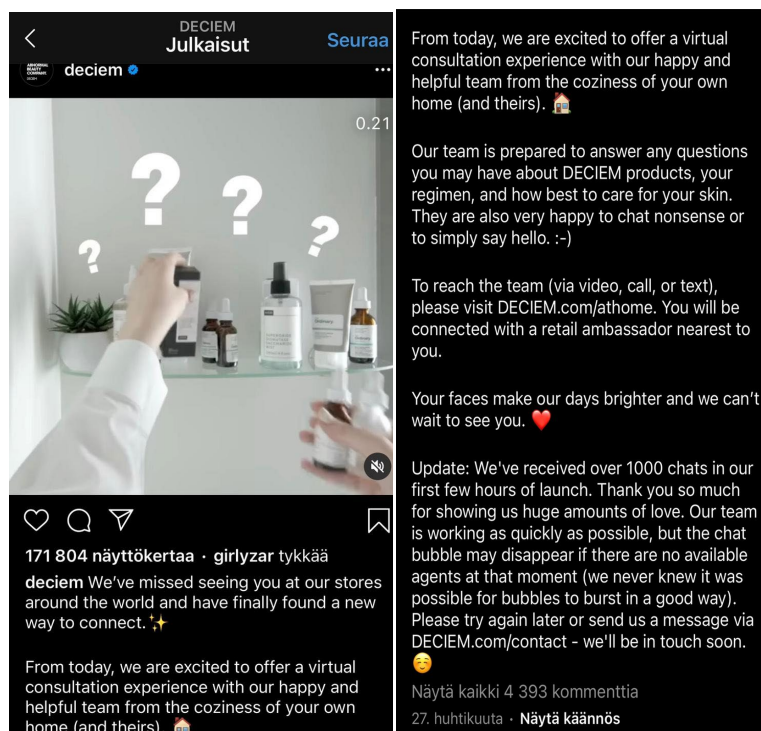


Picture 4. LVMH 8 April 2020.

Multinational corporation LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton posted many examples on their social media of how were their different brands helping fight the global pandemic. One example is presented here, luxury brand Louis Vuitton repurposed several of their production workrooms with volunteer artisans into producing non-surgical face masks as the global pandemic caused a shortage of them. This portrays a good brand message and shows that LVMH cares about the problem at hand, aiding its positive status in the consumers' minds.

Responding to a hand sanitizer shortage, LVMH also repurposed three of its perfume manufactories (Christian Dior, Givenchy, and Guerlain) into producing hand sanitizer instead; this happened already very proactively in March. (Kestenbaum 2020).

Kestenbaum commented in the Forbes magazine online article (Kestenbaum 2020), “A true luxury business has to fill consumers' needs at the highest level, and by converting to hand sanitizer manufacturing, LVMH is doing just that.”



Picture 5. Deciem 27 April 2020.

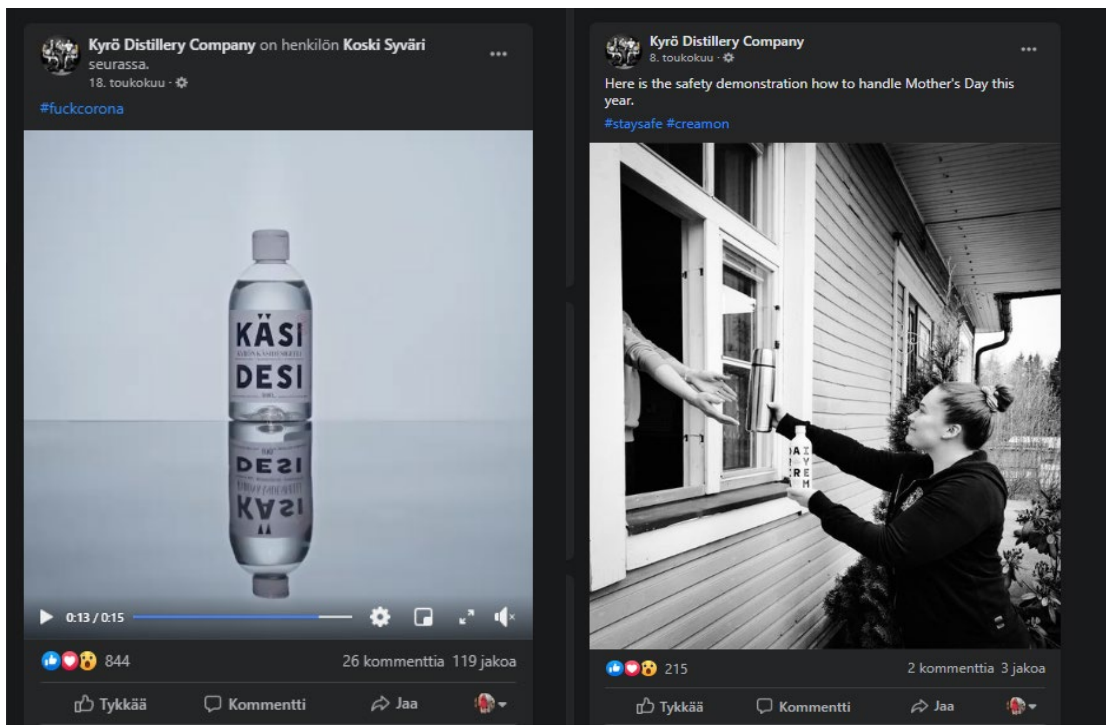
Beauty company Deciem approached the pandemic and the closing of its retailers in an innovative way of providing virtual consultations involving their products. Building and maintaining a relationship with their customer community safely turned out to be successful as they received over 1000 chat requests in the first hour of the launch.



Picture 6. Olehenriksen 18 March 2020.

Beauty brand Ole Henriksen's Instagram post, shown as an example, took a humorous approach. During the beginning of the pandemic, people prepared for social distancing and stocking up on essentials such as toilet paper (Mao 2020). The brands' approach to the toilet paper incident was to compare their products as similar essentials to their social media community, asking who is stocking up on their favorite Ole Henriksen products.

### Posts on Facebook



Picture 7&8. Kyrö Distillery Company 18 May 2020 & Kyrö Distillery Company 8 May 2020.



Finnish distilling company Kyrö also put their distillery to good use when they started producing hand sanitizer instead of their usual alcoholic beverages. This transition saved their employees from getting laid off and kept the production going. The idea was to produce hand sanitizer at a reasonable price or even distribute it free of charge to healthcare providers. According to Custobar's blog Kyrö's decision to start making hand sanitizers had a big societal impact; they were willing to do the right thing and adapt their business to the right course. (Custobar 2020.)

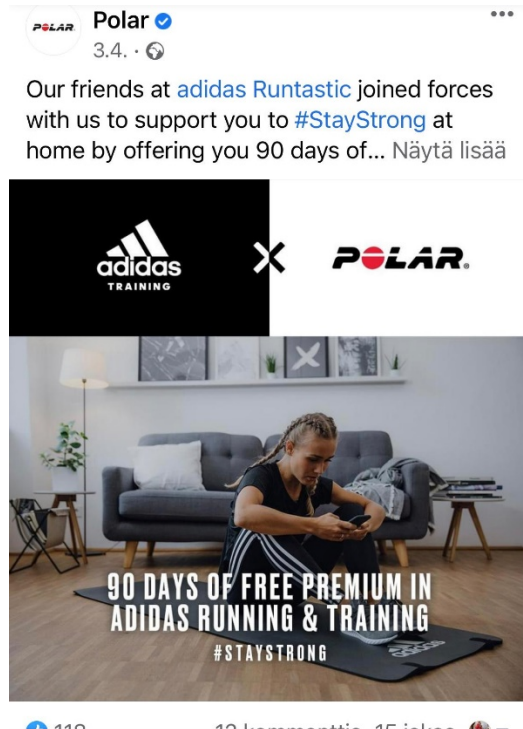
Kyrö also posted earlier in May about how to safely celebrate Mother's Day while practicing social distancing. This post touches on a very emotional subject about not being able to be close to our mothers and not being able to give gifts traditionally, showing an alternative way to celebrate.



Picture 9&10. Reissumies 9 April 2020 & Reissumies 2 October 2020.

Food corporation Fazer's long-standing rye bread brand "Reissumies" (translated to Travel man) markets itself as a compact travel snack. It has created a story of the "Reissumies" in the logo that travels around and eats the rye bread in the places he travels and wanders off to. During April, when social distancing and staying home was heavily recommended, the man in the logo was rebranded on social media as "Kotimies" (translated to Home man). This slight logo change was subtle and supported the right message of avoiding travel and sticking to the recommended restrictions.

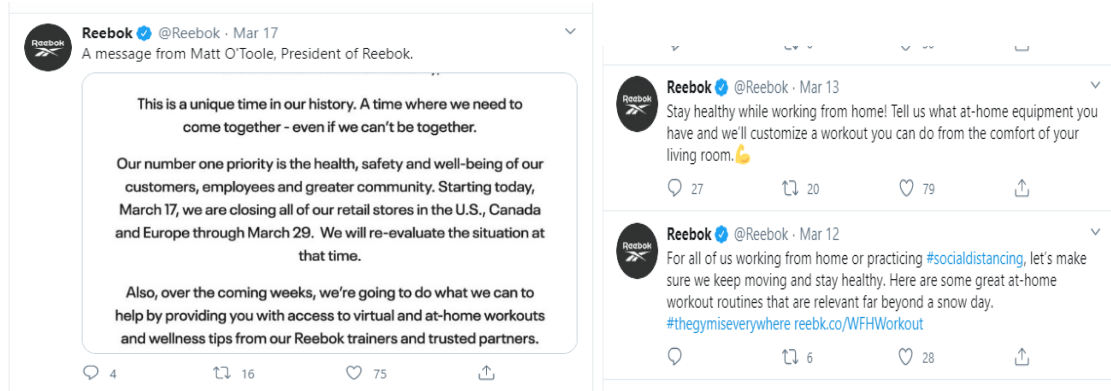
In October, the brand took a strong stance and added a surgical face mask on the face of its traditional "Reissumies" logo; this was in support of the recommendation to wear masks or face covers in public to fight the global pandemic. The new logo was marketed on social media platforms and printed on a million bread packets; during that same week, a promotional stand inside the Helsinki Railway Station was giving out rye bread and facemasks with the "Reissumies" logo for free of charge to people passing by. (Oululainen 2020.)



Picture 11. Polar 3 April 2020.

Sports training computer manufacturer Polar partnered with sportswear manufacturer Adidas is offering a running and training program free of charge for 90 days. This portrayed a supportive message of keeping fit and strong from both brands even during difficult times when the users' routines might change because of the global pandemic.

## 4.2 Case Examples on Twitter



Picture 12&13. Reebok 17 March 2020 & Reebok 13 March 2020.

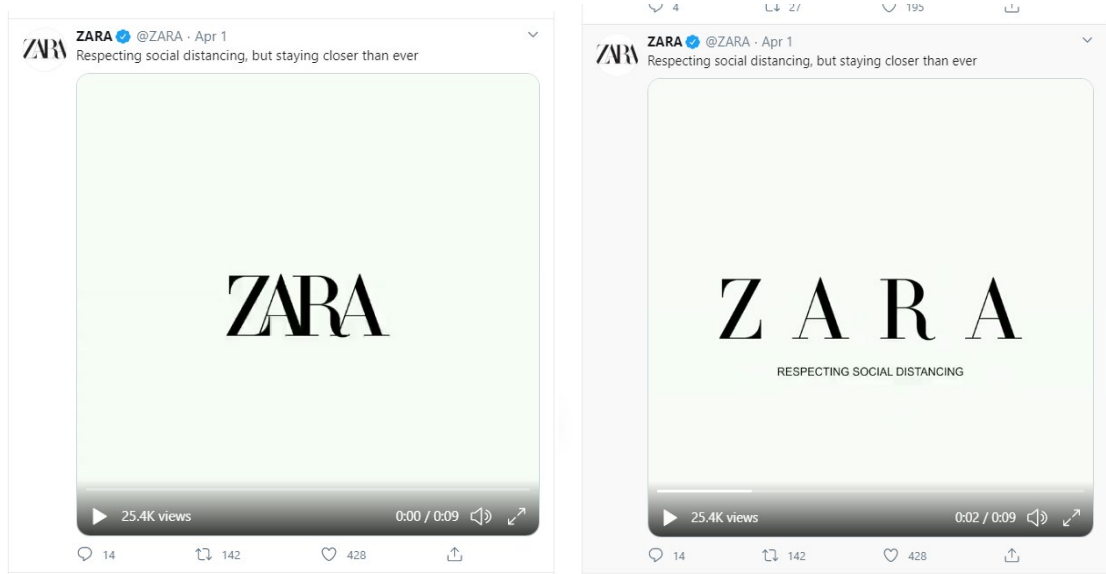
Sportswear company Reebok started reacting to the spread of the pandemic with a very active Twitter feed. First, they started promoting their home workouts by stating that the gym is everywhere; on the next day, a different tactic was used to uplift and create user engagement. Reebok's Twitter post from March 13<sup>th</sup> asked followers to comment on what at-home gym equipment was available to them, and Reebok promised to create a customized workout utilizing said equipment. A few days later, on March 17<sup>th</sup> Reebok tweeted out a message by their company president, this message had a personal touch, and it was informing customers about the closing of their physical retailers. The message was ended with a reminder that the Reebok trainers and Reebok team would still be active and available to help with fitness & wellness related tips and support.



Picture 14. McDonald's 11 March 2020.

As the global pandemic was spreading worldwide, health experts agreed that washing hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds was the best way to fight the spread of

the COVID-19 virus. This sparked an idea to create a website that would generate a hand-washing instructions poster that pairs any song's lyrics to a 13-step handwashing routine that would take 20 seconds. The website was called Wash Your Lyrics, created by William Gibson. (Locker 2020.) Fast food company McDonald's created an informative Twitter post using the Wash Your Lyrics website about the importance of hygiene and washing hands, including in their famous ad jingle "I'm lovin it." Encouraging their followers to wash their hands with soap and water while singing or thinking about the ad jingles lyrics is a clever way to keep the brand in mind and spread awareness about an important global issue.



Picture 15&16. Zara 1 April 2020.

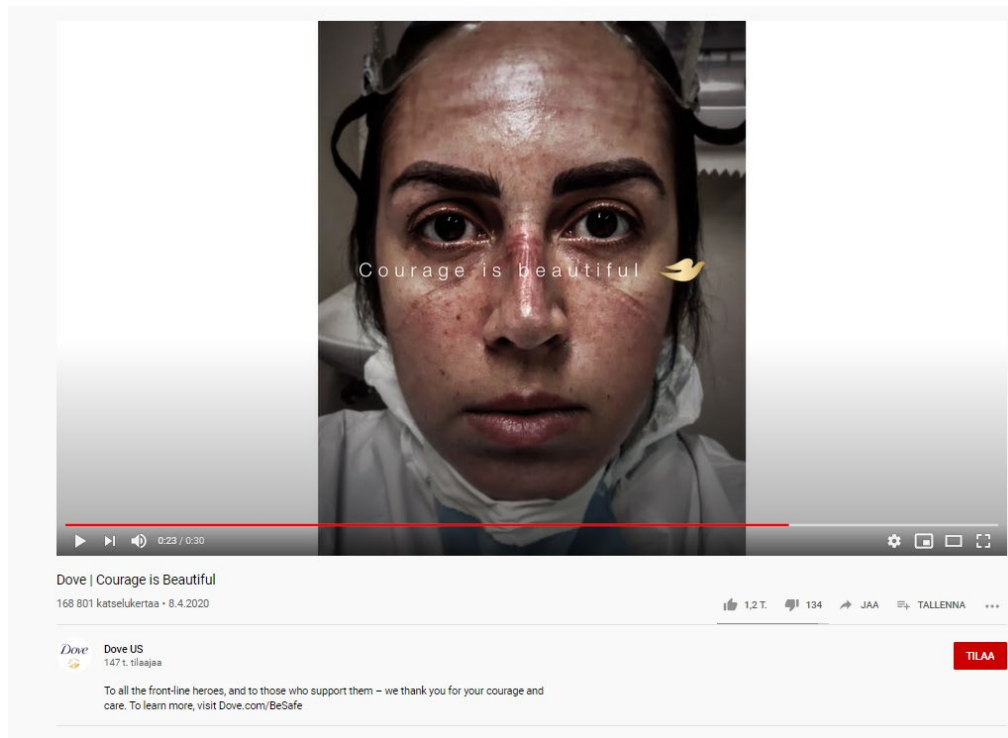
Zara, a clothing store brand owned by the Inditex clothing group, chose a very simple way to promote social distancing; this was the brand's only post mentioning the global pandemic in any way. By adjusting their logo lettering further apart, Zara showed their support for social distancing. Many of Inditex's brands followed this rather non-innovative approach on their social media feeds, including Massimo Dutti and Bershka.

### 4.3 Case Examples on YouTube



Picture 17. Burger King 9 April 2020.

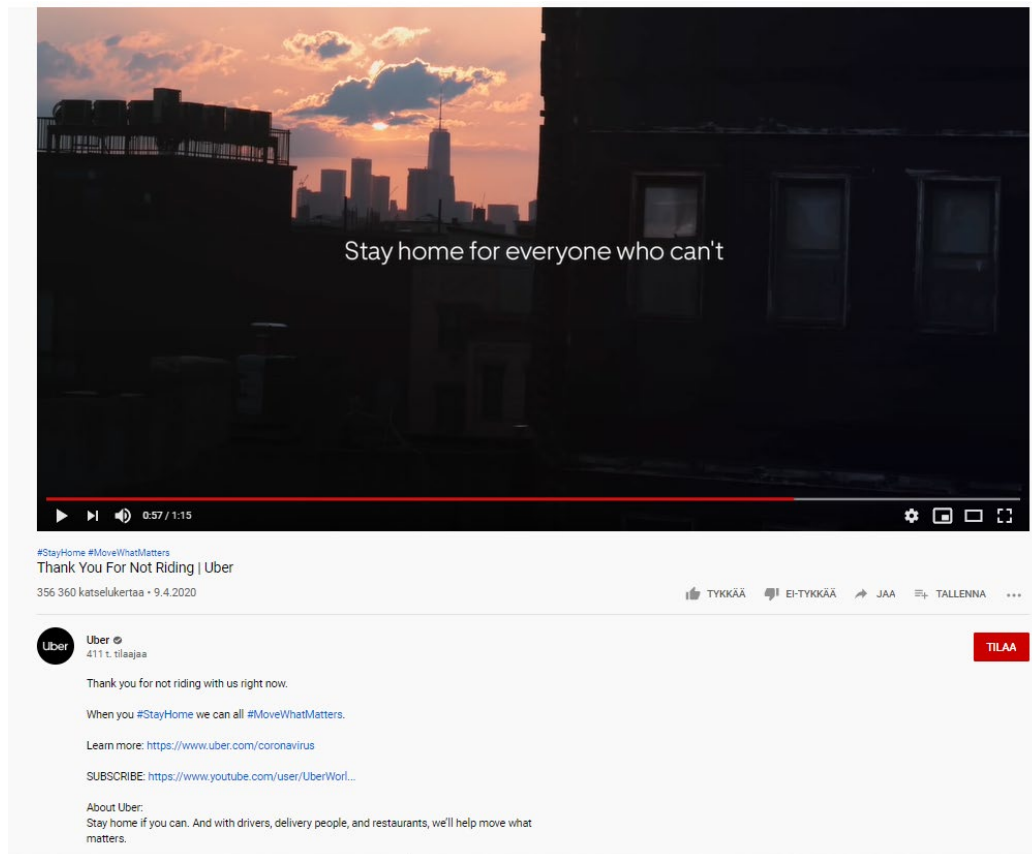
Burger King published a commercial on YouTube in April that supported the message of social distancing and staying home, emphasizing that essential workers were still working and that everyone else should stay home for them. The commercial's theme was patriotic; it implied that by staying in and ordering Burger King directly to your home, the customer is a "couch patriot," a hero for staying inside and on the couch. Burger King offered free delivery on takeaway orders in order to help people stay home and still be able to enjoy their fast food easily. In the same ad, Burger King also showed their support to nurses working the frontlines by donating food to them and collecting donations to the American Nurses Foundation.



Picture 18. Dove US 8 April 2020.

Unilever's personal care brand Dove already had an existing ad campaign called a Campaign For Real Beauty, showing regular people from all shapes and sizes using their products. The global pandemic added a new campaign idea to display frontline nurses in their element as the courageous workers they are. With the powerful slogan "Courage is beautiful," they highlighted nurses' faces and the toll that the protective gear caused to their faces. These real and raw YouTube video commercial snippets projected the harsh reality of the pandemic's impact on the healthcare workers, showing appreciation and support. Unilever also charitably allocated 100 million euros to fighting the pandemic's spread by donating soap, hand sanitizer, bleach, and food (Glenday 2020).





Picture 19. Uber 9 April 2020.

Transportation company Uber made a touching YouTube commercial showing people living amid the pandemic, how have they been keeping busy inside their homes in the socially distanced times. Uber thanked its customers for not riding with them and staying home for those who cannot, urging people to stop moving. Uber recognized how important it was for everyone to do their part during the pandemic; it committed to giving 10 million free rides and food deliveries to people in need worldwide, focusing on healthcare workers and seniors (Wieden+Kennedy 2020).

#### 4.4 Recurring themes in the SMM examples

In this subchapter, the author will present and break down the common recurring themes from the collected SMM examples. The first parts of the analysis results have been tied to the theoretical framework discussed earlier in this thesis's second chapter. After the results regarding the theoretical framework have been discussed, other risen similarities in the themes are presented.

The first discovered common theme was the utilization of social marketing. The purpose of social marketing is to market behavioral and social change through different selected marketing methods. Dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on consuming

behaviors lead to businesses using social marketing tactics to manage through the crisis. Companies and brands started taking social responsibility; this caused a notable shift in brands and companies' social media channels, making their posts more informative and focused on spreading information about how to fight the virus and encourage responsible behavior.

In the following examples, the author has identified social marketing as a common theme:

- As shown in the McDonald's example (picture 14), by demonstrating how to wash hands properly utilizing their commercial jingle, McDonald's is doing their part to fight the pandemic.
- Sport-related brands Nike (pictures 1&2), Reebok (pictures 12&13), and Polar (picture 11) raising awareness and encouraging their followers to maintain an active lifestyle in order to stay healthy and strong mentally by promoting their online services or modified home workouts.
- Showing an example of how to behave responsibly (socially distancing and wearing a mask or a face cover) during the pandemic through a brand's story, as Fazer portrayed through their rye bread brand "Reissumies" (pictures 9&10).
- Kyrö (picture 8) portraying an example of how to spend Mother's day safely in a socially distanced way.
- Zara (pictures 15&16) enforcing a message of social distancing through their social media posts.

The second common theme discovered in the SMM examples was that nearly all of them shared characteristics of social media community building and focusing on forming group mentality through encouraging social exchanges between users. Through those exchanges, organic content sharing rose, and the brand or company stayed in the consumers' minds. Regarding the social exchange theory discussed in chapter two, these examples listed below have been keeping the social exchanges' cost-benefit ratio in a good balance. The strength of the social bonds have been maintained, and the communication costs are kept very small.

In the following examples, the author identified social exchanges and community forming as a common theme:

- A company or a brand addressing themselves to their consumers as being family or one team, as seen on the Nike example (pictures 1&2).
- Ikea (picture 3) is using social exchanges as a tactic to create more engagement and activity on their post by asking their followers to tag the people they miss and would like to have dinner with.



- Burger King's (picture 17) approach to addressing their customers as the nation's patriots for staying home and ordering in their food is essentially portraying that by eating their food, the customer is saving their community.
- Ole Henriksen (picture 6) is sending a message that to their loyal brand community, their products are considered essential even in a state of crisis.

The third common theme discovered was the utilization of brand awareness. During a time of change in consumer habits, keeping a brand in consumers' minds remains vital. Through investigating the SMM examples, brands and companies had different approaches in keeping their brand relevant and in the top of mind status.

In the following examples, the author identified utilizing brand awareness as a common theme:

- Fazer's "Reissumies" (picture 10) printed their logo on the masks they distributed free of charge with the new bread packet, making the people that wear them walking advertisers of their brand.
- Kyrö (picture 7) making hand sanitizer bottles and keeping the logo and branding almost identical to their actual alcoholic beverages, so the customer still feels the connection to their original products.
- McDonald's (picture 13) using their brand and their commercial jingle in consumers' minds as they wash their hands.

In addition to the common themes listed above, the author discovered other similarities through the analysis. Brands and companies relied heavily on storytelling and putting action behind their social media posts. Innovative ways were created in order to reach customers from home, and altruistic efforts were portrayed.

In the following examples, the author identified other common themes:

- Brands telling stories and associating themselves with good actions
  - Dove and Uber (pictures 18&19) both using real people from real-life situations in their marketing campaigns, essentially thanking everyone for doing their part to fight the pandemic.
- Putting action behind their words and SMM campaigns
  - Making large charitable donations like Dove, Uber, and Burger King did.
- Showing innovation and ways to help in a crisis
  - Changing their production line from alcoholic beverages to hand sanitizers like Kyrö (picture 7) did or how LVMH (picture 4) repurposed some of their perfume and clothing factories to making hand sanitizers and face masks.

- Deciem (picture 5) started virtual skincare and product consultations in order to still be able to reach its customers amid a global pandemic.
- Showing altruism and transparency
  - Uber (picture 19) telling people not to use their service despite the financial losses it may cause them.
  - Nike (picture 1) and Reebok (picture 12) closing their physical retailers to protect their employees and their customers.

## 5 Discussion

This chapter discusses the following topics: conclusion, summary, further recommendations, and development, including the author's learning outcome.

### 5.1 Conclusion & Summary

Based on the qualitative analysis of the SMM examples from the different social media platforms, it was concluded that all the examples mentioned the ongoing pandemic and shared information about the COVID-19 virus and its effects. This thesis shows that social marketing has a large role in SMM amid a global crisis. The use of social marketing tactics was the biggest similarity occurring in the examples; encouraging behavior that would, in this case, help fight the pandemic and maintain overall health was a crucial part of the marketing efforts and social media presence. The results were not surprising as, during severe crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, the goal is to get through the pandemic, as it is mutually beneficial to the consumer and the business. The SMM examples showed that bigger brands and companies like Uber, Dove, and LVMH chose to focus on associating their brand with good actions, diminishing focus on financial profits. Portraying what actions they were taking to help fight the global crisis.

This thesis's main objectives were to find out what type of SMM was done during the COVID-19 pandemic, what similarities surfaced, and how did the marketing efforts change. To reach these objectives and a deeper understanding of the topic, the author chose the appropriate marketing and sociology theories to support the analysis results. The author believes that the chosen research methods were sufficient in answering the research questions and were enough to create the thesis product. The secondary data chosen was enough to form analysis and create the guidelines on what kind of SMM should be done during a crisis. The data chosen was trustworthy because it was chosen only from verified social media accounts. A deeper understanding of the SMM examples' success rate could have been further developed if it was possible to access the social media metrics of the businesses' social media accounts. Social media metrics could have enabled access to further information about content sharing rates and user engagement to see what resonated with users and what did not. This research holds high reliability because all of the research material was collected as secondary data; anyone can access it. Further research could entail observing more SMM examples during a longer period to see how the themes develop. As the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is ongoing, and the ripple effects of it will linger for a long time, further research needs to be done to understand what type of SMM is beneficial in the end. The research could be further developed by introducing primary data collection methods. Interviews with crisis marketing

and SMM experts, consumer surveys, and questionnaires could offer more depth and different perspectives.

## **5.2 Learning Outcome**

This thesis was a very beneficial learning experience to the author; it allowed researching a topic that was interesting and very current. The author had little experience in doing marketing research of any kind besides the work done through coursework. Being familiar with some of the concepts helped advance the thesis process, but additional learning and familiarization were required. Finding the appropriate theoretical framework to support the SMM examples analysis was time-consuming, but it ensured a solid, comprehensive base for the entire research. The whole process of finding the right information and sources improved the authors' research techniques; an improvement in the authors' academic writing skills was also noted.

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## **Appendices**

Appendix 1. SMM Guidelines: During a Global Crisis

# B<sub>2</sub>C SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING: Guidelines in a Global Crisis

“The Chinese use two brush strokes to write the word ‘crisis.’ One brush stroke stands for danger; the other for opportunity. In a crisis, be aware of the danger — but recognize the opportunity.” — John F. Kennedy (1959)

# Introduction

- These guidelines were created to provide a simple approach to navigating social media marketing during a crisis

## How to start?

- Follow official information channels
- Think about how the crisis affects your business activities
- Inform your customers and followers about possible preventative actions taken



## How to react pt.1?

- Think of ways your business can help fight the crisis
  - making charitable donations and producing products that are in shortage
- Associate your brand or company with good intentions
- Be truthful and transparent

## How to react pt.2?

- Focus on making a difference
  - even if it means temporary financial loss
- Innovate ways to reach your customer audience via social media platforms
- Think of how to make your customers lives more easy during a crisis

## What to post on social media pt.1?

- Encourage responsible behavior
- Engage users in commenting and sharing content
- Use subtle ways to keep your brand or company in consumers minds
  - make informative posts utilizing the brand logo
  - don't allow your brand to be forgotten!

## What to post on social media pt.2?

- **Focus on your community**
  - Listen and emphasize that everyone is working together through the crisis
- **Show action**
  - Post the things your business is doing to help with the crisis
- **Tell stories**
  - Tap into emotions and positivity
  - Present real people and create discussions