

# **Influence Of Online Marketing On Creating Brand Image Awareness**

By Using The Brand Turn To Zero

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Submitted to  
Prof. (FH) Fleerackers Tom M.A.

Handed in by  
Janine Lang BSc.

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## **Abstract**

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Nowadays, online marketing is becoming increasingly important not only in the B2C but also in the B2B sector, as evidenced by marketing budget expenditures. Companies pursue overarching goals involving visibility and attention from prospective customers in order to raise brand awareness and as a result, outperform increasing market competition. This begs the question of whether online marketing is appropriate for increasing brand awareness.

The master's thesis topic developed from both a personal as well as a professional perspective. Private research increased the author's interest in the topic of online marketing. Furthermore, brands, whose level of awareness needs to be improved, are becoming a more common topic of professional debates. In this way, the research of the current master's thesis was created.

The aim of this master's thesis was to discover how online marketing can be used to increase awareness of a brand. This will be analyzed by using the brand turn to zero, which offers consulting services for B2B customers in the sustainability industry. In this context, suitable and visible online marketing channels for increasing brand awareness are to be identified. In addition to this, suitable content for the company's own as well as paid online marketing channels need to be collected. Furthermore, the influence that online marketing has on creating brand image awareness is to be presented.

Research questions are defined in order to achieve the described objectives. Within the scope of the master thesis, one main research question, as well as three sub-research questions, are to be answered based on the literature as well as the generated output resulting from the empirical part. Eight existing B2B customers of turn to zero, originating from commercial and industrial sectors, were interviewed in the empirical part. The interview findings were evaluated by using qualitative content analysis according to Mayring.

Research results showed that targeted combinations of online marketing channels are contributing to increase brand awareness. In addition, the research succeeded in determining suitable communication content for various online marketing channels. Furthermore, the influence of online marketing could be investigated more closely in terms of brand image.

Keywords in English: Online Marketing, Online Marketing Channels, Brand, Brand Awareness, Brand Image

## Kurzreferat

Einfluss von Online Marketing auf die Markenbekanntheit - Am Beispiel der Marke Turn to Zero

Heutzutage gewinnt Online Marketing nicht nur im B2C-Bereich, sondern auch im B2B-Sektor zunehmend an Bedeutung, was sich auch in den Ausgaben des Marketingbudgets widerspiegelt. Unternehmen verfolgen übergeordnete Ziele, zu denen Sichtbarkeit und Aufmerksamkeit der Zielgruppe gehören, um die Markenbekanntheit zu steigern und sich so gegen die zunehmende Konkurrenz auf dem Markt durchzusetzen. Dies wirft die Frage nach der Eignung des Online Marketings zur Steigerung der Markenbekanntheit auf.

Das Thema der Masterarbeit hat sich aus dem privaten und beruflichen Kontext ergeben. Private Nachforschungen erhöhten das Interesse an der Thematik Online Marketing. Des Weiteren repräsentieren Marken, deren Bekanntheitsgrad erhöht werden soll, zunehmender Gegenstand von beruflichen Diskussionen. Auf diese Weise setzte sich dann der Forschungsgegenstand der vorliegenden Masterarbeit zusammen.

Im Rahmen der Masterarbeit soll herausgefunden werden, wie Online Marketing zur Steigerung der Markenbekanntheit eingesetzt werden kann. Analysiert wird dies anhand der Marke turn to zero, welche Beratungsdienstleistungen für B2B Kunden in der Nachhaltigkeitsbranche anbietet. In diesem Zusammenhang sollen geeignete sichtbare Online Marketing-Kanäle zur Bekanntheitssteigerung identifiziert werden. Zusätzlich dazu gilt es auch herauszufinden, welche Inhalte für die eigenen oder bezahlten Online Marketing-Kanäle geeignet sind. Außerdem soll dargestellt werden, welchen Einfluss Online Marketing auf die Schaffung des Markenimages ausübt.

Um die beschriebenen Zielsetzungen zu erreichen, wurden Forschungsfragen definiert. Im Rahmen der Masterarbeit soll eine Hauptforschungsfrage sowie drei Nebenforschungsfragen auf Basis der Literatur und dem generierten Output aus dem empirischen Teil beantwortet werden. Im empirischen Teil wurden dazu acht bestehende B2B Kunden von turn to zero aus der Gewerbe- bzw. der Industriebranche befragt. Die gewonnenen Erkenntnisse wurden anhand der qualitativen Inhaltsanalyse nach Mayring ausgewertet.

Die Forschungsergebnisse verdeutlichen, dass gezielte Kombinationen von Online Marketing-Kanälen zur Bekanntheitssteigerung der Marke beitragen. Darüber hinaus ist es gelungen geeignete Kommunikationsinhalte für verschiedene Online Marketing-Kanäle festzulegen. Außerdem konnte der Einfluss von Online Marketing auf das Markenimage genauer erforscht werden.

Stichwörter auf Deutsch: Online Marketing, Online Marketing Kanäle, Marke, Markenbekanntheit, Markenimage

# Table of Contents

<b>List of Figures</b>	<b>VII</b>
<b>List of Tables</b>	<b>VIII</b>
<b>List of Abbreviations &amp; Symbols</b>	<b>IX</b>
<b>1 Chapter of Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 Background, Problem Description &amp; Relevance</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.2 Purpose of Research &amp; Research Question</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1.3 Research Method</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1.4 Thesis Structure</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2 Brand &amp; Company</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2.1 Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1.1 Reasons for Relaunch of Brand Klimaneutralitätsbündnis 2025	5
2.1.2 Launch of new Brand turn to zero	5
<b>2.2 Vision &amp; Mission</b>	<b>6</b>
2.2.1 Vision of turn to zero	6
2.2.2 Mission of turn to zero	6
<b>2.3 Target Group &amp; Target Markets</b>	<b>7</b>
2.3.1 Target Groups of turn to zero	7
2.3.2 Target Markets of turn to zero	7
<b>3 Theoretical Foundation</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>3.1 Purchase Decision Models for B2B Customers</b>	<b>8</b>
3.1.1 Definition & Delimitation of Terms	8
3.1.2 Introduction	8
3.1.3 AIDA	10
3.1.3.1 Definition & Delimitation of Terms	10
3.1.3.2 Introduction	10
3.1.3.3 AIDA-Model	10
3.1.4 Customer Journey	12
3.1.4.1 Definition & Delimitation of Terms	12
3.1.4.2 Introduction	12
3.1.4.3 Customer Journey-Model	13
3.1.4.4 Touchpoints	18
3.1.4.5 Goals of Customer Journey Analysis & Benefits	19
3.1.5 Suitable Theoretical Model	20

<b>3.2</b>	<b>B2B Online Marketing</b>	<b>22</b>
3.2.1	Definition & Delimitation of Terms	22
3.2.2	Development of Online Marketing & further Consequences	23
3.2.3	Goals & Importance of Online Marketing	24
3.2.4	Media Model for Content Distribution (PESO-Model)	25
3.2.4.1	Definition & Delimitation of Terms	25
3.2.4.2	Introduction	25
3.2.4.3	PESO-Model	26
3.2.4.4	Relationship & Interaction of Media Types	32
3.2.4.5	Online Marketing Manifestation	34
3.2.5	Selection of PESO-Channels	35
3.2.6	Suitable Online Marketing Channels	37
3.2.6.1	Website	37
3.2.6.2	Social Media Advertising	42
<b>3.3</b>	<b>B2B Brand Image</b>	<b>43</b>
3.3.1	Definition & Delimitation of Terms	43
3.3.2	Identity-based Brand Management	44
3.3.2.1	Brand Identity	44
3.3.2.2	Brand Image	46
3.3.2.3	Relationship between Brand Image & Brand Identity	47
3.3.3	Importance of Brand Image	49
3.3.4	Riezebos Image Forming Process	50
3.3.4.1	Introduction	50
3.3.4.2	Components of Image Forming Process	50
<b>4</b>	<b>Research Design</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>4.1</b>	<b>Research Methodology</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>4.2</b>	<b>Qualitative Research</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>4.3</b>	<b>Expert Interviews</b>	<b>55</b>
4.3.1	Selection & Description of Interview Partners	55
4.3.2	Contact to Interview Partners & Research Setting	57
4.3.3	Interview Guideline	58
<b>4.4</b>	<b>Data Collection</b>	<b>59</b>
4.4.1	Transcription	59
4.4.2	Transcription Rules	59
<b>4.5</b>	<b>Data Analysis</b>	<b>60</b>
4.5.1	Qualitative Content Analysis	60

4.5.2	Summarizing Content Analysis	61
<b>5</b>	<b>Empirical Research</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>5.1</b>	<b>Content Analysis</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>5.2</b>	<b>Evaluation of Results</b>	<b>65</b>
5.2.1	Brand turn to zero	65
5.2.1.1	Perception turn to zero	65
5.2.1.2	Attention turn to zero	65
5.2.1.3	Importance & Visibility turn to zero	65
5.2.1.4	Information Research	66
5.2.1.5	Interaction Instagram Channel turn to zero	66
5.2.2	Attention	67
5.2.2.1	Website	67
5.2.2.2	Social Media Channels	67
5.2.2.3	Google	67
5.2.2.4	Brand Visibility	67
5.2.3	Brand Awareness	68
5.2.3.1	Website	68
5.2.3.2	Social Media Channels	68
5.2.3.3	Social Media Advertising	68
5.2.3.4	Google	69
5.2.4	Brand Image	70
5.2.4.1	Perception	70
5.2.4.2	Influencing Factor Website	70
5.2.4.3	Influencing Factor Social Media	71
5.2.5	Social Media Channels	72
5.2.5.1	General	72
5.2.5.2	LinkedIn	72
5.2.5.3	Xing	72
5.2.5.4	Facebook	73
5.2.5.5	Instagram	73
5.2.6	Social Media Advertisements	74
5.2.6.1	Advertising Measure	74
5.2.6.2	Limitation Target Group	74
5.2.6.3	Advertising Content	74
5.2.7	Website	76
5.2.7.1	Significance & Goals	76
5.2.7.2	Website Design & Content	76
5.2.7.3	Credibility & Trust	78
5.2.8	Purchase Decision Process	79
5.2.8.1	Influence Brand & Brand Image	79

5.2.8.2	Significance of Brand & Brand Image	79
<b>6</b>	<b>Discussion</b>	<b>80</b>
6.1	Answering of Sub-Research Questions	80
6.2	Answering the Main-Research Question	84
6.3	Limitation & Outlook	85
<b>7</b>	<b>Conclusion &amp; Recommendation for Action</b>	<b>87</b>
7.1	Summary Theoretical & Empirical Findings	87
7.2	Recommendation for Action for turn to zero	89
	<b>References</b>	<b>91</b>
	<b>Appendix</b>	<b>99</b>
	<b>Statement of Affirmation</b>	<b>104</b>

## List of Figures

Figure 1: AIDA-Model.....	11
Figure 2: B2B Customer Journey.....	17
Figure 3: Touchpoints across B2B Customer Journey .....	18
Figure 4: Overview of PESO-Model.....	26
Figure 5: PESO-Model .....	33
Figure 6: PESO-Model including Manifestations of Online Marketing.....	34
Figure 7: Brand Identity Components .....	45
Figure 8: Brand Image Components.....	47
Figure 9: Relationship Brand Image & Brand Identity.....	48
Figure 10: Image Forming Process.....	50
Figure 11: Process Model of Summarizing Content Analysis.....	61

## List of Tables

Table 1: Overview Interview Experts .....	56
Table 2: Category System.....	64

## List of Abbreviations & Symbols

Ad	Advertisement
AIDA	Attention, Interest, Desire, Action
B2B	business-to-business
B2C	business to-consumer
CO <sub>2</sub>	carbon dioxide
CJ	Customer Journey
CTA	Call-to-Action
DACH region	Deutschland-Österreich-Schweiz region
illwerke vkw	illwerke vkw AG
PEO-Model	Paid, Earned, Owned Media
PESO-Model	Paid, Earned, Shared, Owned Media
e.g.	for example (lat. <i>exempli gratia</i> )
etc.	et cetera
EU	European Union
n. y.	no year
SEO	Search Engine Optimization
SMA	Social Media Advertising
USA	United States of America
USP	Unique Selling Proposition

# 1 Chapter of Introduction

## 1.1 Background, Problem Description & Relevance

Climate protection and sustainability is a department belonging to the energy supply company illwerke vkw AG, located in Vorarlberg, which supports companies and organizations on their way to climate neutrality. This includes customized consulting and services as well as the sale of carbon offset projects to offset greenhouse gas emissions for business-to-business (B2B) customers in Austria, Northern Italy and Southern Germany.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the company's strategic focus on sustainability and climate protection, the Fridays for future movement has also raised awareness of climate issues. Furthermore, also the European green deal, which aims to establish the European Union (EU) as the first climate-neutral continent by 2050 created awareness, since all EU member states have committed to contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gases and to jointly reduce emissions by 55 % until 2030 compared to 1990. Therefore, companies are forced to adapt their strategies and contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gases since obligations are imposed to have certificates for greenhouse gas emissions, otherwise, noncompliance imposes a penalty payment of 100 euros per ton of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions.<sup>2</sup>

These developments, the missing lack of international comprehensibility of the brand Klimaneutralitätsbündnis 2025 as well as the various customer-specific requests demanded a realignment of the brand. For these reasons, the previously used brand Klimaneutralitätsbündnis 2025 was relaunched and in October 2021 the new brand turn to zero was introduced. This leads in fact to an adaption of the brand, the website as well as the appearance on all online as well as offline marketing channels. The aim of the new brand turn to zero is to increase awareness as well as to advise and support companies in serious climate protection. In Vorarlberg, the brand is already known, but the brand must be further strengthened in order to achieve the vision of establishing itself as the number one for climate protection services in Austria. In Austria, Northern Italy and Southern Germany the brand still has a low level of awareness, which is to be increased and disseminated more widely.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, reaching the target group is even more important in the future, since the competitive landscape is getting stronger. For this reason, companies must attract the attention of the target group in order to increase awareness of the brand and therefore compete against the competition. This clearly highlights the fact, that companies strive for a significant online presence. In this context, the communication of the right content, as well as the selection of the right marketing channels, will continue to be largely responsible for assertiveness against the competition on the market as well as for the company's success in the future.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> illwerke vkw AG 2021a.

<sup>2</sup> Europäische Kommission 2022; illwerke vkw AG 2021c, p. 9–11; Wirtschaftskammer 2022.

<sup>3</sup> illwerke vkw AG 2021c, p. 9–11.

<sup>4</sup> Albisser 2022, p. 31; Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 31–32, 64–76, 116; Chaffey; Ellis-Chadwick 2016, p. 11; Daou 2020; Dietrich 2020; 2021; Grote 2021; Halb; Seebacher 2021, p. 343; Holland; Flocke 2014, p. 827–828; Hopf 2021, p. 5–7, 11; Horstmann 2021, p. 596; Ives; Müllner 2021, p. 226; Immerschitt 2017,

## 1.2 Purpose of Research & Research Question

The aim of the master thesis is to investigate ways in which online marketing can be used to increase the level of brand awareness. The research idea arose from the fact that until now no studies and theories have been conducted that deal with the main research question of the master thesis. During the literature research several websites and blogs, which list the top online marketing channels to boost awareness, to promote the brand or to boost the brand image are discovered. However, scientific literature lacks regarding recommendations about which are the best online marketing channels for increasing the level of brand awareness for B2B consulting services in the sustainability industry.

The identification of this science gap has led to the main question of this master thesis, which is as follows:

**How can the online marketing strategy be used to create awareness around a specific brand for consulting services in the sustainability industry – by using the brand turn to zero?**

Therefore, the main-research question as well as the following sub-questions are intended to support the achievement of the objective of this master thesis. The following sub-questions are supporting the answer of the main-research question and should be also replied within the scope of this master's thesis.

- *What influence has online marketing on creating brand image awareness for consulting services in the sustainability industry?*
- *What are appropriate visible online marketing channels for a brand in the sustainability sector that offers consulting services?*
- *Which paid or owned channels are best suited for the communication of diverse content aspects for a brand in the sustainability industry?*

Answering these questions serves the purpose of the work, which is to derive recommendations for action for the brand turn to zero. If online marketing proves to be suitable for increasing brand awareness, the most appropriate online marketing channels for consulting services in the sustainability industry should be also identified. Additionally, the content to be communicated via the selected channels needs to be defined.

The company benefits from the master's thesis by having an analysis of the online marketing channels with regard to the development of the brand. This gives the company an overview of marketing channels that work well in the sustainability industry. With this knowledge, the marketing activity plan can be adapted for future activities to increase brand awareness for the brand turn to zero.

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p. 63, 86; Jallad 2019; Kollmann 2020, p. 396; Macnamara et al. 2016, p. 1–11; Mühlenhoff; Hedel 2014, p. 534; Schmitt 2019, p. 39; Wankel 2021, p. 282–283; Zöller 2019, p. 175–176.

### **1.3 Research Method**

The master's thesis is divided into two parts. In the beginning, the thesis starts with a theoretical part, which builds up the theoretical background through comprehensive literature research. This is followed by the empirical part of the master's thesis.

In order to answer the research questions, a qualitative research approach is used in the selection of the research method. For this reason, the data will be collected through semi-structured interviews. This interview form is characterized by the fact that the interviewer already has a list of questions and topics to be covered. However, in semi-structured interviews questions can vary from interview to interview.<sup>5</sup>

Normally, semi-structured interviews are conducted in a personal setting in the form of face-to-face conversations. Due to the current situation and the geographically dispersed interview partners, non-standardized interviews are conducted with the use of modern technology by real-time interviews via Microsoft Teams. This technology also enables the recording of expert interviews. The interviews are done with existing B2B customers of turn to zero on a one-to-one basis. Those customers are selected geographically dispersed and are located in Vorarlberg and Northern Italy in order to get different insights, opinions and perceptions. Eight interview partners are selected.<sup>6</sup>

### **1.4 Thesis Structure**

This master's thesis is divided into seven subchapters plus appendix. The first chapter is intended to present the problem description, to highlight the relevance, to describe the purpose of research as well as the main and sub-research questions. In addition, this chapter includes the presentation of the research methodology.

The second chapter provides more detailed information about the brand turn to zero, which is used for empirical research.

After that, the third chapter lays the theoretical foundation for the master's thesis. This chapter is divided into three major subchapters - Purchase Decision Models for B2B Customers, B2B Online Marketing and B2B Brand Image.

Followed by that, the fourth chapter deals with the research design and describes the qualitative research methodology in more detail. In particular, the chapter refers to the expert interviews and the subsequent data collection as well as the data analysis process according to Mayring.

Chapter five is intended to summarize all important findings resulting from the conducted interviews in the form of a category system.

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<sup>5</sup> Saunders; Lewis; Thornhill 2016, p. 391.

<sup>6</sup> Saunders; Lewis; Thornhill 2016, p. 391- 392.

In the following chapter six, the main-research question as well as the three sub-research questions are answered by bringing together theoretical and empirical findings. Furthermore, limitations and further research opportunities are pointed out.

Subsequently, the last chapter summarizes the most important theoretical and empirical findings and contains concrete recommendations for action to increase awareness of the brand turn to zero.

The appendix includes the interview guidelines in German and English, the transcribed expert interviews and a more detailed category system including all individual subcategories.

## **2 Brand & Company**

Since the empirical part of the thesis is based on a specific brand, it will be introduced in more detail at the beginning of the master's thesis. This chapter is intended to provide more information about the brand, the target groups, the target markets as well as the vision and mission of the brand.

### **2.1 Introduction**

The local energy supply company illwerke vkw has two locations in Vorarlberg and employs around 1,200 people. Furthermore, the company's main business is the provision of locally and sustainably produced electricity. The company exhibits core competencies in the operation of efficient energy networks and the generation of sustainable regional electricity through power plants. From an organizational perspective, the company is divided into the following four business areas - hydropower, supply and services, energy networks and tourism.<sup>7</sup>

#### **2.1.1 Reasons for Relaunch of Brand Klimaneutralitätsbündnis 2025**

In 2013, the brand Klimaneutralitätsbündnis 2025 was launched to achieve the goal of rendering all corporate activities of ten founding member companies climate-neutral until 2025. The number of customers has risen sharply over the years and various changes and requirements have necessitated a realignment and relaunch of the brand Klimaneutralitätsbündnis 2025 at the end of 2021. On the one hand, the Fridays for future movement in 2019 generated more awareness for climate protection. On the other hand, however, the company was also confronted with different customer requirements that demanded individual solutions. Furthermore, the company recognized the need for multilingual communication to address several customer groups from different countries. As a result, the company decided to relaunch the brand and change the name, because only German-speaking regions understand the brand name of Klimaneutralitätsbündnis 2025. At the end of 2021, an adaptation of the brand name to turn to zero was completed in the course of the relaunch process to guarantee international comprehensibility. Additionally, also the scope of services and offers was extended for supraregional expansion in Austria, Southern Germany and Northern Italy.<sup>8</sup>

#### **2.1.2 Launch of new Brand turn to zero**

The topic of sustainability takes on an important role in the company. For this reason, it is firmly anchored at illwerke vkw and allocated to the business area of supply and services. In this business area, the brand turn to zero is known as a partner for serious climate protection since October 2021. The new initiative represents transparency, trust, quality and credibility. Furthermore, the brand is intended to support customers on their individual way to net zero.

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<sup>7</sup> illwerke vkw AG 2021b.

<sup>8</sup> illwerke vkw AG 2021a; 2021c, p. 9–12.

Based on that turn to zero deals with consulting services around climate protection and reduction possibilities of greenhouse gas emissions for companies and organizations. Under turn to zero, footprint calculations are conducted for B2B customers to identify greenhouse gas emissions caused by the company and the products. These findings are used to derive individual recommendations for action as well as measures for reducing greenhouse gas emissions for the different companies.<sup>9</sup>

The unavoidable greenhouse gas emissions can be offset by various carbon offset projects, that comply with the highest standards. The international climate protection projects focus on offsetting greenhouse gases and additionally combine social and economic added value. These projects are designed to help people in poorer regions, improve glorified living conditions and build resilient habitats. Currently, business customers can choose between 21 different offset projects worldwide.<sup>10</sup>

## **2.2 Vision & Mission**

This subchapter deals with the definition of the terms vision and a mission. It is followed by the vision of the brand turn to zero and the measures to achieve those objectives are highlighted.

### **2.2.1 Vision of turn to zero**

The vision provides information about the direction a company or brand is aiming for in the future. Therefore, the vision also describes the long-term goals to be achieved in the future. In addition, formulated visions should be continuously adapted in relation to internal and external changes, because otherwise, a risk regarding ineffectiveness and the lack of acceptance exists.<sup>11</sup>

The brand turn to zero pursues the vision of a sustainable and efficient future which is not characterized by cutbacks or prohibitions. To achieve this vision, many individual and effective contributions of companies are necessary to reach the climate goals. Furthermore, the brand pursues the goal to establish itself as the number one contact for consulting, calculation, reduction and compensation of greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2026. This vision is pursued over the next five years in Austria.<sup>12</sup>

### **2.2.2 Mission of turn to zero**

The mission statement describes the purpose of the company or brand and also provides further information about the mission to be fulfilled, which subsequently leads to the achievement of the goal.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> illwerke vkw AG 2021d, p. 10,16.

<sup>10</sup> illwerke vkw AG 2021a.

<sup>11</sup> Schubert; Kast 2020 p. 32-33.

<sup>12</sup> illwerke vkw AG 2021a; illwerke vkw AG 2021c, p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> Hille 2017, p. 20-21.

The mission of turn to zero is "your climate goal is our mission". In order to achieve the goal of a sustainable future, the climate targets of the individual B2B customers represent an important point in this context. Furthermore, turn to zero can support them with various measures. The footprint calculations reveal potential for the reduction of greenhouse gases. These emissions can subsequently be reduced with suitable reduction measures. In addition, a customized climate and sustainability strategy for the company also contributes to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

Unavoidable greenhouse gas emissions can be offset by various carbon offset projects worldwide. Through this action plan, companies can achieve their climate targets and subsequently also contribute to a sustainable future.<sup>14</sup>

## **2.3 Target Group & Target Markets**

This subsection provides more insight into the customer structure and the different industries from which the customers originate. Furthermore, a country overview is provided in which the brand turn to zero is already present.

### **2.3.1 Target Groups of turn to zero**

Turn to zero has focused on small, medium and large companies some of them having international locations and thus having great potential to support carbon neutrality. The B2B customers are very diverse and originate from technical, technological, commercial, industrial, tourism and cultural sectors.<sup>15</sup>

Compared to business-to-consumer (B2C) markets, B2B markets are characterized by a higher complexity of products and services, a smaller number of customers and long-standing relationships between supplier and customer.<sup>16</sup>

### **2.3.2 Target Markets of turn to zero**

Vorarlberg accounts for the largest share of the brand's customers. At the beginning of 2022, the brand recorded 192 customers. These include customers from Austria, Northern Italy and South Germany who are supported by turn to zero on their way to climate neutrality. The brand aims to expand its existing customer base in Austria, Northern Italy and South Germany.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> illwerke vkw AG 2021a.

<sup>15</sup> illwerke vkw AG 2021d, p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> Kotler; Pfoertsch 2006, p. 21.

<sup>17</sup> illwerke vkw AG 2021a; illwerke vkw AG 2021c, p. 8.

### **3 Theoretical Foundation**

The theoretical chapter is intended to provide an overview about the topics of customer behavior, online marketing and brand image in order to form the theoretical foundation. Furthermore, theoretical content is structured in a way which ensures an understanding of the subject matter and contributes to answering the research questions. The theoretical part also highlights special characteristics of the individual topics in relation to the B2B area.

#### **3.1 Purchase Decision Models for B2B Customers**

The theoretical part begins with an analysis of the individual phases that the customer passes through and the online touchpoints until the final target action is performed. In this context, the AIDA-Model and the customer journey are presented as possible models to analyze the buying behavior of customers. At the end of the subchapter, a decision is made about which model is relevant for further consideration in the master's thesis.

##### **3.1.1 Definition & Delimitation of Terms**

According to the literature, various models exist to explain the buying behavior of customers. These models deal with the consideration of the customer's purchase decision in the individual phases.<sup>18</sup>

In the scope of this master's thesis purchase decision models refer to the behavior of B2B customers in the respective phases of the entire purchase decision process. The two concepts AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) and customer journey are used in the context of purchase decision models to describe the purchase decision behavior of B2B customers.

##### **3.1.2 Introduction**

Decades ago, companies had a much easier job since customers just need to be persuaded to purchase the products. However, today that is not enough because both customer behavior regarding the purchase decision process and the market situation have changed. Nowadays, a large number of competitors operate on the market and online retailing has also gained enormously in importance. In order to prevail against the competition, managing the potential customer during the purchasing process plays a decisive role. The potential customer must be guided through all phases, from initial contact to execution of the final action. This managing process is of importance for the company as each phase determines the further course of the buying process and therefore contributes to the conclusion of the final action.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, the purchase decision behavior of the customers needs to be analyzed in the individual phases of the purchase process. Afterwards, insights can be used to convert as many potential customers as possible into customers who execute the target action. However, to ensure this, companies must adapt the communication content to the needs of the target

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<sup>18</sup> Meffert; Burmann; Kirchgeorg 2015, p. 100.

<sup>19</sup> Zöller 2019, p. 175–176.

customer in each phase and select the right marketing channel for communication. In addition, this control of the potential customer, the communication of the right content as well as the selection of the right marketing channel will continue to be largely responsible for assertiveness against the competition on the market as well as for the company's success in the future.<sup>20</sup>

The most popular models for observing the customer's purchase decision behavior are the AIDA-Model as well as the customer journey. With reference to the models, AIDA is an acronym for attention, interest, desire and action and represents the original model, which has been used for over 100 years. The five-stage model customer journey, on the other hand, was historically invented later and is based on the principle of the AIDA-Model. Compared to the AIDA concept, this model already contains some innovations and optimizations. In the following, the differences between the two models for analyzing customer's purchase decision behavior will be briefly explained.<sup>21</sup>

The classic four-stage AIDA-Model deals with the consideration of the customer behavior in the pre-sales as well as the purchase phase. In contrast, the customer journey also addresses the post-purchase phases, which nowadays gained enormous importance for the company, as those phases contribute to customer loyalty.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, the AIDA-Model is merely the cornerstone of the customer journey, therefore this concept will be only briefly outlined. The customer journey is much more important in today's digital age, in which customer loyalty also plays a significant role. For this reason, the purchase decision behavior is described in more detail in chapter 3.1.4 by using the customer journey model.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Halb; Seebacher 2021, p. 343; Holland; Flocke 2014, p. 827–828; Hopf 2021, p. 5–7; Horstmann 2021, p. 596; Mühlhoff; Hedel 2014, p. 534; Zöllner 2019, p. 175–176.

<sup>21</sup> Flächenäcker 2019, p. 53–54; Meffert; Burmann; Kirchgeorg 2015, p. 718; Mörk 2021, p. 36.

<sup>22</sup> Eggers 2021, p. 192; Flächenäcker 2019, p. 53–54; Halb; Seebacher 2021, p. 344; Hopf 2021, p. 6, 33; Horstmann 2021, p. 596; Mörk 2021, p. 36; rankeffect GmbH n. y.; Schmitt 2019, p. 11; Zöllner 2019, p. 182.

<sup>23</sup> Hildebrandt 2018, p. 40; Mörk 2021, p. 36; Sens 2018, p. 6; Wenger 2021, p. 292–293.

### 3.1.3 AIDA

#### 3.1.3.1 Definition & Delimitation of Terms

The AIDA-Model visualizes the path of the potential customer. Starting from first interactions with the company up to the conclusion of the purchase.<sup>24</sup>

In the context of the master's thesis, the term AIDA is used to describe the behavior of B2B customers along the pre-sales and purchase phase in the digital world. Additionally, this model is used to explain the basic concept on which the original model is built.

#### 3.1.3.2 Introduction

The concept of the online marketing funnel forms the basis for the AIDA concept. The idea behind the online marketing funnel is to capture all prospects at the top level and continually sort them out with each subsequent level. This means that the funnel opening is very wide at the beginning, but during the channeling, this funnel becomes narrower and narrower. With this methodology, only those prospects remain who convert into customers and have a genuine interest to pay for the product or service.<sup>25</sup>

Overall, the first three phases of the AIDA-Model pursue the goal of increasing awareness of the company and the offered solutions, contributing towards a positive image and strengthening the customer's intention to buy. The final phase aims to convince the customer to perform the target action in order to generate profits for the company. The four stages are described in the following.<sup>26</sup>

#### 3.1.3.3 AIDA-Model

AIDA is a marketing theory, which was invented by the US American advertising strategist Elmo Lewis in 1898. This four-stage model refers to attention, interest, desire and action. Moreover, the model visualizes the path of the potential customer.<sup>27</sup>

In the following, the individual phases, their goals as well as characteristics are described in more detail and visualized in Figure 1.

#### Attention

The first phase aims to attract the attention of potential customers. In this context, the company, as well as the products, need to be promoted. To achieve this, a variety of marketing measures in the online as well as in the offline area are available. Especially in the B2B area, offline channels such as events, magazines or print mailings play a central role in raising awareness of the company. However, current trends toward digitalization and technological

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<sup>24</sup> Hildebrandt 2018, p. 40; Sens 2018, p. 6; Wenger 2021, p. 292.

<sup>25</sup> Flachenäcker 2019, p. 53–54; Mörk 2021, p. 36.

<sup>26</sup> Homburg 2017, p. 438; Massoudy 2021, p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> Hildebrandt 2018, p. 40; Sens 2018, p. 6; Wenger 2021, p. 292.

advances increase the importance of online channels in the future. Therefore, the attention measures a company focuses on will be increasingly targeted toward online channels.<sup>28</sup>

## Interest

The customer's interest has been aroused by the company's products or services. Now, the potential customer starts with more targeted research. In this context, the company can make an important contribution by communicating advantages of the products or services. This information provides clarity for potential customers about whether the need can be fulfilled or not. A characteristic feature of this phase is the change in communication between the company and the potential customer to two-way communication. Overall, the interest phase aims to turn the potential customer into a prospect and thus initiate the next phase.<sup>29</sup>

## Desire

Interest from the customer's side has already been aroused, but this phase aims to reinforce the prospect's need for the product or service. In order to achieve this, the company has to specifically arouse customer's desire and clearly communicate the added value of the solution. The brand and the unique selling proposition (USP) also make an important contribution to this process in order to ensure long-term and successful persuasion. The next phase is initiated as soon as the customer's demand for the offered solution is strong enough that the desire to use the solution arises.<sup>30</sup>

## Action

In the final phase of the funnel model, the prospect performs the target action and converts to a customer. This target action can be represented by the purchase of a product or the ordering of a service. As already mentioned, this target action is executed as soon as the customer's desire is strong enough.<sup>31</sup>

Figure 1 provides an overview of the four-stage concept of the funnel model. Beginning with attention, followed by interest, through desire and conclude with the final action.

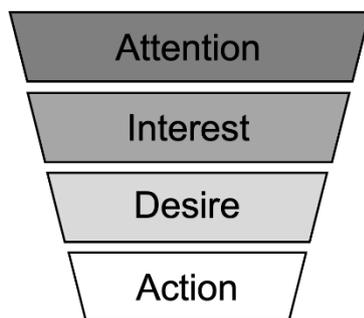


Figure 1: AIDA-Model<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> MarketingProfs 2019, p. 1; Milz 2013, p. 29; Wenger 2021, p. 292–293.

<sup>29</sup> Mörk 2021, p. 36; Wenger 2021, p. 292–293.

<sup>30</sup> Milz 2013, p. 29; Wenger 2021, p. 292–293.

<sup>31</sup> MarketingProfs 2019, p. 1; Wenger 2021, p. 292–293.

<sup>32</sup> Own illustration translated by the author based Wenger 2021, p. 294.

### **3.1.4 Customer Journey**

#### **3.1.4.1 Definition & Delimitation of Terms**

The term customer journey has been used for a long time in the field of classic marketing and there is also a generally valid definition. The designation customer journey refers to the journey a potential customer takes across different touchpoints with brands, companies, products, or services until the final action is performed. During this process, the customer passes various phases from the moment of the first consideration until the final target action is completed. The final target action can pursue different purposes and include, for example, the purchase of products, subscriptions to newsletters or inquiries.<sup>33</sup>

A uniformly valid definition specifically in the field of online marketing does not exist so far for the term customer journey, which originates from online commerce. A variety of different descriptions exist, whereby the German Digital Economy Association delivered the first explanation as the customer's internet journey. The customer is in contact with various online touchpoints, such as different online marketing channels during the digital interaction.<sup>34</sup>

In the context of the master's thesis, the term customer journey refers to the purchase decision behavior of B2B customers along the pre-sales, purchase as well as post-purchase phase in the digital world. The term also includes the possible contact points that a B2B customer encounters during the digital interaction along the purchase decision process.

#### **3.1.4.2 Introduction**

The customer journey has become very important in science and practice. Therefore, companies are also dealing with the challenge of understanding the customer journey tailored to their industry. In recent decades, the customer journey has been an important tool, especially in the business-to-consumer (B2C) sector. Moreover, the necessary leads were generated through trade fair appearances, events or telephone acquisition in the B2B area. Nowadays, the whole business became more complex, because new technologies enabled broader access to information and especially in the B2B area, a large part of preliminary research is conducted online. Therefore, the added value of the customer journey in the B2B area was underestimated for a long time. However, the tide has turned as the customer journey has gained importance in the B2B sector in recent years. Companies have recognized that also potential B2B customers need to be addressed through the right touchpoints by providing correspondingly relevant content in the individual phases of the journey.<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, the B2C and B2B customer journeys just differ by minimal individual characteristics, as they have become increasingly similar in recent times and therefore exhibit many commonalities. As in B2C, also in B2B there is ultimately a person behind the company who needs to be addressed. Therefore, the same requirements are imposed on the information search and even the search process is very similar, since people transfer their private habits

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<sup>33</sup> Holland; Flocke 2014, p. 827–828.

<sup>34</sup> Halb; Seebacher 2021, p. 342; Holland; Flocke 2014, p. 827–828.

<sup>35</sup> Halb; Seebacher 2021, p. 342–343; Verdure Medienteam GmbH n. y., p. 3,11; Zinkann; Mahadevan 2018, p. 157.

to their business life. In addition, not only B2C customers but also B2B customers exhibit an increasing number of touchpoints alongside the customer journey. A clear differentiation can be made between B2C and B2B target groups. Whereas the B2C customer group is heterogeneous and broader defined, the B2B target group is often represented by a smaller customer group with clearly defined requirements.<sup>36</sup>

### 3.1.4.3 Customer Journey-Model

The customer journey represents the further development of the AIDA-Model and deals not only with the stages and touchpoints the customer passes through before purchasing a product or service but also with those after. Ideally, the customer repurchases the product or service, shares the experience and recommends the product or service to other interested customers.<sup>37</sup>

The customer journey consists of five different phases – awareness, consideration, conversion, retention and advocacy. In the following, the correlations and differences between the two models, AIDA and customer journey, will be examined. The first phase of the customer journey is equivalent to the attention phase of the AIDA-Model. However, the consideration phase represents the combination of the two phases interest and desire of the AIDA-Model. The conversion phase corresponds to the action phase of the AIDA-Model. The two post-purchase phases are not covered within the AIDA framework and thus represent further development. Each phase of the customer journey is serving a different purpose and decides about the further progress of the journey. However, all phases of the customer journey contribute to a common goal, also known as the target action. Marketing should support the creation of positive experiences for customers, in order to guarantee customer's change into next the phase and finally the execution of the target action.<sup>38</sup>

In the customer journey, marketing pursues the fundamental goal of accompanying the potential customer along the purchase decision process. The relevant information needs to be provided in the individual phases, which enables the customer to take the required decisions. These marketing measures are intended to provide continuous support for brand development.<sup>39</sup>

In the following, the individual phases, their goals, characteristics as well as key figures for measuring success are described in more detail and are visualized in Figure 2.

#### Awareness Phase

At the beginning of the customer journey, the primary goal of the first phase is to capture the attention of the potential new customer and increase brand awareness to make sure, that the products and services offered by a company are perceived by potential customers. The awareness phase is characterized by the fact that customers have no specific need respectively the awareness of the need is not yet present. Google recommends beginning with the communication before the customer starts with the active search process. Following this advice is

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<sup>36</sup> Verdure Medienteam GmbH n. y., p. 10-12.

<sup>37</sup> Eggers 2021, p. 192; Hopf 2021, p. 6; Horstmann 2021, p. 596.

<sup>38</sup> Hopf 2021, p. 5–7; Horstmann 2021, p. 596; rankeffect GmbH n. y.

<sup>39</sup> Hopf 2021, p. 2.

beneficial to draw the attention of the customer toward the own product or service in the face of existing competition.<sup>40</sup>

From a marketing perspective, it is difficult to capture customer's attention by communicating product-specific or service-specific content, as there is not yet a concrete need. For this reason, general and informative rather than fact-based communication is the primary approach. The communication content should attract customer's attention and represent added value for the customer. Ultimately, B2B customers are also addressed by a person in the end and advertising content can arouse emotions and contribute to establish relationships. Because in these days, the relationship that the customer develops with the brand as well as the values and emotions conveyed by the brand take on a significant role.<sup>41</sup>

In the next step, the need is triggered by an event or impulse and the customer actively starts to search for information. This impulse can be manifold and triggered by a defective product, resulting from external influences or economic backgrounds. Additionally, marketing can support the research process by communicating the right information. Since the customer has no knowledge about possible solutions, the communication of informative content needs to be focused. Especially in the B2B area, the required products or services are more complex and therefore require a higher level of explanation. The next phase in the customer journey is initiated as soon as customers show a strong need to satisfy the desire. This need satisfaction is reflected by customers, who actively research for specific products or service solutions. The preliminary research is conducted almost exclusively online in the case of B2B customers via google search or checking out well-known specialist portals.<sup>42</sup>

The most common way to measure awareness is by metrics dealing with the reach of the company as well as the potential influence exerted by the company on social media. A variety of metrics exist, but those need to be carefully selected according to the touchpoints used by the company.<sup>43</sup>

## **Consideration Phase**

The previous phase has already aroused the general interest of the customer. This phase is characterized by the fact, that customers specifically seek information and seriously consider buying a product or obtaining a service. In addition, an active exchange of knowledge between the potential customer and the company can be seen in this phase, especially in the B2B sector. For this reason, the interest in relation to the brand or the company's offerings should be increased, because customers compare offers from various competitors and contrast them with their own needs. This can be achieved through targeted measures such as newsletters, blog articles, expert opinions, studies or product comparisons to support customers in the consideration process.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Hopf 2021, p. 11; Jallad 2019.

<sup>41</sup> Consoli 2010, p. 4; Halb; Seebacher 2021, p. 342–343; Hopf 2021, p. 11; Zöller 2019, p. 179.

<sup>42</sup> Halb; Seebacher 2021, p. 342–343; Hopf 2021, p. 11; Verdure Medienteam GmbH n. y., p. 5; Wenger 2021, p. 295–296; Zinkann; Mahadevan 2018, p. 160.

<sup>43</sup> Hopf 2021, p. 11–12.

<sup>44</sup> Hopf 2021, p. 19–22; Schmitt 2019, p. 10–11; Verdure Medienteam GmbH n. y., p. 6, 11; Wenger 2021, p. 295–296.

The interest of customers can be measured quite simply by means of a CTA (Call-to-Action), which is integrated into the provided information. Behind the CTA is a link, which allows customers to easily access the website for more information. The CTA can be also placed to guide the customer to the next stage of the customer journey. By analyzing these clicks, the number of customers who show a deeper interest can be determined.<sup>45</sup>

For this reason, the phase aims to strengthen customers' considerations in order to ensure that customers include company's specific offerings in the shortlist. Especially in the B2B area, this selection process takes longer since products and services are usually associated with higher investments. Therefore, the offers are extensively checked, compared and internally subjected to a vote by representatives from various departments, also known as the buying center. Whether the company manages to be placed on the customer's preference list depends strongly on the customer's perception. This customer perception refers especially to the extent of differentiating company's own products or services from other competitors on the market in the previous phase.<sup>46</sup>

Therefore, from a marketing point of view, the engagement of users needs to be increased in this phase with regard to the interaction of the provided communicative content. Thus, the engagement rate is used for verification purposes. This key figure indicates the extent by which the company has succeeded in persuading customers toward an active interaction.<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, the evolvement from a potential customer toward an informing customer has led to the fact, that the communication can be adapted to product-specific details such as price, technical aspects as well as added values. This product-specific information should be relevant, specified and fact-based, otherwise, the risk exists of customers, who switch to competitors with more targeted information provision. As a result, customers are buying the product or services from the competitors on the market. At the end of this phase, the customer takes the purchase decision, which is not necessarily followed by the initiation of the purchasing process. Now the next phase of the customer journey follows.<sup>48</sup>

## **Conversion Phase**

The goal of this phase is to persuade the prospective customer, who already took the purchase decision, to complete the buying process. Depending on the complexity of the product or service, the purchase phase can also take different amounts of time. Especially in B2B, this can take more time because the products or services often represent only one component of a large project. Therefore, multiple people are involved in the decision-making process as the decision is taken jointly by several departments. In this context, certain purchase incentives support the customer to take the final purchase decision and to complete the purchase

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<sup>45</sup> Hopf 2021, p. 19–22.

<sup>46</sup> Hopf 2021, p. 19–22; Schmitt 2019, p. 10–11; Verdure Medienteam GmbH n. y., p. 6, 11; Wenger 2021, p. 295–296.

<sup>47</sup> Hopf 2021, p. 19–22.

<sup>48</sup> Hopf 2021, p. 19; Wenger 2021, p. 295–296; Zöllner 2019, p. 180.

process. Companies can contribute in a supportive way by offering online demos or trial versions.<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, this phase is characterized by the completion of the purchase process, the conclusion of the contract as well as the execution of the payment process. The customer has to experience the simplicity and convenience of a smooth process during the completion of these components. Otherwise, a complicated process can still lead to a loss of customers, for example, if the desired payment method is not available or the support for the final steps is missing. If this is the case, customers prefer other competitors on the market, which offer simpler and less complicated closing processes. At this stage, the customer has one goal - to complete the purchase. Therefore, the company should focus on a straightforward and simple process, which guarantees a smooth procedure.<sup>50</sup>

In this phase, the focus is placed on the key sales figures, which measure the transfer from the purchase decision to the purchase process and finally to the conclusion of the purchase. For this purpose, the conversion rate is used as a key figure. This determines the number of customers who have performed the desired target action.<sup>51</sup>

Finally, the completion of the purchase process indicates that the customer has been convinced by the offered solution. The company which is able to cover the need of information successfully and also convince the potential customer of the offered product or service receives the contract. With this step, the company has reached an important milestone in the customer journey.<sup>52</sup>

## **Retention Phase**

This phase is intended to create a long-term relationship between the new customer and the company. After the purchase process is completed, the customer gains first experiences with the purchased product, the completed service and the after-sales support. Ideally, the customer's expectations regarding the product or service are met or exceeded and the company thus achieves a high level of customer satisfaction. In this case, the company possesses the potential for successful cross-selling or up-selling, as the customer has already experienced positive results with the existing solutions and is therefore open to new offers. The term cross-selling describes the sale of complementary products. Upselling, on the other hand, refers to selling similar products from the same area, which are of higher quality. This can be achieved through newsletters by introducing new products and services of the company or by sharing information about special offers.<sup>53</sup>

There are further strategies for achieving long-term customer loyalty. In the past, volume discounts contributed to customer loyalty. Nowadays, the focus is more on memberships whose members receive exclusive advantages in comparison to other customers. In the case of

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<sup>49</sup> Hopf 2021, p. 27–28; Verdure Medienteam GmbH n. y., p. 11; Wenger 2021, p. 295; Zinkann; Mahadevan 2018, p. 160.

<sup>50</sup> Zöller 2019, p. 181.

<sup>51</sup> Hopf 2021, p. 27–28.

<sup>52</sup> Schmitt 2019, p. 11; Verdure Medienteam GmbH n. y., p. 7.

<sup>53</sup> Flachenäcker 2019, p. 161; Halb; Seebacher 2021, p. 344; Hopf 2021, p. 33; Schmitt 2019, p. 11; Verdure Medienteam GmbH n. y., p. 8; Zöller 2019, p. 182.

satisfied customers, also cross-selling and up-selling contribute to customer loyalty. Therefore, a long-term relationship between the customer and the company is expressed, for example, in repeat purchases, new purchases of other products or completion of new services.<sup>54</sup>

In order to evaluate the success of this phase customer satisfaction needs to be examined in more detail. Measuring customer satisfaction requires a further parameter, the probability of recommendation. Net promoter score measures and evaluates the probability of recommendation. Therefore, the result can be used to assess the level of customer satisfaction.<sup>55</sup>

## Advocacy Phase

The highest added value for a company is represented through recommendations of products or services by satisfied customers. Therefore, the goal of the last phase is achieved when customers recommend purchased products or services to other business partners and colleagues out of conviction and satisfaction. In this case, the company has the opportunity to optimize the recommendation rate by setting up so-called sharing buttons. These simplify the recommendation and sharing of specific information in business networks or rating platforms. By sharing their positive experiences with others in the network, potential new customers can be persuaded to purchase products or services from the same company.<sup>56</sup>

To evaluate the functionality of touchpoints for advocacy, various social media metrics are used. In this phase, the number of increasing online ratings and recommendations or the rating values on rating platforms are used to gain further information for statements.<sup>57</sup>

Figure 2 illustrates the order of the individual phases of the B2B customer journey. Starting with the awareness phase, moving to the consideration phase, via the conversion phase, followed by the retention phase until the advocacy phase.

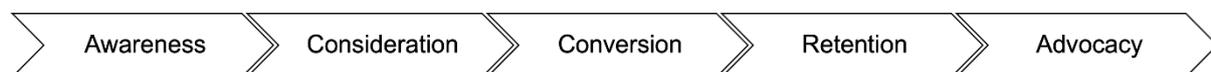


Figure 2: B2B Customer Journey<sup>58</sup>

A survey conducted among B2B marketers showed that 90 % of the respondents believe that a cohesive customer journey across touchpoints and channels have not only a positive impact on customer loyalty but also impact revenue growth.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Halb; Seebacher 2021, p. 344; Hopf 2021, p. 33–34; Schmitt 2019, p. 10–11; Verdure Medienteam GmbH n.d.; Zöllner 2019, p. 182.

<sup>55</sup> Hopf 2021, p. 33–34.

<sup>56</sup> Hopf 2021, p. 35; Schmitt 2019, p. 11; Verdure Medienteam GmbH n. y., p. 9.

<sup>57</sup> Hopf 2021, p. 35–36.

<sup>58</sup> Own illustration translated by the author based on Horstmann 2021, p. 596.

<sup>59</sup> Halb; Seebacher 2021, p. 344.

### 3.1.4.4 Touchpoints

Within the framework of the customer journey, the customer exhibits different touchpoints. A touchpoint can be described as a possible point of contact with the brand, product or service. However, the customer does not connect directly with the company or brand at all touchpoints. The reason behind is the distinction between direct and indirect contact points with the company. Direct contact points between a potential customer and the company, can simply be influenced by the company, such as its website. Indirect contact points are also important from the customer's side because they provide information about the brand, product or service. Those contact points make it difficult or even impossible for companies to exert a direct influence and include for example blogs.<sup>60</sup>

In terms of channels, it is essential to distinguish between online (digital) touchpoints and offline (classic) touchpoints. On the one side, digital touchpoints consist of apps, websites and newsletters. On the other side, the classic touchpoints include for example, trade fairs, catalogs or customer service.<sup>61</sup>

Ideally, these touchpoints can be sequenced for better clarity and understanding. The various phases of the customer journey can be used for this purpose. Figure 3 shows a collection of possible touchpoints of a B2B customer clustered according to the phases of the customer journey.<sup>62</sup>

TYPE OF TOUCHPOINTS		PHASES OF CUSTOMER JOURNEY				
		AWARENESS	CONSIDERATION	CONVERSION	RETENTION	ADVOCACY
ONLINE	DIRECT	Online ads Social media ads Advertorial Website	Website Social media Newsletter Landingpage	Onlineshop Apps Website E-Mail	App E-Mail Newsletter Helpdesk Service portal Social media	Mail contact Survey Social media Xing, LinkedIn
	INDIRECT	Google search Specialist portal Webinars	Blogs B2B, platforms Forums Search	Online market place		Rating platform
OFFLINE	DIRECT	Trade fairs PR	Direct mailing	Customer service/support Shop/branch	Customer service/support	
	INDIRECT	Word of mouth Recommendations				

Figure 3: Touchpoints across B2B Customer Journey<sup>63</sup>

Figure 3, provides an overview of all possible touchpoints in the offline as well as online areas. Due to the fact that this thesis focuses on online marketing measures, only the online touchpoints are relevant in the further course of the paper.

Most importantly, all touchpoints must harmonize with each other and have to be considered as a whole. The goal is not to optimize individual touchpoints, but to ensure a consistent and coherent brand presence across all touchpoints. This issue is addressed in the customer touchpoint management. For many companies, consistent brand presence represents a challenge which will be even more complex to master in the future. On the one hand, technological

<sup>60</sup> Verdure Medienteam GmbH n. y., p. 2, 18-19; Zinkann; Mahadevan 2018, p. 160-161.

<sup>61</sup> Verdure Medienteam GmbH n. y., p. 2, 18-19; Zinkann; Mahadevan 2018, p. 160-161.

<sup>62</sup> Verdure Medienteam GmbH n. y., p. 2, 18-19; Zinkann; Mahadevan 2018, p. 160-161.

<sup>63</sup> Own illustration translated by the author based on Verdure Medienteam GmbH n. y., p. 5-9, 19; Horstmann 2021, p. 596; Pradiani; Nirwanto; Subiyantoro 2018, p. 246; Wald 2020.

advances continue to generate new touchpoints which did not exist before. On the other hand, customers are more informed than ever before due to the multitude of touchpoints and the wide availability of information.<sup>64</sup>

Online marketing and the various channels enable companies to accompany and individually address customers throughout the entire customer journey. Nowadays, customers themselves decide about their media consumption and interaction. New technologies also enable target group-specific and media-specific placement of advertising content on various channels. This means companies can seize the opportunity and influence customer's purchase decision through targeted marketing measures.<sup>65</sup>

### **3.1.4.5 Goals of Customer Journey Analysis & Benefits**

With customer journey analysis, the customer path through the digital world is in the main focus. In particular, various advertising channels and touchpoints are to be examined more closely and analyzed specifically in which of the phases they exert a strong or weak influence on the target group.<sup>66</sup>

Touchpoint analysis is primarily about distinguishing the relevant touchpoints from irrelevant ones and finding out which ones are love points or pain points from the customer's point of view. The love points should be used and intensified, as they have an important influence on customer loyalty and word of mouth. The pain points, on the other hand, should be deactivated.<sup>67</sup>

In addition, the interdependencies of effects between different channels and contact points are also investigated in more detail. Furthermore, also the influence that marketing campaigns exert on each other is explored as a part of this analysis. The gained information is very beneficial for companies, as marketing efforts can be targeted to the most efficient channels at the different stages.<sup>68</sup>

Additionally, customer journey analysis pursues the goal of gaining far-reaching insights with regard to behavior and preferences of customers. In this context, user behavior, as well as the perception and reaction towards various online advertising measures are to be investigated in more detail. The findings gained from the analysis will be used to optimize messages and the application of different marketing channels in the individual phases.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Zinkann; Mahadevan 2018, p. 160–161.

<sup>65</sup> Mühlenhoff; Hedel 2014, p. 534.

<sup>66</sup> Holland; Flocke 2014, p. 828.

<sup>67</sup> Halb; Seebacher 2021, p. 345.

<sup>68</sup> Holland; Flocke 2014, p. 828.

<sup>69</sup> Halb; Seebacher 2021, p. 343–345; Holland; Flocke 2014, p. 828.

### 3.1.5 Suitable Theoretical Model

This chapter aims to select one of the two purchase decision models, AIDA or customer journey, for analyzing customer behavior in the B2B area. The selected model will be used as a reference in the further course of the master's thesis. Additionally, the reasons for the decision as well as the critical aspects that argue against the other model will be outlined in more detail. Additionally, also important aspects from the company's perspective are mentioned.

According to the literature research, the AIDA-Model has been increasingly criticized in the past and is no longer up to date after being used for over 100 years. After all, the comprehensive range of different products as well as the access to digital channels has led to more demanding, judgmental and better-informed customers. On the one hand, the classic funnel model AIDA is no longer able to address all touchpoints as well as drivers in the purchase decision process. On the other hand, the funnel-shaped structure is increasingly discussed because experts argue that this model shows only a low level of customer orientation. Therefore, this represents one of the main points of criticism, as customer loyalty takes on an important role nowadays and also in the digital future.<sup>70</sup>

In contrast, the customer journey, takes the new technologies, changes in customer buying behavior and marketing as well as the availability of digital channels into account. In contrast to the AIDA-Model, the customer journey addresses the post-sale phases, which are gaining significance, as they contribute to customer loyalty and thus achieve long-term customer retention. Additionally, it is of high importance that customers share their experiences with others from the business network, in order to convince new potential customers to purchase the solution from the same company. Product or service recommendations from satisfied customers represent the highest added value for the company. This strategy is the only way to ensure long-term success for a company because customer loyalty alone is not enough. For the aforementioned reasons, the customer journey is used as the preferred model for further consideration in the context of the master's thesis.<sup>71</sup>

Nowadays, the various online channels and sources enable a wide range of information to be obtained. Particularly in the B2B sector, preliminary information gathering almost takes place exclusively online. For this reason, the presence of the company at the beginning of the customer journey is increasingly important in order to be able to build the brand. Content with added value needs to be created alongside the customer journey, to bind potential customers to the company.<sup>72</sup>

Since the research question deals the most with the issue of increasing brand awareness and the company benefits, if brand awareness is built up at the beginning of the customer journey, the focus needs to be placed on the awareness phase of the customer journey.

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<sup>70</sup> Halb; Seebacher 2021, p. 344; Mörk 2021, p. 36–37.

<sup>71</sup> Eggers 2021, p. 192; Flächenäcker 2019, p. 53–54; Halb; Seebacher 2021, p. 344; Hopf 2021, p. 6, 33–35; Horstmann 2021, p. 596; Grunert 2019, p. 31; Mörk 2021, p. 36; rankeffect GmbH n. y.; Schmitt 2019, p. 10–11; Verdure Medienteam GmbH n. y., p. 8–9; Zöllner 2019, p. 182.

<sup>72</sup> Halb; Seebacher 2021, p. 342–343; Kamps; Schetter 2020, p. 25; Schmitt 2019, p. 16–17; Verdure Medienteam GmbH n. y., p. 3, 11; Zinkann; Mahadevan 2018, p. 157.

This is because higher brand awareness is associated with better opportunities for customers to perceive the solutions offered. Furthermore, successful brand awareness also indicates that products and services enjoy a good reputation on the market. Moreover, brand awareness positively affects brand loyalty, trust and subsequently purchase intention. Therefore, brand awareness can also have a significant impact on the buying process and the associated risk assessment.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Malik; Ghafoor; Iqbal 2013, p. 168–169; Jallad 2019; Tueanrat; Papagiannidis; Alamanos 2021, p. 343.

## 3.2 B2B Online Marketing

Following the chapter of the customer journey, now the topic of online marketing is covered in more detail by providing an overview of possible online marketing channels. This is accomplished with the use of the so-called PESO-Model. Based on the literature research, two sub-areas of the PESO-Model are forced. Within these sub-areas, the focus is set on the most important two online marketing channels for further consideration.

### 3.2.1 Definition & Delimitation of Terms

Marketing literature published after 2010 often defines the term online marketing very broadly and does not focus on precise boundaries. For this reason, a variety of different definitions exist in relation to meaning and classification of online marketing, as the delimitation is more difficult than ever before. In the following, the most popular definitions of two well-known authors are presented.<sup>74</sup>

*According to Lammenett 2015, online marketing includes all measures and activities which "aims to steer the visitor to one's own or a very specific internet presence, where a business deal can be initiated or directly concluded".<sup>75</sup>*

*According to Kreutzer 2018, the term can be defined as follows: "online marketing comprises the planning, organization, execution and control of all market-oriented activities that make use of mobile and/or stationary end devices with Internet access to achieve marketing objectives".<sup>76</sup>*

In the context of this work, online marketing is used as a term which encompasses all online marketing channels contributing to the achievement of marketing and business objectives. These objectives include increasing awareness of the company and the brands as well as drawing the attention of prospective customers to the company and the products and services offered in order to subsequently conclude a business deal. The focus of the analysis lies on relevant and visible marketing channels for B2B customers.

In the future, marketing will develop further in the direction of digital marketing and will be almost completely digital in some years. This process is supported by new technologies which emerge new possibilities. As a result, most end devices will have access to the Internet in the future and will also interact with people. For this reason, the term online marketing, as well as digital marketing, can be used synonymously in the future. But nowadays, both terms can still be distinguished from each other.<sup>77</sup>

Digital marketing can be used as an overall term to describe marketing activities which are performed or evaluated by means of digital tools. In contrast, online marketing is based on the support of Internet technologies in order to execute and evaluate marketing activities. The terms Internet marketing or web marketing can be considered synonymous with online marketing.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Lammenett 2017, p. 35; 2021, p. 40.

<sup>75</sup> Translated by the author based on Lammenett 2015, p. 31.

<sup>76</sup> Translated by the author based on Kreutzer 2018, p. 6.

<sup>77</sup> Lammenett 2021, p. 41.

<sup>78</sup> Lammenett 2021, p. 41.

### 3.2.2 Development of Online Marketing & further Consequences

Marketing has significantly changed during the last 20 years. The focus of marketing was initially set on communication via stationary and mobile telephony networks. An important milestone in the history of online marketing was reached by the use of the Internet from 1991 onwards. At that time, the Internet was still in its early stages, the possibilities were limited and included, for example, the international data transfer via email.<sup>79</sup>

Alongside the Internet, further developments in the telecommunications sector represent the main driver of online marketing. The increasing spread of mobile communications access and the high penetration rate of mobile devices with internet access has played a key role in this development process. Technology has evolved over the years, which resulted in many new possibilities and new degrees of connections between people around the world. Additionally, the Internet also created new developments and areas of application which did not exist before. Now, users have the opportunity to actively participate, upload their own content, share it with others or make changes by themselves. These new possibilities have been realized by the introduction of wikis, blogs and media sharing platforms.<sup>80</sup>

An important milestone in history was accomplished with global access to the Internet in 2017. More than half of the global population had access to the Internet for the first time. Developments in recent years showed an increasing number of users. From this point of view, the importance of online marketing in today's business world is obvious.<sup>81</sup>

Technological developments have fundamentally resulted in two major transformations - the change in media consumption and the change in customer expectations. Therefore, these changes also affect marketing and require a significant shift. This means that companies have to adapt their advertising measures according to the changed user behavior and expectations. Compared to traditional marketing, online marketing offers the possibility to monitor the behavior of customers in real-time. Furthermore, companies can benefit from the evolution of online channels, as they can focus on targeted communication for different customer groups. Additionally, communication via online channels is cost-effectively and offers the advantage of fast response time. For this reason, marketing investments have shifted significantly today, as companies invest the largest part of their budgets in online media. B2B companies in particular invest a much larger share of the marketing budget for online marketing measures compared to B2C companies. The latest figures also showed that 41 % of the total worldwide advertising expenditures from companies are attributable to online marketing. For successful and customer-oriented marketing, companies are required to place their advertising measures on those channels which the target group actively uses. For this reason, increasing marketing expenditures in the online area will continue in the future, as confirmed by forecasts.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Kaur 2017, p. 72; Kreutzer 2019, p. 7–10; Lammenett 2021, p. 22, 38.

<sup>80</sup> Kaur 2017, p. 72; Kreutzer 2019, p. 7–10; Kollmann 2020, p. 396.

<sup>81</sup> Kreutzer 2021, p. 1–2.

<sup>82</sup> Ahrholdt; Greve; Hopf 2019, p. 3; Kaur 2017, p. 73; Lammenett 2021, p. 23–29; Jensen 2006, p. 357; Wankel 2021, p. 282.

### 3.2.3 Goals & Importance of Online Marketing

Online marketing pursues one overriding goal - to be discovered in the digital world, which is difficult to achieve without any online marketing activities. Furthermore, online marketing is intended to support companies to effectively accomplish individually defined corporate goals. These are far more complex and exceed the simple placement on the Internet.<sup>83</sup>

A company can strive for a variety of different goals with the support of online marketing. In this context, specifically selected online marketing activities contribute significantly to the fulfillment of the objectives. On the one hand, the focus of online marketing activities can be set on increasing brand and company awareness or awareness of specific products and services. On the other hand, online marketing measures have the objective of enhancing a company's image and reputation. In addition, targeted online marketing measures are intended to improve customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Moreover, online marketing efforts can also contribute to increasing sales and profits of companies.<sup>84</sup>

The main reasons why online marketing gained importance in recent years are technological developments such as the introduction of smartphones, almost nationwide coverage of broadband and mobile broadband access, as well as increasing digitization. Compared to traditional marketing activities, online marketing is much more important for companies due to the fact that customers can be addressed more effectively and cost-efficiently. Furthermore, there is the possibility to measure results of different marketing activities more easily.<sup>85</sup>

Nowadays, online marketing is rising in importance not only in the B2C sector but also in the B2B sector. Online marketing is already a central part of the marketing strategy of B2B companies. More and more companies are investing a large part of their marketing budget in online marketing activities, as this is the only way to achieve the defined goals. At the same time, monitoring the success of individual online marketing activities also plays a significant role in this context. New technologies can specifically track user behavior and trace customers back to specific online marketing activities.<sup>86</sup>

For this reason, the competitive landscape is very strong in the market, because all companies want to benefit from the advantages of online marketing. In contrast to other marketing media, online marketing offers significant advantages, especially in terms of lower costs and greater potential to boost brand and company awareness. Therefore, the understanding of necessary marketing activities, as well as the knowledge about suitable online marketing channels, are most important to prevail against the competition. An essential component in this context is represented by understanding customer behavior. The analysis of the customer's purchase behavior is described in chapter 3.1.4 with the model of the customer journey.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Eng 2017, p. 1, 45; Lammenett 2006, p. 214; Zerres; Tscheulin; Israel 2017, p. 176, 179.

<sup>84</sup> Eng 2017, p. 1, 45; Lammenett 2006, p. 214; Zerres; Tscheulin; Israel 2017, p. 176, 179.

<sup>85</sup> Kreutzer 2019, p. 1–2; Lammenett 2021, p. 22–24; Schwarzl; Grabowska 2015, p. 190; Zerres; Tscheulin; Israel 2017, p. 174.

<sup>86</sup> Ahrholdt; Greve; Hopf 2019, p. 3; Kreutzer; Rumler; Wille-Baumkauff 2020, p. 1; Jensen 2006, p. 357; Lammenett 2021, p. 23; Zerres; Tscheulin; Israel 2017, p. 174.

<sup>87</sup> Lorrie 2011, p. 8; Schwarzl; Grabowska 2015, p. 190; Zerres; Tscheulin; Israel 2017, p. 174.

## 3.2.4 Media Model for Content Distribution (PESO-Model)

### 3.2.4.1 Definition & Delimitation of Terms

In the literature, the authors provide very similar definitions and descriptions of the PESO-Model. In the following, the definition of the founder Gini Dietrich, as well as the explanation by Immerschitt are presented.<sup>88</sup>

*According to Gini Dietrich 2021, "the PESO-Model takes the four media types – paid, earned, shared and owned – and merges them together".<sup>89</sup>*

*Immerschitt describes the PESO-Model in 2017 as follows: "the abbreviation PESO stands for Paid, Earned, Shared and Owned Media. This means that the right mix of paid (advertising, advertorials), earned (media relations), shared (social media) and owned (publications, own web-site) content must be found".<sup>90</sup>*

In the context of this master's thesis, the PESO-Model refers to the various relevant online marketing channels, which are visualized and classified according to the four different media types – paid, earned, shared and owned.

### 3.2.4.2 Introduction

The digital age is characterized by constantly increasing electronic competition and therefore companies have to be present on various online marketing channels in order to prevail against the competition. For this reason, companies strive for a significant online presence today.<sup>91</sup>

The literature research reveals a large number of diverse and above all comprehensive graphics which visualize different marketing channels, areas and platforms of online marketing. These support companies in the context of brand development and contribute to brand building. As a result, targeted marketing measures can help to increase awareness of the brand or the company. In addition, online marketing can be used to share information, establish and maintain contact with potential and current customers and generate sales.<sup>92</sup>

The company's task is to select relevant online media types and subsequently suitable online marketing channels for content distribution from the comprehensive possibilities of online marketing. One of the best-known media models for content distribution is the so-called PESO-Model.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 30; Immerschitt 2017, p. 62; Mühlenhoff; Rudloff 2021, p. 498; Wankerl 2021, p. 281–282.

<sup>89</sup> Translated by the author based on Dietrich 2021.

<sup>90</sup> Translated by the author based on Immerschitt 2017, p. 62.

<sup>91</sup> Chaffey; Ellis-Chadwick 2016, p. 11; Kollmann 2020, p. 396.

<sup>92</sup> Chaffey; Ellis-Chadwick 2016, p. 11; Eng 2017, p. 2; Immerschitt 2017, p. 62; Lorrie 2011, p. 8–9; Zerres; Tscheulin; Israel 2017, p. 175–176.

<sup>93</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 29–30, 116; Chaffey; Ellis-Chadwick 2016, p. 11; Immerschitt 2017, p. 62.

### 3.2.4.3 PESO-Model

In 2009, the media model existed in a slimmed-down version and the different media types were categorized in the so-called PEO-Model. PEO is an acronym for paid, earned and owned media. This model captures the relevant media types and marketing channels for content promotion. The increasing importance and acceptance of social media as well as the ongoing digitization led to an adaptation of the PEO-Model.<sup>94</sup>

In 2014, the digital expert Gini Dietrich added shared/social as the fourth media type to the already existing media model. The PEO-Model thus became the well-known PESO-Model, which is still in use and stands for paid, earned, shared and owned media. The content distribution model is not a separate area of online marketing, but a combination of different media types. In this framework, the various relevant online marketing channels are visualized and classified according to the four different media types.<sup>95</sup>

The PESO-Model aims to improve authority by targeted measures. This can be achieved through optimal use of the PESO-Model, which means an optimal interaction of the different media types. Therefore, the company can use the model to achieve successful publicity and create credibility among customers as well as the competitors.<sup>96</sup>

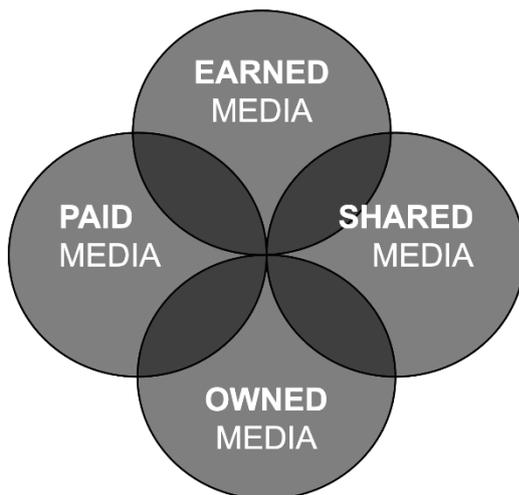


Figure 4: Overview of PESO-Model<sup>97</sup>

Different marketing channels can be assigned to each of these four media types, as illustrated in Figure 4. The company selects the appropriate media types depending on the target group and marketing objectives to be accomplished. In the following, the four media types - paid, earned, shared and owned - are explained in more detail.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 29–30, 115–116; Chaffey; Ellis-Chadwick 2016, p. 11; Dietrich 2021; Mühlenhoff; Rudloff 2021, p. 498.

<sup>95</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 29–30, 115–116; Chaffey; Ellis-Chadwick 2016, p. 11; Dietrich 2021; Mühlenhoff; Rudloff 2021, p. 498.

<sup>96</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 116; Dietrich 2021; Wankerl 2021, p. 282.

<sup>97</sup> Own illustration translated by the author based on Dietrich 2021.

<sup>98</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 30; Dietrich 2021.

## **Paid Media**

The first media type is paid media and includes all advertising measures which companies have to pay for in order to communicate certain content and advertising messages. Paid media can include both digital and non-digital media. However, the focus is placed on online media and for this reason, non-digital media will not be considered in the further course of the master's thesis.<sup>99</sup>

In a highly competitive industry, this type of media is best suited to communicate advertising messages and reach the relevant target groups. Paid media has been an important part of successful brand communication in the past as well as today. This fact is not expected to change in the future and organizations can benefit from numerous advantages by using this type of media. A significant advantage is the generation of large coverage, which subsequently enables an increase in awareness and differentiation from competitors on the market. On the one hand, paid media allows content distribution which can be tailored to target groups and their needs. On the other hand, advertising measures of this media type are often immediately target-oriented and generate attention as soon as the advertisement (ad) has been placed online. In addition, the placed ads can be adjusted and coordinated easy and quickly. Moreover, the latest technologies offer the possibility to track the ads. These tracking results are directly available, can be analyzed and improvements can be made in order to address the target groups in an even more targeted and effective way.<sup>100</sup>

However, also disadvantages exist by using paid media. The biggest disadvantage concerns the fact that advertising measures are ineffective as soon as the corresponding ad is deactivated. Furthermore, advertising scepticism and the low credibility that recipients express towards advertising can also represent a problem for the company. After all, in the worst case recipients may develop a negative attitude towards the brand or the company based on the advertising. As a result, recipients may avoid contact with the company and the offered products and services in the future.<sup>101</sup>

A collection of possible online marketing channels belonging to the media type of paid media is provided in Figure 5.

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<sup>99</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 32; Daou 2020, p. 12.

<sup>100</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 32, 116; Daou 2020, p. 12; Rommerskirchen; Roslon 2020, p. 214.

<sup>101</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 32, 116; Rommerskirchen; Roslon 2020, p. 215.

## Earned Media

Earned media is often equated with shared media, but the two terminologies do not describe the same thing.<sup>102</sup>

*Earned media refers to "the voluntary distribution of content outside of social networks."*<sup>103</sup>

*Shared media, on the other hand, describes "the user-controlled sharing of content via social platforms."*<sup>104</sup>

Earned media includes media relations and publicity. In this type of media, online newspapers or magazines report about companies and their activities. The content is written and distributed by external persons such as bloggers or journalists. Moreover, the people have no direct relationship with the producer of the content, which is represented by the company. For this reason, the company is dependent on third parties in case of earned media and first has to earn publications.<sup>105</sup>

Additionally, earned media is suitable to draw attention of the target group towards the company and offers. Subsequently, earned media is used to gain trust of the target group. This type of media can increase reach and awareness of a company.<sup>106</sup>

However, this media type also possesses downsides and is associated with considerable risk, because the image of a company can be enormously damaged. As already mentioned, the content to be communicated is not defined by the company, but by external persons who have no direct connection to the company. Therefore, the company has no control over the communicated content and cannot prevent publications of negative advertising. If this type of media is used by the company, all advertising channels of the own company should be monitored and regularly checked concerning negative advertising. Negative headlines that damage the company's prestige can sometimes be contained by a professional and fast advertising presence.<sup>107</sup>

The other criticism of earned media is characterized by the company's dependence on bloggers, journalists or publishers. Additionally, the biggest hurdle of this media type is represented by the fact that external people must become aware of the content in order to perceive and share the content with their target group. In this context, companies can make use of the content outreach strategy, which can be applied for earned media. This technique involves companies to enter partnerships with journalists, bloggers or other website operators who possess a wide reach. As a result, companies can draw the attention of their partners to the company content in a targeted manner. Therefore, the company should provide informative content, meaningful images as well as appealing videos to ensure, that the provided content is shared. These collaborations are intended to push publications and sharing of content since partners have a large reach. In addition, this can also counteract the obstacle that partners do not become aware of the content. However, no monetary consideration is given to partners

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<sup>102</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 64.

<sup>103</sup> Translated by the author based on Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 64.

<sup>104</sup> Translated by the author based on Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 64.

<sup>105</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 64–66; Dietrich 2021; Immerschitt 2017, p. 63.

<sup>106</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 65.

<sup>107</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 65.

for sharing content, since voluntary distribution is the basis, otherwise, it would be part of paid media.<sup>108</sup>

Nevertheless, the risk exists that the content is not noticed, uninteresting or classified as irrelevant. In this case, content is not distributed or shared by partners. Thus, the idea behind earned media is not successfully implemented and the company cannot benefit in any respect, as neither reach nor awareness of the company was increased.<sup>109</sup>

Figure 5 provides an overview of possible online marketing channels for the part of earned media.

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<sup>108</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 64–67; Chaffey; Ellis-Chadwick 2016, p. 12; Dietrich 2021; Immerschitt 2017, p. 63; Ryan 2014, p. 83.

<sup>109</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 64–67; Chaffey; Ellis-Chadwick 2016, p. 12; Dietrich 2021; Immerschitt 2017, p. 63; Ryan 2014, p. 83.

## Shared Media

The boom of social media as well as the almost unlimited availability of mobile broadband access offers numerous opportunities to share content on different online channels. Shared media include all internet platforms which enable exchange and discussion between different users, friends, followers, subscribers or within communities. This means shared content is generated on forums or social media channels.<sup>110</sup>

Shared media and earned media can be clearly distinguished from each other as the multipliers do not consist of journalists or bloggers in case of shared media, but instead are represented by the users themselves. These users share and discuss certain content on online platforms.<sup>111</sup>

The goal of shared media is to get users to share or discuss the provided company content. When this objective is achieved, we talk about so-called shared media. According to research, two reasons can be identified that motivate users to share or discuss content. The first reason is the relevance and reliability of the provided content. Second, emotionally appealing or amusing content can cause the impetus to share.<sup>112</sup>

Companies can also benefit by using shared media if they apply the technique of content seeding. This technique is pursuing the goal of getting as many people as possible to share content viral in order to increase the reach. Thus, content seeding is not only about spreading the content, but rather focuses on creating a viral spread. Companies must support this process by stimulating discussions through the publication of content in groups, forums or social media communities in order to ensure that content seeding works. Subsequently, the provided content of relevance spreads automatically and will be shared virally by many users on social media, forums or social communities.<sup>113</sup>

But with shared media, companies are still dependent on other people, who share the content. If the provided content of the company is not considered as interesting or does not offer any added value, the content will not be shared by other people and the company cannot benefit from a wider reach. Shared media also faces the problem, that companies cannot control shared content or prevent negative advertising. Thus, the company has no control over the interaction of users.<sup>114</sup>

A collection of possible online marketing channels belonging to the media type of shared media is given in Figure 5.

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<sup>110</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 73; Dietrich 2021; Immerschitt 2017, p. 86; Macnamara et al. 2016, p. 2, 11.

<sup>111</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 73.

<sup>112</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 73; Immerschitt 2017, p. 86.

<sup>113</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 66–67, 73–74; Immerschitt 2017, p. 86.

<sup>114</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 73–74.

## Owned Media

Owned media includes all media and publications which are owned by the company and allow complete control. The provided content clearly indicates the origin of the company. From the company's point of view, individual marketing channels of owned media can represent potential contact points with customers along the customer journey. For this reason, all marketing channels play an essential role in the development between brand-customer relationship.<sup>115</sup>

Due to technological improvements, companies now have to deal with a completely changed media landscape. Recent developments showed an increase in owned media activities since companies also prefer to share content on their own and already established channels. For this reason, companies are focusing on owned media channels to share content with specific target groups. According to experts, this type of media will continue to gain in importance in the future, as companies are interested to have complete control over the published content.<sup>116</sup>

Owned media offers the great advantage that the published content as well as the timing, the channel, and the visibility of user comments can be decided and controlled by the company. In addition, the company can define the period in which the respective content is displayed. Therefore, companies can enjoy the advantage of a fast response time by using owned media channels. Furthermore, this form is also a cost-effective way to communicate content in a targeted manner, as no additional costs are incurred for publication on various owned media. Thus, the company is independent of external channels or partners by using owned media and can publish the content independently.<sup>117</sup>

Furthermore, owned media is mostly independently found by recipients. For this reason, the content needs to be designed appealingly. This is the only way to ensure that recipients will engage with the company in the future, as owned media strives customers to directly interact with the company. Additionally, various options exist to get in touch with the company.<sup>118</sup>

However, this type of media is also accompanied by disadvantages. Above all, the dependence on other marketing channels plays an important role in order to attract the attention of the customers toward owned media. Furthermore, own statements of the company cannot achieve the same credibility as statements or recommendations from customers or third parties who have no direct relationship with the company, since the content is not subjected to any external review in case of owned media.<sup>119</sup>

Figure 5 provides an overview of possible online marketing channels for the part of owned media.

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<sup>115</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 76; Daou 2020, p. 12; Dietrich 2021; Macnamara et al. 2016, p. 1; Rommerskirchen; Roslon 2020, p. 224.

<sup>116</sup> Macnamara et al. 2016, p. 6; Wankerl 2021, p. 282–283.

<sup>117</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 76; Wankerl 2021, p. 282–283.

<sup>118</sup> Daou 2020, p. 12–13; Rommerskirchen; Roslon 2020, p. 215–216.

<sup>119</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 31–32, 64–76, 116; Daou 2020, p. 12; Dietrich 2021; Grote 2021; Immerschitt 2017, p. 63, 86; Macnamara et al. 2016, p. 1–2, 11; Schmitt 2019, p. 39; Wankerl 2021, p. 282–283.

### 3.2.4.4 Relationship & Interaction of Media Types

Figure 5 shows the different media types - paid, earned, shared and owned, including the associated possible online marketing channels. Furthermore, the chart clearly illustrates that marketing channels cannot always be clearly assigned to one media type. From a theoretical point of view, the individual media types can be clearly delineated, but in practice, a clear separation cannot always be made. This results in overlaps between two media types, which are shown in dark grey. The PESO-Model contains four overlaps - advocacy, dialogue, promoted content and native advertising.<sup>120</sup>

The overlap between earned and shared media is also known as **advocacy**. This interface enables the so-called ambassadorship, as this intersection deals with the publication and distribution of content.<sup>121</sup>

The intersection between shared and owned media is referred to as **dialogue**. Content is automatically produced, viewed and subsequently used by the public within this overlap area.<sup>122</sup>

**Promoted content** represents the intersection between owned and paid media. This combination creates new opportunities to distribute content. Promoted content also offers added value for the company's owned media, since reach is increased.<sup>123</sup>

Furthermore, **native advertising** defines the overlap of paid and earned media. Native advertising intends to integrate the advertising into context instead of a traditional online advertisement presentation. As a result, advertisements appear less intrusive compared to classic banner advertising.<sup>124</sup>

At the core of the PESO-Model is reputation and Search Engine Optimization (SEO), which is influenced by all four media types. If the PESO-Model is applied optimally, authority can be built and subsequently thought leadership and expertise. As a result, not only the competitors but also Google perceives the company as an expert leading to an appearance at the top search results. Therefore, the company can take advantage of a successful reputation as well as SEO.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Immerschitt 2017, p. 64–65; Rommerskirchen; Roslon 2020, p. 225, 234.

<sup>121</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 67; Immerschitt 2017, p. 65.

<sup>122</sup> Immerschitt 2017, p. 64.

<sup>123</sup> Immerschitt 2017, p. 65.

<sup>124</sup> Immerschitt 2017, p. 64; Rommerskirchen; Roslon 2020, p. 214.

<sup>125</sup> Dietrich 2021.

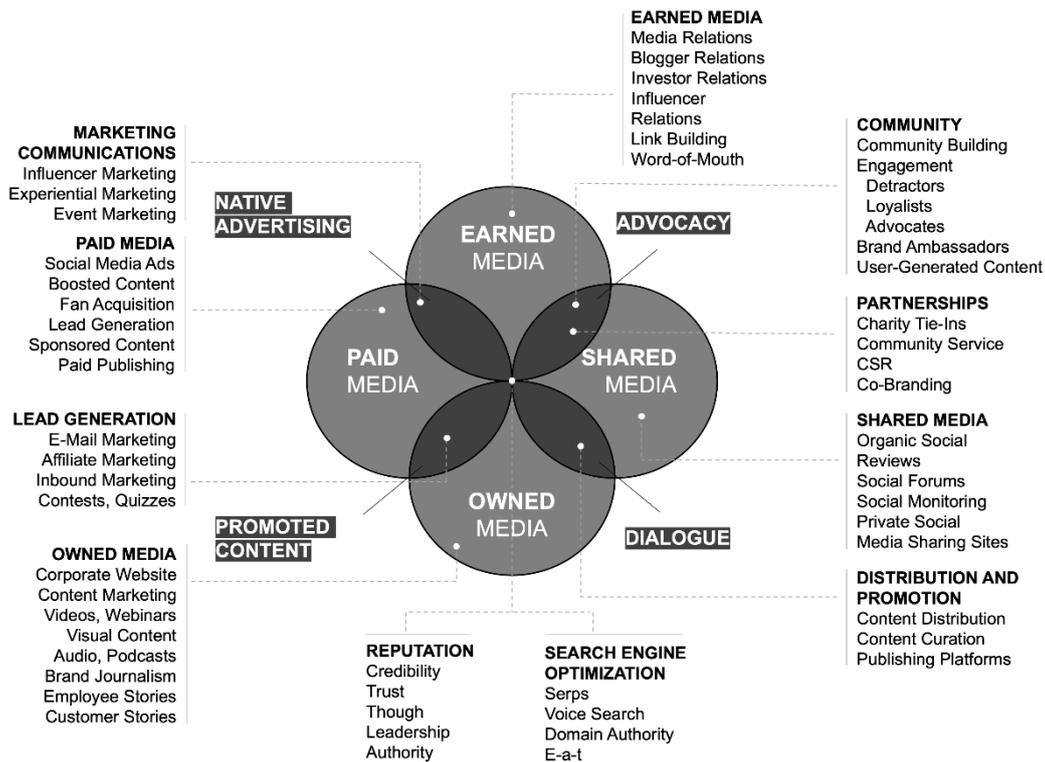


Figure 5: PESO-Model<sup>126</sup>

Often, the total potential and thus the successful publicity is achieved by combining different media types. This strategy is also called converged media. Converged media is achieved as soon as at least two media types interact with each other.<sup>127</sup>

Each of the four media types is facing certain challenges. Owned media is confronted with the problem, that the traffic is generated solely via the company's own channels. This means the target group must first become aware of the company's own channels. In this process, other media types such as paid media can provide support in order to attract the attention of the target group. Paid media, on the other hand, will not be successful as long as the first media impulse is not set. However, paid media is immediately effective as soon as the first advertising measure is placed. Therefore, the attention is attracted directly and more traffic is generated. Thus, this media type can push owned and shared media. Shared and earned media, in contrast, are dependent on the company's own content. If no content is provided by the company, external people cannot perceive or distribute the content. If the content is distributed, earned media can help to increase awareness for owned media channels. The key to success lies in combining individual media types to circumvent their challenges. The successful use of various media types enables companies to avoid dependencies on one media type.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>126</sup> Own illustration translated by the author based on Dietrich 2021; Immerschitt 2017, p. 63–65.

<sup>127</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 116; Dietrich 2021; Grote 2021.

<sup>128</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 31–32, 64–76; Daou 2020, p. 12; Dietrich 2021; Grote 2021; Immerschitt 2017, p. 63, 86; Macnamara et al. 2016, p. 1–2, 11; Wankel 2021, p. 282–283.

### 3.2.4.5 Online Marketing Manifestation

Nowadays, the term online marketing covers a lot of different marketing channels, as illustrated in Figure 5. These various marketing channels can be categorized according to two different manifestations. Therefore, a distinction can be made for customers between visible and non-visible forms of online marketing channels. For better illustration, Figure 6 has been adapted according to manifestations of visible or non-visible online marketing channels.<sup>129</sup>

Moreover, the marketing channels, which are visible for the customer are marked with grey. On the other side, non-visible marketing channels for the customer are not highlighted.<sup>130</sup>

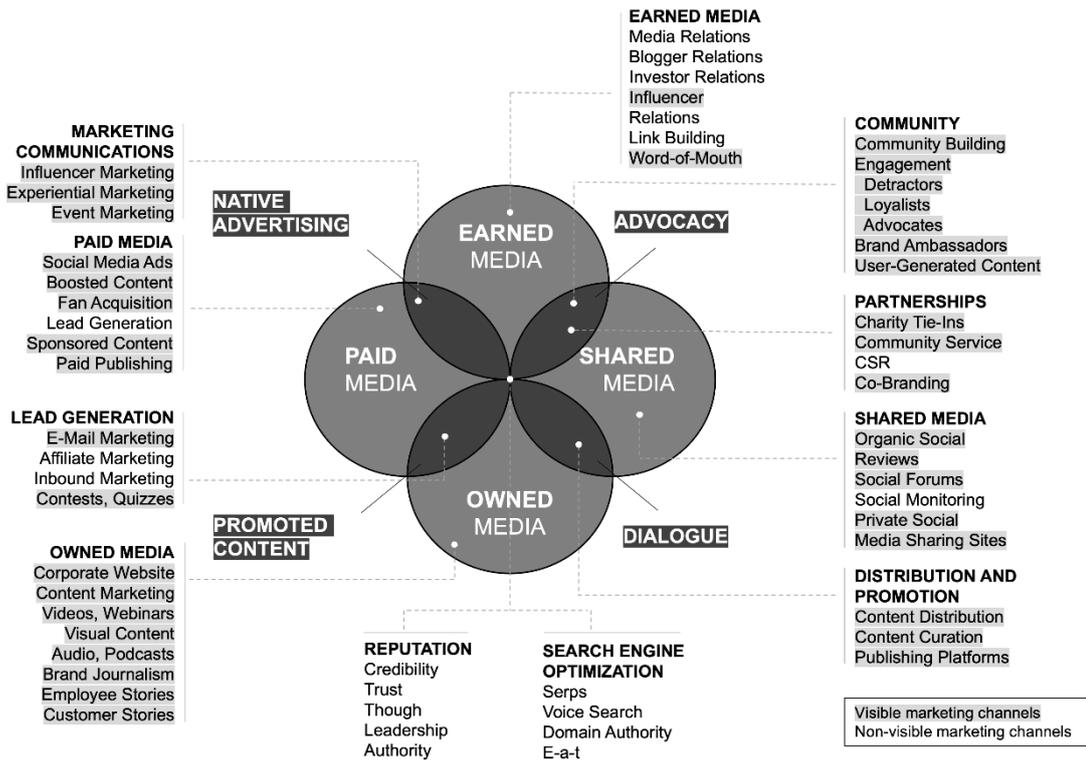


Figure 6: PESO-Model including Manifestations of Online Marketing<sup>131</sup>

This master thesis will focus on online marketing channels, which are visible for customers and suitable for the B2B market. For this reason, the next chapter identifies suitable media types of the PESO-Model and specializes on suitable visible online marketing channels within the selected media types.

<sup>129</sup> Kreutzer 2021, p. 2.

<sup>130</sup> Kreutzer 2021, p. 2.

<sup>131</sup> Own illustration translated by the author based on Dietrich 2021; Immerschitt 2017, p. 63–65; Kreutzer 2021, p. 2.

### 3.2.5 Selection of PESO-Channels

The four media types and their marketing channels serve the main purpose, which is to force the distribution of online content. A company possesses diverse possibilities for communicating relevant content. The communication measures should be selected and combined depending on the goal and purpose to be pursued.<sup>132</sup>

Furthermore, the success of these communication measures depends on whether the recipients take notice of the advertising and the interpretation in the company's interests. This once again highlights the importance for the company to have knowledge about the media usage behavior of their target groups. With this knowledge, content can be disseminated successfully by using the right marketing channels.<sup>133</sup>

The company has to decide which media types or marketing channels are best suited for the communication of the content. Decisions should be made with regard to available budgets and resources. Furthermore, other aspects influence the selection process. On the one hand, the company needs to decide which channels are relevant as well as used by the target group. On the other hand, the characteristics of individual media types need to be considered. These include, above all, fast-moving nature, the combination of different communication options and the possibility for feedback. Of course, the company must also be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of each media type and consider those in the decision-making process. Furthermore, the ability to plan, as well as necessary time resources, must be taken into account, as some media types are less flexible and need more time for implementation.<sup>134</sup>

According to Gini Dietrich, the founder of the PESO-Model, owned media is the basis for successful brand communication and will continue to gain importance in the future. The reason for this is, without content, nobody knows the company or the offered products and services. Due to the lack of content, nothing is shared and disseminated by other people such as users, journalists or bloggers. One of the biggest advantages compared to the other media types is represented by the independence from other partners, since the company has complete control and can publish the content independently. However, owned media struggles to attract the attention of recipients towards the company. Here, a combination with paid media can provide support to capture the attention of the target group.<sup>135</sup>

With paid media, marketing communication can be adapted directly to the target group. Furthermore, the ad directly attracts attention as soon as it is placed online since large reach exists. Therefore, the reach of owned media can be raised by using paid media. This increases the level of awareness of the company as well as of the brand and ensures differentiation from competitors. For this reason, paid media represents an important part of marketing communication today and in the future. As already mentioned, this type of media is only effective as soon as the first media impulse is set and only as long as the advertisement is active online. The two media types paid and owned, have a potential risk in terms of recipients showing low

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<sup>132</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 116–117; Rommerskirchen; Roslon 2020, p. 199, 204.

<sup>133</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 116–117; Rommerskirchen; Roslon 2020, p. 199, 204.

<sup>134</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 116–117; Rommerskirchen; Roslon 2020, p. 199, 204.

<sup>135</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 31–32, 64–76, 116; Daou 2020, p. 12; Dietrich 2020; 2021; Grote 2021; Immerschitt 2017, p. 63, 86; Macnamara et al. 2016, p. 1–11; Schmitt 2019, p. 39; Wankerl 2021, p. 282–283.

credibility and scepticism towards the advertising content. Due to the fact that the content is determined by the company and not subjected to any external review.<sup>136</sup>

Earned and shared media can be used to circumvent this problem since the multipliers have no direct relationship with the company and therefore enjoy higher credibility in terms of sharing provided content. In the case of earned media, the content distribution is carried out by journalists and bloggers and in the case of shared media by users themselves. However, with both types of media, the company is dependent on multipliers sharing and spreading the content further. Thus, the company faces the challenge that multipliers become aware of the content and are willing to share. In this case, the company has no control over the publication of content, because the multipliers themselves determine the content to be published. As a result, publications that harm the company's image cannot be prevented. If the content is not shared, the company cannot benefit from the advantages, which the two media types offer since neither reach nor awareness of the company has been increased.<sup>137</sup>

The comparison of the individual media types, the aspects for and against as well as the risk assessment have led to the decision to focus on **owned media** and **paid media** in the further course of the master's thesis.

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<sup>136</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 31–32, 64–76, 116; Daou 2020, p. 12; Dietrich 2021; Grote 2021; Immerschitt 2017, p. 63, 86; Schmitt 2019, p. 42; Macnamara et al. 2016, p. 1–2, 11; Rommerskirchen; Roslon 2020, p. 214–215; Wankerl 2021, p. 282–283.

<sup>137</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 64–67, 73–74; Chaffey; Ellis-Chadwick 2016, p. 12; Dietrich 2021; Immerschitt 2017, p. 63, 86; Ryan 2014, p. 83.

### 3.2.6 Suitable Online Marketing Channels

In the following selection process of suitable online marketing channels, only those, which are visible for the customer and part of owned or paid media will be taken into account, since the sub-research question sets the focus on those two aspects. Therefore, all non-visible marketing channels which are listed in Figure 6 are no longer considered since interviews with B2B customers are planned to receive more detailed information.

The main focus of online marketing channels will be directed towards the **website** in the further course of the master's thesis, as this represents one of the most important online marketing channels alongside the customer journey and the basis for online communication. Furthermore, **social media advertising** cannot be neglected in today's world as social media enables a viral spread of content very quickly and attracts attention. Thus, companies can increase awareness as well as strengthen product and company brands through advertising measures on social media. Moreover, paid media (social media advertising) can support owned media (website) in attracting the attention of the target group towards the company or brand.<sup>138</sup>

#### 3.2.6.1 Website

##### Definition and Delimitation of Terms

The website comprises the entire presence of a company on the Internet and not only a few web pages. The virtual space on the Internet contains documents, files as well as additional resources, which are all bundled and accessible via a uniform navigation. Moreover, terms such as corporate website or web presence can be used as a synonym for website.<sup>139</sup>

##### Introduction

The website often provides information about the company or brands, the products and services offered as well as career opportunities. Furthermore, depending on the business model, a website can also contain the request for information, ordering options, product configurator, an online store as well as a search for dealers and sales offices. In addition, websites enable connections to social networks by linking to blogs, online communities or company presences on Instagram, Facebook or YouTube.<sup>140</sup>

Referring to the objectives of a website, which lies in supporting the company's goals. For this reason, the main purpose of a website is to support the sale of offered products and services. Furthermore, company-specific marketing goals can pursue different purposes. On the one hand, the website can be used to exchange information, on the other hand, the website can

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<sup>138</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 31–32, 64–76, 116; Alpar; Koczy; Metzen 2015, p. 7; Daou 2020, p. 12; Dietrich 2020; Eng 2017, p. 27; Grote 2021; Immerschitt 2017, p. 63, 86; Kamps; Schetter 2020, p. 133–134; Kreutzer 2021, p. 121, 406; Kreutzer; Rumler; Wille-Baumkauff 2020, p. 82–83, 236–243; Macnamara et al. 2016, p. 1–11; Schmitt 2019, p. 39; Wankerl 2021, p. 282–283; Zerres; Tscheulin; Israel 2017, p. 176.

<sup>139</sup> Ahrholdt; Greve; Hopf 2019, p. 173–174; Kreutzer; Rumler; Wille-Baumkauff 2020, p. 82; Kreutzer 2021, p. 121.

<sup>140</sup> Ahrholdt; Greve; Hopf 2019, p. 174; Kreutzer; Rumler; Wille-Baumkauff 2020, p. 82; Kreutzer 2021, p. 121.

represent a supplement for an advertising campaign. In addition, marketing-specific goals of the website can also be defined by branding, increasing brand awareness and credibility.<sup>141</sup>

## Importance

Establishing an Internet presence depicts the most important step for a company in the area of online marketing. The company's own website thus represents the most important online marketing measure and can be regarded as the company's online business card. Furthermore, the website exhibits high reach, because of worldwide access and visibility. For this reason, a website forms the foundation of online communication and is particularly important in the B2B sector, due to the higher complexity of products and services, which require a higher level of explanation.<sup>142</sup>

Attractive websites can take advantage of increasing brand awareness, as the content and topics presented on the website spread quickly on the Internet. Therefore, the website represents one of the strongest mediums for branding and affects brand awareness as recipients become aware of the brand. Furthermore, also curiosity is triggered to use company products and services. In addition, the website also has an impact on the brand image. How the website influences the image formation process is explained in more detail in chapter 3.3.4.2.<sup>143</sup>

Furthermore, it is confirmed that satisfied website users visit the website again and give recommendations toward business partners or friends. This increases the visibility of the brand, strengthens the positive attitude towards the brand and reinforces the purchase intention.<sup>144</sup>

After all, the website accompanies the prospect from the research stage towards the final action and thus represents an important online marketing channel alongside the customer journey. For this reason, the optimal design of the website takes on a significant role for companies. During the design process of the website, importance should be placed on the adaptation to the customer's needs. As mentioned before, other online marketing measures pursue the goal - to direct potential customers to the company's website and subsequently encourage them to perform the target action. This can be achieved by integrated links in ads or banners, which, when clicked, forward the interested party directly to the company website. If the website fails to convince the potential customer, this will negatively impact the subsequent actions of the potential customer along the customer journey. As the recipient may lose interest in the company and the offered products or services at the very first point of contact. Therefore, the company should remind themselves once again that the development of a website is not a project with a fixed beginning and end but is instead characterized by a continuous improvement process which is never over.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Lorrie 2011, p. 19–20; Zerres; Tscheulin; Israel 2017, p. 175–176.

<sup>142</sup> Halb; Seebacher 2021, p. 342–343; Hopf 2021, p. 11; Kreutzer; Rumler; Wille-Baumkauff 2020, p. 82–83; Kreutzer 2021, p. 121; Wenger 2021, p. 295–296; Verdure Medienteam GmbH n. y., p. 5; Zerres; Tscheulin; Israel 2017, p. 176; Zinkann; Mahadevan 2018, p. 160.

<sup>143</sup> Huang; Ku 2016, p. 83; Isoraite 2016, p. 327–328; Pradiani; Nirwanto; Subiyantoro 2018, p. 246.

<sup>144</sup> El Gazzar; Mourad 2012, p. 3.

<sup>145</sup> Bockhorni; Beauchamp 2019, p. 5–6; Kreutzer; Rumler; Wille-Baumkauff 2020, p. 82–83; Kreutzer 2021, p. 121–122; Zerres; Tscheulin; Israel 2017, p. 176.

The need for continuous improvement can be seen as a weakness, but in reality, the ephemeral nature of the website represents the biggest strength. The website is scalable and can be continuously enhanced to support company expansions.<sup>146</sup>

Due to the fact that the website presents the start or end of several online marketing activities and is also the most important marketing measure, the content of the website is of essential importance in terms of success. As one aim of the website is represented by the exchange of information and support in terms of selling products and services. Therefore, the provided content should represent real added value for customers in order to meet their needs and to prevent potential customers from losing interest in the company or the offered products and services. In this context, a possible strategic approach for the communication of content is represented by content marketing, which will be explained in the following.<sup>147</sup>

### **Content-Marketing vs. Classic Advertising Marketing**

The distinction between the two terms content marketing and classic advertising marketing can be made via the content. Classic promotional marketing communication focuses on product- or brand-related content in which the offered products and services, brands or the company is in the spotlight. Content marketing, on the other hand, includes editorial and journalistic content that helps customers, provides more detailed information or entertains. All this content is communicated independently from the offered products and services, brands or the company.<sup>148</sup>

Content marketing is not another marketing channel but can be described as a strategic overarching approach for communication. Therefore, content marketing is applied in individual online communication channels such as the website. Thus, content marketing refers to the content orientation of communication. The communication channels, on the other hand, have control over the channels and communication form.<sup>149</sup>

Furthermore, content marketing aims to build a relationship with the customer, which is also the beginning of the customer journey. Ultimately, content marketing is intended to convince the potential customer to take the desired action. For this reason, content marketing attempts to achieve the highest possible customer satisfaction, which subsequently also contributes to customer loyalty. Therefore, the content should be tailored to the interests of the potential customer, in order to satisfy the needs of the customer. In addition, content marketing also supports corporate goals, which lie primarily in increasing the level of brand awareness, brand and company image, visibility, reach and traffic as well as the expansion of the brand.<sup>150</sup>

Nowadays, various online channels and sources enable a wide range of information to be obtained. Particularly in the B2B sector, preliminary information gathering almost exclusively takes place online. For this reason, the presence of the company at the beginning of the

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<sup>146</sup> Lorrie 2011, p. 19–20.

<sup>147</sup> Bockhorni; Beauchamp 2019, p. 5–6; Kreutzer 2021, p. 121; Lorrie 2011, p. 19–20; Zerres; Tscheulin; Israel 2017, p. 175–176.

<sup>148</sup> Eng 2017, p. 19; Lammenett 2021, p. 337–342.

<sup>149</sup> Lammenett 2021, p. 337–340.

<sup>150</sup> Eng 2017, p. 19; Kamps; Schetter 2020, p. 24–25; Schmitt 2019, p. 17; Lammenett 2021, p. 337–339.

customer journey is increasingly important in order to be able to build the brand. Ideally, content marketing is used in a way that arouses the customer's need for information and finally leaves a lasting impression on the brand. Content with added value needs to be created alongside the customer journey, to bind potential customers to the company.<sup>151</sup>

### **Criteria of successful Websites**

A successful website is defined not only by the provision of various, relevant information about the company, brand and the offered products as well as services but also by other criteria. In the following, possible criteria are mentioned which have a considerable influence on the performance of websites. Some of these criteria have an impact on the design, others on the provided content and the preparation of the website.<sup>152</sup>

The first criterion is represented by findability. The focus is on visibility and findability of the company. Unless the website is perceived by the recipients, the defined goals cannot be achieved. In order to improve the positioning of the company as well as the awareness, additional marketing channels can provide support.<sup>153</sup>

Scannability is also an essential component of a successful website. The scanning technique enables recipients to identify the essential content simply by skimming the website. This means that relevant information, including call-to-actions, should be visible immediately. For this purpose, headings, bulleted lists, short paragraphs and highlighting in the text can be used. Readability also plays an important role in this context, as the content needs to be comprehensible and appealing to the recipient.<sup>154</sup>

A significant influence on the performance of a website is represented by the usability, therefore the provided content is of great importance. The provided content on the website should be adapted to the target group, relevant and up to date. Ideally, both the content and the process of access are presented in a way that is automatically understandable for prospective customers, as visitors of websites have low frustration tolerance and demand easy handling, otherwise, the competitor's website will be called. User-friendliness leads the visitor to stay longer and interact with the website, e.g. in the form of clicks.<sup>155</sup>

In addition, success is significantly influenced by trust and credibility of a website. In this context, the key factor is to ensure that the company or brand is real and not fake. Moreover, the level of trustworthiness is also determined by the provided content. Credibility of a website can be influenced by the design, which includes the planning of the content or the graphics, the font and color selection.<sup>156</sup>

Another important factor is the usefulness of the provided content. As already mentioned, the content should be adapted to the target group. In addition, visitors of the website should be

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<sup>151</sup> Halb; Seebacher 2021, p. 342–343; Kamps; Schetter 2020, p. 25; Schmitt 2019, p. 16–17; Verdure Medienteam GmbH n. y., p. 3, 11; Zinkann; Mahadevan 2018, p. 157.

<sup>152</sup> Kreutzer; Rumler; Wille-Baumkauff 2020, p. 92–97; Kreutzer 2021, p. 121, 148–156; Lorrie 2011, p. 22–25.

<sup>153</sup> Kreutzer; Rumler; Wille-Baumkauff 2020, p. 92; Kreutzer 2021, p. 148; Lorrie 2011, p. 24.

<sup>154</sup> Kreutzer; Rumler; Wille-Baumkauff 2020, p. 92–93; Kreutzer 2021, p. 149.

<sup>155</sup> Kreutzer; Rumler; Wille-Baumkauff 2020, p. 93; Kreutzer 2021, p. 150; Lorrie 2011, p. 23.

<sup>156</sup> Kreutzer; Rumler; Wille-Baumkauff 2020, p. 93; Kreutzer 2021, p. 150; Lorrie 2011, p. 22.

made aware about the advantages of the offers as well as built-in call-to-actions. Thus, usefulness presents an overriding criterion for success.<sup>157</sup>

To allow visitors an easy distribution of the provided content on social platforms, the website should provide like-, retweet- or share-buttons.<sup>158</sup>

Failure to comply with these criteria can lead to potential customers leaving the website immediately. The importance that a good website performance represents for a company is now clearly recognizable. Furthermore, companies should not only invest in the content but also in the preparation to set up a successful website.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Kreutzer; Rumler; Wille-Baumkauff 2020, p. 93–94; Kreutzer 2021, p. 150–151.

<sup>158</sup> Kreutzer; Rumler; Wille-Baumkauff 2020, p. 94; Kreutzer 2021, p. 151.

<sup>159</sup> Kreutzer 2021, p. 151–152.

### 3.2.6.2 Social Media Advertising

#### Definition & Delimitation of Terms

The term social media includes online media as well as technologies which enable users to exchange information and collaborate online. In addition to social networks, social media also includes media sharing platforms, blogs or online forums and communities.<sup>160</sup>

Social networks are web-based platforms or websites which enable users to communicate, share texts, images or videos. Examples of social networks include Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter.<sup>161</sup>

Social media advertising (SMA) comprises all paid advertising measures on social media networks. This includes, for example, story ads, advertising campaigns or sponsored tweets.<sup>162</sup>

#### Introduction

In order to achieve the defined marketing goals, companies are increasingly applying social media marketing. Due to the wide range of options for various advertisements and target group specifications, social media marketing can pursue different goals, which need to be defined individually for the specific industries. The available amount of user data allows companies to tailor advertising specifically to diverse target groups. Additionally, advertising measures that B2B companies display on social media channels are intended to increase the company's reputation and strengthen company brands. For this reason, the campaigns and advertising content on social media aim to increase awareness. Not only strengthening the brand but also gathering information about customers and markets as well as building communities are often set as objectives. Promotional activities on social media are less appropriate to meet an existing need because B2B companies hardly use social media for research of products or services. However, social media channels are suitable for arousing the customer's desire.<sup>163</sup>

#### Importance

The viral spread of content on the Internet is primarily pushed by social media, as an exchange of many-to-many takes place. Due to the rapid spread of information, social media channels are highly demanded as an online advertising platform. According to studies, around 78 % of Internet users use at least one social network, which explains the wide reach of social media advertising. Those industries, which require a high level of information can benefit the most by using social media advertising. Thus, especially for B2B companies, the usage of social media for the communication of content is classified as reasonable. In addition, communication on social media should be continuous, transparent, and at the same level as the target group.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Kamps; Schetter 2020, p. 133; Kreutzer 2021, p. 406.

<sup>161</sup> Eng 2017, p. 30; Kamps; Schetter 2020, p. 133.

<sup>162</sup> Alpar; Koczy; Metzen 2015, p. 7; Kamps; Schetter 2020, p. 133.

<sup>163</sup> Alpar; Koczy; Metzen 2015, p. 7; Kamps; Schetter 2020, p. 133–134; Kreutzer; Rumler; Wille-Baumkauff 2020, p. 242–243; Kreutzer 2021, p. 406.

<sup>164</sup> Eng 2017, p. 27; Kamps; Schetter 2020, p. 133; Kreutzer; Rumler; Wille-Baumkauff 2020, p. 92–97, 237–245; Kreutzer 2021, p. 121, 148–156; Lorrie 2011, p. 22–25.

### 3.3 B2B Brand Image

The theoretical chapter ends with the subsection of the brand image, in which also the relationship towards the so-called brand identity is explained. This final section describes the elements of brand image and the influencing factors that have an impact on the formation of the brand image. In order to explain possible influencing factors, the image forming process according to Riezebos is used.

#### 3.3.1 Definition & Delimitation of Terms

##### Brand

*“According to Kotler, a trademark can be described as a name, term, sign, symbol, design form or a combination of these elements for the purpose of identifying the products or services of a supplier or a group of suppliers and differentiating them from competing offers.”<sup>165</sup>*

The term brand is composed of two different aspects, brand identity and brand image, both consider different perspectives. Therefore, the author Burmann describes the brand as the emerging output, which results from the correlation of brand image and brand identity. For this reason, brands often represent the result of communication nowadays.<sup>166</sup>

##### Brand Identity

Brand identity describes the holistic self-image of the brand from a corporate perspective. Thus, the brand identity embodies the content which defines the character of the brand from an internal perspective. Important content to be conveyed by the brand identity is brand core values, the purpose as well as the essence of the brand. In addition, brand identity refers not only to the content representing the brand but also to the way the brand appears within the company. Brand identity comprises everything the company wants to send to their customers.<sup>167</sup>

##### Brand Image

Brand image is the perception of the corporate brand by various stakeholders of the company. The brand image describes not only the individual perception of the brand but also the interpretation of the brand messages in the minds of the customers. Thus, the brand image represents the external image of the corporate brand, which was created in the minds of the customers.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Translated by the author based on Lehmann 2008, p. 12 according to Kotler; Bliemel 2001, p. 689.

<sup>166</sup> Albisser 2022, p. 24; Eckert 2014, p. 149; Lodde 2010, p. 60; Radtke 2014, p. 1–4.

<sup>167</sup> Albisser 2022, p. 26–27; Eckert 2014, p. 149; Kist 2020, p. 19; Meenaghan 1995, p. 3; Steiner 2020, p. 57–59.

<sup>168</sup> Albisser 2022, p. 29–30; Eckert 2014, p. 149–150; Radtke 2014, p. 2; Steiner 2020, p. 62–63.

### 3.3.2 Identity-based Brand Management

In the beginning, brand management approaches focused only on the demand perspective also known as the brand image (outside-in perspective). Later, the so-called identity-based brand approach emerged. This approach expands the previous approach of the external by the internal perspective, which is also called brand identity (inside-out) and compares the two views.<sup>169</sup>

#### 3.3.2.1 Brand Identity

The creation of the brand identity, also called the root of the brand, occurs solely through the ongoing interrelationship which exists between the brand's internal and external stakeholders. Brand identity describes the target image of the brand and is mainly determined by the brand owner, who must also take external influences into account.<sup>170</sup>

Identity-based brand management aims to build up a meaningful brand identity with a consistent core to communicate effectively to all stakeholders. Additionally, brand identity represents the background of communication and is therefore used to build up or maintain knowledge about the brand among customers.<sup>171</sup>

Brand identity comprises a large number of characteristics that represent the personality of a brand. According to Burmann, brand identity originates from social science and psychological identity research. With the help of six identified components, brand identity can be described comprehensively and a permanent distinctiveness from other brands can be secured. Thus, brand identity covers the following components: brand origin, brand competencies, brand values, brand personality, brand vision and brand performance.<sup>172</sup>

The brand origin represents the foundation of brand identity and the basis for the self-reflection of a brand. Moreover, the brand origin is of great importance due to external and internal perception and interpretation by target groups and includes only relevant parts of brand history. The identity can be shaped in the long term and can contain three facets: spatial origin, company origin and industry origin.<sup>173</sup>

Brand competencies refer to the resources and capabilities of the company and help to maintain the competitive advantage of the brand. Dominance over competitors can only be ensured if brands represent superior customer benefits. In order to achieve this, existing resources need to be combined appropriately or non-existing resources must be built up.<sup>174</sup>

Brand values express brand personality and embody beliefs or basic convictions held by the company, employees and managers. The focus is set on emotional components of the brand

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<sup>169</sup> Burmann, Christoph et al. 2015, p. 29; Eckert 2014, p. 150; Jost-Benz 2009, p. 5–6; Schallehn 2012, p. 60.

<sup>170</sup> Albisser 2022, p. 29; Steiner 2020, p. 59.

<sup>171</sup> Albisser 2022, p. 29; Steiner 2020, p. 59.

<sup>172</sup> Radtke 2014, p. 24–26; Steiner 2020, p. 59.

<sup>173</sup> Burmann, Christoph et al. 2015, p. 43–44; Radtke 2014, p. 24.

<sup>174</sup> Burmann, Christoph et al. 2015, p. 43, 48–49; Radtke 2014, p. 25–26.

identity that have a connection to the benefits of the brand. The brand values should embody the requirements that customers have towards an ideal brand.<sup>175</sup>

In the case of brand personality, target personality of the brand must be defined, by taking the competitors into account. In terms of content, attention must be paid about what the external target group should associate with the brand. The brand personality is then conveyed through verbal and non-verbal communication of the brand.<sup>176</sup>

The brand vision refers to the direction of a brand's future development and thus to the desired brand identity to be achieved. Furthermore, brand vision should embody a target state to be realized in order to unfold the internal identification power. In addition, the vision also serves as a motivation and orientation factor for the internal target group.<sup>177</sup>

Brand performance describes the type and form of usability that a brand represents for the customer. The main focus is on determining the functional benefit (economic benefit) of the brand and type of service. In this context, importance is clarified over the compatibility of brand performance with all other identity components.<sup>178</sup>

Figure 7 visualizes all brand identity components.

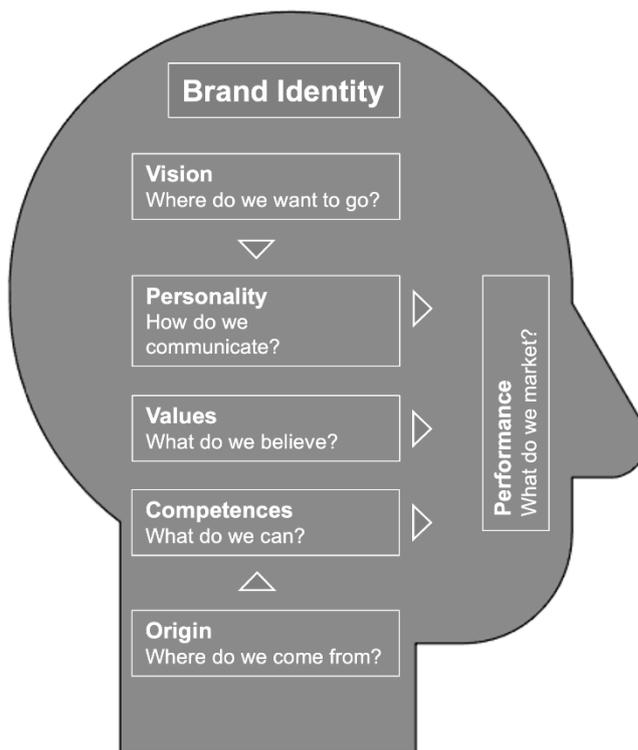


Figure 7: Brand Identity Components<sup>179</sup>

<sup>175</sup> Burmann, Christoph et al. 2015, p. 43, 50–51; Radtke 2014, p. 26.

<sup>176</sup> Burmann, Christoph et al. 2015, p. 43, 52; Radtke 2014, p. 26.

<sup>177</sup> Burmann, Christoph et al. 2015, p. 43, 47–48; Radtke 2014, p. 24–25.

<sup>178</sup> Burmann, Christoph et al. 2015, p. 43, 54–58; Radtke 2014, p. 26.

<sup>179</sup> Own illustration translated by the author based on Burmann, Christoph et al. 2015, p. 43.

### 3.3.2.2 Brand Image

The external image of a brand, also known as brand image, is composed of the customer's perception and assessment, which are made based on communicated brand content. Thus, all sent brand signals individually shape the image anchored in the minds of customers. Moreover, the company, partners, other community members or Internet users can provide image-influencing communication content. With a unique brand image, companies can differentiate their offerings from those of the competition and thus create a competitive advantage.<sup>180</sup>

The brand image aims to anchor an independent image of the brand in the minds of customers and clearly communicates special features of the brand. This ensures a clear differentiation of the existing competitive brands from the customer's point of view.<sup>181</sup>

According to Meffert and Burmann, brand image is determined by two essential components - brand attributes (brand identity) and brand benefits, which are visualized in Figure 8. In this context, it is important to mention that brand awareness is the basis for building and shaping the brand image among the external target group. Thus, brand awareness does not represent a partial element of the brand image but refers to the target group's ability to remember or recognize the brand.<sup>182</sup>

Furthermore, brand attributes comprise those properties of a brand regarded as characteristics from the target group's point of view to define and distinguish the brand. For this reason, brand attributes represent the individually acquired knowledge about the brand generated by the customer. Thus, all components of the brand identity are reflected.<sup>183</sup>

Brand benefit describes the individual evaluation in relation to the perception of the brand. The benefit refers to the degree of fulfilment from each brand attribute, based on the customer's expectations. In this context, a distinction can be made between functional brand benefits (economic benefits) and non-functional brand benefits (additional benefits). The former is determined by the customer's existing knowledge of products and services as well as by the brand's competencies and performance. The non-functional benefit is shaped by brand personality, values as well as vision. The component of brand origin can be determined by both functional and non-functional brand benefits.<sup>184</sup>

Figure 8 visualizes all brand image components.

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<sup>180</sup> Albisser 2022, p. 30; Lodde 2010, p. 60; Schallehn 2012, p. 60; Steiner 2020, p. 62–63.

<sup>181</sup> Steiner 2020, p. 62–64; Timothy 2016.

<sup>182</sup> Albisser 2022, p. 29; Burmann, Christoph et al. 2015, p. 57; Kist 2020, p. 23–24; Steiner 2020, p. 59.

<sup>183</sup> Burmann, Christoph et al. 2015, p. 57; Kist 2020, p. 23–24.

<sup>184</sup> Burmann, Christoph et al. 2015, p. 57–58; Kist 2020, p. 25.

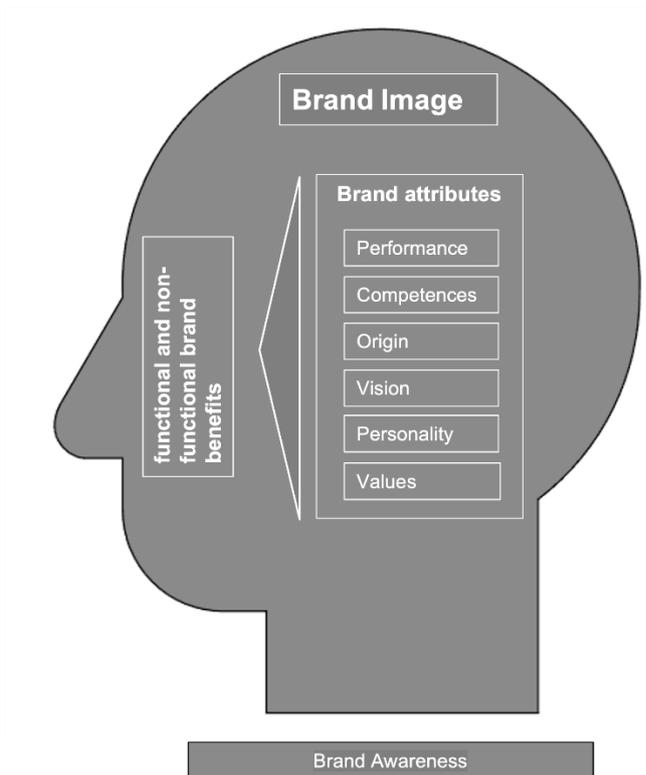


Figure 8: Brand Image Components<sup>185</sup>

### 3.3.2.3 Relationship between Brand Image & Brand Identity

The identity-based brand approach pursues the goal of achieving the highest possible congruence between brand identity and brand image so that the target group gains clarity about brand image. Too many differences between brand image and brand identity result in a gap that can negatively affect the company's market position.<sup>186</sup>

Brand identity can be described as a statement concept or a management concept because it represents the essential characteristics of the brand. Brand image can be described as an acceptance concept since customers judge and perceive the brand identity individually. The brand identity can directly be shaped and influenced, the image not.<sup>187</sup>

Figure 9 graphically illustrates the basic model of an identity-based brand approach and the relationship between brand identity and brand image.

<sup>185</sup> Own illustration translated by the author based on Burmann, Christoph et al. 2015, p. 57.

<sup>186</sup> Eckert 2014, p. 150; Knape; Lundell 2011, p. 9; Steiner 2020, p. 62.

<sup>187</sup> Radtke 2014, p. 3.

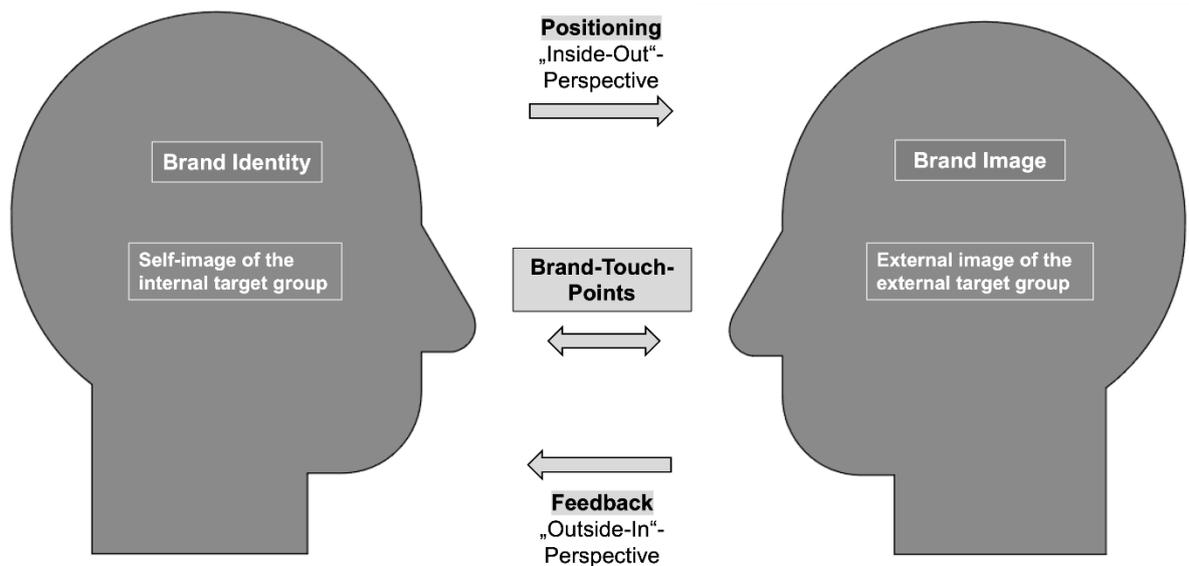


Figure 9: Relationship Brand Image & Brand Identity<sup>188</sup>

As the illustration shows, there is a continuous exchange process between brand identity and brand image, which is also referred to as the brand-demand relationship. The feedback loop (outside-in perspective) is based on the effects generated by a brand among the reference groups. Positioning (inside-out perspective) aims to position the brand advantageously in order to achieve a positive effect in the minds of customers and a differentiation from the competition.<sup>189</sup>

In addition, the connection between the two sides is defined by brand touchpoints, through which an interaction between internal and external reference groups is created.<sup>190</sup>

Since the research questions deal with the issue of creating brand image awareness, the focus in the further course is primarily placed on the brand image. For this reason, the next chapters deal with the importance of creating a brand image in today's world as well as aspects, which influence the formation of the brand image.

<sup>188</sup> Own illustration translated by the author based on Kist 2020, p. 15; Lodde 2010, p. 61; Schallehn 2012, p. 63.

<sup>189</sup> Jost-Benz 2009, p. 11; Lodde 2010, p. 61; Schallehn 2012, p. 61.

<sup>190</sup> Kist 2020, p. 18.

### 3.3.3 Importance of Brand Image

A strong brand image is very important for every company, regardless of the industry in which the company operates. Companies sell not only products and services to customers, but also core brand values that define the brand. Therefore, the creation of a brand image is of enormous importance for the company, to make sure that the customers understand which values the company wants to communicate. In this context, various reasons can be mentioned, why companies need a strong and consistent brand image.<sup>191</sup>

Nowadays, customers are confronted with a multitude of information through digital channels and social media. For this reason, companies must attract the attention of the target group, and compete against their competitors. Here, online marketing provides support in terms of capturing the attention of the target group. This makes clear that companies need a convincing and understandable advertising message that stays in the customer's mind. Here, an established and strong brand image support to achieving differentiation from competitors and their offers.<sup>192</sup>

Brand image enables a recognition of the products or services and thus communicates information quickly. This communication of information leads to a reduction of complexity and uncertainty during the customer journey and at the same time builds trust with customers. Because as soon as customers begin to identify with company offerings, a relationship with the brand is built up.<sup>193</sup>

A positive perception of the brand image from the customer's point of view results in a positive attitude towards the brand. This in turn leads to the fact that customers have a good feeling about the brand. They favor strong brands and consciously decide against competitors' brands. Thus, a positive brand image exerts a positive influence on the purchase of products or the order of services. Subsequently, this also has a beneficial effect on customer loyalty.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Steiner 2020, p. 62–64; Timothy 2016.

<sup>192</sup> Albisser 2022, p. 31; Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 31–32, 64–76, 116; Daou 2020, p. 12; Dietrich 2020; 2021; Grote 2021; Immerschitt 2017, p. 63, 86; Ives; Müllner 2021, p. 226; Macnamara et al. 2016, p. 1–11; Schmitt 2019, p. 39; Wankel 2021, p. 282–283.

<sup>193</sup> Albisser 2022, p. 31; Ives; Müllner 2021, p. 226.

<sup>194</sup> Albisser 2022, p. 31; Steiner 2020, p. 65.

### 3.3.4 Riezebos Image Forming Process

#### 3.3.4.1 Introduction

With regards to Riezebos, a brand image can be formed through two different types of processes - the inductive and deductive inference process. The deductive inference process describes the transmission of brand associations from one product or service to a further. This way of inference will not be discussed in more detail.<sup>195</sup>

The inductive inference process relates to components, which influence the brand's image formation in the customer's mind. In this context, the image forming process of Riezebos entails all the different aspects, which influence brand image formation.<sup>196</sup>

#### 3.3.4.2 Components of Image Forming Process

The image theory according to Riezebos illustrates the importance of image formation and shows which factors can significantly influence the customer during the image forming process. In the following, the influencing factors, marketing communication (advertising), consumption experience and social influence are visualized and explained in Figure 10.<sup>197</sup>

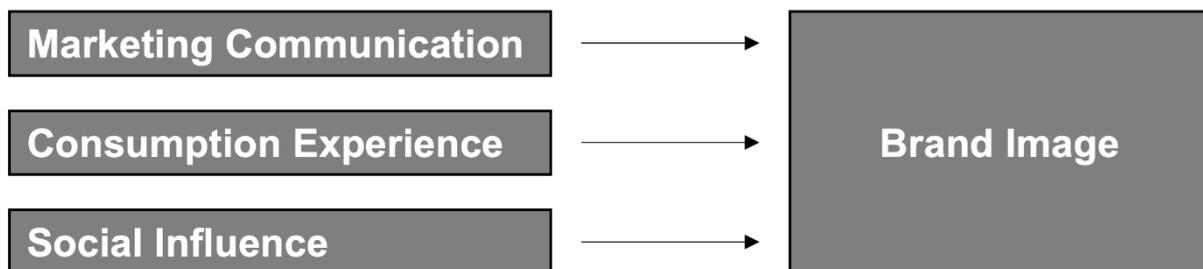


Figure 10: Image Forming Process<sup>198</sup>

<sup>195</sup> Falck 2018, p. 25–26; Rosengren; Standoft; Sundbrandt 2010, p. 6.

<sup>196</sup> Knape; Lundell 2011, p. 8; Rosengren; Standoft; Sundbrandt 2010, p. 6.

<sup>197</sup> Knape; Lundell 2011, p. 6–8; Rosengren; Standoft; Sundbrandt 2010, p. 6.

<sup>198</sup> Own illustration translated by the author based on Knape; Lundell 2011, p. 9; Rosengren; Standoft; Sundbrandt 2010, p. 6 according to Riezebos 2003, p. 66.

## Marketing Communication

This part of the image forming process can be controlled by the company. Marketing communication enables companies to communicate and implement brand identity. As mentioned earlier, the aim is to achieve as much correspondence as possible between brand identity and brand image. However, after a certain level of communication has been established with customers, the exerted influences can only be changed with difficulty, since first impressions counts and contribute to image creation.<sup>199</sup>

For this reason, the company should consider the content to be communicated and the effect such content exerts on the customer in advance. In this context, customers need to understand the communicated messages of the company, as those influence brand image. Therefore, the communication of the company should ensure, that the created image by the customer matches the identity of the company.<sup>200</sup>

Referring to the digital world, online marketing can communicate brand identity in order to develop the brand image in the minds of customers, as it increases awareness, enhances the image and reputation of the brand. Thus, online marketing represents an economical option to build the brand.<sup>201</sup>

The company's website as one of the most important online marketing channels represents an important communication interface and touchpoint between the potential customer and the company. Furthermore, the website has a significant impact on the formation of the brand image since perceptions of potential customers are based on the gained impressions from the website. Thus, the content of a website such as text, graphics, videos as well as design elements like selected fonts and colors or used technologies essentially determine the perception and thus the brand image. Furthermore, user-friendliness, usefulness as well as the quality of a website also influences the brand image.<sup>202</sup>

In addition, social media advertising also represents an important part of building a brand's image. This type of online marketing also influences the impressions of the potential customer and thus the brand image. Furthermore, the influence of social media on the image formation process is explained in more detail in chapter 5.2.4.3.<sup>203</sup>

Above all, Riezebos has the opinion that customers should first come into contact with image-forming advertising before the product or service is purchased or other persons and partners can influence the brand image. This is true since the first impression is decisive for the success of a brand and difficult to change in the aftermath.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Eckert 2014, p. 150; Knape; Lundell 2011, p. 9; Rosengren; Standoft; Sundbrandt 2010, p. 6–7; Steiner 2020, p. 62.

<sup>200</sup> Knape; Lundell 2011, p. 9; Rosengren; Standoft; Sundbrandt 2010, p. 6–7.

<sup>201</sup> Adlmaier-Herbst; Mayer 2021, p. 27; Albisser 2022, p. 31; Eng 2017, p. 1, 45; Huang; Ku 2016, p. 83; Kreutzer; Rumler; Wille-Baumkauff 2020, p. 14; Lammenett 2006, p. 214; Zerres; Tscheulin; Israel 2017, p. 176–179.

<sup>202</sup> Ahrholdt; Greve; Hopf 2019, p. 173–174; Huang; Ku 2016, p. 83.

<sup>203</sup> Sanny et al. 2020, p. 2141.

<sup>204</sup> Falck 2018, p. 26; Knape; Lundell 2011, p. 9.

## **Consumption Experience**

Experiences generated by the use of products and services have an impact on the creation of the brand image. Even though the brand communication achieves the desired and positive effect, sometimes there is no correspondence between brand communication and actual experience resulting in a change in the customer's perception of the brand image. However, this may lead to a less favorable brand image for the company. Therefore, according to Riezebos, it is essential to achieve the highest possible congruence between the two components, because customers can only build up a clear brand image if this prerequisite is fulfilled.<sup>205</sup>

## **Social Influence**

Word of mouth, as well as the exchange or discussion between customers, have a significant influence on the formation of the brand image, as these are given more credibility than other communication channels. The opinion of others can be transferred to the customer and exert far-reaching influence in relation to conviction, which is opposed to products, services or brands.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Knape; Lundell 2011, p. 9; Rosengren; Standoft; Sundbrandt 2010, p. 7.

<sup>206</sup> Rosengren; Standoft; Sundbrandt 2010, p. 7.

## 4 Research Design

After the theoretical foundation has been established, the following chapter represents the research design. In this, the selected methodology, interview experts, development of the interview guide and the evaluation and analysis procedure for the interviews are described.

### 4.1 Research Methodology

According to the literature, a distinction can be made between quantitative and qualitative research design. The quantitative research approach deals with data collection through questionnaires and data analysis of numerical data, which can be represented by graphs or statistics. The qualitative research approach, on the other hand, involves data collection through interviews and data analysis of non-numerical data, which must be categorized for purposes of analysis.<sup>207</sup>

The author has chosen the research design which is better suited to answer the research questions. The literature confirms that the qualitative research method is suitable for analyzing relationships and effects between variables. Furthermore, a qualitative approach is more appropriate to verify the opinions, attitudes and behavior of customers with regard to marketing measures. The quantitative research approach was not relevant for this master's thesis since a large number of customers would have to be surveyed.<sup>208</sup>

### 4.2 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research deals with the collection of less structured and non-standardized data, which allows broader interpretation. In the context of qualitative research, data can be collected, for example, by means of interviews or group discussions. The subsequent data analysis is based on more interpretative procedures than on statistical ones.<sup>209</sup>

Furthermore, qualitative research can be defined by the following principles: research as a part of communication, openness, reflection during the interviews and analysis, research with a process character, explication as well as flexibility.<sup>210</sup>

In order to be able to determine the target as well as the quality of qualitative research, so-called **quality criteria** are used. With this, the research methods can be checked. The classical quality criteria include validity, reliability and objectivity.<sup>211</sup>

The quality criterion of **validity** indicates whether the measured or predicted corresponds to what should be measured or predicted. Thus, validity proves whether the selected procedure really covers the criteria to be measured.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Saunders; Lewis; Thornhill 2016, p. 165.

<sup>208</sup> Kuß; Wildner; Kreis 2014, p. 13–14; Magerhans 2016, p. 69–70, 167–168.

<sup>209</sup> Kuß; Wildner; Kreis 2014, p. 40; Magerhans 2016, p. 69–70.

<sup>210</sup> Helfferich 2011, p. 24; Meyen et al. 2019, p. 24.

<sup>211</sup> Mayer 2013, p. 55; Mey; Mruck 2010, p. 395–396.

<sup>212</sup> Mayer 2013, p. 55–56; Rammstedt 2010, p. 250.

**Reliability** describes the stability and accuracy of repeated data collection. Thus, this criteria examines, to what extent the same measuring results can be obtained, if measurements are accomplished more frequently under the same measuring conditions. In addition, the reliability of the data collection is to be strengthened by appropriate documentation.<sup>213</sup>

The third criterion of **objectivity** refers to the independence between collected data and the person who conducted the research. In the context of this criterion above all objectivity is regarded in relation to the execution, evaluation as well as interpretation.<sup>214</sup>

In this master's thesis, qualitative research is conducted by means of interviews. A distinction can be made between different interview types according to the degree of formality and structure resulting in unstructured or semi-structured interviews. In unstructured interviews, the researcher does not use a prepared list of questions to be answered during the interview. For this master's thesis, **semi-structured interviews** are applied within the scope of explanatory research to understand the relationship between variables. The reasons for that are explained in the following.<sup>215</sup>

Semi-structured interviews are characterized by interviewers, which have already a list of questions and topics to be covered during the interview. However, in semi-structured interviews, the possibility exists to vary questions from interview to interview. Because this approach allows to omit questions or to switch the order of the individual questions, according to the course of the conversation.<sup>216</sup>

This interview approach is used to gather qualitative data and is popular in case studies-investigations to understand not only the context and the approach, but also the reasons behind. Therefore, this type of expert interview enables more detailed insights such as the understanding of attitudes, behaviors or opinions as well as the understanding or analysis of interrelationships.<sup>217</sup>

In this master's thesis, semi-structured interviews are applied to retrieve personal experiences, attitudes as well as opinions of B2B customers from the brand turn to zero with regard to online marketing channels and brand image. The brand offers consulting services in the sustainability industry and poses a lot of different B2B customers from different sectors. Therefore, the next chapter highlights the selection process of sectors in order to choose suitable B2B interviewees.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Mayer 2013, p. 56.

<sup>214</sup> Flick 2019, p. 474; Rammstedt 2010, p. 240.

<sup>215</sup> Saunders; Lewis; Thornhill 2016, p. 390–391.

<sup>216</sup> Saunders; Lewis; Thornhill 2016, p. 391.

<sup>217</sup> Saunders; Lewis; Thornhill 2016, p. 392–394.

<sup>218</sup> Saunders; Lewis; Thornhill 2016, p. 392–394.

## 4.3 Expert Interviews

### 4.3.1 Selection & Description of Interview Partners

The experts for the interviews were selected in advance through the sampling process. The sampling process involves a targeted selection of interview partners in order to answer the research questions. Thus, the interview partners should have subject-specific expertise based on specialized knowledge or experience as well as certain decision-making competence. In a further step, this expertise has a significant influence on the recommendation for action.<sup>219</sup>

The plan was to start with eight interviews, questioning experts from different regions to ensure, that diverse insights are collected. After eight interviews are conducted, the law of saturation is applied in qualitative research. This means that the interview process is complete and no further interviews will be conducted if no new insights can be gained through further interviews.<sup>220</sup>

Therefore, the author contacted eight existing B2B customers of the brand turn to zero, which are active in industry or commercial and headquartered in Northern Italy and Vorarlberg in order to obtain different opinions and perceptions. These two industries are combined as no possibility exists to interview eight B2B customers from just one of the two industries. Therefore, the selected B2B customers were represented by smaller and medium-sized companies, of which some also operate internationally.

Furthermore, the author has deliberately chosen these two industries, as they will continue to gain importance for turn to zero in the future. On the one hand, the focus of the interviews should be on B2B customers within Vorarlberg, although the brand is already known in Vorarlberg, their expert knowledge should be collected in order to further increase awareness and acquire new customers. On the other hand, the interviews with B2B industrial and commercial customers outside Vorarlberg are just as important to find out how companies become aware of the brand or which online marketing channels provide support to get more companies aware.

In the case of smaller companies, experts are represented by the CEO or head of quality manager, since the company does not possess a separate marketing department. In the case of larger companies, experts are represented by online marketing managers or marketing directors. Furthermore, all experts were very interested in sharing their knowledge and experience about the brand turn to zero, online marketing as well as brand image.

In the period from April 6<sup>th</sup> to April 14<sup>th</sup> 2022 eight B2B customers of turn to zero, which have business activities in the industry or commercial, are interviewed, as illustrated in Table 1.

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<sup>219</sup> Bogner; Littig; Menz 2014, p. 13, 34–35.

<sup>220</sup> Wintzer 2016, p. 66.

<b>Company Expert</b>	<b>Position in the Company</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Interview Date</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>Sector</b>
Expert 1	Online Marketing Manger	Microsoft Teams	06.04.2022	00:39:47	Industry
Expert 2	Head of Marketing & Sales	Microsoft Teams	05.04.2022	00:23:03	Commercial
Expert 3	Digital Marketing Communication	Microsoft Teams	14.04.2022	00:34:33	Industry
Expert 4	CEO	Microsoft Teams	07.04.2022	00:33:22	Commercial
Expert 5	Head of Quality	Microsoft Teams	06.04.2022	00:37:47	Commercial
Expert 6	Head of Marketing	Microsoft Teams	05.04.2022	00:40:14	Commercial
Expert 7	CEO	Microsoft Teams	14.04.2022	00:25:55	Industry
Expert 8	CEO	Microsoft Teams	07.04.2022	00:33:08	Commercial

Table 1: Overview Interview Experts

### 4.3.2 Contact to Interview Partners & Research Setting

The first contact with the experts was established by email. In the course of this, eight B2B customers were familiarized with the topic for the first time, the research questions were explained and the direction of the expert interview was outlined. Because not all of the experts were sure that they would be able to answer the interview questions, a rough interview guide was provided in advance, if requested.

Furthermore, the experts were informed about the anonymous data evaluation and the fact that no direct conclusions could be drawn about the interviewee or the company before the interviews were conducted. In addition, the interview partners were notified about the recording of the interviews to transcribe them afterwards. This simplifies the subsequent evaluation and analysis of the interview results for the author. Thus, by agreeing to be interviewed, the interviewees also consented to the recording of the interview and the subsequent use of the data and information.

Due to COVID-19 and the applicable security regulations, as well as the geographic distribution of the interview partners, semi-structured interviews were held online via Microsoft Teams. The interviews themselves lasted between 23 and 40 minutes and were all conducted in German, as requested by the interview partners. Since all interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams and care was taken to avoid any external interference by selecting a quiet environment, the interviews could be recorded in good quality.<sup>221</sup>

The expert interviews were conducted in the context of one-to-one conversations by the author and based on the interview guide described in chapter 4.3.3. This ensured that all-important expert input regarding the relevant topics and questions was gathered. If the questions were not answered satisfactorily, the author relied on targeted follow-up questions to obtain an answer.

Furthermore, the author also considered the following guidelines, while conducting the interviews with the B2B customers of turn to zero:

- Maintain anonymity of interview partners
- Confidential treatment of the collected data
- Voluntary participation of the interview subjects and right to cancel an interview
- Objectivity of the author<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Saunders; Lewis; Thornhill 2016, p. 391- 392.

<sup>222</sup> Mayer 2013, p. 46; Saunders; Lewis; Thornhill 2016, p. 243–245.

### 4.3.3 Interview Guideline

The interviews with B2B customers are conducted based on a so-called interview guide, in order to ensure that all important aspects are covered in the interview. Additionally, the interview questions do not necessarily have to be asked in the same order in all interviews to ensure comparability. Therefore, the order of the questions can vary depending on the received response. For this reason, the interviewer has the possibility to adapt the questioning towards the specific situations especially, if the answers were not sufficient and more detailed answers are required. Furthermore, the interviewer should also make sure that digressions away from the topic are avoided.<sup>223</sup>

The interview guide is divided into three thematic blocks, which are structured like a funnel and characterized by questions getting more and more specific. Those thematic blocks are based on the research object, as well as the previously defined research questions.

- Thematic block 1: Brand turn to zero
- Thematic block 2: Online Marketing
- Thematic block 3: Brand Image

In the beginning, the first topic block contains introductory questions relating to the brand turn to zero in order to pick up the interviewee. In the following topic block, the topic of online marketing and the relevant channels are addressed. The final topic block deals with the influence of brand image and the influenceability through online marketing. At the end, the interviewee was given the opportunity to make comments or additions about the topics of online marketing, brand image and the brand turn to zero. Moreover, the interview guide is available in English and German and is provided in the appendix of the master's thesis.

When developing the interview guide, open-ended questions are used to obtain detailed and a large number of different answers from the experts in order to answer the pre-defined research questions. The main focus is placed on the background knowledge, opinions and additional information of the experts.

The questions included in the interview guide have already been subjected to a pre-test, which was conducted with the marketing manager of turn to zero. The purpose of the pre-test was to ensure a clear, understandable and neutral formulation of the questions. Furthermore, the pre-test gives the possibility to do a rough estimation of the required time.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Bogner; Littig; Menz 2014, p. 28; Mayer 2013, p. 37–38.

<sup>224</sup> Mayer 2013, p. 99; Saunders; Lewis; Thornhill 2016, p. 243–245.

## 4.4 Data Collection

Expert interviews should be recorded to ensure all important information is captured and can be used for subsequent evaluation and analysis. In this way, incomplete data collection or loss of information can be minimized.<sup>225</sup>

### 4.4.1 Transcription

The process of writing down spoken content is referred to as transcription. This transfer of the audio recording into text form is very time-consuming but provides the basis for later evaluation and analysis. The transcription was done manually through the researcher by using the audio recording. Depending on the length of the interview, the transcription can take up five to ten times longer than the interview. The literature contains a large number of possible rules for transcription. Therefore, the transcription rules applied in this master's thesis are explained in the following chapter. The transcribed expert interviews are provided in the appendix.<sup>226</sup>

### 4.4.2 Transcription Rules

The transcription system includes rules to be considered during the transcription process. For this reason, a decision must be taken about the applied criteria before the transcription begins. With reference to the extent of the transcribed text as well as the interpretation part, different transcription systems are available. This master's thesis focuses on a verbatim transcription, in which the communicated content is transcribed into a complete protocol since the main focus lies on the content of the conversation.<sup>227</sup>

Based on Kuckartz, the following rules are considered in the transcription of the expert interviews:

- Transcription is verbatim.
- Used dialect terms are transferred into colloquial language.
- Longer pauses during the flow of speech are indicated by (...) in the transcription.
- Statements of the interviewer are noted with the abbreviation "I" and those of the interviewee with "B".
- Incomprehensible words are marked by means of (unv.).
- Sound utterances (laughing, sighing, coughing) are only transcribed if they change the meaning of the statement.
- Anonymization of the interview partner and company so that no conclusions can be drawn.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Bogner; Littig; Menz 2014, p. 39–40; Geyer 2016, p. 113.

<sup>226</sup> Fuß; Karbach 2019, p. 17, 29; Kühn 2016, p. 163–164; Mayring 2016, p. 89.

<sup>227</sup> Höld 2009, p. 658.

<sup>228</sup> Fuß; Karbach 2019, p. 30; Geyer 2016, p. 116; Höld 2009, p. 660.

## 4.5 Data Analysis

In this chapter, the different forms of qualitative content analysis are described in more detail. Thereby the selection of the unit of analysis is performed and a more detailed description of the data analysis process is given, which is used for analyzing the conducted interviews.

### 4.5.1 Qualitative Content Analysis

According to Mayring, different possibilities exist for analyzing and interpreting qualitative research. In this master's thesis, qualitative content analysis according to Mayring is applied in order to evaluate and interpret the transcribed expert interviews.<sup>229</sup>

Within the framework of qualitative content analysis, the source material, which is represented by the transcribed expert interviews, is systematically analyzed step by step. For this purpose, the source material is broken down into smaller sections, which are continuously processed and assigned to categories. The center point represents the developed category system, which clarifies the aspects of the existing material to be extracted. Thus, relevant aspects of the original material are identified and assigned to corresponding categories.<sup>230</sup>

According to Mayring, three different basic forms to analyze qualitative content can be differentiated. These three basic forms (analysis units) are used to interpret existing data and represent independent analysis procedures which are selected in dependence of the research question and the collected material.<sup>231</sup>

- Summary: The reduction of the existing data material creates a more manageable overview and represents all relevant content aspects of the source material.
- Explication: Incomprehensible or questionable text passages of the existing data material are enriched by additional data in order to guarantee comprehensibility.
- Structuring: Defined text passages are extracted from the existing data material and the data is evaluated based on the defined criteria.<sup>232</sup>

The analysis unit of the summary is identified as an appropriate method for content analysis because reduction and generalization occur gradually, resulting in a more and more abstract summary. The purpose of the summary for qualitative content analysis is represented by reducing large amounts of data to the most essential. Therefore, with the help of the summary extensive expert transcripts are reduced to the essential and most important aspects and statements.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Mayring 2015, p. 65–66.

<sup>230</sup> Mayring 2016, p. 114–115.

<sup>231</sup> Mayring 2015, p. 67–70.

<sup>232</sup> Mayring 2015, p. 67.

<sup>233</sup> Mayring 2015, p. 69–71, 85.

## 4.5.2 Summarizing Content Analysis

The reduction of the material is based on the seven-step model for content analysis according to Mayring, which can be reduced to four steps for large amount of data.<sup>234</sup>

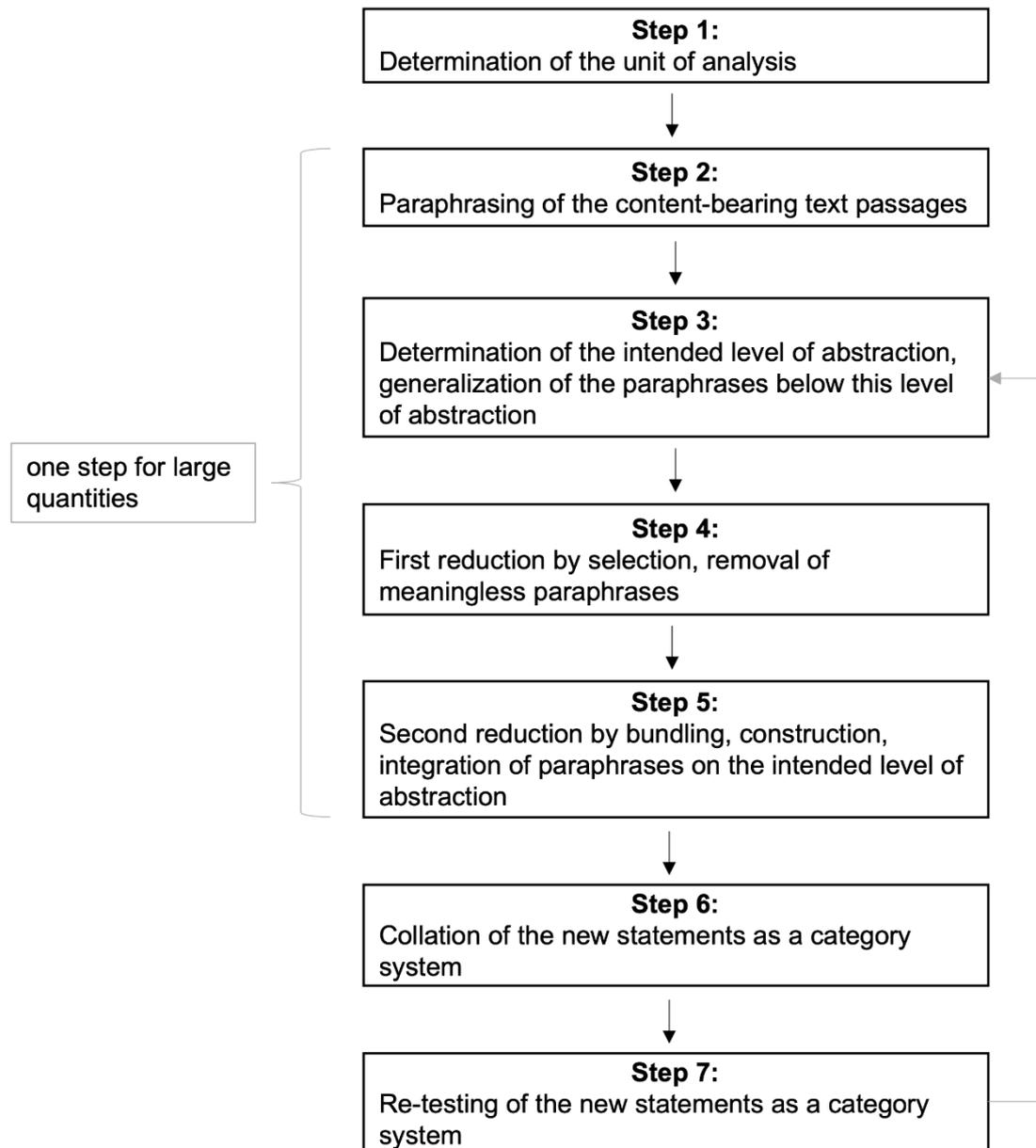


Figure 11: Process Model of Summarizing Content Analysis<sup>235</sup>

Now, the individual phases are briefly described in the following.

<sup>234</sup> Mayring 2015, p. 69–71, 85.

<sup>235</sup> Own illustration translated by the author based on Mayring 2015, p. 70.

## Unit of Analysis

First of all, the qualitative unit of analysis needs to be chosen. The possible units of analysis are described in chapter 4.5.1.

## Paraphrasing

In this first step, all irrelevant text passages without content-related aspects are removed. In a further step, the remaining relevant content is uniformly formulated and reduced to the grammatical short form.<sup>236</sup>

## Generalization

In this second step, paraphrases are generalized to the specified level of abstraction. The content of already existing paraphrases is integrated into the new formulation. In case of ambiguity, theoretical assumptions are used. All paraphrases above the defined abstraction level are not considered for the moment.<sup>237</sup>

## Reduction

The reduction process deletes text passages with synonymous meaning as well as paraphrases without relevant content are removed. In the next step, paraphrases with similar content are combined and reflected by a newly formulated statement. According to Mayring, this step is carried out several times, as shown in Figure 11. In this master thesis, the reduction process was applied in one step.<sup>238</sup>

## Development of Category System

The focus of the content analysis is the definition of the category system. The development of categories can be carried out in different ways: deductively, inductively or a combination of both. Deductive categorization is based on theoretical concepts or the current state of research. In the context of inductive category formation, the categories are determined based on the collected data (expert interviews). Within the qualitative content analysis, the process of category formation is more systematic but follows the same logic and methodology as already described above for summarizing content analysis.<sup>239</sup>

In this master's thesis, the mixed approach of deductive-inductive was used to define the categories since all important content aspects from theory and expert interviews can be included. The first step is the deductive category formation, which represents the starting point. First, a few main categories are defined, which can be derived from the research question, reference theories or the interview guide. Therefore, the existing material is roughly categorized. In the second step, inductive category formation is applied. Sub-categories are formed below the existing main categories. For the formation of the sub-categories, only the assigned data for each main category, which originates from the expert interviews, is used.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Mayring 2015, p. 70–72.

<sup>237</sup> Mayring 2015, p. 70–72.

<sup>238</sup> Mayring 2015, p. 70–72.

<sup>239</sup> Mayring 2015, p. 85–87; 2016, p. 114–115.

<sup>240</sup> Kuckartz 2018, p. 95–96; Mayring 2015, p. 85–87.

The developed category system represents the result and is composed of different categories per topic area. The individual categories contain essential and content-bearing aspects.<sup>241</sup>

### **Re-Testing of new Statement**

In the final phase, a check must be performed to determine if the new statements, which are represented in the form of the category system, still reflect the original material. In this process, care must be taken to ensure that all relevant and content-bearing aspects are included.<sup>242</sup>

In the case of large data sets, several analysis steps are combined, thus resulting in the four phases, which are applied in the master's thesis:

- Unit of analysis
- Paraphrasing, generalization, reduction
- Development of category system
- Re-Testing of the new statement<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Kuckartz 2018, p. 95–96; Mayring 2015, p. 85–87.

<sup>242</sup> Mayring 2015, p. 71–85.

<sup>243</sup> Mayring 2015, p. 70–72, 85.

## 5 Empirical Research

The following chapter presents the developed category system as well as the main interview results from B2B customers originating from industrial and commercial sectors. Furthermore, the most important interview findings are summarized and classified based on the category system.

### 5.1 Content Analysis

As already mentioned, the development of the category system is based on the deductive-inductive approach, since a certain database already exists, the deductive approach was first applied to perform an initial classification, which was specified later by means of the inductive approach.<sup>244</sup>

The main categories as well as the number of subcategories, which were formed by the analysis process according to Mayring are illustrated in Table 2.

<b>Main Category</b>	<b>Number of Sub-Categories</b>
Brand turn to zero	5
Attention	4
Brand Awareness	4
Brand Image	3
Social Media Channels	5
Social Media Advertisements	3
Website	3
Purchase Decision Process	2

Table 2: Category System<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Kuckartz 2018, p. 95–96; Mayring 2015, p. 85–87.

<sup>245</sup> Own illustration translated by the author.

## 5.2 Evaluation of Results

Now, this chapter summarizes the most important findings of the individual categories, which result from the conducted expert interviews.

### 5.2.1 Brand turn to zero

#### 5.2.1.1 Perception turn to zero

The brand turn to zero is associated with improvements. Above all, the brand shows companies a way to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions as well as their carbon footprint in order to reduce environmental impact and contributes to environmental protection. Furthermore, the brand represents a way to achieve the corporate goal of climate neutrality. In addition, the new brand name turn to zero is perceived as more concrete, understandable and simple compared to the old name Klimaneutralitätsbündnis 2025.<sup>246</sup>

#### 5.2.1.2 Attention turn to zero

Some of turn to zero's industrial and commercial customers have been involved since the beginning and did not become aware of the brand through online marketing measures, as online marketing channels were not used intensively at that time. Even today, online marketing channels are underutilized, because customers still became aware of the brand through personal contacts from their network or sustainability institutes.<sup>247</sup>

#### 5.2.1.3 Importance & Visibility turn to zero

The brand turn to zero is not visible. This leads to the fact that new companies only conditionally become aware of turn to zero. In order to attract attention, create awareness and spread knowledge about turn to zero, a variety of online marketing campaigns are necessary. Furthermore, to increase the visibility of the brand, especially professional corporate networks, such as LinkedIn or Xing, represent important online marketing channels. The main reason behind this is the possibility of specifically restricting target groups. In this way, topics around sustainability can be placed in a targeted manner and companies can be encouraged to contribute to the environment.<sup>248</sup>

Shared turn to zero advertisements and postings by customers increase the visibility of the brand on professional networks as well as on Facebook, as most customers so far became aware of turn to zero through personal recommendations. In addition, the necessity exists to actively contact relevant people of companies, such as the managing director, marketing manager or sustainability officer, in order to achieve brand visibility among customers.

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<sup>246</sup> Expert 2 2022, p. 1; Expert 4 2022, p. 1; Expert 5 2022, p. 1; Expert 6 2022, p. 1; Expert 7 2022, p. 1.

<sup>247</sup> Expert 2 2022, p. 1; Expert 4 2022, p. 1; Expert 5 2022, p. 1; Expert 6 2022, p. 1; Expert 7 2022, p. 1; Expert 8 2022, p. 2–3.

<sup>248</sup> Expert 5 2022, p. 2; Expert 6 2022, p. 6; Expert 7 2022, p. 5; Expert 8 2022, p. 3.

Furthermore, advertising placements on country-specific online news channels or business newspapers, as well as banner placements, can help to increase brand visibility.<sup>249</sup>

#### **5.2.1.4 Information Research**

The initial search for information takes place via several online marketing channels. Above all, the website represents the most important point of contact. In addition, Google searches, professional social media channels such as LinkedIn or Xing, Facebook and online specialist portals serve as sources of information. The main channels for additional research are represented by the website and personal exchanges, as the brand and the compensation projects are explained. Furthermore, marketing documents such as brochures also serve as a basis for further research.<sup>250</sup>

#### **5.2.1.5 Interaction Instagram Channel turn to zero**

If turn to zero owns an Instagram channel which is regularly updated with interesting content, customers will subscribe to the channel. Additionally, postings are liked or shared depending on the quality and relevance of the content. Reports from the community, about companies which improved in sustainability as well as information about the contribution that companies can make, are seen as interesting. In addition, the target group of companies can also be made aware of intriguing content about turn to zero via professional networks. Therefore, B2B customers can be better reached via LinkedIn and Xing.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Expert 2 2022, p. 2; Expert 4 2022, p. 1–2; Expert 6 2022, p. 2; Expert 7 2022, p. 3, 5–6; Expert 8 2022, p. 3–4, 9–10.

<sup>250</sup> Expert 1 2022, p. 1–2; Expert 2 2022, p. 3; Expert 3 2022, p. 1; Expert 4 2022, p. 2; Expert 5 2022, p. 2, 3; Expert 6 2022, p. 2; Expert 7 2022, p. 2; Expert 8 2022, p. 3.

<sup>251</sup> Expert 1 2022, p. 5–6; Expert 5 2022, p. 5–6; Expert 6 2022, p. 5; Expert 8 2022, p. 6.

## **5.2.2 Attention**

### **5.2.2.1 Website**

The website represents the digital touchpoint through which brand core values are communicated and therefore provides the basis for creating attention of the brand. Furthermore, the website is suitable for generating attention for sustainability issues. However, the existing website must be known by the target group, otherwise, the website only provides low benefits. On the one hand, this can be achieved by a search-engine-optimized website. On the other hand, active advertising measures, social media channels or banner placements are used in the awareness phase to attract the attention of the prospective customer. Ideally, the prospect is redirected to the website since the information phase is initiated with the website visit.<sup>252</sup>

### **5.2.2.2 Social Media Channels**

Social media channels can be used in the awareness phase in order to generate attention for products or services offered by the company. The professional networks LinkedIn and Xing are suitable for generating attention around sustainability, as the target group-specific communication enables a targeted approach for prospective customers.<sup>253</sup>

### **5.2.2.3 Google**

If the brand or website does not appear on Google's first search results pages, the search is not continued and the website is not visited. Therefore, the findability of the brand or website via the Google search function is an important aspect. Search engine optimization can guarantee the appearance of the brand or the website on the top search results pages, as long as search terms and content are geared towards the sustainability industry. This ensures visibility of the brand or website, raises the chances that interested parties will visit the website and the brand will be part of the shortlisting process.<sup>254</sup>

### **5.2.2.4 Brand Visibility**

The visibility of the brand is an important criterion in the purchase decision. Non-visible brands cannot be found, and thus cannot be considered in the selection process. Therefore, the visibility of the brand represents a prerequisite right at the beginning of the awareness phase, because prospective customers must be able to associate the product or service with the brand. Thus, the visibility of the brand can be ensured by a target group-specific selection of online marketing channels as well as social media advertisements. In addition, awareness campaigns on social media can be used to increase visibility, attention, reach and thus awareness. In new markets companies first have to present the brand, brand values, benefits as well as unique selling propositions and afterwards the products and services, since the target group does not possess knowledge.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Expert 2 2022, p. 1–3; Expert 3 2022, p. 3, 5; Expert 4 2022, p. 2; Expert 6 2022, p. 3, 4.

<sup>253</sup> Expert 2 2022, p. 1–2; Expert 3 2022, p. 1; Expert 6 2022, p. 3.

<sup>254</sup> Expert 3 2022, p. 8; Expert 5 2022, p. 3; Expert 6 2022, p. 2, 8.

<sup>255</sup> Expert 1 2022, p. 5, 7; Expert 2 2022, p. 6; Expert 3 2022, p. 8; Expert 4 2022, p. 7; Expert 5 2022, p. 7; Expert 7 2022, p. 4–5.

## **5.2.3 Brand Awareness**

### **5.2.3.1 Website**

Furthermore, the website contributes to increasing brand awareness. However, brand awareness is not achieved solely by the website, therefore a certain dependence exists on other online marketing channels. Moreover, the website as a foundation of all company activities is a prerequisite in order to increase brand awareness, since all online marketing activities pursue one goal, to forward the prospect to the website. In addition, brand awareness can subsequently be increased via advertising campaigns or guerilla marketing on the website, search engine optimization as well as through social media channels.<sup>256</sup>

### **5.2.3.2 Social Media Channels**

Lacking activities on social media channels negatively impact brand awareness, as the brand fades into oblivion. Therefore, increasing brand awareness and establishing reach are achieved through organic content published on the company's own social media channels and advertisements on various communication channels. The company must regularly provide organic content because the postings activate the algorithm in the background. This algorithm displays the content more often to the target group. In particular, relevant social media channels for the target group are suitable to provide content, as people spend a lot of time on social platforms. In the professional sector, business networks such as LinkedIn and Xing are particularly suitable for raising awareness. However, business managers also represent private individuals, who can be reached via Facebook. In order to increase brand awareness, firstly the presence, as well as the active provision of content on LinkedIn and secondly on Facebook should be promoted.<sup>257</sup>

### **5.2.3.3 Social Media Advertising**

Without promotional efforts on social media channels, brands can be forgotten, which negatively impacts awareness. Therefore, social media advertisements are fundamentally important and purposeful for increasing brand awareness and simultaneously contribute significantly to brand building. The provision of interesting content represents an important aspect in that context. Above all, advertising measures on professional networks like LinkedIn and Xing as well as Facebook, as the platform number one for private individuals, represent suitable social media channels for increasing brand awareness. Moreover, Facebook is also suitable since executives act as private individuals at the same time.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Expert 1 2022, p. 3, 5; Expert 2 2022, p. 3; Expert 3 2022, p. 2; Expert 4 2022, p. 2; Expert 6 2022, p. 6; Expert 7 2022, p. 2; Expert 8 2022, p. 4.

<sup>257</sup> Expert 1 2022, p. 3–4, 6, 8; Expert 4 2022, p. 4, 6; Expert 6 2022, p. 3, 6.

<sup>258</sup> Expert 2 2022, p. 4; Expert 4 2022, p. 4, 6; Expert 5 2022, p. 5; Expert 6 2022, p. 3; Expert 7 2022, p. 3–4.

#### **5.2.3.4 Google**

As long as the website appears on the first Google search results pages, the positioning contributes to increase awareness of the website. In order to achieve the appearance on the first Google search results pages, a search engine optimized website is required.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Expert 2 2022, p. 3; Expert 3 2022, p. 8; Expert 5 2022, p. 4.

## 5.2.4 Brand Image

### 5.2.4.1 Perception

The goal of the brand is to generate a uniform perception, also called an image, across all online marketing channels. Moreover, the prerequisite for a uniform perception or generation of the brand image across all online marketing channels is represented by consistent presentation of the brand respectively the communication of the brand identity. In order to achieve that, a consistently reliable and authentic brand is required, regardless of the online marketing channels.<sup>260</sup>

If a company does not achieve consistent and continuous communication, regardless of the online marketing channels, different perceptions arise. As a result, the company's communication, as well as the perception of the interested party, no longer matches.<sup>261</sup>

### 5.2.4.2 Influencing Factor Website

The website, as an important online marketing channel, is fundamentally important for building brand image, as the target group can be addressed. Therefore, the website, as the company's storefront is image-building since prospective customers often generate their first impression of a brand or company online by visiting the website. Furthermore, the website is visited to receive information about the brand or company and to analyze the provided content. The generated first impression triggers either a good or bad feeling by the prospective customer and is decisive for future decisions about cooperation with the brand or the company. Moreover, the company has already an idea about the image that should be generated. For this reason, the company website must be designed accordingly, so that the prospective customer perceives the desired image of the brand.<sup>262</sup>

The website exerts a significant influence on the image formation of a brand, as the website influences the perception of the interested parties. The perception and thus also the brand image is influenced above all by the design, for example by the colors, as well as the structure of the website. Additionally, the presentation, the communication and the preparation of the content exert an influence. The preparation of the content mainly refers to the comprehensibility, information content as well as scope of the text. Moreover, also the selected images and the provided videos influence the formation of the image. In addition, aspects such as the usability and up-to-dateness of the website and the compatibility on different devices as well as mobile devices impact the image formation.<sup>263</sup>

Thus, the website represents an important channel for prospects to sharpen the perceived brand image.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Expert 2 2022, p. 4; Expert 3 2022, p. 6–7.

<sup>261</sup> Expert 3 2022, p. 6.

<sup>262</sup> Expert 1 2022, p. 3, 6, 8; Expert 2 2022, p. 5; Expert 3 2022, p. 6; Expert 4 2022, p. 3–5; Expert 5 2022, p. 6.

<sup>263</sup> Expert 1 2022, p. 3, 6; Expert 3 2022, p. 6; Expert 4 2022, p. 5; Expert 7 2022, p. 4; Expert 8 2022, p. 7.

<sup>264</sup> Expert 1 2022, p. 3.

### 5.2.4.3 Influencing Factor Social Media

Social media channels, especially, Facebook and LinkedIn represent important online marketing channels for building brand image and reaching the target group. Furthermore, establishing the brand image via social media is extremely important since the majority of interested parties do not even visit the website. On the one side, the organic content that companies post on their social media channels, as well as advertising campaigns on social media, are significantly responsible for image building. In this context especially the used images, videos as well as advertising content are image-building. Depending on the presentation, social media channels, as well as advertisements on social media, exert a positive or negative effect on the brand image. A positive effect can be achieved by target group-specific, non-intrusive advertising, with added value for the customer. The use of appropriate images and videos adds a human, lively touch to the content and promotes a positive spirit and credibility. On the other side, lacking activities and advertising measures on social media channels negatively influence the brand image. Furthermore, negative influence on the brand image and trustworthiness is exerted by intrusive, permanent advertising with impertinent or irrelevant content.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Expert 1 2022, p. 3, 6, 8; Expert 2 2022, p. 4, 5; Expert 3 2022, p. 6–8; Expert 4 2022, p. 4, 6; Expert 5 2022, p. 6; Expert 6 2022, p. 7; Expert 7 2022, p. 5; Expert 8 2022, p. 8.

## 5.2.5 Social Media Channels

### 5.2.5.1 General

Additionally, social media channels represent further channels for visibility and are of enormous importance, as a very precise narrowing of the target group and thus a targeted approach, as well as provision of relevant content, is possible. In addition, social media channels are suitable for communicating the brand since targeted communication can add human traits to the brand. Social media channels are important for promoting interaction and exchange with the target group. Moreover, all marketing measures on social media pursue one overriding goal to direct interested parties to the website. With regard to the content on social media, important aspects need to be taken into account. Most importantly, entertainment and storytelling need to be considered, while preparing content for social media. Moreover, these two factors indicate the quality of the provided content. Social media aims to reach the target group through provided images, videos or texts, in order to forward the interested parties to the website.<sup>266</sup>

### 5.2.5.2 LinkedIn

LinkedIn as a professional network represents the most important social media channel for the B2B sector due to international distribution and the associated wide reach. Furthermore, LinkedIn offers a great advantage of target group-specific accessibility, as filter functions can be used according to demographics, geography, job titles, etc. Thus, LinkedIn represents the best channel for business customers, because responsible persons with decision-making power can be addressed specifically in the company. Furthermore, the business network exists to provide high-quality information for the B2B sector, to pursue professional interests and to build up a professional network.<sup>267</sup>

The professional network is applied to arouse the interest of companies with regard to sustainability topics. Moreover, the content is used to raise awareness, impart knowledge as well as educate the target group. For this reason, a large number of whitepapers can be downloaded on LinkedIn. Furthermore, LinkedIn can also be used specifically for product branding. All of these content-related measures contribute positively to brand awareness and also increase brand recognition. As already mentioned, LinkedIn is also applied to build up a professional network and therefore also offers the opportunity to exchange information and maintain contacts with interested persons from the network.<sup>268</sup>

### 5.2.5.3 Xing

Compared to LinkedIn, Xing exhibits a much smaller reach, as this professional network is only used in German-speaking countries. For this reason, the network is predominantly known in the Germany-Austria-Switzerland (DACH) region.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> Expert 1 2022, p. 2, 8; Expert 2 2022, p. 4, 5; Expert 3 2022, p. 2; Expert 6 2022, p. 7; Expert 7 2022, p. 4.

<sup>267</sup> Expert 1 2022, p. 2, 8; Expert 2 2022, p. 2, 4; Expert 3 2022, p. 1–2; Expert 5 2022, p. 2, 5.

<sup>268</sup> Expert 1 2022, p. 2; Expert 2 2022, p. 2, 4; Expert 3 2022, p. 1–2, 5; Expert 5 2022, p. 2.

<sup>269</sup> Expert 1 2022, p. 2, 5; Expert 5 2022, p. 5.

#### **5.2.5.4 Facebook**

Facebook represents the top social media platform for private individuals and is particularly important due to its enormous reach. On this platform, too, target groups can be partially restricted based on people's disclosed interests. Thus, the content can be published in relation to the interests of the target group. In this way, the managing directors of companies can be addressed as Facebook users are predominantly people over the age of 30 years. In terms of content, topics must be structured accordingly in order to guarantee an entertainment factor, since Facebook is used during leisure time. However, Facebook can be used for raising awareness or educational campaigns on certain topics, such as sustainability, if these are structured in an appropriately entertaining way. Nevertheless, this social media channel is not suitable for product marketing or the presentation of new products.<sup>270</sup>

#### **5.2.5.5 Instagram**

Instagram represents a regularly updated platform that currently exhibits a high number of users and therefore high reach. In terms of target groups, primarily the younger generation is active on Instagram. Furthermore, target groups cannot be as specifically restricted as on other social media channels. Due to the fact of Instagram belongs to Facebook, synergies of both platforms can be used. Therefore, postings can be published on both channels with just one click, resulting in high reach. Instagram focuses primarily on the visual provision of content in the form of short videos or meaningful images. Therefore, the posting must be designed accordingly in order to entertain interested parties or users. However, the target group of B2B customers can be better reached via LinkedIn.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Expert 1 2022, p. 3–5, 8; Expert 2 2022, p. 4; Expert 4 2022, p. 4; Expert 5 2022, p. 5.

<sup>271</sup> Expert 1 2022, p. 5; Expert 2 2022, p. 4; Expert 3 2022, p. 1–2, 5; Expert 5 2022, p. 5; Expert 6 2022, p. 5; Expert 7 2022, p. 3.

## 5.2.6 Social Media Advertisements

### 5.2.6.1 Advertising Measure

The selection of the appropriate social media channel is based on the goal of the advertising campaign as well as on the target group to be reached. Furthermore, advertising measures on social media pursue the overriding goal of directing interested parties to the website, since more detailed information is provided. The advertisements must be designed accordingly in order to arouse interest in the brand or the company. If advertisements achieve this goal, it can be determined as an indicator of innovation.<sup>272</sup>

### 5.2.6.2 Limitation Target Group

Due to the possibility of limiting the target group, advertising measures on social media platforms are meaningful and offer many advantages. Furthermore, advertising measures on social media are target-oriented, as people spend time on social platforms and specific target group accessibility exists through filter functions.<sup>273</sup>

Advertisements on LinkedIn can be restricted to the target group, which clarifies the importance for the B2B sector. Based on the user data, the possibility exists to filter by industries, professions or companies with a certain number of employees. Facebook can also narrow down the target group to a certain extent using available data through user profiles, such as interests. In this way, advertisements are displayed only for relevant target groups.<sup>274</sup>

### 5.2.6.3 Advertising Content

All advertisements have to be designed accordingly in terms of content, in order to arouse the interest of the target group. This can be achieved through advertising content triggering positive emotions, fun and passion. Thereby interest of the target group is aroused to deeper information and therefore visit the website.<sup>275</sup>

In general, advertising on social media channels can be used to educate and raise awareness about sustainability as well as climate neutrality to ensure knowledge transfer, since some companies do not yet possess knowledge. Furthermore, advertisements can be utilized to inform companies about which contribution can be made towards sustainability and the advantages resulting therefrom. In addition, social media advertisements can be used to arouse the need for joining turn to zero and therefore becoming part of the community. This can be achieved by highlighting benefits for companies and referring to existing customers. In order to gain new customers, opportunities to improve the company's own image in the direction of sustainability can be communicated, which arise as turn to zero customers. In this context, also the steps for joining turn to zero can be explained.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> Expert 1 2022, p. 5, 9; Expert 3 2022, p. 5; Expert 7 2022, p. 3.

<sup>273</sup> Expert 7 2022, p. 4; Expert 8 2022, p. 6.

<sup>274</sup> Expert 1 2022, p. 8; Expert 3 2022, p. 2.

<sup>275</sup> Expert 4 2022, p. 5.

<sup>276</sup> Expert 2 2022, p. 5; Expert 6 2022, p. 5–6; Expert 8 2022, p. 7.

In addition, education, product marketing, as well as the presentation of new products in the form of advertisements contribute to raise awareness and can be focused on LinkedIn, since business customers are addressed.<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> Expert 1 2022, p. 2; Expert 5 2022, p. 2; Expert 7 2022, p. 4–5.

## 5.2.7 Website

### 5.2.7.1 Significance & Goals

The website as a static and important source of information presents the company or the brand and forms the prerequisite for establishing new contacts and generating visibility. Thus, nowadays the website forms the basis, the first point of contact as well as the destination of all online marketing activities on social media since this channel provides more detailed, long-term valid and important information about the brand respectively the offered products and services. Thus, the importance of a website is illustrated since the website is the center of all incoming and outgoing activities.<sup>278</sup>

The website represents one of the strongest digital channels and at the same time the digital footprint of the company since all important information regarding the brand or the company is provided. Furthermore, the website offers the advantage as companies can determine the provided content. Moreover, the first impression of a brand is also created based on the website in the digital world. Therefore, the website represents one of the most important and serious information channels, especially in the information phase since the possibility exists to track the behavior of the visitors in order to optimize the website.<sup>279</sup>

Furthermore, the website pursues the goal of creating awareness, communicating important content, establishing a communication platform, building up an interaction with the target group and thus arousing their interest in order to achieve further success.<sup>280</sup>

### 5.2.7.2 Website Design & Content

Regarding website design, the following aspects also need to be taken into account. These include, on the one hand, the structure of the website, user-friendliness and the ease of navigation, which simultaneously represent indicators of a good website. On the other hand, the website should be designed authentically according to the brand and the brand identity that the prospective customer is supposed to perceive. The provision of the content should be as specific as possible. This means simple, as well as clear information preparation in the form of bullet points and keywords or step-by-step instructions, is preferred.<sup>281</sup>

The homepage presents all important information about the company and brand as well as brand and company values at a glance. In this context, care must be taken to convey credibility if the brand or company should be given credence.<sup>282</sup>

The website must present company activities as well as products and services in a clear and comprehensible manner, supported by meaningful images. With regard to services provided by turn to zero, an important aspect is the presentation of possible and serious compensation projects for offsetting unavoidable greenhouse gas emissions, as companies can choose from

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<sup>278</sup> Expert 1 2022, p. 3; Expert 2 2022, p. 3; Expert 3 2022, p. 1; Expert 4 2022, p. 2, 3; Expert 6 2022, p. 7; Expert 7 2022, p. 2; Expert 8 2022, p. 7.

<sup>279</sup> Expert 1 2022, p. 3; Expert 3 2022, p. 2, 5; Expert 4 2022, p. 2.

<sup>280</sup> Expert 2 2022, p. 1–2; Expert 4 2022, p. 2; Expert 6 2022, p. 3.

<sup>281</sup> Expert 2 2022, p. 3; Expert 3 2022, p. 2, 3; Expert 5 2022, p. 3; Expert 6 2022, p. 4.

<sup>282</sup> Expert 1 2022, p. 4; Expert 3 2022, p. 2, 3, 6; Expert 4 2022, p. 3; Expert 6 2022, p. 7; Expert 8 2022, p. 5.

a wide range of different projects for compensation. In this context, importance needs to be placed on a clear, simple and comprehensible explanation concerning various offset projects and the principle behind them.<sup>283</sup>

In addition, presenting a USP of the company or brand, as well as the USP and added value for the customer is important. Furthermore, the website needs to clarify which contribution companies can make to climate protection.<sup>284</sup>

In addition, the presentation of existing customers as well as the provision of testimonials and feedback from other companies, also represent important content aspects of a website. Another significant aspect is represented by the steps to membership for the purpose of becoming a customer of turn to zero. In this context, especially low-threshold entry points are beneficial. A clearly visible contact information of the experts needs to be provided on the website in order to get more information. In this context, the provision of email addresses or telephone numbers for contact is important. Hidden contact options can provide the impression that companies do not actually want to be contacted by customers.<sup>285</sup>

Based on the provided information, the customer generates an image or feeling of the company, which determines, whether or not the company fits their own and thus future cooperations arise or not.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Expert 1 2022, p. 4; Expert 2 2022, p. 3; Expert 4 2022, p. 3; Expert 5 2022, p. 3, 4; Expert 7 2022, p. 3; Expert 8 2022, p. 4.

<sup>284</sup> Expert 1 2022, p. 4, 7; Expert 5 2022, p. 3, 4; Expert 8 2022, p. 5.

<sup>285</sup> Expert 1 2022, p. 3; Expert 2 2022, p. 3; Expert 3 2022, p. 3; Expert 4 2022, p. 3; Expert 5 2022, p. 3, 4.

<sup>286</sup> Expert 1 2022, p. 4, 7; Expert 5 2022, p. 3, 4; Expert 8 2022, p. 5.

### 5.2.7.3 Credibility & Trust

Some factors contribute to building credibility and trust in a brand or website. In addition to technical factors such as website loading time, website service, certificates and test protocols, also the presented content on the website is of major importance. Above all, the provision of current and professional information about the brand or company as well as qualitative preparation of the information are indices for building up credibility and trust towards a brand or website. Therefore, prospective customers have the impression of regularly and actively provided information since the website is updated on a regular basis. During the content preparation, honest and transparent communication of the information needs to be focused on since the brand should fulfil the promises made by the website. In addition to that, consistent communication across all marketing channels should be sought in order to avoid contradictory statements, as these exert a negative impact on credibility and trust.<sup>287</sup>

Moreover, references or testimonials including pictures, statements, the name of already existing customers as well as expert comments strengthen credibility. Also, personal testimonials by means of videos, where people talk about their experiences boost credibility and trust, because statements of company-neutral persons are weighted more heavily than company's own. A clearly designated option for contacting the company's subject-matter experts, which is presented on the website also increases trust in a website or brand. In addition to content and technical aspects, an appealing website design also represents an important factor in building trust, since an outdated design impacts trust, credibility and brand image negatively.<sup>288</sup>

An essential and important aspect is represented by the perceived brand image, whether credibility or trust is built up towards a brand or a website since the majority of advertising and marketing takes place in subconsciousness. In addition to the website, also the company's linked social media channels respectively postings and activities on social media can be examined more closely in order to verify authenticity or trustworthiness of the brand or company.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> Expert 1 2022, p. 4; Expert 2 2022, p. 3–4; Expert 3 2022, p. 3; Expert 4 2022, p. 3; Expert 5 2022, p. 3, 4; Expert 7 2022, p. 2, 3; Expert 8 2022, p. 5, 7.

<sup>288</sup> Expert 1 2022, p. 4; Expert 2 2022, p. 3–4; Expert 3 2022, p. 3; Expert 4 2022, p. 3; Expert 5 2022, p. 3, 4; Expert 6 2022, p. 4; Expert 8 2022, p. 4, 7.

<sup>289</sup> Expert 3 2022, p. 3; Expert 4 2022, p. 3.

## 5.2.8 Purchase Decision Process

### 5.2.8.1 Influence Brand & Brand Image

Brands are gaining in importance because they ensure recognition, therefore companies need to work on brand building. In this context, also the logo represents an important point as part of the brand. In addition, the generated brand image is an important factor in the purchase decision since a significant influence is exerted. On the one hand, this can be explained by the analysis of the brand appearance or the perceived image on various online marketing channels, before the purchase decision is taken. On the other hand, the reason lies in the comparison process which takes place between the brand perception and the conveyed brand image. If these two factors match, the prospective customer decides in favor of the brand.<sup>290</sup>

### 5.2.8.2 Significance of Brand & Brand Image

The brand image should be perceived in such a way that the product or service behind is reflected to ensure that prospective customers perceive the image correctly. As customers expect that the communicated measures improve the company's sustainability efforts and do not just enhance the company's image.<sup>291</sup>

Especially in the area of sustainability, greenwashing is currently an important topic and fraud is also not uncommon in the consulting sector. Therefore, a strong brand, the knowledge of the values behind the brand, as well as a positive brand image, are enormously important in order to make the purchasing decision and thus enter into cooperation with another company. Consequently, the brand's promises in terms of content need to be reflected by the perceived brand image, since purchases are driven by emotions and customers ultimately buy the brand image.<sup>292</sup>

For this reason, the brand image represents an important decision-making factor for the selection of cooperation partners, as the conveyed images and values of the partners need to be compatible. Furthermore, a well-chosen cooperation partner with a positive image in the direction of sustainability also enhances the company's own image. In addition, a strong brand or a positive brand image of the cooperation partner affects the own company in a profitable way. As a result, the brand image is fundamentally important for the future success of the brand.<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Expert 1 2022, p. 6; Expert 2 2022, p. 5–6; Expert 4 2022, p. 7; Expert 7 2022, p. 5; Expert 8 2022, p. 9.

<sup>291</sup> Expert 2 2022, p. 6; Expert 6 2022, p. 8.

<sup>292</sup> Expert 1 2022, p. 7; Expert 3 2022, p. 8; Expert 4 2022, p. 6; Expert 5 2022, p. 7; Expert 6 2022, p. 7–8; Expert 8 2022, p. 9.

<sup>293</sup> Expert 1 2022, p. 7; Expert 3 2022, p. 8; Expert 4 2022, p. 6–7; Expert 6 2022, p. 7–8; Expert 7 2022, p. 5.

## 6 Discussion

In this section, the defined sub-research questions, as well as the main-research question, are answered by bringing theoretical as well as practical findings together. The answers refer specifically to the brand turn to zero, which offers consulting services for B2B customers in the sustainability industry. Furthermore, this chapter clarifies the limitations of the master thesis and gives an outlook for possible further research.

### 6.1 Answering of Sub-Research Questions

#### **Sub Question 1: What influence has online marketing on creating brand image awareness for consulting services in the sustainability industry?**

Online marketing communicates the brand identity in order to develop the brand image in the minds of the customers. Therefore, online marketing not only increases awareness of the brand but also awareness of the brand image, since online marketing channels possess enormous reach as well as the ability to quickly spread content virally. However, online marketing not only contributes to brand image awareness but also influences the brand image of turn to zero.

Especially the website as well as social media channels such as LinkedIn and Facebook represent important online marketing channels for building brand image of turn to zero as well as influence the image formation process. Furthermore, the website is image-building, since first impressions of a brand are generated based on the website. For this reason, the perception of the brand image of turn to zero is mainly influenced by the following aspects:

- Design of the website (e.g. colors or fonts)
- Structure of the website
- Preparation (comprehensibility, information content and scope) of provided content on the website
- Presentation and communication of content provided on the website
- Selection of images and videos on the website
- Usability and up-to-dateness of the website
- Compatibility on different devices

Social media channels are also image-building due to the organic content that companies post as well as advertising campaigns, which influence the impression of the potential customer. In this context, the main influencing factors are represented by the used images, videos as well as content and communicated messages in terms of turn to zero. Depending on the presentation either a positive or negative effect is exerted on the brand image. A positive influence is achieved by target group-specific, non-intrusive advertising, with added value for the customer. On the contrary lacking activities on social media channels as well as intrusive,

permanent advertising with impertinent or irrelevant content negatively influence the brand image of turn to zero.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Adlmaier-Herbst; Mayer 2021, p. 27; Ahrholdt; Greve; Hopf 2019, p. 173–174; Albisser 2022, p. 31; Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 31–32, 64–76, 116–117; Alpar; Koczy; Metzen 2015, p. 7; Daou 2020, p. 12; Dietrich 2020; 2021; Eckert 2014, p. 150; Eng 2017, p. 1, 27, 45; Expert 1 2022, p. 3, 6, 8; Expert 2 2022, p. 4, 5; Expert 3 2022, p. 6–8; Expert 4 2022, p. 4, 6; Expert 5 2022, p. 6; Expert 6 2022, p. 7; Expert 7 2022, p. 4–5; Expert 8 2022, p. 7–8; Grote 2021; Huang; Ku 2016, p. 83; Immerschitt 2017, p. 63, 86; Kamps; Schetter 2020, p. 133–134; Knappe; Lundell 2011, p. 6–9; Kreutzer; Rumler; Wille-Baumkauff 2020, p. 14, 82, 236–243; Kreutzer 2021, p. 406; Lammenett 2006, p. 214; Macnamara et al. 2016, p. 1–11; Meenaghan 1995, p. 1; Rosengren; Standoft; Sundbrandt 2010, p. 6–7; Rommerskirchen; Roslon 2020, p. 199–204, 214–215; Sanny et al. 2020, p. 2141; Schmitt 2019, p. 39–42; Steiner 2020, p. 62; Wankerl 2021, p. 282–283; Zerres; Tscheulin; Israel 2017, p. 176–179.

## **Sub Question 2: What are appropriate visible online marketing channels for a brand in the sustainability sector that offers consulting services?**

According to the literature as well as the insights gained from the conducted interviews, revealed that the website and social media channels are appropriate online marketing channels for the brand turn to zero respectively for the topic of sustainability.

First of all, the **website** is of importance, since one of the strongest digital channels represents the basis for online communication and generating visibility, the prerequisite in order to increase brand awareness for turn to zero as well as the destination of all online marketing activities on social media. Therefore, the website as a source of detailed information is especially important in the awareness phase. Furthermore, this online marketing channel represents the center of all incoming and outgoing activities, which illustrates the importance of the provided content. However, the success of a website is linked to the knowledge of the audience regarding the existing website. If the target group does not know the existing site, the website only provides low benefits. For this reason, a certain dependence exists on other online marketing channels in order to attract the attention of B2B customers.

In this context, a combination with social media channels is beneficial in order to attract the attention of the target group in the awareness phase and create awareness for turn to zero, due to the rapid spread of information. Furthermore, the overriding goal of directing interested parties to the website is pursued by social media channels and all other marketing measures. Especially LinkedIn and Facebook are seen as top social media channels for addressing and generating attention for sustainability topics in the area of B2B customers. The reasons are enormous reach as well as the possibility of precise delimitation of target groups, which enables a target-oriented approach as well as specific provision of relevant content.

**LinkedIn**, as the most important professional network in the B2B area, uses filter functions according to demographics, geography, job titles, etc. to obtain target-group-specific accessibility. Therefore, responsible persons with decision-making power in the companies can be addressed directly. Additionally, LinkedIn is suitable for sustainability topics since the business network exists to provide high-quality information for pursuing professional interests for the B2B sector.

At the same time business managers also represent private individuals, who can be best reached via **Facebook**, as it represents the most important social media platform for private persons. On this social media channel too, target-group-specific accessibility can be partially restricted based on people's disclosed interests as well as other user profile information to place sustainability topics.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 31–32, 64–76, 116; Alpar; Koczy; Metzen 2015, p. 7; Bockhorni; Beauchamp 2019, p. 5–6; Daou 2020, p. 12; Dietrich 2020; Eng 2017, p. 19, 27; Expert 1 2022, p. 2–8; Expert 2 2022, p. 1–5; Expert 3 2022, p. 1–2, 5; Expert 4 2022, p. 2–4, 6; Expert 5 2022, p. 2, 5; Expert 6 2022, p. 3–7; Expert 7 2022, p. 2, 4; Expert 8 2022, p. 4, 7; Grote 2021, p. 83; Huang; Ku 2016, p. 83; Halb; Seebacher 2021, p. 342–343; Immerschitt 2017, p. 63, 86; Isoraite 2016, p. 327–328; Kamps; Schetter 2020, p. 24–25, 133–134; Kreuzer; Rumler; Wille-Baumkauff 2020, p. 82–83, 92–97, 236–243; Kreuzer 2021, p. 121–122, 148–156, 406; Lammenett 2021, p. 337–342; Lorrie 2011, p. 19–25; Macnamara et al. 2016, p. 1–11; Pradiani; Nirwanto; Subiyantoro 2018, p. 246; Schmitt 2019, p. 16–17, 39; Verdure Medienteam GmbH n. y., p. 3–11; Wanknerl 2021, p. 282–283; Zerres; Tscheulin; Israel 2017, p. 175–176; Zinkann; Mahadevan 2018, p. 157.

### **Sub Question 3: Which paid or owned channels are best suited for the communication of diverse content aspects for a brand in the sustainability industry?**

The website and LinkedIn as well as Facebook are owned channels, that are best suited for the communication of sustainability topics, as already mentioned. Furthermore, also advertisements on LinkedIn and Facebook act as appropriate paid channels since advertisements can be specifically restricted to the target group. Overall, the communicated content needs to be relevant, offer an added value for the target group and communicated via the right marketing channel.

The **website**, as one of the most important owned channels, is suitable to communicate all important information about the brand and company as well as the values behind it. In this context also USP of the brand as well as the USP and added value for the customer can be communicated. Accordingly, also the contribution, that companies can make to climate protection can be presented. In addition, the website is suitable to present products and services behind the brand including meaningful pictures. With regard to turn to zero, especially information regarding possible compensation projects for offsetting unavoidable greenhouse gas emissions represents appropriate content for the website. Furthermore, the website can be used to present existing customers as well as testimonials. In addition to that, the steps to become a customer of turn to zero represent appropriate website content.

The first owned social media channel is represented by **LinkedIn**. The content on LinkedIn is especially suitable for raising awareness, imparting knowledge and educating the target group about sustainability topics and the brand turn to zero. Furthermore, LinkedIn can be specifically used for product and service branding and thus for the communication of more detailed information.

The second owned social media channel is **Facebook**, where special aspects need to be considered for the communication. Above all, content needs to be prepared in a way to guarantee an entertainment factor, since Facebook is used during leisure time. This means that Facebook can still be used to raise awareness for educational campaigns about sustainability topics, as long as these are structured entertainingly. However, Facebook is not suitable for product or service marketing as well as for the presentation of new products and services.

In general, **advertisements on social media platforms** are suitable for educating the target group about sustainability and climate neutrality to ensure knowledge transfer, since some companies do not yet possess knowledge about these topics. Therefore, advertisements can be used to inform companies about the contribution that can be made toward sustainability and climate protection. Promotional activities on social media are less appropriate to meet an existing need. Nevertheless, they are suitable for arousing the customer's desire or the need for joining turn to zero and therefore also the steps for becoming part of turn to zero. Moreover, also benefits as a customer of turn to zero and the opportunities to improve the own company image can be communicated.<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Alpar; Koczy; Metzen 2015, p. 7; Expert 1 2022, p. 2–5, 7–8; Expert 2 2022, p. 1–5; Expert 3 2022, p. 1–6; Expert 4 2022, p. 2–4; Expert 5 2022, p. 2–5; Expert 6 2022, p. 3–7; Expert 7 2022, p. 3, 4; Expert 8 2022, p. 4–5, 7; Kamps; Schetter 2020, p. 133–134; Kreutzer; Rumler; Wille-Baumkauff 2020, p. 242–243; Kreutzer 2021, p. 406.

## 6.2 Answering the Main-Research Question

**Main Question: How can the online marketing strategy be used to create awareness around a specific brand for consulting services in the sustainability industry - by using the brand turn to zero?**

First of all, the company's presence in the awareness phase of the customer journey is increasingly important in order to attract the attention of prospective customers and create brand awareness for turn to zero. Therefore, a combination of the **website** as well as social media channels increases brand awareness more successfully and effectively than either one of the online marketing efforts alone. The reasons are presented in the following. The website represents the basis for online communication, spreads the content quickly on the Internet and is, therefore, one of the most important online marketing channels since more detailed information about the brand and company are provided such as added value, USP and offset projects. In this context, credibility-enhancing elements like testimonials or expert comments need to be placed on the website. In addition, criteria for a successful website such as usability or scannability must be observed. However, brand awareness of turn to zero is not solely achieved by the website alone, it can be additionally increased by advertising campaigns or guerilla marketing. But the target group must know the website, otherwise, the website provides low benefits. For this reason, a certain dependence exists on other online marketing channels.

In this context, **social media** is supportive and fundamentally important to attract the attention of prospective customers since interested parties can be specifically addressed by filter functions. Social media is suitable since the goal of reaching the target group through provided images, videos and content is pursued in order to forward the interested parties to the website. In this context also storytelling can be used to create attention and therefore awareness for turn to zero. Especially the business network of LinkedIn as well as Facebook, as the private platform number one, are particularly suitable for attracting attention, imparting knowledge and raising awareness for sustainability topics. Because business managers also represent private individuals, who use Facebook in their leisure time. With regard to the filter function, LinkedIn uses filters like industries, professions or number of employees and Facebook filters according to data from user profiles.

On the one side, brand awareness is ideally and most effectively achieved through an interaction between organic content and advertisements on social media. Organic content refers to content, that companies post on their social media channels. The reason behind this is that regular organic postings activate the algorithm in the background, which displays the content more often towards the B2B target group and therefore achieves visibility. Furthermore, advertising on social media is fundamentally important and purposeful for increasing brand awareness of turn to zero since a rapid viral spread can be achieved. In general, all advertisements on social media channels need to be designed appropriately, in order to arouse the interest of the target group through the communicated content.

On the other side, visibility of the brand represents a prerequisite at the beginning of the awareness phase since the interested party must be able to associate the consulting service with the brand turn to zero. In this context, awareness campaigns on social media can be used

to increase visibility, attention, reach and therefore awareness. In this regard, informative content about the brand as well as the aroused benefits can be presented.<sup>297</sup>

## 6.3 Limitation & Outlook

### Limitation

With regard to online marketing, this master's thesis focuses on the area of visible forms of online marketing activities for the customer and non-visible forms are not covered. In addition, the master's thesis does not provide any analyses or recommendations about suitable offline marketing activities for increasing brand awareness.

Relating to the brand image and the different forms of the brand image processes, the deductive brand image process will not be discussed in more detail in the master thesis. Because one aim of the thesis is to analyze the effects that online marketing activities have on brand image formation and not to transfer one brand association of a product or a service to another. As mentioned, the brand can be viewed from two different perspectives – the external view (brand image) and the internal view (brand identity). The aim of the master thesis is not to analyze the brand identity of turn to zero.

With reference to the interviews, it must be pointed out that those are limited exclusively to existing B2B customers. The further steps for a transfer or analysis of other target groups such as potential customers are not covered in this thesis. Furthermore, the interviews will be also restricted to selected industries of commercial and industrial customers. Additionally, interviews with B2C customers will not be conducted and therefore no recommendations can be delivered for this group. Moreover, even though international active companies are interviewed they are only located within Europe. To guarantee more reliability also experts from other countries need to be interviewed to get their expertise and opinions.

### Outlook

The master's thesis gives an overview of suitable visible online marketing channels contributing to increasing brand awareness. In addition, appropriate content which can be placed via the various online marketing channels is presented. However, the thesis does not deal with a concrete implementation as well as a communication plan, which thus represents a further point for research.

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<sup>297</sup> Auler; Huberty 2019, p. 31–32, 64–76, 116; Alpar; Koczy; Metzen 2015, p. 7; Bockhorni; Beauchamp 2019, p. 5–6; Daou 2020, p. 12; Dietrich 2020; Eng 2017, p. 19, 27; Expert 1 2022, p. 2–3, 5–9; Expert 2 2022, p. 1–6; Expert 3 2022, p. 1–3, 5, 8; Expert 4 2022, p. 2–7; Expert 5 2022, p. 2, 5, 7; Expert 6 2022, p. 3, 4, 6–7; Expert 7 2022, p. 2–5; Expert 8 2022, p. 4, 6; Grote 2021; Halb; Seebacher 2021, p. 342–343; Huang; Ku 2016, p. 83; Immerschitt 2017, p. 63, 86; Isoraite 2016, p. 327–328; Kamps; Schetter 2020, p. 24–25, 133–134; Kreutzer; Rumler; Wille-Baumkauff 2020, p. 82–83, 92–97, 236–243; Kreutzer 2021, p. 121–122, 148–156, 406; Lammenett 2021, p. 337–342; Lorrie 2011, p. 19–25; Macnamara et al. 2016, p. 1–11; Pradiani; Nirwanto; Subiyantoro 2018, p. 246; Schmitt 2019, p. 16–17, 39; Verdure Medienteam GmbH n. y., p. 3–11; Wankerl 2021, p. 282–283; Zerres; Tscheulin; Israel 2017, p. 175–176; Zinkann; Mahadevan 2018, p. 157.

The interviews show how the brand image is influenced by different online marketing channels. More detailed investigations and observations offer the potential for further research since exact effects, as well as positive and negative influencing factors, can be identified about brand-specific elements like pictures, videos as well as content. Those further investigations can be specifically adapted to turn to zero and conducted on different online marketing channels.

Furthermore, also non-visible online marketing channels contributing to increasing awareness of turn to zero could be analyzed in more detail in a further research process since this master's thesis focuses on visible online marketing channels for B2B customers.

## 7 Conclusion & Recommendation for Action

This conclusion summarizes the most important findings of the theoretical as well as empirical part of the master's thesis. The findings from the theory and the empirical part led to a recommended course of action for B2B customers of the brand turn to zero.

### 7.1 Summary Theoretical & Empirical Findings

Nowadays, especially in the B2B sector, the initial information research increasingly takes place online via different online marketing channels, such as Google, websites, professional social media channels and specialist portals. Additionally, the competitive landscape is raising continuously and prevailing against the competition is becoming even more important. For this reason, the company's presence in the first phase, also known as the awareness phase, turned out to be extremely important respectively a prerequisite since brand awareness is built up at the beginning of the customer journey and needs to be focused. Otherwise, the product or the service cannot be associated with the brand. Additionally, higher brand awareness of turn to zero is associated with better chances, that the brand is perceived by potential customers and therefore impacts the buying process.

Furthermore, referring to the interviews, which revealed, that **turn to zero** is barely visible in the digital world, therefore existing customers became aware of the brand through personal recommendations. The lacking online presence leads to the fact, that also new customers only conditionally become aware of turn to zero.

In this context, **online marketing** takes a central role in terms of increasing brand awareness of turn to zero since the overriding goal is to be discovered in the digital world. Therefore, targeted online marketing measures contribute to brand building, boost brand and company awareness. In this respect, knowledge about the media behavior of B2B customers needs to exist to choose the right marketing channel for content distribution since the success of marketing measures depends on whether recipients take notice of the advertising. Therefore, content with added value needs to be created alongside the customer journey, to bind potential customers to the company or brand.

Moreover, **owned media** is relevant and gains importance in the future since this media type represents the basics for successful brand communication because, without content, nobody knows the brand, company or the offers. Owned media, however, is confronted with the challenge of attracting the attention of recipients and generating reach. In this context, a combination with **paid media** can provide support since targeted advertisements are possible. Furthermore, paid media increases the awareness level of turn to zero or the company since a larger reach is achieved and directly attracts the attention as soon as the ad is placed online. Combining different media types is the key to success and enables to avoid dependencies on one media type.

In this context, the **website** represents an important online marketing channel alongside the customer journey since all other online marketing measures pursue the goal to direct the potential customer toward the company's website. Furthermore, also **social media channels as well as advertisements**, especially on **LinkedIn and Facebook**, are ideally suited for

targeted addressing and generating attention about sustainability topics for B2B customers. Therefore, social media channels are able to create the first touchpoints with the brand as early as possible to ensure visibility at the beginning of the customer journey, precisely in the awareness phase.

This master's thesis focuses on visible online marketing channels for customers, but the interviews also revealed **non-visible online marketing channels**, which contribute to increasing brand awareness. Especially SEO contributes to a ranking of the brand or website in Google's first search results and is particularly relevant for visibility and therefore increases brand awareness.

Furthermore, brand awareness is the basis for building and shaping the brand image. Therefore, brand awareness and brand image appear together once awareness has been created. The overriding goal alongside different online marketing channels is not to optimize individual touchpoints, but to ensure a consistent and coherent brand presence across all touchpoints. This is the only way that the target group generates a uniform perception and therefore a consistent brand image of turn to zero, across different online marketing channels.

The first impression is crucial and thus the generated **brand image** represents an important factor for the purchase decision since a significant influence is exerted. Furthermore, a positive brand image, a strong brand as well as knowledge about the values behind represent important indicators in order to make the purchase decision and thus enter into cooperation with another company since images of cooperation partners must match. For this reason, a strong brand image is beneficial since the relevant content is communicated quickly and therefore leads to a reduction of complexity and uncertainty during the customer journey, which influences the purchase of products or order of services in a positive way. Especially with regard to the brand turn to zero and the sustainability industry, this represents an important factor, because the topic of greenwashing is currently important and also fraud is not uncommon in the consulting sector. As a result, the generated brand image of turn to zero is decisive for the future success of the brand.

In addition to online marketing also **consumption experience**, which is generated by the use of the product or the service as well as **social influence**, which refers to the exchange or discussions between customers, significantly influence the formation of the brand image.

## 7.2 Recommendation for Action for turn to zero

According to the author, online marketing should be used more actively in order to increase visibility, attract the attention of prospective customers and create awareness of turn to zero right at the beginning of the awareness phase of the customer journey. In this context, a unified and informative communication approach should be focused across all online marketing channels since the topic of sustainability and the brand turn to zero require more explanation. This is the only way that prospective customers perceive the brand in the same way and therefore, develop the same brand image regardless of the online marketing channel.

The website occupies one of the most important channels from the author's point of view, due to the provision of detailed brand information and represents a prerequisite for increasing brand awareness of turn to zero. With reference to the content, a targeted selection should be the focus since the website is image-building and therefore the first impression of the interested party decides about future cooperations. Referencing to the sustainability industry, the author recommends conveying credibility and trust via the website, as greenwashing is currently an important topic. In this context, credibility-enhancing elements like testimonials or expert comments need to be placed on the website. In addition, also criteria for a successful website such as usability or scannability must be observed.

In the author's view, social media is particularly suitable and fundamentally important for attracting attention and increasing awareness because of the high reach and the possibility to restrict the target group. In order to attract attention and increase awareness of turn to zero, active and regular use of social media represents an important basis. The main focus should be placed on a combined approach of organic content and targeted advertising measures by communicating suitable and relevant content for the B2B target group. Interested parties should also be able to form an image of the brand based on the social media presence since the website is not always visited, although social media pursues the goal of forwarding prospective customers to the website. On this channel, too, the content should be selected specifically since trust and credibility need to be conveyed. The author recommends convincing existing B2B customers to share organic content, as well as promotional activities of turn to zero, on their own social media channels since recommendations out of conviction represent the highest added value for the company. Furthermore, this represents an important point for increasing visibility and awareness for the brand, as most customers so far became aware of turn to zero through personal recommendations. The author holds the opinion, that awareness campaigns should be focused in order to present turn to zero, the values behind and therefore contribute to raising visibility, attention and subsequently also awareness. Therefore, also customers with less knowledge about turn to zero can be reached, which is especially important outside of Vorarlberg.

From the author's point of view, the focus should be placed primarily on the professional business platform LinkedIn, due to its international distribution and the large reach. The author holds the opinion, that especially B2B customers can be reached most effectively via LinkedIn, as target group-specific accessibility can be achieved by extensive filter functions. Those filter functions are beneficial since relevant people in the company, such as the managing director, marketing manager or sustainability officer need to be contacted directly in order to generate visibility among customers. Additionally, LinkedIn is also suitable to build up professional

networks, this especially represents an important aspect for increasing awareness for the brand turn to zero, according to the author. From the author's point of view, Facebook represents the platform that can be used in a second step. Facebook is the top social media platform for private individuals and reaches business managers in their leisure time.

According to the author, the second well-known business platform Xing also helps to increase awareness, but this platform is only used in German-speaking countries and therefore only reaches German-speaking customers. For this reason, the author recommends preferring the internationally widespread platform LinkedIn over Xing. The author also suggests not to rely on Instagram, as especially the younger generation uses this platform as well as a targeted restriction of the target group is not possible. Therefore, corporate customers can be better reached via LinkedIn.

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## Appendix

Main Category	Number of Sub-Categories
<b>Brand turn to zero</b>	Perception turn to zero
	Attention turn to zero
	Importance & Visibility turn to zero
	Information Research
	Interaction Instagram Channel turn to zero
<b>Attention</b>	Website
	Social Media Channels
	Google
	Brand Visibility
<b>Brand Awareness</b>	Website
	Social Media Channels
	Advertising Measures Social Media
	Google
<b>Brand Image</b>	Perception
	Influencing Factor Website
	Influencing Factor Social Media
<b>Social Media Channels</b>	General
	LinkedIn
	Xing
	Facebook
	Instagram
<b>Social Media Advertisements</b>	Advertising Measure
	Limitation Target Group
	Advertising Content
<b>Website</b>	Significance & Goals
	Website Design & Website Content
	Credibility & Trust
<b>Purchase Decision Process</b>	Influence Brand & Brand Image
	Significance Brand & Brand Image

Figure: Detailed Category System

Source: Own illustration by the author

## **Interview Guideline English:**

### **Introduction**

- Introduction of myself
- Introduction to the topic
- Procedure of the interview (structure + duration)
- Objectives of the interview
- Note of recording + anonymization
- Clarify open questions

### **Brand related Questions**

- 1.) Are you familiar with the brand turn to zero?
  - a. How do you perceive the brand turn to zero? (Which aspects do you connect or associate with the brand?)
- 2.) How did you become aware of the brand turn to zero (Klimaneutralitätsbündnis 2025)? Did online marketing channels such as the own website play an important role during this process?
  - a. Which online marketing channels are suitable for drawing attention towards the brand turn to zero and generate interest from your point of view?
  - b. Why are these online marketing channels suitable from your point of view?
  - c. How do the channels help to get your attention?
- 3.) How did your company obtain further information about the brand turn to zero and its offerings?
  - a. Which online marketing channels have supported you?

### **Online Marketing related Questions**

- 4.) Which online marketing channel does your company prefer to obtain information about the brand turn to zero?
  - a. Why is this online marketing channel so important for you?
  - b. If the preferred online channel did not exist, which other channels would attract the company's attention?
- 5.) How important is the website of a sustainability brand for your company to obtain further information about products or services?
  - a. What makes a company's website so important from your perspective?
  - b. Does the company's own website contribute to increase brand awareness or awareness of the brand image from your point of view?
    - i. If yes, why?
    - ii. If no, why not?

- c. What helps you to build credibility as well as trust towards the website or the brand in order to subsequently complete the purchase process?
      - i. Does the brand image play a role?
- 6.) What content and information should be presented on a website for consulting services in the sustainability industry?
  - a. How does the content help you?
  - b. What is important for you?
- 7.) Does your company use social media channels?
  - a. If yes, which ones and why? If no why not?
  - b. Would advertising measures on social media platforms be effective in increasing awareness of the brand image of turn to zero from your point of view?
    - i. If yes, why and on which platforms?
    - ii. If no, why not?
  - c. Would your company use the Instagram channel of turn to zero if one exists? How would you use it?
  - d. What content/which information do you think should be promoted via social media advertising to generate interest for your company?

### **Brand Image related Questions**

- 8.) Does the company's appearance on the own website have an influence on building brand image from your point of view?
  - a. How does the website affect brand image from your perspective?
  - b. Why does the website affect brand image?
- 9.) Do social media advertisements influence the formation of the brand image?
  - a. How does social media advertising affect the brand image from your perspective?
  - b. Why does social media advertising affect the brand image?
- 10.) How important is brand image for your company, when searching for consulting services in the sustainability industry?
  - a. Does brand image influence the purchase decision process?
    - i. If yes, which influence?
    - ii. Why does brand image have an impact from your perspective?
  - b. Should the brand already be present at the beginning of the purchase decision process in order to be able to assert itself against other brands on the market from your point of view?

### **Closing**

- 11.) Are there any additions or comments around the topic from your point of view?

## **Interview Guideline German:**

### **Einleitung**

- Vorstellung
- Hinleitung zum Thema
- Ablauf des Interviews (Aufbau + Dauer)
- Zielsetzungen des Interviews
- Hinweis: Aufzeichnung + Anonymisierung
- Offene Fragen klären

### **Marke turn to zero**

- 1.) Kennen Sie die Marke turn to zero?
  - a. Wie nehmen Sie die Marke turn to zero wahr? (Welche Aspekte verbinden oder assoziieren Sie mit der Marke?)
- 2.) Wie sind Sie auf die Marke turn to zero (Klimaneutralitätsbündnis 2025) aufmerksam geworden und haben dabei Online Marketingkanäle wie beispielsweise die eigene Website eine wichtige Rolle gespielt?
  - a. Welche Online Marketingkanäle sind aus ihrer Sicht dafür geeignet, um auf die Marke turn to zero aufmerksam zu machen und das Interesse zu wecken?
  - b. Warum sind diese Online Marketingkanäle aus ihrer Sicht geeignet?
  - c. Wie helfen diese um Aufmerksamkeit zu erlangen?
- 3.) Wie hat ihr Unternehmen weiterführende Informationen zu turn to zero und dessen Angebote erhalten?
  - a. Welche Online Marketingkanäle haben Sie dabei unterstützt und wie haben diese Sie unterstützt?

### **Online Marketing**

- 4.) Welcher Online Marketingkanal wird von Ihnen als Unternehmen präferiert um Informationen zu turn to zero einzuholen?
  - a. Warum ist dieser Online Marketingkanal so wichtig für Sie?
  - b. Wenn es den präferierten Online Marketingkanal nicht geben würde, über welchen Kanal würde ihr Unternehmen sonst aufmerksam werden?
- 5.) Wie wichtig ist die Website einer Nachhaltigkeitsmarke für ihr Unternehmen, um weiterführende Informationen zu Produkten bzw. Dienstleistungen zu erhalten?
  - a. Was macht die Website eines Unternehmens so wichtig aus ihrer Sicht?
  - b. Trägt die eigene Website aus ihrer Sicht dazu bei, die Bekanntheit der Marke bzw. das Bewusstsein für das Markenimage zu steigern?
    - i. Wenn ja, wieso?
    - ii. Wenn nein, wieso nicht?

- c. Was hilft Ihnen dabei Glaubwürdigkeit als auch Vertrauen gegenüber der Website bzw. der Marke aufzubauen, um anschließend den Kaufprozess abzuschließen?
    - i. Spielt das Markenimage dabei eine Rolle?
- 6.) Welche Inhalte und Informationen sollten Ihrer Meinung nach auf einer Website für Beratungsdienstleistungen im Nachhaltigkeitsbereich präsentiert werden?
- a. Wie helfen Ihnen die Inhalte weiter?
  - b. Was ist Ihnen dabei wichtig?
- 7.) Nutzt ihr Unternehmen Social-Media-Kanäle?
- a. Wenn ja welche, wieso diese? Wenn nein wieso nicht?
  - b. Wären Werbemaßnahmen auf Social-Media-Plattformen aus ihrer Sicht zielführend, um die Bekanntheit der Marke bzw. das Markenimages von turn to zero zu steigern? (Wenn ja, wieso und auf welchen Plattformen?; Wenn nein, wieso nicht?)
  - c. Würde ihr Unternehmen den Instagram-Kanal von turn to zero nutzen, wenn es einen geben würde? Wie würden Sie diesen verwenden?
  - d. Welche Inhalte/Informationen sollten ihrer Meinung nach über Social-Media-Werbung beworben werden, damit ihr Unternehmen Interesse bekundet?

### **Marken Image**

- 8.) Hat der Unternehmensauftritt auf der eigenen Website aus Ihrer Sicht einen Einfluss auf die Imagebildung?
- a. Wie wirkt sich die Website aus ihrer Sicht auf das Markenimage aus?
  - b. Warum wirkt sich die Website auf das Markenimage aus?
- 9.) Haben Werbemaßnahmen auf Social-Media-Kanälen aus Ihrer Sicht einen Einfluss auf die Imagebildung?
- a. Wie beeinflusst Social-Media-Werbung das Markenimage aus ihrer Sicht?
  - b. Warum wirkt sich Social-Media-Werbung auf das Markenimage aus?
- 10.) Wie wichtig ist Ihnen das Markenimage bei der Suche nach Beratungsdienstleistungen in der Nachhaltigkeitsbranche?
- a. Hat das Markenimage einen Einfluss auf den Kaufentscheidungsprozess?
    - i. Wenn ja, welchen Einfluss?
    - ii. Wieso hat das Markenimage einen Einfluss aus ihrer Sicht?
  - b. Sollte die Marke aus Ihrer Sicht bereits zu Beginn des Kaufentscheidungsprozesses präsent sein, um sich gegen andere Marken am Markt durchzusetzen zu können?

### **Schluss**

- 11.) Gibt es aus Ihrer Sicht Ergänzungen oder Kommentare zu diesem Thema?

## **Statement of Affirmation**

I hereby declare that all parts of this thesis were exclusively prepared by me, without using resources other than those stated above. The thoughts taken directly or indirectly from external sources are appropriately annotated.

This thesis or parts of it were not previously submitted to any other academic institution and have not yet been published.

Dornbirn, 01.07.2022

Lang Janine