PROVOCATIVE MARKETING

A study in how provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies is perceived by users’ in a social media context

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Thank you!

We hope you enjoy reading our study!

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Abstract

Title: Provocative marketing – A study in how provocative marketing from profit-seeking senders is perceived by users in a social media context

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The everlasting noise in today's marketing landscape has given rise to provocative marketing, which has become a frequently applied technique by marketers in an attempt to attract individuals’ attention. Provocative marketing can be defined as a deliberate appeal within the content of a marketing message, expected to shock its audience, since it is signified with values, norms or taboos that are not generally challenged in marketing because of its equivocalness and distinctiveness. Profit-seeking companies are increasingly applying provocative marketing techniques in order to gain attention, and simultaneously, the World Wide Web has given rise to the phenomena of social media, which presents a new context for provocative marketing messages. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore how provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies is perceived by users’ in a social media context. In order to answer the purpose of the study, the research question is: ‘What makes advertisements provocative in social media?’ The study is of qualitative nature, and uses a cross-sectional research design by conducting a semi-structured focus group. The results reveal that provocative marketing is seen as a risky venture for profit-seeking companies to apply in the context of social media, however, the receiver would not be as shocked to see provocative marketing messages with sexual content in the context of social media as in the traditional media context. Moreover, provocative marketing in the context of social media runs the risk of becoming habitualized if displayed over a long period of time, and the element of shock can become diminished. Therefore, profit-seeking companies who apply provocative marketing in the context of social media need to constantly innovate and revive their advertisements to avoid tediousness.

Keywords: Provocative marketing, marketing communication, profit-seeking companies, users’ perception, social media, sexual appeals
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1. Introduction

The chapter outlines an introduction where the reader is introduced to the topic of this study, which is provocative marketing. The chapter includes a background, providing the reader with a general understanding of the phenomena, a problem discussion that problematizes the area, landing in the studies purpose and research question, which will guide the researchers in this study towards meeting the purpose of the paper.

1.1 Background

As one of many solutions to the everlasting noise in today's marketing landscape (Dahl et al., 2003; Huhmann & Mott-Sternerson, 2008), provocative marketing has arisen, and become a frequently applied technique by marketing professionals in an attempt to attract the attention of individuals (Prendergast et al., 2002; Pope et al., 2004; Waller et al., 2005; Huhmann & Mott-Sternerson, 2008). Provocative marketing can be defined as a deliberate appeal within the content of a marketing message, expected to shock its audience, since it is signified with values, norms or taboos that are not generally challenged in marketing due to its equivocalness and distinctiveness (Vézina & Paul, 1997; Dahl et al., 2003). Images of provocative or shocking nature are often applied in order to catch the attention of the audience, and evoke a reaction (Parry et al., 2013).

There is little, next to no doubt that the most widely publicized marketing campaigns within the field of provocative marketing are those by the Italian clothing company Benetton and the American brand Calvin Klein (Dahl et al., 2003). It was in the end of the 1980’s that Benetton’s advertisements changed, and the company started to display a slain soldier’s bloodied uniform, a white child being breastfed by a black woman or a dying AIDS patient, addressing issues such as warfare, racism and disease (Vézina & Paul, 1997; Dahl et al., 2003). The marketing campaigns by Calvin Klein were in contrast of sexual nature and have been targeted by governmental and political groups for their deliberately shocking graphics of pornographic nature (Goodrum & Dalrymple, 1990; Sloan & DeCoursey, 1995). Provocative marketing can be carried out in numerous forms, with allusions on sex, religion, violence, political and racial issues, or on drugs (Vézina & Paul, 1997; Dahl et al., 2003; Pope et al., 2004). For several years the strongest and most prominent allusion within provocative marketing has been the one of sexual nature, and companies today still apply the technique (Putreveu, 2008).
company that has been subject to controversy is the retailer American Apparel, notorious for their marketing campaigns depicting employees in various stages of undress and sexual poses (Yan et al., 2010). The use of a ‘sex sells’ message has exposed American Apparel to criticism and the company has been reprimanded and slammed for overtly sexual imagery (Shields, 2012). Another profit-seeking company that has been criticized is Tom Ford, disreputable for using nudity and provocative sexual appeals in their advertisements (Bilal-Javed & Zeb, 2011). Profit-seeking companies need to be aware of what impact marketing efforts of provocative nature can have on their potential consumers, but also on how their company is perceived by the general public, and an attempt to shock or provoke can result in a high level of awareness, but also lead to a high level of disapproval (Vézina & Paul, 1997).

Profit-seeking companies are increasingly applying provocative marketing techniques in order to gain attention (Parry et al., 2013). Simultaneously, the World Wide Web has given rise to the phenomena of social media, a form of digital communication that has enabled companies to interact directly with individuals, and vice versa (Vernuccio, 2014). The social media phenomenon involves texts, words, pictures and videos created with the intention of sharing (Evans & Bretton, 2012). The emergence of social media has provided both companies and consumers with a new channel of communication (Vernuccio, 2014), and more and more customers inform themselves online about a company's products (Evans & Bretton, 2012). The extent of social media use enables profit-seeking companies to analyse their competitors and is an applicable indicator of where to increase social media activities (Aichner & Jacob, 2015). However, with the rise of the World Wide Web, consumers have become more empowered, and are increasingly utilizing platforms such as social networking, blogs, and online communities in order to discuss, create, modify and share online content (O’Brien, 2011). This represents the social media phenomenon in which consumers can have a great impact on a company's reputation and even survival (Hermken et al., 2011). Social media has opened up a new social and economic landscape (Vernuccio, 2014), and companies need to find ways to break through the noise in order to stand out from the crowd (Fam & Waller, 2003; Virvilaite & Matuleviciene, 2013), and in order to attract consumers attention, it has become common practice to apply provocative marketing techniques (Waller, 1999; Parry et al., 2013).
1.2 Problem Discussion

Provocative marketing has become more common over the last decade (Vézina & Paul, 1997) and previous research has investigated the phenomena thoroughly (Vezina & Paul, 1997; Pope et al., 2004). According to Vézina and Paul (1997) provocative marketing can have a positive effect when it comes to knowledge of content, and in order for a marketing message to be perceived as provocative, researchers state that it should be distinctive, ambiguous as well as transgress norms and taboos of society (Childers & Houston, 1984; Vézina and Paul, 1997; Dahl et al., 2003; Manceau & Tissier-Desbordes, 2006; Atkin et al., 2008). Furthermore, aspects such as involvement, attitude and demographics trigger different reactions and perceptions from individuals (Waller et al., 2005; Hansen & Riis-Christensen, 2007; Te'eni-Harari et al., 2007; Dens et al., 2008; Geunes et al., 2011), and can affect individuals level of perceived offensiveness to a marketing message (Prendergast et al., 2002).

Vézina and Paul (1997) found that younger people tend to have a more favourable outlook towards provocative marketing and previous research also show that women tend to be more offended by provocative marketing tactics than men (Waller, 1999; Andersson et al., 2004; Pope et al., 2004; Manceau & Tissier-Desbordes, 2006), especially when it comes to sexual content (Dudley, 1999; Andersson et al., 2004; Beetles & Harris, 2005). Furthermore, certain products, services and ideas can elicit a higher level of offensiveness than others (Waller, 1999), and according to Christy and Haley (2008) certain products have an influence on individuals perception of offensiveness. According to Boddewyn (1991), Waller (1999) and Manceau and Tissier-Desbordes (2006), provocative marketing can be perceived as offensive due to its content, and racism, sexism, death and offensive language are a few of the main reasons causing provocation (Beard, 2008). Christy and Haley (2008) also mention nudity, violence and religion as themes that are likely to elicit offense. What can be said is that the more an individual likes a specific advertisement the more he or she is willing to accept any of the advertisements content, regardless if it is provocative or not (Manceau & Tissier-Desbordes, 2006). If a provocative marketing message has congruency between the product or service marketed, and its content, it is likely to be perceived in a more favourable manner (Vézina & Paul, 1997: Pope et al., 2004; Beetles & Harris, 2005; Christy & Haley, 2008). Previous research within this field seem to be
Traditionally, many profit-seeking companies carefully plan their advertisements and cautiously make a choice to not be connected with provocative marketing or offensive advertisements (Hastings et al., 2004). However, in non-profit organisations, offensive appeals has been embraced by marketers for a long period of time (Hastings et al., 2004), since the technique elicits attention from individuals (Parry et al., 2013). In order to break through the noise, profit-seeking companies are increasingly applying provocative marketing techniques (Parry et al., 2013), and according to Dens et al., (2008), the use of provocative marketing by profit-seeking companies can be a risky venture. Furthermore, Christy and Haley (2008) argue that provocation from profit-seeking companies can lead to unpleasant feelings towards the sending firm, making it somewhat problematic. Many profit-seeking companies aim is to maximise profit, and may in the process discard individuals’ different values and beliefs (Taylor, 2014). According to Parry et al., (2013), individuals are more favourable towards provocative marketing imagery in non-profit contexts compared to profit-seeking ones, and therefore, provocation is a high-risk strategy to apply in profit-seeking companies. How provocative marketing in the non-profit sector is perceived has been investigated by previous researchers (West & Sargent, 2004; Brennan & Binney, 2009; Banyte et al., 2014), and since profit-seeking companies are increasingly employing provocative marketing in advertising, more specific research should be conducted in the profit-seeking sector (Parry et al., 2013).

According to Christy and Haley (2008), traditional media such as broadcast and print does not elicit as high levels of provocation as non-traditional ones, such as the Internet and social media. Furthermore, Beard (2008) claims that intrusive advertisements are more likely to cause offense online, since these are difficult to avoid. Christy and Haley (2008) found that non-traditional media generates higher levels of offence, and that there is a need to explore how provocative marketing is perceived by users in the context of social media. How provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies is perceived has been thoroughly investigated in the context of traditional media (Dahl et
al., 2003: Andersson et al., 2004; Pope et al., 2004; Parry et al., 2013) however, the research regarding how provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies is perceived in the context of social media remains a question of interest (Tuten, 2008). What is yet to be illustrated is what causes advertisements to become provocative in the context of social media, and if the technique is efficient in commanding attention in social media platforms. The study herein extends previous research in the field of provocative marketing by exploring how it is perceived in a new context. By doing this, the authors of this study will contribute to concurrent knowledge in the field of provocative marketing by taking established theory into the new context of social media.

1.3 Purpose
The purpose is to explore how provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies is perceived by users’ in a social media context.

1.4 Research question
What makes advertisements provocative in social media?
2. Theoretical framework

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework of the study, and is divided into three main sections. In order to provide the reader with an understanding of what provocative marketing involves, the chapter begins by presenting the phenomena under investigation, provocative marketing, and what it entails in the context of social media. The next section presents the first building block of the study, which is titled ‘How the message is presented by the sender’ and the second part represents the second building block and, which is titled ‘The receiver of the message’. Profit-seeking companies present a message in their provocative marketing advertisements, which the recipient receives and interprets. The building blocks have an important role in how the receiver perceives provocative marketing messages from profit-seeking companies in the new context of social media.

2.1 Presentation of the phenomena

Provocative marketing is based on the fundamental principle of seeking to stand out from the crowd (Stafford & Stafford, 2002) and is defined by Dahl et al., (2003) as an endeavour to astonish an audience by intentionally violating norms, values and religious taboos in order to attract cognizance of individuals. In other words, advertisements are created with the sole purpose of creating shock and provocation amongst its viewers (Dahl et al., 2003). Cooper (1996) states that provocative marketing involves shocking the audience by whatever mean possible and according to Vézina and Paul (1997), the technique uses a deliberate appeal in order to shock viewers of the provocative content. Furthermore, Sandıkçı, (2011) states that provocative marketing is an attempt to elicit attention for a company name. Provocative marketing generally contains provocative imagery, language or situations that signify subjects that are viewed as taboo to certain degrees by society, which can include violence, offensive language, violence, nudity, indecent body parts, racial issues and sexual appeals that violate norms and moral values of societies (De Pelsmacker & Van Der Berghs, 1996; Dahl et al., 2003). Common techniques for achieving provocation in marketing are the use of humour, contrast, fear, music, sex and warmth appeals (Vézina & Paul, 1997; Putrevu, 2008).

It is of importance to clarify that there is a difference between provocative marketing defined above, and the marketing of products, services or interests that can be
considered as provocative (Vézina & Paul, 1997). In the latter case it concerns products or services that are controversial by nature and which are perceived as provocative regardless of how they are marketed, for example alcohol and tobacco (Waller et al., 2005). Provocative marketing is a strategy which includes more extensive content than traditional appeals, since it can refer to issues larger than its content (Vézina & Paul, 1997), and refers to the controversial aspect of the marketing message rather than the controversy that inspires the product (Laadhar & Romdhane, 2013). According to Dennis et al., (2008) and Lovelock and Wirtz (2011), provocative marketing is perceived as provocative based on how the message is presented by the sender, and how it is received by the receiver.

2.1.1 Provocative marketing in a social media context

Provocative marketing is widely applied by marketers with the intent of breaking through advertising clutter (Vézina & Paul, 1997), and with the rise of new platforms, marketing communication has gone through a change (Vernuccio, 2014) and a new platform of communication has emerged, commonly known as social media (Kiron et al., 2012). According to Kerr et al., (2012), marketing messages of provocative nature are generally not provocative due to the content itself, but the context in which they are presented, and Prendergast and Hwa (2003) found that provocative marketing elicits higher levels of offence on the Internet than in traditional media. The social media context represents a new platform for marketing communication (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2010) and according to Richard et al., (2011), there are hundreds of social media platforms available such as; social networks, photo sharing, video streaming, podcasts, blogs, wikis and discussion groups. The most commonly used communication platforms in social media include Facebook and Instagram (Aichner & Perkmann, 2013), which are used by hundreds of millions on a daily basis (Kiron et al., 2012). The social media context cannot be ignored by marketers and the social media context does not function in the same manner as traditional media channels (Holzner, 2009). In social media, the users are in charge, not the marketer (Holzner, 2009), indicating the power of online users (O’Brien, 2011). According to Christy and Haley (2008), the context in which provocative content is presented matters to users, and Prendergast and Hwa (2003) state that individuals are less tolerant towards provocative marketing attempts on the web in relation to other channels, indicating that the use of provocative marketing messages in social media contexts may cause higher levels of offense than in traditional settings.
2.2 How the message is presented by the sender

The way in which a message is presented, both visually and verbally, has an effect on how the message is processed (Usunier, 1996; De Mooij, 1998). According to Sabri (2012), it is of importance how provocative marketing messages are applied, since it can have an impact on how the message is perceived and interpreted, and if there is a direct connection to the product, service and company that is marketed. If the message has a strong connection to the product, service and company, one has to assure that the image explicitly expresses the intended message, and if there is no direct connection there is a possibility the image is misinterpreted by the receiver (Andersson et al., 2004). If the presentation of the provocative marketing message is highly provocative, people will pause and discuss its content (Manceau & Tissier-Desbordes, 2006). Divergences between countries and societies are also viewed as contributing factors that can affect how marketing messages are interpreted (Wiles & Wiles, 1995), and moral values, religion, body language and taboos may influence how individuals perceive and interpret marketing messages (White, 2000). If the presentation of the marketing message is provocative, users may react and discuss the message (Dahl et al., 2003). Provocative marketing can have harmful effects on companies, and according to An and Kim (2006), consumers are less likely to purchase products from firms who employ provocative marketing techniques. Provocation targets feelings (De Pelsmacker & Van Den Bergh, 1996), and according to Vézina and Paul (1997) there are three main components of provocative marketing: distinctiveness, ambiguity and transgressions of norms and taboos.

2.2.1 Distinctiveness

A component of provocative marketing is its distinctiveness, referring to the ability to stand out from the crowd, and regardless of content, a marketing message that resembles another will lose some of its vigour (Vézina & Paul, 1997). Research has indicated that distinctive stimuli can have a favourable effect on the attention paid to an advertisement, and make the marketing message stick in the memory of an individual, allowing retrieval (Childers & Houston, 1984). Distinctiveness is a key element of
provocative marketing, and if competing messages of similar nature are available, the intended effect of the marketing message may be weakened. To be explicit, individuals tend to become used to a specific type of provocation if they are exposed to it on a regularly basis, and consequently, the challenge for marketers applying provocative techniques lies within the need for constant renewal to keep up originality (Vézina & Paul, 1997). When applying provocative marketing, marketers should be creative and innovative in order for the marketing effort to be successful (Childers & Houston, 1984). Several studies have been conducted in order to test the theory, and most of the results show that distinctive stimuli such as size, colour, language, content and position of the marketing message has a positive effect on the degree of attention given to the marketing message (Childers & Houston, 1984; Vézina & Paul, 1997). According to Childers and Houston (1984), distinct colours can affect the attention given to the advert, and also how well the receiver of the message recalls it.

2.2.2 Ambiguity

Even though distinctiveness is a key element of provocative marketing, it is not enough to elicit provocation (Vézina & Paul, 1997). Ambiguity refers to the degree which a marketing message enables for various interpretations and intentions, if not of the content in itself, at the very least of the intentions of the marketer (Vézina & Paul, 1997; Pope et al., 2004). Research has shown that the more ambiguous an advertisement is, the higher the level of cognizance will be, and therefore marketers should strive to create advertisements that allow for ambiguous interpretations and associations (Stafford & Stafford, 2002). A marketing message that is open to various interpretations can enable further cultivation and provide an opportunity for an aesthetic experience (Pope et al., 2004) and companies often apply strategic ambiguity by consciously creating advertisements that are abstract and thus create the possibility of multiple interpretations from individuals with different preferences (Atkin et al., 2008).

According to Tinic (1997), it is not necessarily the provocative advertisement that elicits provocation, but the ambiguous intent that underlies the image. The fundamental rule behind ambiguity in provocative marketing is that messages of provocative nature that do not hold any ambiguity are more probable to be rejected immediately by receivers, and the message will most likely not be processed at all (Vézina & Paul, 1997). Vezina and Paul (1997) further state that that ambiguity could possibly increase the provocative
reach of provocative marketing, and state that the recipients’ interpretation of a marketing message can concern both its content and its context. So to rely solely on distinctiveness will not be enough to elicit provocation, and for a provocative marketing message to be successful in its intended purpose, a certain degree of ambiguity is required. The conception of ambiguity in marketing has mostly been indirectly addressed in several ways regarding the topic of persuasion (Vézina & Paul, 1997).

2.2.3 Transgression of norms and taboos

Even if distinctiveness and ambiguity are fundamental components of a provocative marketing message, they are not adequate to elicit provocation, since a marketing message can be both distinct and ambiguous, but still remain unprovocative (Pope et al., 2004). According to Childers and Houston (1984), provocation is more probable to occur when the content of the marketing message refers to topics that are generally seen as taboo. De Pelsmacker and Van Der Bergh (1996) and Vézina and Paul (1997) argue that the transgression of norms and taboos is the most vital component for a marketing message to be considered provocative, since a marketing message that only contains distinctiveness and ambiguity would hardly evoke provocation in itself. Norms are formed by social interaction between individuals in social groups (Dahl et al., 2003), and these norms control what is considered as prohibited by the receiver and what is seen as violations against ethical issues and moral values (Manceau & Tissier-Desbordes, 2006). If the content of a marketing message is perceived as taboo by the receiver it can be classified as provocative (Childers and Houston, 1984; Vézina & Paul, 1997).

The use of sexual imagery in marketing messages is often classified as provocative, since the topic of sexuality is classified as taboo, to various degrees, across the world (Vézina & Paul, 1997). In western literature, racial discrimination and sexism are two provocative appeals, which are in focus (Boddewyn, 1991). Even if sexual appeals in marketing messages are controversial, studies have shown that advertisements that contain sexual imagery are more likely to receive attention. However, the effect tends to vary depending on which context the advert is presented in and to which audience (Vézina & Paul, 1997). The execution of sexual imagery generally portrays women as sexual toys or victims of violence, which has become a grave concern within western literature, since this type of provocation reinforces inequality between the sexes (Chan
et al., 2007). Furthermore, the presence of erotic and sexual content in a marketing message is not always viewed as acceptable if you view it from a moral perspective. A provocative marketing message can even lead to individuals rejecting the marketing message and sometimes even the company (Henthorne & LaTour, 1995).

2.3 The receiver of the message

Marketing is essentially how communication takes place between the sender and the receiver and perception is seen as the most important barrier to effective communication (Wang et al., 2000). How the receiver perceives provocative marketing is a social action which differs among individuals, and can depend on several factors (Sandıkçı, 2011). According to Waller et al., (2005), aspects such as involvement, attitude and demographics are likely to trigger different reactions and perceptions amongst individuals towards provocative marketing in the context of social media.

2.3.1 Level of involvement

The level of involvement from the individual receiving the provocative marketing message is of interest, since it can have an effect on the degree to which distinct stimuli are processed (Andrews et al., 1991). How much influence a provocative marketing message will have on the individual is strongly determined by the degree of involvement from the recipient (Te'eni-Harari et al., 2007). According to Dens et al., (2008), individuals with a high level of involvement are more likely to process information and form strong opinions based on the content and information in the marketing message. Individuals with a high level of involvement may also remember the sending company better than individuals with levels of low involvement, which could affect how they perceive the sending company (Dens et al., 2008). Moreover, individuals with a high level of involvement tend to develop counterarguments to provocative marketing messages they perceive as offensive, and reject the provocative marketing message as a ‘cheap trick’ to elicit attention. The more involved an individual becomes, the more elaborate the processing of the provocative marketing message is developed, which also enhances an individual's understanding of the marketing message (Huhmann & Mott-Stenerson, 2008). In contrast, individuals with a low level of involvement are more prone to be influenced by tangent cues and let their emotions determine how they perceive the provocative marketing content (Dens et al., 2008).
When individuals have a low level of involvement they use their feelings as information, taking a shortcut in evaluating the provocative marketing message (Geunes et al., 2011). The individual evaluates the provocative marketing message based on emotions, and not information, mistaking their feelings towards the provocative marketing imagery for information (Geunes et al., 2011). Provocative marketing can trigger either positive or negative emotional responses that affect the receiver's response, and advertisements containing nudity are likely to evoke emotions of embarrassment (Manceau & Tissier-Desbordes, 2006). Laadhar and Romdhane (2013) argue that negative feelings may be expressed by a receiver that has been exposed to provocative stimuli. However, the degree of negativity varies in proportion to the degree of the provocation perceived (Holbrook & Hirshman, 1982). Furthermore, Laadhar and Romdhane (2013) highlight the importance of emotions by stating that emotions affect behavioural reactions of a message or product.

2.3.2 Attitude towards profit-seeking senders

According to Söderlund (2003), an individual may have a preformed attitude to the presentation of a message and the sender behind it, which can differ depending on the circumstances. According to Pope et al., (2004), the attitude towards the sending firm can be defined as the total impression that the company makes in the mind of the individual. An individual's attitude can vary depending on if they have previous experience of the profit-seeking company and the attitude is reflected in how the recipient interprets the company and their values in order to be able to determine if the advertisement lives up to their expectations or not (Hansen & Riis-Christensen, 2007). The emotional reaction that occurs in connection with how a firm presents their provocative marketing message depends on how the message is conveyed and not the actual message in itself (Vezina & Paul, 1997). These emotions can influence how the receiver perceives the provocative marketing message, and therefore control how the recipient perceives the sending company as a whole (Hansen & Riis-Christensen, 2007).

Provocative marketing messages are effective in commanding attention (Weinreich, 1999), however, if a company is already established on a market, the use of provocative marketing appeals may be a risky venture (Dens et al., 2008; Parry et al., 2013). Individuals who receive provocative marketing messages from well-known companies generally have a preformed attitude towards the company and because of this, there is
quite some risk involved when well-known profit-seeking companies employ
provocation in their marketing efforts, since there is a possibility of individuals forming
a less favourable view of the company after such techniques have been applied (Dens et
al., 2008). Furthermore, aspects such as how the company treats its employees, engages
in social issues and how the firm is managed can affect individuals’ attitudes towards
the sending company (Javalgi & Traylor, 1994).

The increasing amount of marketing messages in circulation has caused several profit-
seeking companies to employ the use of provocative imagery in marketing efforts to
attract attention (Dahl et al., 2003; Dens et al., 2008; Parry et al., 2013). Even if the
technique has been successful in attracting attention of individuals (Dahl et al., 2003;
Pope et al., 2004), the use of provocative marketing has backfired in the for-profit sector
on numerous occasions (Parry et al., 2013), and some successful for-profit companies
therefore tend to avoid provocative tactics in their marketing efforts to evade negative
associations (Hastings et al., 2004). When using provocative marketing appeals, profit-
seeking companies aim is to maximize profit (Taylor, 2014), whilst provocative
marketing from the non-profit sector is often referred to as ‘social marketing’ (Kotler &
Zaltman, 1971). The difference between profit-seeking companies provocative
marketing is that the intent of ‘social marketing’ is to alter behaviour, and not benefit
the underlying corporation, but the target group or society at large (Kotler & Zaltman
1971), and because of these underlying motives, provocative marketing attempts from
profit-seeking companies can be viewed as unethical (Dahl et al., 2003). Furthermore,
research shows that individuals tend to perceive provocative marketing from non-profit
companies in a more favourable manner, since they generally address topic that seek to
act for ‘the greater good’ (Dahl et al., 2003). Despite the potentially damaging effect of
provocative marketing imagery, there are still numerous profit-seeking companies who
employ the technique in order to attract attention from potential consumers (Dahl et al.,
2003; Dens et al., 2008; Parry et al., 2013).

2.3.3 Attitude towards the advertisement
An individual can have a preformed attitude towards the advertisement as well as to the
sending company behind it (Söderlund, 2003). According to MacKenzie et al., (1986),
an individual’s attitude towards an advertisement can be defined as a predisposition to
respond in a favourable or unfavourable manner to a specific advertising stimuli during
a specific occasion of exposure. According to Pope et al., (2004) and Hansen and Riis-Christensen (2007), the receiver's attitude towards how the message is presented has been a topic of interest for research during a long period of time. An individual's attitude towards an advertisement can consist of emotional responses such as the feeling of joy and values, for example, an advertisement's credibility or ability to inform (Baker and Lutz, 1988). These emotional responses can cause individuals to create both positive and negative attitudes to how the provocative marketing message is presented (Hansen & Riis-Christensen, 2007).

2.3.4 Effects of long-term provocative appeals

According to Zhou et al., (2003) the use of either short-term or long-term provocation in marketing efforts should elicit some sort of cognizance. Companies need to consider the long-term effects of applying provocative marketing techniques as a form of marketing strategy, since it may affect individuals’ opinions about the firm (LaTour & Zahra, 1989). Previous studies have found that the amount of provocative marketing imagery a profit-seeking company applies in their marketing efforts may affect the intended message, and also the firm (Hastings et al., 2004). Moreover, Hastings et al., (2004) argue that even if provocative marketing imagery is effective to elicit attention initially, long-term exposure to provocative content could diminish the shocking effect of the message. If a provocative marketing message is displayed over a longer period of time, it runs the risk of habituation, becoming predictable, uninteresting and even laughable, causing the technique to lose effectiveness (Tanner et al., 1991; Hastings et al., 2004). Also, long-term usage of provocative marketing may cause damage to the sending company, since the firm could be irretrievably connected to the provocative content (Hastings et al., 2004). Because of this possibility, provocative marketing is more efficient when used in short time periods than in longer ones (Fry, 1996; Hastings et al., 2004).

Long-term exposure to provocative marketing imagery from companies could lead to receiving individuals becoming so exasperated that they choose to disregard the intended message (Hastings et al., 2004). There is also a possibility of individuals becoming so defensive that they tend to avoid being exposed to the marketing message, making it difficult for companies to reach individuals with their message (Hastings et al., 2004). Longitudinal usage of provocative tactics could also result in a misplaced
focus, and the sending company can become the centre of attention, instead of the intended message (Jasperson & Fan, 2002). The recipient may view the profit-seeking company as offensive, and form a negative outlook of the company as a whole and therefore, it is important that profit-seeking companies are aware of the long-term effects of provocative marketing tactics (Hastings et al., 2004).

2.3 Demographical factors

In order to understand how and why an individual interprets and assesses marketing messages of provocative nature, there are a number of demographic factors to consider. These factors include age, generation/cohort and gender (Dens et al., 2008).

2.3.5.1 Age and generation/cohort

According to Manceau and Tissier-Desbordes (2006) it is of importance to consider the age and cohort that an individual belongs to in order to enable an understanding of how an individual views provocative marketing messages. Members of a generation are connected through their shared experiences during the formative years, and things like popular culture, world events, economic conditions, natural disasters, politics and technology are all experiences that construct liaisons, connecting individuals of a generation together into cohorts (Smith & Clurman, 1998). Due to these shared experiences, cohorts form and preserve resembling values and life skills as they get to know and learn how to go about conducting things, and what to treasure. These experiences form individual's understanding of what is seen as right and wrong, normal or abnormal and so forth (Manceau & Tissier-Desbordes, 2006). Manceau and Tissier-Desbordes (2006) and Sabri (2012) both state that an individual's understanding, and how they receive provocative marketing messages, can vary depending on which generation they were born into.

There are several distinctions between generations; Veterans, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y (Szamosi, 2006; Bristow et al., 2011; Lyons et al., 2014). Veterans are born between 1925-1942 and Baby Boomers between 1943-1964, Generation X refers to individuals born between 1965 and 1980, and Generation Y are individuals born between 1981 to 2000 (Szamosi, 2006; Bristow et al., 2011). Since the study at hand is focused on how provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies is perceived by users in a social media context, the focus on generations will be on the
latter two brackets. Generation X is viewed as somewhat different from the preceding ones. A typical characteristic for individuals born in Generation X is that they are seen as a hard working generation with autonomous individuals. X-ers are cautious in where to place their knowledge and abilities since they are careful and do not want to compromise their personal lives for the sake of their careers (Szamosi, 2006), and they seek work-life balance (Bristow et al., 2011). Individuals who belong to Generation X are generally not viewed as loyal to firms, and tend to have a high level of mobility (Lyons et al., 2014), since they are constantly seeking change (Bristow et al., 2011). X-ers have made themselves a name as work-shifters, who change jobs frequently in order to pursue opportunities (Lyons et al., 2014), and they also expect more options, and to be able to impact a product or service as a customer (Bristow et al., 2011). Individuals of Generation X witnessed economic stagflation and a multitude of large business fusions and failures, making them distrustful of corporations (Bristow et al., 2011). Since X-ers are quite distrustful of corporations, they are sceptical towards provocative marketing imagery. Due to this scepticism, provocative marketing needs to be placed into a context that will appeal to Generation X’s desire to contribute to a better world (Bristow et al., 2011).

Generation Y have come of age in surroundings that have been highly affected by cursory changes, economic progress and technological innovation (Szamosi, 2006; Bristow et al., 2011; Lyons et al., 2014). Gen-Yers are often referred to as ‘the lazy generation’ (Szamosi, 2006), and have been provided an advantage in comparison to Generation Xers, since they entered the workforce in a time of economic prosperity (Lyons et al., 2014). Individuals in Generation Y have grown up with the emergence of the World Wide Web and the phenomena of social media (Szamosi, 2006; Bristow et al., 2011). According to Bristow et al., (2011) the majority of Gen-Yers are active members in social media platforms, and communicate on several levels in social media channels. Gen-Yers have always been told that they are ‘winners’, and that they can do whatever they want, making them a confident generation (Bristow et al., 2011), and they are highly demanding (Szamosi, 2006). As a result, Gen-Yers are not easy to sway for marketers, since they want to make their own decisions (Szamosi, 2006; Bristow et al., 2011). Another difference in relation to Generation Xers is that Generation Yers expect creative partnerships with companies, and are driven by cooperation for a common cause (Bristow et al., 2011).
There are several researchers who agree that provocative marketing imagery is less offensive to individuals belonging to the latter of Generation Y, and that provocative tactics is more accepted amongst the younger generation (Alwitt & Prabhaker, 1994; Vézina & Paul, 1997; Dahl et al., 2003; Manceau & Tissier-Desbordes, 2006; Dens et al., 2008). However, this inference largely depends on the context of the marketing message. Most provocative marketing appeals are generally aimed towards the younger generation (Dens et al., 2008). Moreover, Pope et al., (2004) and Dens et al., (2008), state that the way in which provocative marketing is viewed has shifted with time. According to Dens et al., (2008), provocative marketing messages are more effective on members of the Generation Y, since this type of tactic has been present during their forming years, making them less critical towards the technique than members of Generation X.

2.3.5.2 Gender

According to Pope et al., (2004) and Dens et al., (2008), there is a difference between women and men in how they view provocative marketing imagery. Dens et al., (2008) state that women are more sensitive and hence have stronger reactions towards provocative marketing imagery that depicts disgusting images. This is consistent with the findings by Manceau and Tissier-Desbordes (2006), who found that women are more hostile than men when it comes to imagery with sexual content. According to Pope et al., (2004), women may be more inclined to contemplate the underlying reasons of the marketer who created the provocative message, and attach more meaning to the images than men, who may be more inclined to the peripheral effects of the image. However, women may respond more approvingly to sexual appeals in marketing messages if there is a strong connection between the message and the sending company, whilst in contrast, men do not care if there is a connection or not (Putrevo, 2008). When it comes to gender and the effect of provocative marketing imagery, most researchers are in agreement that there is a difference between genders (Pope et al., 2004; Manceau & Tissier-Desbordes, 2006; Dens et al., 2008; Putrevo, 2008). However, LaTour and Henthorne (1994) oppose this inference and argue that there is no significant difference between how women and men view provocative marketing imagery.
2.4 Summary of the theoretical framework

In order to gain an understanding of what provocative marketing entails, the phenomenon is outlined explicitly in the first chapter of the theoretical framework, and is defined by Dahl et al., (2003) as an endeavour to astonish an audience by intentionally violating norms, values and religious taboos in order to attract cognizance of target consumers. A new platform of communication is also presented, commonly known as social media (Kiron et al., 2012), which represents the context for this study.

By reviewing existing research within the field of provocative marketing and specifically provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies in the context of social media, the two main conceptual building blocks of how the message is presented by the sender and how the message is received have emerged (Dennis et al., 2008; Lovelock & Wirtz, 2011). The profit-seeking company presents a provocative message in the context of social media, which is interpreted by the receiver, who forms a perception of the message (Dennis et al., 2008; Lovelock & Wirtz, 2011). The two building blocks have several aspects and components which can affect how the provocative marketing message is perceived by users in a social media context. Within the first building block, the three dominant components that construct how the message is presented by the sender include distinctiveness, ambiguity and transgressions of norms and taboos (Vézina & Paul, 1997). Distinctiveness refers to the advertisements ability to stand out from the crowd, which can be achieved by its size, colour, position and language in the marketing message (Vézina & Paul, 1997). A provocative marketing message should be ambiguous, allowing for various interpretations and intentions (Vézina & Paul, 1997), providing opportunity for an aesthetic experience (Pope et al., 2004). If the content of the marketing message transgresses norms and taboos of society, provocation is more probable to occur (Childers and Houston, 1984; Vézina & Paul, 1997).

The second building block of the study, how the message is received, includes components which can affect how the user will perceive the provocative marketing message. These components include the level of involvement, attitude towards profit-seeking companies, attitude towards the advertisement and demographical factors (Waller et al., 2005). How much influence a provocative marketing message will have
on the individual is strongly determined by the degree of involvement from the recipient (Te'eni-Harari et al., 2007).

The receiver's perception of the provocative marketing message can also be influenced by if there is a pre-formed attitude towards the sending company, or the advertisement. An individual's attitude towards the sending company can be influenced by emotions, which can control how the recipient perceives the sending company as a whole (Hansen & Riis-Christensen, 2007) whilst an individual's attitude towards an advertisement can consist of emotional responses such as the advertisements credibility or ability to inform (Baker and Lutz, 1988). Aspects such as how the firm treats its employees, engages in social issues and how the company is managed can also affect individuals attitudes towards the sending company (Javalgi & Traylor, 1994), as well as if the receiver is familiar with the company (Dens et al., 2008) and if the firm seeks to maximize profit (Taylor, 2014) or work for ‘the greater good’ (Dahl et al., 2003). Furthermore, the receiver's perception is influenced by what the receiver thinks about being exposed to provocative marketing content during a longer period of time (Hastings et al., 2004). In order to understand how individuals perceive and interpret provocative marketing messages, demographic factors play an important part. These factors include age, generation/cohort and gender (Dens et al., 2008).
3. Methodology

This chapter outlines the selected method for the study. Initially, the research approach that will be employed in the study is presented, with the choice of research strategy, source of data, research design, method for data collection and the sampling selection. The chapter ends by presenting an operationalisation schedule, how the focus group will be conducted, the researchers chosen method of presenting and analysing data, quality criteria and ethical aspects.

3.1 Qualitative research approach

According to Bryman and Bell (2007) there are two different approaches to analyse, interpret and present data; the qualitative and quantitative research approach. The choice of research approach depends on the research problem, the research design and the purpose of the research (Murray, 2003; Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005; Bryman & Bell, 2007). The most obvious difference between the approaches is that qualitative research is concerned with words rather than numbers and the approach assigns attention to reasons, underlying motives and desires that determine human behaviour (Clayton, 2010). In contrast, quantitative research is applicable to phenomena which can be expressed in terms of quantities (Dhawan, 2010; Bryman & Bell, 2007). In quantitative research one applies statistical tools (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2010) in order to explore, describe, present and examine different trends and relationships within data (Saunders et al., 2009).

The researchers of this study will apply the qualitative research approach, which emphasizes words, texts, symbols and actions, in contrast to the quantitative approach, which focuses less on human nature and more on numbers (Murray, 2003; Clayton, 2010; Bryman & Bell, 2007). Since the purpose of the study is to explore how provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies is perceived by users in a social media context, the qualitative research is beneficial. The qualitative research approach enables a holistic understanding within a specific area, instead of analysing how different variables are dependent on each other, as in the quantitative research approach (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Dhawan, 2010). Moreover, the qualitative research approach is more appropriate for this study than the quantitative approach, since quantitative results only provide an overview of the topic, and does not go into depth in the area (Murray,
A qualitative research approach aims to provide a deeper knowledge regarding the nature of human behaviour, as well as the underlying reasons for that behaviour (Hyde, 2000; Bryman & Bell, 2007; Clayton, 2010). Therefore, the qualitative research approach is seen as suitable for this study in order to see how provocative appeals from profit-seeking companies is perceived by users in a social media context. Because of this, it is of both practical and theoretical relevance to apply this form of approach in this study, in order to obtain detailed and comprehensive answers and meet the purpose of the study.

### 3.2 Research strategy

When a research problem has been identified, it needs to be transformed into a scientifically researchable purpose (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2010), and research questions which will guide the mode of the study (Bryman & Bell, 2007). There are three main purposes that can be applied in a qualitative research; exploratory, explanatory and descriptive (Babbie, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Zikmund et al., 2012). The different designs serve as a tool to facilitate the fulfilment of the study's purpose (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Babbie, 2007), and many qualitative studies are either exploratory or descriptive (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). An exploratory research is a study of an unfamiliar problem of which the researcher has little or no cognizance about (Richey & Klein, 2007; Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2010;) and the research design contributes with rich descriptive data of what is yet unexplored in literature (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Because of this, there are very few guidelines and restrictions to follow, which makes the research design less structured than a descriptive one (Richey & Klein, 2007). In order to determine what type of purpose a study should have, the researcher can emanate from the research question of the study, since the research question guides the focus of the study (Boudah, 2011).

Since the research question of this study is; ‘What makes advertisements provocative in social media?’ an exploratory research is necessary since the research question demands in-depth answers. The researchers of this study will adopt an exploratory design because there is limited research on how users perceive provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies when the message is presented in a social media context. The exploratory research design is often applied to general problems where a research
phenomenon is in a preliminary stage, and there is an insufficient amount of available research in the area (Bryman & Bell, 2007, Babbie, 2007; Aaker et al., 2010). Because the purpose of this study is to explore how provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies is perceived by users in a social media context, the exploratory research design is beneficial in order to uncover new knowledge within the area (Saunders et al., 2009).

3.3 Source of data

According to Bryman and Bell (2007) the main techniques of collecting data are by applying the qualitative and the quantitative method. However, it is also possible to emanate from when and how the data was collected, which is what makes up the distinction between primary and secondary data (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Primary data refers to material that is gathered for the first time and can be collected by applying focus groups, interviews and observations to answer the formulated research problem (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005) and is used for specific studies and research problems at hand (Hox & Boeije, 2005). In contrast, secondary data is any type of data collection that is acquired by any other person except the original author (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

The researchers of this study will use primary data sources, since the empirical material will be gathered directly from the respondents. The authors of this study found it necessary to gather primary data in order to collect information for the specific purpose of this study, since the purpose is of an exploratory nature. Furthermore, the questions asked by the researchers can be tailored to fit the study. The collection of primary data is deemed as beneficial for this study, since new data is added to already existing knowledge (Backman & Hentinen, 2001), and primary data customizes information specifically for the study's research problem (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005). This study will address a specific research issue, and the use of primary data will enable the authors to collect the needed information (Hox and Boeije, 2005). Moreover, primary data enables the researchers to attain more control over how the information is collected and can make decisions regarding how many respondents there will be as well as the location of the research (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005).
3.4 Research design

When the research problem, research technique and source of data have been determined, the next step is to determine the research design for the collection of data (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005). The research design provides a plan of action for a study, and specifies the methods for collecting and analysing the data (Saunders et al., 2009; Zikmund et al., 2012) and the main aspect to consider when selecting a research design is that it needs to function in conjunction with the study's purpose and research question (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005). There are several methods of how to collect data, and these differ depending on the chosen research approach (Zikmund et al., 2012). There are five different types of research designs; experimental, cross-sectional, longitudinal, comparative and case study design, which all have distinct characteristics which separates them from each other (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

The authors of this study deemed the cross-sectional research design to be the most appropriate for this study, since the cross-sectional research design makes it possible to gather information regarding a substantial number of factors, as well as provide the researchers with a large amount of data regarding a limited number of factors (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Since this study requires in-depth answers, and hence needs to delimit the amount of data collected, the cross-sectional research design is beneficial (Appannaiah et al., 2010). According to Bryman and Bell (2007), the cross-sectional research design is the most commonly used strategy in marketing research and it typically takes the form of qualitative focus groups at a specific point in time (Appannaiah et al., 2010). The cross-sectional research design is beneficial for this study, since the strategy is often applied on a sample of members from a population at a particular point in time, providing the researchers with a snapshot during that time (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Appannaiah et al., 2010). The authors of this study seek to detect patterns of association among individuals, and according to Bryman and Bell (2007) and Appannaiah et al., (2012), the cross-sectional research design enables this type of information to be detected, since data is collected from several different respondents.
3.5 Method for data collection

The most commonly used qualitative methods are; interviews, focus groups, observations and document analysis (Patton, 2002; Bryman & Bell, 2007). In general, a qualitative interview is a so called ‘conversation with a purpose’, where the aim is to obtain feelings, perceptions and perspectives from the participants (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2010). Considering that the purpose and the research question of the study is of an exploratory nature, focus groups is the most appropriate fit, and will therefore be applied in this study, since the technique allows involvement of a number of people that share ideas, feelings, thoughts and perceptions regarding a certain topic (Morgan & Spanish, 1984). A focus group can be done in the same time required for one personal interview (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2010), making the technique more efficient than the one-on-one interview (Fontana & Fery, 1994). Also, respondents tend to be more articulate in a group interview than in an individual interview (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2010), which is beneficial since the researchers can gather more in-depth data. Focus groups are seen as beneficial when seeking to generate exploratory data in exploratory research (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2010), and is therefore preferable to the personal interview technique. According to Kitzinger (1995), the focus technique is also beneficial since it can get individuals who do not wish to be interviewed alone involved.

The focus group method has been applied in market research for many years to test advertising initiatives, and the technique depicts the most commonly applied method in market research (Bryman & Bell, 2007), which strengthens the use of the technique in this study. The focus group technique can be conducted in both an unstructured or semi-structured manner (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2010), and in this study, the semi-structured focus group is seen as appropriate to meet the purpose. In a semi-structured focus group, the questions asked are open-ended and has some degree of pre-determined order, but still allows for flexibility and follow-up questions. The technique is characterised by its conversational and somewhat informal tone (Clifford et al., 2010). The main advantage with the semi-structured focus group is that it is a flexible approach (Clifford et al., 2010) that enables respondents to express how they feel about a topic in their own words, and at the same time provide the researchers the possibility to question their answers (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Furthermore, the focus
group technique serves well in research where existing knowledge is insufficient and the topic under investigation is of a complex nature (Powell & Single, 1996). When conducting a focus group, the interest is to explore the different ways individuals discuss an issue as members of a group, rather than simply as individuals, and capture collective sentiments. In this case, the discussion refers to how provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies is perceived in a social media context. The way in which individuals respond to others diverse views and observe interactions is the essential part of a focus group discussion (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The semi-structured focus group is deemed as beneficial by the authors of this research, to allow the respondents to speak openly about how they perceive provocative marketing advertisements in a social media context.

3.6 Sample selection

3.6.1 Sampling frame

When conducting research it is not feasible to involve an entire population, and it is almost certain that one will need to sample a part of the entire population (Bryman & Bell, 2007). A sample refers to the subset of the population that is chosen for investigation, and the population is the total amount of individuals from which the sample will be selected. Usually the sample is delimited to a sampling frame, in which all units of a population are listed (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005; Bryman & Bell, 2007). Sampling methods can be divided into two universal types; probability and nonprobability sampling. In probability sampling every population has a chance of being selected for the study and this technique should be used when generalization is the object of the study. In contrast, non-probability sampling does not provide a chance of selection to each population and therefore the results may be difficult to generalize (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2010). According to Marshall (2013), probability sampling is not appropriate for qualitative studies, and since this study is of a qualitative nature, the sample will be selected based on a non-probability sampling technique. The sampling frame will emanate from a sample of the chosen population for the study, and Bryman and Bell (2007) argue that a sample is the ideal mean to draw conclusions regarding a population.
3.6.2 Selection of respondents

There are four sub categories in non-probability sampling; convenience sampling, purposive sampling, quota sampling and snowball sampling (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2010). The population of this study refers to all individuals in Sweden, which are at times exposed to provocative marketing imagery. Since this population is quite extensive, the researchers will select participants based on a convenience sample. A convenience sample is selected by using individuals that are available to the researcher, and is commonly applied in the field of business research (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Since provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies in a social media context is deemed as a quite unexplored field, this technique is beneficial. The researchers of this study have two criteria that need to be fulfilled in order for a respondent to participate in the focus group session. The first criteria is that they frequently use social media channels, since the researchers of this study seek to investigate how users perceive provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies in a social media context. Therefore, it is important that all participating individuals are familiar with social media and how it is used. The second criterion that needs to be fulfilled is that the participants know what provocative marketing entails, and that they are aware of its existence. This is deemed as an essential prerequisite, so that the respondents can express their opinions regarding provocative marketing attempts, and enable the researchers to gather as comprehensive and informed answers as possible.

The selected respondents for this study will be both women and men, which belong to both generation X and Y, in order to determine if there are variations within different generations. According to Dens et al., (2008), different generations may view provocative marketing imagery in separate ways, and have different perspectives on the matter. Moreover, Dens et al., (2008), argue that generation Y may be less conservative and have a more favourable view of provocative marketing, causing them to be less offended by the technique, whilst generation X may see provocative imagery as more disturbing. The researchers also want to see if there is a difference between male and female respondents, and therefore the focus group will consist of mixed genders, four females and four males. According to Bryman and Bell (2007), a focus group should include six to ten members at each occasion and the use of more participants may be more complex to manage. Therefore there will be eight and not any more participants in the focus group for this study.
The chosen respondents are presented in the table below (see table 3.1). The authors of this study will not mention the respondents by their real names, but give them fictional names, allowing the respondents to be anonymous. The researchers want to keep the respondents anonymous, since it allows the respondents to feel more secure, and also provides more honest answers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Active on social media</th>
<th>Has been exposed to provocative marketing in social media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frida</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stefanie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabelle</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lukas</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emil</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Markus</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 – Participants selected from the convenience sample

3.7 Operationalisation

Operationalisation is the process of defining variables into measurable factors (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005; Cohen et al., 2011), which makes it easy to examine and discuss (Olsen, 2012). In other words, the ‘operations’ are the steps one must go through in order to observe the concept being defined (Babbie, 2007). The process defines theoretical concepts, and allows them to be empirically measured in a natural setting (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Saunders et al., 2009). An operationalization shifts the researcher from an abstract level to an empirical one (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004) and research questions are generally set up in advance with a general design, which is not coded at the point of the collection (Punsch, 2014). An operationalisation is essential for a qualitative study since the execution of semi-structured focus groups requires that all the questions are understandable for the respondent (Cohen et al., 2011). According to
Jonker and Pennink (2010), the questions asked in an operationalisation should to be founded in theory that can be found in existing literature, and Ghauri and Grønhaug (2005) mean that the theoretical framework will be assigned a higher level of credibility if the questions asked in an operationalisation are anchored in existing theory. Because of this, this study has used previous research as a base for developing an operationalisation. The aim is to construct an operationalisation that actually measures the concepts it is intended to measure (Engel & Schutt, 2014).

In order to understand how individuals receive provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies in a social media context, the authors of this study needed to form a theoretical definition of the main building blocks; how the message is presented to the sender and how the message is received in a social media context. Within these building blocks there are several concepts, which can provide an in-depth understanding for how provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies is perceived by users in a social media context. Within the provocative marketing block, the concepts refer to if a message is distinct, ambiguous and transgresses norms and taboos. The building block of how the message is received contains an individual’s level of involvement, attitude towards profit-seeking senders, attitude towards the advertisement, effects of long-term provocative appeals and demographical factors. An operationalisation of the theoretical framework was necessary in order to develop questions that could reflect the phenomena of provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies, and how it is received by individuals who are exposed to the message. The authors of this study excluded the demographical factors from the operationalization schedule, since the authors will use a convenience sample, and were already familiar with the respondents' backgrounds.
PROVOCATIVE MARKETING – PRESENTATION OF THE PHENOMENA

Provocative marketing is based on the fundamental principle of seeking to stand out from the crowd (Stafford & Stafford, 2002) and is defined by Dahl et al., (2003) as an endeavour to astonish an audience by intentionally violating norms, values and religious taboos in order to attract cognizance of target consumers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONCEPT</th>
<th>CONCEPTUAL DEFINITION</th>
<th>OPERATIONALIZATION</th>
<th>QUESTIONS APPENDIX 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presentation of the phenomena – Provocative marketing</td>
<td>Provocative marketing advertisements are created with the sole purpose of creating shock and provocation amongst viewers (Dahl et al., 2003) and uses a deliberate appeal in order to shock viewers of the provocative content (Vézina &amp; Paul, 1997).</td>
<td>This theoretical concept will provide the participants with a more comprehensive overview of what provocative marketing entails, and provide the researchers with information regarding how the participants view provocative marketing.</td>
<td>1.1 1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provocative marketing in a social media context</td>
<td>The social media context represents a new platform for marketing communication (Haenlein &amp; Kaplan, 2010) and according to Christy and Haley (2008), the context in which provocative content is presented matters to users.</td>
<td>This theoretical measure will provide the participants with an initial contact to the context of the study, which is social media, and let the researchers see if the participants have been exposed to provocative marketing in social media.</td>
<td>2.1 2.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PROVOCATIVE MARKETING – HOW THE MESSAGE IS PRESENTED

Provocative marketing is generally not provocative due to the content itself, but the context in which it is presented (Kerr et al., 2012). According to Vézina and Paul (1997), there are three main components of provocative marketing: distinctiveness, ambiguity and transgressions of norms and taboos.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How the message is presented</td>
<td>The way in which a message is presented, both visually and verbally, has an effect on how the message is processed (Usunier, 1996; De Mooij, 1998). According to Sabri (2012), it is of importance how provocative marketing imagery is applied.</td>
<td>This theoretical measure provides the researchers with a general understanding regarding how the respondents receive the presented images.</td>
<td>3.1 3.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distinctiveness</td>
<td>The ability to stand out from the crowd is a central component of provocative marketing, (Vézina &amp; Paul, 1997).</td>
<td>The questions formed from this measure will help the researchers see if the respondents think that the chosen advertisements are distinct and differ from other marketing attempts.</td>
<td>4.1 4.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Selection of colour</td>
<td>According to Childers and Houston (1984), distinct colours can affect the attention given to the advert, and also how well the receiver of the message recalls it.</td>
<td>The colouring of the advertisements is of interest to ask about in order to determine if the respondents of the study believe the adverts to be distinctive in social media due to their colouring.</td>
<td>4.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Position of the marketing message</td>
<td>Most results show that distinctive stimuli such as position of the marketing message has a positive effect on the degree of attention given to the marketing message (Vézina &amp; Paul, 1997).</td>
<td>The question in this section will allow the researchers to see if the placement of an advertisement matters.</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content of the message</td>
<td>A component of provocative marketing is it’s distinctiveness, referring to the ability to stand out from the crowd, and regardless of content, a marketing message that resembles another will lose some of its vigour (Vézina &amp; Paul, 1997).</td>
<td>The questions formed from this theory will allow the researchers to see if the content of an important aspect for an advertisement to be perceived as distinct.</td>
<td>4.5</td>
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<td>Ambiguity</td>
<td>Ambiguity refers to the degree which a marketing message enables for various interpretations and intentions (Vézina &amp; Paul, 1997; Pope et al., 2004), and is a component of ensuring that a message is provocative.</td>
<td>The main objective of exploring if the advertisements allow for ambiguous interpretations is to see what the respondents think that the companies want to convey with their advertisements.</td>
<td>5.1 5.2 5.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transgression of norms and taboos</td>
<td>Norms control what is considered as prohibited by the receiver and what is seen as violations against ethical issues and moral values (Manceau &amp; Tissier-Desbordes, 2006). If the content of a marketing message is perceived as taboo by the receiver it can be classified as provocative (Childers and Houston, 1984; Vézina &amp; Paul, 1997).</td>
<td>Norms and taboos may differ amongst respondents, and the questions formed from this concept will allow the researchers to measure what provocative marketing means to the respondents and what they think of for-profit organizations employing provocative tactics in their advertisements.</td>
<td>6.1 6.2 6.3 6.4 6.5</td>
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THE RECEIVER OF THE MESSAGE

How the receiver perceives provocative marketing is a social action, which differs among individuals, and can depend on several factors (Sandıkcı, 2011). According to Waller et al., (2005), aspects such as involvement, attitude and demographics are likely to trigger different reactions and perceptions amongst individuals.

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<td>Level of involvement</td>
<td>How much influence a provocative marketing message will have on the individual is strongly determined by the degree of involvement from the recipient (Te'eni-Harari et al., 2007). Provocative marketing can trigger either positive or negative emotional responses that affect the receiver's response (Manceau &amp; Tissier-Desbordes, 2006).</td>
<td>The questions asked to measure this concept will see if the participants think that they would perceive the advertisements differently depending on their level of involvement.</td>
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| Attitude towards for profit seeking senders | According to Söderlund (2003), an individual may have a preformed attitude to the presentation of a message and the sender behind it, which can differ depending on the circumstances. According to Pope et al., (2004), the attitude towards the sending company can be defined as the total impression that the company makes in the mind of the individual. | This measure will enable the researchers to evaluate how the participant’s attitude towards for-profit seeking senders is perceived in a social media context. | 8.1  
8.2  
8.3  
8.4  
8.5 |
| Attitude towards the advertisement | An individual's attitude towards an advertisement can consist of emotional responses such as the feeling of joy and values, for example, an advertisements credibility or ability to inform (Baker and Lutz, 1988). | This measure will provide the researchers with information of participant’s attitude towards the advertisements in a social media context. | 9.1  
9.2  
9.3 |
| Long-term use of provocative marketing | Companies need to consider the long-term effects of applying provocative marketing techniques as a form of marketing strategy, since it may affect individual’s opinions about the company (LaTour & Zahra, 1989). If a provocative marketing message is displayed over a longer period of time, it runs the risk of habituation (Hastings & MacFadyen, 2002; Hastings et al., 2004). | This measure will enable the researchers to see of the respondents opinions regarding provocative marketing content would change if they were exposed over a longer period of time. |

3.8. Conducting the focus group

There are several practical aspects that should be taken into consideration when conducting focus groups, such as how to record and transcribe the session, and who will guide the session (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The focus group session works best if it is properly recorded and transcribed, since it is difficult to keep track of who says what and the pace of the discussion (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The researchers will begin by asking questions regarding the topic of provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies in a social media context. These questions will be directly connected to the content in the theoretical framework. It is important that the material will encourage interaction. By doing this the researchers can pick up on different views and opinions of the participants (Barbour, 2008). In order to get the desired outcome from a focus group, it is crucial that the moderator who is questioning the participants and presents
the topic is presented to the participants before asking the questions (Puchta & Potter, 2004).

When planning the focus group, the researchers need to think of the goals of the focus group, the various tasks, the group size and composition in terms of age, sex, status and gender. Focus groups are normally made up of individuals who share common characteristics and a similar level of understanding regarding the topic, rather than aiming for diversity. This due to that individuals generally tends to express personal views and disclose more to those who they perceive to as similar to themselves (Litosseliti, 2003). This is something that the researchers will take in mind when conducting the focus groups from a convenience sample. However, there needs to be a balance between similarity and difference between the participants in order for the answers to differ and not be too homogeneous (Litosseliti, 2003). The researchers will conduct a pilot study to test the operationalization, and one focus group. The focus group will be mixed in terms of gender and involve the participation of four females and four males.

During the focus group session, the moderator needs to have in mind not to ask leading questions that could influence or lead the respondents in any direction (Bryman & Bell, 2011, Litosseliti, 2003). The time frame will be limited to ninety minutes in order to ask all the questions needed but also to keep the respondents active during the focus group discussion. One of the researchers will act as a moderator and lead the focus group discussion. Another researcher will assist the moderator with follow up questions and explain the questions in detail if needed, as well as transcribe the session by taking notes. The third researcher will actively take notes during the focus group and record the session by using a recording device, so the researchers can go back and listen to the sessions again if needed (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

3.8.1 Tactics applied during the focus group

During the focus group sessions, the researchers will display visual images to the respondents, as a complement to the discussion. This type of technique is called the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Instrument Technique (ZMET), which involves the use of visual and sensory imagery during the focus group, and in this specific research it will be the use of pictures in the form of advertisements (Coulter & Zaltman, 1994; Coulter
et al., 2001). Pictures or other visual objects are often referred to as the catalyst for the group discussion, and this external stimuli is introduced to elicit comments from individuals concerning specific topics (Greenbaum, 2000). By monitoring the stimuli, respondents can represent their cognition and emotions and find issues that are significant for them, and potentially unknown for the researchers (Coulter et al., 2001). Since there are several occurrences within individuals senses that they may be unaware of (Coulter et al., 2001), the ZMET can enable participants to express themselves in a more precise manner regarding their view of provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies in a social media context. Sexual appeals is an increasingly applied advertising technique in social media for consumer brands and products to gain attention (Wyllie et al., 2014). The researchers have chosen four advertisements from the profit-seeking companies Tom Ford and American Apparel, which can be found in the context of social media. Both companies work within the fashion and cosmetic industry and have been noticed for their provocative marketing techniques. These two companies are chosen since they are profit-seeking companies which are active in the context of social media and use provocative marketing in their advertisements.

The questions asked during the focus group session will be connected to the theory and the four different advertisements. The four advertisements will be displayed on a whiteboard in order for the participants to see each and one of them clearly. Each advertisement will also be assigned a number from one to four in order to make it easier for the researcher to know which one of the advertisements the participants are talking about in the focus group. At the end of the session the researchers will inform the participants in more detail about the purpose of the study so the study is as transparent as possible for the participants.

3.9 Pilot study

A pilot study is conducted to ensure that the questions asked in the study are working well and that the research instrument (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Problems that can occur within the questions can be solved when creating a pilot study before the focus group. According to Bryman and Bell (2007), the researchers can be provided with a greater sense of confidence when conducting a pilot study before the actual focus group. Another advantage is that the pilot study makes the researches become aware of
questions that can make the respondents uncomfortable. Loss of interest in certain parts of the focus group can also be identified and taken cared of (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Moreover, the use of a pilot study facilitates understanding of the questions asked, and provides the chance to remove or change the questions (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The pilot study also allows the researchers to see how well the questions flow and the researchers have the opportunity to change the order and structure of the questions. Bryman and Bell (2007) state that the respondents participating in the pilot study should not be the same as in the full study, and therefore, the pilot study will consist of other respondents than in the actual focus group discussion.

3.10 How to present and analyse qualitative data

Qualitative data generally results in a large amount of unstructured textual material, and there are no clear cut rules of how to present and analyse qualitative material (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Creswell, 2007). The main characteristic of qualitative data analysis is that it focuses on the meaning and context rather than searching for universal generalisations (Schutt, 2011). Material gathered from qualitative research consists of words, texts and symbols which represent individuals, actions and events which occur in social reality (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Schutt, 2011). According to Bryman and Bell (2007), there are few established methods for how to analyse qualitative data. However, there are some general strategies which can be of assistance in order to analyse the material; analytic induction, grounded theory and turning data into fragments (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Analytic induction seeks to generalise theory and find universal explanations of phenomena, whilst grounded theory seeks to create new theory (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Since this study does not seek to find universal explanations or establish new theory, the authors of this study will choose to employ the analysing technique of data reduction. Data reduction is a method for analysing data which seeks to facilitate a more in-depth understanding of the phenomena under investigation by reducing the amount of data continuously during its collection (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The authors of this study deemed the technique of data reduction as beneficial for this study, since the collected data from the focus group session will be quite extensive and detailed. Furthermore, data reduction is relevant for this study since the main objective of a qualitative analysis is to detect variations and patterns of association in the collected material (Bryman & Bell, 2007).
In order to map the collected material, data can be fragmented and broken down into codes and themes. The first step is to conduct a very basic coding and in the second step, these codes are categorized into themes (Bryman & Bell, 2007). These themes emerge from the collected data and in order to identify these categories, the researcher needs to verify, confirm and qualify them by searching through the data thoroughly and repeat the process in order to find more categories (Burnard et al., 2008). In order to do this, the researcher needs to read the transcribed material and make notes in the margins in the form of words, theories or short sentences that summarize what is being said in the text (Burnard et al., 2008). The aim is to offer a broad analytic theme for what is being said in element of the transcript, which is done in the third step, where the themes are constructed into broad analytic themes (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Burnard et al., 2008). The authors of this study will start mapping the collected data during the focus group session, by comparing and organising the respondents’ answers to match the operationalisation schedule and the theoretical framework. Thereafter, the researchers of this study will take notes and fragment the material by analysing what is being said in each section, to land in broad analytic themes. By applying the technique of data reduction, the researchers of this study can decrease the collected material, and the technique will facilitate the researchers of this study in finding variations and patterns of association amongst the respondents.

3.11 Quality criteria in business research

There are several quality criteria to examine regardless if the research is of qualitative or quantitative nature in order to determine if the research is trustworthy and authentic (Bryman & Bell, 2007). In order for an analysis to be trustworthy, the whole research needs to be applicable and usable (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005). The quality criteria for qualitative research can be evaluated in numerous manners, the most common ones being through trustworthiness and authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

3.11.1 Trustworthiness

According to Bryman and Bell (2007) credibility consists of four sub-criteria; credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The criteria of credibility refers to ensuring that the research is conducted to the standards of good practice and reports the findings of research to members of the social environment which were studied, in order to confirm that the researcher has understood the social environment
correctly (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The criteria of transferability refers to the whether or not findings from one research environment is applicable in other contexts, or even in the same context at another point in time (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). However, transferability and generalisation is a problem within qualitative research, since it typically entails depth rather than breadth. Qualitative research generally has a small sample of members from a population, and due to this, researchers conducting qualitative studies are encouraged to produce rich and detailed data (Bryman & Bell, 2007). According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), this provides others with a database from which judgements can be made regarding the data's transferability to other environments. Dependability involves the transcription and documentation of all phases in the research process, and is a direct parallel to reliability in quantitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The fourth and final criteria, confirmability, is concerned with ensuring that the researcher has acted in good faith, and it should be obvious that the researcher has not intentionally allowed personal values and beliefs bias the research and resulting findings (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

The authors of this study have created an operationalisation schedule, and in order to increase the trustworthiness of the study, the schedule will be tested in connection with the pilot study. By testing the operationalisation schedule the researchers can ensure that the questions are understandable, and that the operationalisation from theoretical concepts measure what the researchers intend them to measure. The authors of this study also established a plan of how to facilitate the structure of the focus group and to ensure the quality of the process (Patton, 2002). The credibility of the study will be increased by conducting the pilot study, which will ensure that the questions are understandable. The same questions that were asked during the pilot study will be used during the focus group, which also increases the trustworthiness of the study. The questions are open ended and since the focus group will be semi-structured, which allows for follow up questions. This ensures rich and detailed in-depth data, but replicability will be limited.

3.11.2 Authenticity

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), there are five criteria for authenticity. These criteria raise more general questions regarding the broader political implications of research and in order for a research to be authentic it should be; fair, ontological,
educative, catalytic and tactical (Bryman & Bell, 2007). In order for research to be considered as fair, it should represent diverging viewpoints from members of a social setting in a fair manner, and provide an equitable depiction of opinions and beliefs from the population (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Ontological authenticity refers to if the research enables members of a social setting to gain a better comprehension of their social environment and surroundings. Educatively authentic refers to if the research enables members of the population to gain a better appreciation for other individuals’ perspectives of their social environment, and serves as a pedagogical tool to facilitate this understanding (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Catalytic authenticity refers to if the research has enabled members of a social setting to change their situation and engage in action. The fifth and final criteria, tactical authenticity, wants to know if the research has empowered members of a social setting to take the needed steps in order to engage in action (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

The authors of this study decided to employ certain prerequisites to participate in the study, one of them being that the participants knew what provocative marketing entails, and that they were aware of its existence. This prerequisite serves as a tool to make the study as fair as possible, and to detect patterns of association. In order to the study to represent a fair picture of the populations different viewpoints and opinions, respondents also needed to frequently use social media channels, since this study seeks to investigate how individuals receive provocative marketing content in a social media context. In order to maintain the quality criteria of authenticity, the authors of this research made sure to record the empirical material by using a computer. This was done in order to avoid any potential misunderstandings and to represent the participants’ answers as justly as possible. The authors of this study also want to make sure that the respondents understand what provocative marketing entails, and will display five pictures of provocative nature from two different profit-seeking companies during the focus group sessions, in order to allow the respondents to gain a deeper understanding of provocative marketing. The aim of displaying these pictures is to evoke a reaction from the participants, and make them discuss the topic. The technique of using visual images will also make it easier for respondents to relate to the topic of provocative marketing.
3.12 Ethical issues in business research

In business research, ethical issues arise at various stages of the process, and ethical issues cannot be ignored in business research (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Ethical issues concern how the researchers should treat the individuals who are involved in the research process, and when to engage or not engage with participants. There are four main ethical principles to consider when conducting business research, and these are whether there is; harm to participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy and if deception is involved (Bryman & Bell, 2007). According to the Swedish Scientific Council (vr.se) there are eight ethical principles that should be taken into account when conducting business research. These are; the requirement of information, the requirement of consent, requirement of confidentiality and anonymity, utilization requirement, not operate under false pretences and not steal research from others (vr.se).

The ethical principles above will be followed by the authors during this study, with the intention of presenting a study which does not violate ethical principles. The ethical principle of informed consent (also referred to as requirement of information and consent) will be fulfilled by informing the respondents in the focus group about the purpose of the study, and walking through the timeframe of the focus group session. The researchers will also inform the respondents that their participation in this study is voluntary, and that if they feel the need to terminate and leave the focus group discussion, they may do this. Since provocative marketing imagery may be a sensitive issue to individuals, this is a possibility the researchers need to take into consideration. In order to ensure the respondents confidentiality, the researchers will create fictional names to present in the study, and hence not disclose any personal information about the participating respondents. In order to fulfil the utilization requirement, the researchers will only use the collected material for the purpose of this study, and not in any other context. During the process, the researchers will not employ any deceptive tactics, but be honest and not operate under false pretences. The respondents will be fully informed about all aspects of the study, which will ensure that deception is minimized.
4. Empirical material

This chapter outlines a summarized version of the primary data collected from the semi-structured focus group, containing eight respondents. All respondents are anonymous and their real names have been replaced with fictional ones. In order to make it easier for the reader to follow, the empirical material is presented by different themes, which have emerged from the operationalisation schedule and focus group discussion.

Provocative marketing diverges from traditional marketing tactics in social media

When starting off the semi-structured focus group, the moderator began by asking the eight respondents what they thought the phenomena provocative marketing meant to them. The respondents were familiar with provocative marketing, but found it difficult to transform its meaning into words. However, the respondents discussed that provocative marketing is something that diverges from traditional marketing attempts, and attracts attention because it stands out from other marketing messages. The moderator picked up on this and asked the focus group why they thought that provocative marketing stands out from traditional marketing messages and one of the male respondents, Lukas, explained that provocative marketing is something that breaks the pattern of traditional marketing advertisements because he thinks it is noticeable. Lukas further explained that his encounters with provocative marketing were mainly from non-profit organizations, advocating for human rights and charitable objectives in order to attract attention to a specific social issue. A few of the participants nodded and said that they agreed with Lukas and that they thought of provocative marketing in a similar way. One of the female participants, Anna, explained that she had seen provocative marketing from non-profit organizations which displayed starving children, which made her react. Emil also gave an example of his earlier experience with provocative marketing and said that he had seen an anti-smoking campaign once, with frightening pictures, which caught his attention.

All of the participants in the focus group stated that they are active users of social media platforms, which also was an requirement to participate. Frida said that social media is something that is an essential part of her life, which was also the case for the rest of the
participants, who said that it is something that is kind of unavoidable. The most frequently used social media platforms were Facebook and Instagram. The moderator continued this discussion by asking the respondents if they had been exposed to provocation in the social media setting. The respondents answered that they had, mostly involuntarily, since the online setting generates a large amount of content, which is hard to control, especially on Facebook. Lukas said that by viewing other people's activities, shares and likes, it is hard to avoid being exposed to provocative marketing content in the context of social media.

**Distasteful and demeaning advertisements elicit provocation**

When the four advertisements were displayed for the participants in the focus group for the first time, a few of them had some immediate reactions, and Marcus who was sitting next to the advertisements used the phrase ‘oh my god!’ when he turned around and saw them. Stefanie also reacted right away and said ‘that is disgusting!’. Overall, the respondents had some sort of reaction towards the advertisements, some indicated reactions of surprise and some of shock, and Isabel said ‘this is almost pornography’. The four advertisements are displayed below in a smaller size and can be viewed in full size in appendix 2 (page 99-100).

![Image 4.1 The four advertisements from Tom Ford and American Apparel](image)

The discussion continued and the respondents agreed upon that the advertisements were eluded towards sex and nudity, and Anna pointed out that all the advertisements depicted women in various sexual poses. She inquired; ‘why is it always women, and not men?’. The participants also thought that the advertisements were vulgar and shocking, but not necessarily provocative and Max explained that today, you are used to
being exposed to these kind of advertisements, both on the Internet and in traditional media settings. Isabel agreed with Max and added that she didn’t feel provoked by the advertisements, but offended and that they were quite vulgar. Advertisement number one was the most provocative one according to the participants, which depicts a fully nude lower section of a woman, spreading her legs and covering her intimate parts with a perfume bottle (see appendix 2). Marcus said that advertisement number one was just demeaning to women, and quite frankly, disgusting. Emil thought that advertisement number two (see appendix 2), which displays a fully nude women, lying on a bench, being touched by a fully clothed man, looked more cheap than the other three, and said that it was not presented tastefully. Emil and Lukas said that they thought all the advertisements looked kind of cheap and not very professional. This was agreed upon by Stefanie and Markus, who drew it even further, stating that the advertisement evoked feelings of pity for the women in the picture, and said that it looked like she was a subject for human trafficking. Frida said that she had not given that any thought before it was mentioned by Stefanie, and expressed that she was especially agitated by advertisement number two, and did not understand why the woman is naked whilst the man is dressed. It was noted by Markus that there was a difference between advertisement number one and two as compared to advertisement number three and four, and that the latter were less professional. Lukas reaction towards advertisement number one was quite strong, and he said that the advertisement is just perverted and distasteful.

**The advertisements stand out from other marketing messages in social media**

The moderator asked the respondents why they thought the four advertisements were distinctive as compared to other marketing attempts within the social media context, and Emil said that advertisement number one and two stand out, since they do not seem like advertisements, and seem to be aimed at a different purpose than marketing. He also stated that advertisement number four stood out to him, since it looked less edited than the other advertisements, and even compared the advertisement with a sexist profile picture. When the moderator placed the advertisements in the context of social media, the respondents expressed that they would not be as shocked in the online setting of social media as in a traditional media context. The moderator asked the focus group
why they thought they would be less shocked in an online setting, and Lukas explained that since it is quite common to be exposed to provocative advertisements on the Internet, it loses its element of surprise. Frida added that she thought provocative advertising is more socially accepted online, and Max stated that he reacts differently to these types of advertisements in social media than in other media channels. It was expressed by Anna that she thought that it was not appropriate for these types of advertisements to be placed in the context of social media, since everyone can see them, even children and teenagers, and questioned their ethical aspect. Stefanie said that she would be shocked, but not offended by seeing these types of advertisements online and Emil expressed that he thought that these advertisements in social media would not provoke him as much as seeing them on for example, a billboard, and progressed by explaining that when you enter the context of social media, you are aware that these types of advertisements can emerge.

Distinctive colours attract attention in social media

When the moderator asked if the colours in the advertisements could affect the distinctiveness the respondents stated that the choice of colour was something that was important for the advertisements in order to stand out from other marketing messages in social media. Marcus started off by saying that more colourful advertisements are more distinctive than black and white ones, which according to him can be perceived as art. Frida agreed and further explained that black and white colours downplay the expression. Max thought that if he had seen advertisement number one or two in an art gallery or similar, he might have regarded it as art, and Isabel said that black and white pictures feel more classy than ones that contain colour. Isabel, Frida Stefanie thought that the red colour in all the advertisements made them distinctive, and Anna said that the red colour on the woman's nails in advertisement number one and two makes them become more sexual and vulgar. The moderator picked up on this statement, and asked why the colour red was perceived as more vulgar than other colours, and Anna expressed that she perceives the advertisements as provocative regardless of colour, but that certain colours, such as red, can intensify her provocation. However, Stefanie explained that she preferred the red colouring in the advertisements, since a colour such as light pink would make the image more provoking and offensive for her, stating that red is generally a colour for adult women, whilst light pink is more connected to younger girls and teenagers. It was also noted by Stefanie that the woman's lips in
advertisement two and three were also red, and she believes there must be some sort of strategic thought behind this choice from the sending company, which was agreed by Markus, who argued that the red colouring in the advertisements make the advertisements more effective in commanding attention. The red colouring is galling according to Lukas, who says that it really stands out from the rest of the colours in the advertisement. Stefanie further brought the colouring of the advertisements background into the discussion, and said that since the advertisements all have white backgrounds, attention is immediately drawn to the content of the advertisement, and if the advertisements would have had a less abstract background with for instance patterns and different, lively colours, the content would have been less distinct, and the advertisement would have been less provocative. Max said that even if the red colour evokes attention, it is not unusual in provocative marketing today, and further states that it is not essentially an unique feature for the four advertisements displayed.

Content, language and positioning play an important role in social media
When the moderator started to ask questions regarding the content of the four advertisements, Max and Emil both felt that the content of the advertisements stands out from other marketing attempts in social media. Max expressed that he reacted towards the nudity and sexual positions of the women in the advertisements, and said that if the women were just nude and not in sexual positions, the content might not be as offensive. He explained that the advertisements really allude on sex and that the content in advertisement number one stands out the most out of the four advertisements. It was stated by Isabel that the nakedness in the advertisements really make them stand out, and that the content really sends a ‘sex sells’ signal, which stands out in the online context of social media. She also noted that there is a difference in the content of the advertisements when it comes to language, and advertisement number one and three contain text whilst advertisement number two and four do not. This was also picked up by Anna, who said that the advertisements do not feel informative, the content of the advertisements does not speak for themselves. Stefanie agreed with Anna, and explained that the lack of text in advertisement number two and four assigns them with another connotation, and that the content in advertisement number one is very provocative according to her. She added that the perfume bottle covering the woman's
intimate parts makes her connect the advertisement even more with sex, and sexual assault, and if she saw this type of advertisement in social media, she would be highly offended. Lukas said that he had not given the perfume bottles denotation any thought until Stefanie mentioned it, but when she did, he also made the connection to sexual assault. Markus explained that the text in advertisement number three made him feel quite offended. The text reads ‘now open’ with large letters and the advertisement depicts a woman in a small swimsuit, spreading her legs. Markus also said that the text made the content even more obvious, stating that the text made him offended and quite disgusted. This was noted by the respondents, and Frida, Emil and Isabel thought the text in advertisement number three makes the content more palpable. Max reacted strongly towards advertisement number three, and said that he thought the contrast between the man being fully clothed, whilst the woman was fully nude, was provocative for him. Max also reacted towards the position of the man's hands on the woman's body, stating that they give an impression of sex, which is kind of weird, since only the woman is naked. Stefanie added that she had given some thought to the same thing, and that the placement of the man’s hands on the naked woman’s body caused her to take offense. She also noted the placement of the woman's hands in advertisement number one, and said that her hands seem to be strategically placed as to highlight her private parts and attract attention to that section.

The advertisements can be interpreted as a way of attracting attention to the sending company

The following questions asked by the moderator concerned the respondents’ interpretations of the four advertisements as well as how they would interpret the advertisements in the context of social media. The first one to answer was Emil, who said that he thought all the advertisements were unclear in what they wanted to sell. He understood that advertisement number one sought to sell perfume, however, he could not connect the sale of the perfume with the message of the advertisement, which according to him was more about the woman’s private parts than the product itself. Max thought that the advertisements could be interpreted in numerous different ways, but that he interpreted them as advertisements created to attract attention by using naked women. The moderator asked why Max made this interpretation, and Max explained that advertisement number three was especially ambiguous, since the text reads ‘now
open’ with a woman spreading her legs. He said that this could mean that the woman was ‘open’, and it could also mean that something else was open, making the advertisement equivocal. Isabel, Frida and Lukas thought that advertisement number three was definitely the most ambiguous one. Markus thought that advertisement number two was an advertisement seeking to sell knee-high socks, but that it could easily be interpreted as something else, and he connected the picture to human trafficking and sexual exploitation of women. Emil agreed with Markus, and said that advertisement number four does not even feel like an advertisement to him. Emil said that advertisement number two felt like an advertisement for suits, but that the underlying meaning of the advertisement was not clear to him. Marcus agrees and also mentioned that it could be an advertisement for glasses. Anna further argued that she does not interpret any of the advertisements as marketing attempts created to sell products, but to provoke and draw attention to the company behind the advertisement. When Anna was done explaining, Stefanie said that in advertisement number one, there is a clear product present, but that in the other three advertisements the women are the products.

**Sexual appeals transgress norms and taboos of society in the social media context**

The next question asked by the moderator whether the four advertisements would transgress norms and taboos of society in the social media setting. The participants of the focus group thought that the four displayed advertisements placed on the whiteboard would definitely transgress norms and taboos of society if they were exposed in the context of social media. Stefanie started off by saying that it was explicitly the nudity in the advertisements, and the sexual poses, which made them taboo for her. She continues to explain that even if she sees it as taboo, her grandmother would probably see it as even more prohibited and offensive. Frida agreed with Stefanie, and said that their generation is probably more tolerant towards provocative marketing within the context of social media. Lukas explained that the advertisements are definitely taboo according to him, and that they break norms and regulations of society. When the moderator asked him why, he said that the nudity in the four advertisements is just vulgar and distasteful, which makes him view them as taboo. Max further said that he would be concerned if he saw these advertisement in social media, due to the fact that there are a lot of
younger people who use social media platforms, and further stated that if minors were to view these four advertisements it could breach some sort of ethical principle. Lukas agreed, and said that the advertisements are on the borderline, and that the level of violation against norms depends on the age of the audience. Stefanie added that if these advertisements were displayed in social media, and teenagers saw them, she would be concerned that they would not understand the intent of the sending company. The moderator picked up on this and asked why she had these concerns, and Stefanie explained that teenagers could become affected on a personal level and connect the images to some sort of ideal which they are supposed to achieve and personify, and because of this possibility, it might violate ethical issues and norms of society. Anna said that she feels the four advertisements violate her own moral values, and Stefanie added that if you really think about it, the advertisements are not morally accepted since they only depict women. Markus said that the advertisements definitely break moral values of society, and if these advertisements would have been displayed in any of his social media platforms, he would have unfollowed the company or person sharing the advertisements. Emil and Lukas expressed that advertisement number one transgressed norms and taboos of society to the highest degree according to them, and Isabel also said that advertisement number two could be seen as a moral violation, since the advertisement exploits the woman but not the man. Stefanie said that advertisement number two did not feel like it was intended as an advertisement, but an entirely different purpose, and Markus added that he associates the images with sex. Isabel and Emil discussed that advertisements with sexual appeals are not really acceptable in the context of social media, however, they are common, which was agreed by Anna, who explained that the advertisements would not have been as provoking if there had been men in the images, and states that these kind of sexual appeals are demeaning to women.

**The level of involvement influences users’ feelings and perception**

When the moderator asked the participants if they thought that their level of involvement could influence how they perceived provocative marketing in a social media setting, and Markus said that he thought that the level of involvement mattered and can affect the perceived message. Anna added that if you are involved in feminist issues you might perceive the four advertisements differently. Isabel, Lukas and Max agreed with Markus and said that if you are highly involved in social and political issues
you might be more provoked by these types of images. Stefanie added that it is obvious that an individual's level of involvement matters, and if you are engaged or have a strong passion for these types of social issues you would be furious if you saw these four advertisements displayed in social media. Anna made an additional point, and said that if you see these types of advertisement it may evoke feelings that trigger emotions and curiosity to become more involved to find out about the intent. Lukas added that if you are a frequent user of social media you might be more prepared when exposed to provocative marketing online. He further explained that exposure to videos, pictures and provocative marketing is hard to avoid and control, especially on social platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. Frida and Markus said that the more an advertisement has been discussed and shared in social media the more involved they would become, and Stefanie added that the more attention an advertisement receives in social media, the more involved she would become. Isabel said that the more involved she becomes the more feelings the advertisement will evoke which was agreed by Anna, who said that if she saw this advertisement in social media she would be annoyed and somewhat frustrated. The moderator asked why she would feel frustrated, and Anna explained that it was the way in which the women are portrayed in the four advertisements. She also added that the four advertisements are vulgar and feels angry when she thinks over these advertisements being exposed to minors. Emil makes an additional point by stating that he would not be irritated by seeing sexual appeals in social media, however, these pictures are on an extreme level and therefore he would be shocked and try to get rid of them if they appeared in his social network. According to Frida and Max, the four advertisements in social media would not evoke any positive feelings. With that said, Anna highlighted that you would be more provoked by these four advertisements in a traditional media setting than in social media, which was agreed by Isabel, who explained that since you are more exposed to sexual appeals in social media, the element of shock is not as extensive.

**Previous experience affects how you perceive the organization**

The moderator started off by asking the participants about the profit-seeking companies behind the four advertisements. When discussing these advertisements, the question regarding who the sender behind these advertisements was arose. Stefanie could immediately identify advertisement number one as a typical Tom Ford advertisement, because of the provocative content in the advertisement. The moderator picked up on
this and asked her why she made this connection, and Stefanie explained that she had earlier experience of the sending company in social media, and could quickly associate the advertisement number one with Tom Ford. Isabel was also very familiar with Tom Ford and recognized both advertisement number one and two. Anna and Frida said that they were not as familiar with Tom Ford and that they only recognized the company's name but would not have been able to connect the advertisement to the company. However, Emil, Max and Lukas were all aware of the company name, and said that they connected Tom Ford with fashion and clothing. Marcus had previous experience of American Apparel and said that these advertisements were kind of typical for the company. The moderator asked him why they he thought of them as typical for American Apparel, and Markus explained that because of his previous experience of American Apparel, these advertisements enhanced his earlier perception of the company in social media. Markus also added that American Apparel have been going through a turbulent time and have been exposed to critique in social media platforms. Isabel, Anna, Frida and Stefanie were familiar with American Apparel, but Max, Emil and Lukas were not as aware about the company's existence. Markus said that he had unfollowed American Apparel on social media and taken a stance against the company, and the moderator asked him why he had done this, and Markus explained that because of American Apparel's provocative tactics, his perception of the company has changed, and that he did not want to be connected with them.

**It is not as risky to use provocative marketing in social media**

When the moderator asked the focus group if the size of the company matters when it comes to provocative marketing, Max and Lukas said that it can be risky for well-known companies to use these types of advertisements in social media. However, Isabel thought that it is more acceptable for large and established companies to apply this type of marketing technique. Stefanie and Anna agreed, and said that larger companies can use provocative marketing to a greater extent without experiencing consequences than smaller ones. However, Markus said that he disagreed with this statement, and explained that provocative marketing from larger companies in the context of social media is very risky, and then referred to his own perception of American Apparel. Markus further stated that larger companies have a greater responsibility towards society, and that it is worse when larger companies use provocative tactics than smaller ones, since they have a greater reach. Markus also said that he was especially provoked
by how American Apparel treats their employees, and not only their provocative advertisements. The moderator asked the focus group about their thoughts of provocative marketing in social media, and Lukas said that when you enter the social media context, you are aware that you may encounter unexpected advertising content. Lukas further explained that in the traditional media context, like on a billboard, it becomes more tangible and is harder to ignore. Emil, Frida and Anna agreed and said that the advertisements would become more palpable in a traditional media setting than in the context of social media. The moderator asked the respondent if the intent behind the provocative marketing message could affect their perception of it, and Markus said that the intent behind the advertisement can affect his attitude towards the company. Frida added that provocative marketing becomes more acceptable to her when non-profit organisations use it to gain attention and help a good cause. She further explained that in the for-profit sector, provocative marketing is used as a method for gaining attention to the company and seek even more profit, which makes it less acceptable than when highlighting social issues. Emil and Max agreed, and explained that the intent behind the advertisement can affect their attitude towards the company, and that for-profit seeking company’s intent is generally to elicit attention and gain profit, which is not as justified as using provocative tactics in social media as a tool for helping others.

**Vague advertisements can become more clear in the context of social media**

The moderator asked whether the participants viewed the advertisements as credible and informative when presented in a social media context. Stefanie explained that she did not find any of the advertisements informative at all, and she didn’t really understand what the four advertisements want to convey other than attention. Max, Lukas and Anna were in agreement with Stefanie, and said that the advertisements are not informative regarding what they want to achieve, they attract attention to the company name in advertisements one and three, but not in number two and four, since the company name is not visible. Isabel added that if you view these advertisements in social media, your attention is drawn to the company, and not what they intend to sell. Frida and Anna agreed, and said that the product becomes a background variable, and that the sending company is in focus. Lukas and Markus explained that the advertisements didn’t feel professional, and they didn’t feel that they could trust the companies and Isabel pointed
out that the portrayal of the women in the advertisements is misleading, and does not paint a credible picture of how women’s bodies look like in real life. Frida added that she thought the advertisements could mean different things depending on in which context they were viewed, and said that the advertisements are less equivocal in the context of social media than in the context of traditional media. Emil and Isabel agreed and explained that the advertisements could become somewhat more informative in the context of social media, since you can track the sending company, and therefore gain a better understanding of what the company wants to convey with the advertisements. This was agreed by Anna, who added that if you were to be exposed to these types of advertisements in a magazine, you would not necessarily connect the advertisements to the company, but blame the responsible publisher of the magazine. Isabel further explained that she thinks it is more acceptable when she knows who the sender of the message is, which was agreed by Stefanie, who said that if you know who the sender is, it is easier to interpret the advertisement.

**Long term exposure in social media decreases the shocking effect**

When the moderator asked the focus group if they thought that there is a difference between short-term and long-term exposure to provocative marketing, Lukas and Anna said that if they were to be exposed to a provocative advertisement for a longer period of time in social media, the advertisement attracts less attention and is not as shocking. Frida also stated that after a while you do not care as much about the provocative content of the advertisement, it almost becomes habitualized. Max and Isabel agreed with Frida and said that after a while you kind of ‘shut down’, and do not care as much. Markus added that it’s definitely more shocking to see any of these four advertisements once than multiple times in social media. The moderator asked Markus why he thinks provocative marketing becomes less shocking over time, and Markus explained that over time the shocking effect diminishes since you become used to it. Emil and Stefanie agreed and said that short-term exposure is definitely more shocking than long-term exposure in social media. Emil added that when you are exposed to an advertisement for a longer period of the in the social media context there is a possibility that the shift in focus goes from the product to the sending company. Stefanie added that she does not recognize Tom Ford’s logo but she knows that Tom Ford is a frequent user of applying provocative marketing in their advertisements. This was agreed upon by Isabel, and she said that she does not really know what type of product Tom Ford sells, however she
knows that the advertisement comes from Tom Ford. Lukas explains that there is definitely more focus on the sender when they use provocative marketing over a long period of time. The moderator asked Lukas why he thought this could happen, and Lukas explained that when you use provocative marketing for a long period of time the focus shifts from the products and the company becomes the centre of attention. Max agreed with Lukas and said that when using provocative tactics for a longer period of time it can become dull and predictable. It was added by Anna that if companies use provocative tactics in marketing over a longer period of time it can become irritating, and if their intent is to attract attention, she thinks it is more effective to use it for a shorter period of time. Emil further explained that if a company intends to use provocative marketing in social media it is important to be creative and constantly change the advertisements in order to attract attention. However, Emil also highlights that this might be difficult to achieve in social media, since users can easily share older content and expose viewers to it over a long period time.

**Various answers could not be connected to the participants’ gender**

Both the male and the female participants expressed strong feelings and reactions towards the advertisements such as shock, disgust, offense and irritation. Markus immediate reaction was somewhat stronger than most of the other participants in the focus group. Stefanie was one of the female participants that throughout the focus group had strong opinions regarding the topic. Max and Isabel were not as provoked by the four advertisements and did not have as strong opinions as the rest of the group. The respondents reacted mainly towards the nudity in the four advertisements, and the sexual, demeaning positions of the women displayed in the advertisements. However, the females paid more attention to details such as hand placements and colour used in the advertisements. Some of the male respondents mentioned that advertisements number one and two were targeted towards men and thought that the reason was to attract the ladies when buying their products.
5. Analysis

In this chapter, the gathered empirical material is interpreted, discussed and analysed. The chapter is structured based on the constructed themes that emerged in the empirical material, in order to make it easier for the reader to comprehend and follow. The aim of this chapter is to clarify variations and patterns by using the theoretical framework from chapter two.

Provocative marketing diverges from traditional marketing tactics in social media

According to Stafford and Stafford (2002), provocative marketing is based on the fundamental principle of seeking to stand out from the crowd. When discussing what provocative marketing meant, the respondents referred to it as a marketing technique that differs from traditional marketing attempts, because it stands out from other marketing messages in the context of social media. This indicates that provocative marketing advertisements stand out from other advertisements that can be encountered in the social media context, and suggests that advertisements that are provocative attract the respondents’ attention. According to Sandikci, (2011) provocative marketing is an attempt to elicit attention for a company name, and the respondents noted that provocative marketing is something that attracts attention to the sender behind the advertisement, which suggests that provocative marketing is an efficient technique to attract attention to a company. Vézina and Paul, (1997) state that provocative marketing is a strategy which includes more extensive content than traditional appeals, since it can refer to issues larger than its content. The discussion amongst the participants concerned that their experience with provocative marketing came from the non-profit sector, and that provocative marketing from that sector seeks to attract attention to a specific social issue such as human rights, starving children or the danger of cigarettes. This indicates that the respondents had a preformed conception of provocative marketing, mostly from the non-profit sector, and suggests that advertisements of provocative nature can make individuals discuss and reflect upon its meaning. It was brought to light that advertisements from the non-profit sector can use frightening pictures to catch the attention of the viewer, which implies that the respondents associate provocative
marketing to fear appeals, which are a common technique for achieving provocation in marketing (Vézina and Paul, 1997; Putrevu, 2008).

The social media context cannot be ignored by marketers (Holzner, 2009) and the participants in the focus group expressed that social media is something that is unavoidable today. This suggests that social media is an integral part of the respondents lives, and indicates that profit-seeking companies could take advantage of this platform. According to Aichner and Perkmann (2013), the most commonly used communication platforms in social media include Facebook and Instagram, and these were also the most frequently used social media platforms for the participants in the focus group. Individuals that belong to Generation Y have grown up with the phenomena of social media (Szamosi, 2006) and according to Bristow et al., (2011) the majority of Gen-Yers are active members in social media platforms. However, the empirical material revealed that there was no difference amongst the participants in the focus group, and that Gen-Xers were just as active in social media platforms as Gen Y-ers, which demonstrates that the use of social media platforms does not differ amongst Gen X-ers and Gen-Yers in this study. However, it should be noted that the respondents from Generation Y belong to the latter part of that cohort, which may explain why they are just as active as members belonging to Generation X. Therefore, it can be established that provocative marketing in the context of social media can be an efficient technique to reach individuals from both Generation X and Y.

**Distasteful and demeaning advertisements elicit provocation**

The way in which a message is presented, both visually and verbally, has an effect on how the message is processed (Usunier, 1996; De Mooij, 1998). When the advertisements were displayed to the respondents, they showed reactions which indicate surprise and shock, and said that the four advertisements alluded towards sex. This suggests that advertisements with sexual content can induce reactions from individuals, and that marketing messages which allude on sex can affect how the message is interpreted and processed. If the presentation of the marketing message is provocative, users may react and discuss the message (Dahl et al., 2003), which corresponds with the participants in the semi-structured focus group, since they discussed the advertisements content. This implies that provocative marketing in the context of social media can
make users discuss the message, and therefore it can be established that provocative marketing is an efficient technique to achieve reactions in the context of social media.

According to Vézina and Paul (1997), Dahl et al., (2003) and Dens et al., (2008), provocative marketing imagery is less offensive to individuals belonging to the latter of Generation Y, and provocative tactics are more accepted amongst the younger generation, depending on the context in which it is displayed. However, the participants belonging to Generation X were just as offended by the four advertisements as the participants belonging to Generation Y, which in this specific case indicates that there is no detectable variation between the generations and it can be determined that there does not seem to be any difference between the generations when it comes to the level of perceived offense to provocative marketing appeals in the context of social media. However, Manceau and Tissier-Desbordes (2006) found that the perceived level of offensiveness largely depends on the context, which could explain why the respondents in both Generation X and Generation Y were just as offended by the advertisements.

The advertisements stand out from other marketing messages in social media

According to Vézina and Paul (1997), a component of provocative marketing is distinctiveness, which refers to the ability to stand out from the crowd, regardless of its content. The participants in the focus group thought that the four advertisements were distinctive compared to other marketing attempts within the context of social media, which suggests that the four advertisements are successful in achieving attention from users. It can therefore be determined that distinctiveness is a contributing factor for an advertisement to stand out from other marketing messages, and one of the aspects that make the advertisements provocative in social media. However, the respondents also said that they would not be as shocked to see these types of advertisements in the online setting compared to the traditional media context, especially if the advertisement was placed in a visible location and in a larger format, which indicates that advertisements of provocative nature are less distinct in the context of social media. According to Childers and Houston, (1984) and Vézina and Paul (1997), distinctive stimuli such as the position and size of the marketing message can affect the degree of attention assigned to it. The participants said that they would be more prepared to be exposed to
provocative marketing in a social media setting and that it is less common to see provocative marketing in the traditional media setting. This suggests that users are aware that provocative advertisements can appear in social media platforms, and indicates that provocative marketing attempts in social media can forfeit its element of surprise. Childers and Houston (1984) state that if competing messages of similar nature are available, the marketing message may be weakened, and the respondents in the focus group highlighted that the four advertisements were not similar to other marketing attempts in social media. This implies that the four advertisements stand out in the context of social media, and therefore, it can be established that provocative marketing is efficient in commanding attention when they are unique.

**Distinctive colours attract attention in social media**

According to Childers and Houston (1984), distinctive stimuli such as colour can have a favourable effect on the attention paid to an advertisement and the respondents of the focus group thought that the choice of colour was important in order for the advertisements to be distinctive and stand out from other marketing attempts in social media. It was also highlighted that the more colour an advertisement contains, the more distinct it becomes. It can therefore be determined that if profit-seeking companies apply provocative marketing advertisements in the context of social media, the choice of colour can affect the level of attention assigned to it. It was noted that the colour red was a distinct colour in the four advertisements that made the advertisements more sexual and vulgar. The participants also mentioned that all of the four advertisements had white backgrounds, which immediately drew their attention to the content of the advertisement. This suggests that the contrast between the white background and the red details in the advertisements made them more distinct and powerful, and it can established that the contrasts in the advertisements were efficient in commanding attention and making the advertisements more provoking. This corresponds with the findings from Childers and Houston (1984) and Vézina and Paul (1997), who state that distinct stimuli such as colour has an effect on the level of attention paid to a marketing message.
Content, language and positioning play an important role in the social media context

According to Childers and Houston (1984) and Vézina and Paul (1997), distinct stimuli such as content, language and positioning of a marketing message can affect the level of attention paid to it when presented in the social media context. The general impression was that the content of the advertisements allude on sex, especially advertisement number one, which suggests that the content of this advertisement was provoking to the respondents. This demonstrates that allusions on sex in provocative marketing attracts attention in the context of social media. Furthermore, the sexual positions and the strategic hand placements in the advertisements made them more provocative to the participants, and was also an aspect which made them stand out in the social media context. This implies that how the content in an advertisement is presented can affect the level of perceived provocation, and that sexual positions strengthen the advertisements distinctiveness. According to Dahl et al., (2003) the presentation of a marketing message can determine whether or not a marketing message is provocative, and users may react and discuss the message, which is in line with the findings from the semi-structured focus group.

Another aspect that was noted by the respondents in the focus group was that advertisements number one and three contained text, and that the lack of text in advertisement number two and four made them less informative. The respondents said that it was more difficult to interpret advertisement number two and four, since they did not contain any text, logotype or visual product, which demonstrates that a clear message makes an advertisement easier to interpret. According to Sabri (2012), there should be a direct connection to the product or service in the advertisement. If there is no connection, there is a possibility that the advertisement is misinterpreted by the receiver (Andersson et al., 2004), and the respondents in the focus group did not really understand the intent of the advertisement. This implies that the meaning behind an advertisement is not as clear when it does not contain any text, and that a text that can be connected to content of the advertisement can have a positive effect on the attention given to the marketing message. This is in line with the findings from Childers and Houston (1984) and Vézina and Paul (1997), who state that language and content has a positive effect on the attention given to a marketing message. Therefore, it can be
established that it can be beneficial for profit-seeking companies to present their provocative advertisements into a clear coherence, since it can enhance the receiver's understanding of the advertisement.

One of the participants reacted strongly towards advertisement number three due to the body language combined with the text saying ‘now open’, which suggests that body language combined with text can evoke reactions, and according to White (2000) features such as body language can influence how individuals perceive and interpret marketing messages. The content of this is that advertisements can easily be misinterpreted if there is no clear connection between the product and the advertisement, but if there is a visible logotype it can become more apparent (Andersson et al., 2004).

The advertisements are interpreted as a way of attracting attention to the sending company

Ambiguity refers to the degree which a marketing message enables for different interpretations and intentions (Vézina & Paul, 1997; Pope et al., 2004), and in the focus group, the participants interpretations of the advertisements differed. Interpretations are created based on an individual's experiences and preferences (Vézina & Paul, 1997; Atkin et al., 2008), which could explain why they interpreted the advertisement in different ways. Another reason that the respondents interpreted the advertisements differently could be that they belong to different generations. According to Manceau and Tissier-Desbordes (2006) and Sabri (2012), an individual's understanding of a provocative marketing message can vary depending on which generation they were born into. Dens et al., (2008), found that provocative marketing messages are more effective on members of Generation Y, since this type of tactic has been present during their formative years, making them less critical towards the technique than members of Generation X. However, the respondents from Generation Y were just as critical as the ones from Generation X, which could be due to the fact that the participants from Generation X belong to the latter part of that cohort.

According to Tinic (1997), it is not necessarily the provocative image that elicits provocation, but the ambiguous intent that underlies the image. The empirical material revealed that the participants thought it was unclear what the intent behind the
advertisements was, which indicates that the respondents paused to analyse the advertisements. This demonstrates that the underlying meaning behind provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies within the context of social media can be questioned. The focus group revealed that some of the participants were more provoked by the advertisements equivocalness than their content. Furthermore, the respondents in the focus group highlighted that the advertisements could mean different things depending on in which context they were viewed, which implies that provocative marketing in the context of social media can be perceived differently than in a traditional media context. A few of the participants said that since you generally know who the sender of the advertisement is in the context of social media, it is more accepted. This suggests that provocative marketing becomes less ambiguous in the context of social media, and according to Vézina and Paul (1997), the recipient's interpretation of a marketing message can concern both its content and context. It can therefore be established that one of the main components that make provocative marketing messages provocative, ambiguity, is not as strong in the context of social media as in traditional media settings.

**Sexual appeals transgress norms and taboos of society in the social media context**

The participants said that the advertisements transgressed norms and taboos of society when displayed in the social media context, and according to Childers and Houston (1984) provocation is more likely to occur when the content of the marketing message refers to topics that are seen as taboo. Some of the reasons to why the participants thought the advertisements were taboo was the use of nudity, sexual poses, vulgarity, and the fact that they were distasteful and violated moral values. According to De Pelsmacker and Van Der Berghs (1996), nudity, indecent body parts and sexual appeals are viewed as taboo to various degrees across society, and this suggests that sexual appeals in the context of social media can be viewed as taboo, and a reason for the respondents interpreting the advertisements as provocative could be that sexual appeals is seen as a transgression of societies norms. Moreover, sexual imagery is often classified as provocative in marketing, since the topic of sexuality is seen as taboo in western literature (Boddewyn 1991; Vénezia & Paul 1997).
The participants were concerned that there were only naked women being portrayed in the advertisements and most were in agreement that they were demeaning to women. Another concern that emerged was regarding how easily these advertisements could be exposed to minors, since a lot of younger people use social media platforms and these types of images could affect their ideals. This suggests that it can be perceived as unethical for profit-seeking companies to use sexual appeals depicting women in the context of social media, which indicates that the respondents have an unfavourable view of marketing content that portrays naked women. This is in line with the findings by Chan et al., (2007) who argues that sexual imagery that portrays women as sexual victims or toys can reinforce inequality between the sexes. The participants said that the advertisements transgressed their own moral values and ethical stance. It is interaction between individuals in social groups that form these moral values and norms, which control what is seen as prohibited by the receiver (Dahl et al., 2003), and this could be a reason for why the respondents reasoned in a similar manner, since they were selected from a convenience sample. Some of the participants in the focus group said that they had rejected or unfollowed companies that in their opinion transgressed norms and taboos, which suggests that provocative marketing that transgresses norms and taboos in the context of social media can be perceived negatively by the receiver. According to Henthorne and LaTour, (1995) a provocative marketing message can lead to individuals rejecting the marketing message and sometimes even the sending company behind it, which was the case for some of the respondents in the focus group.

**The level of involvement influences users’ feelings and perception**

According to Manceau and Tissier-Desbordes (2006), provocative marketing can trigger either positive or negative emotional responses that affect the receiver's response, and the empirical material revealed that the participants of the focus group had negative reactions towards the four advertisements and if they were to be displayed in the context of social media, they would try to avoid it. This finding is in line with Laadhar and Romdhane (2013), who claim that negative feelings may be expressed by a receiver that has been exposed to provocative stimuli. This implies that respondents who are exposed to provocative marketing advertisements in the context of social media will not have a positive emotional response, and suggests that users might remove provocative marketing from their sphere. Therefore, it can be established that profit-seeking
companies who apply provocative marketing in the context of social media might not reach the receiver as efficiently as in the traditional media setting. Waller et al., (2005) found that the level of involvement is likely to trigger different reactions and perceptions, and according to Dens et al., (2008), individuals with a low level of involvement are more prone to be influenced by tangent cues and let their emotions determine how they perceive the provocative marketing content. This was something which was revealed during the focus group when some of the participants indicated initial feelings and emotions such as irritation, anger and frustration towards the advertisements if they were to be displayed in the context of social media. Since the respondents allowed their emotions to control their initial perception of the four advertisements, it implies a low level of involvement towards the content of the provocative advertisements. According to Geunes et al., (2011), this type of evaluation is a shortcut for evaluating the provocative marketing message. However, the participants mentioned that feminist, political and social issues as well as their own level of involvement in social media channels could affect how provoked they would be by these types of images, which indicates that the respondents analysed the information in the four advertisements thoroughly. This suggests that the respondents had a higher level of involvement when they gave the advertisements some more thought and processed the information in a more elaborate manner, and according to Dens et al., (2008), individuals with a high level of involvement are more likely to process information and form strong opinions based on the content and information in the marketing message. This finding indicates that if the receiver considers the information in the provocative marketing advertisement to be interesting, it can elicit a higher level of involvement and also make the recipient perceive the provocative marketing in a different way, which leads to the provocative marketing having a greater influence on the receiver (Te’eni-Harari et al., 2007). It can therefore be established that if a profit-seeking company manages to involve the recipient in the content, the provocative marketing message may have a greater influence on the receiver in the context of social media.

According to Dens et al., (2008) individuals with a high level of involvement will remember the sending company better than individuals with a low level of involvement. Therefore it can be implied that the respondents may remember the provocative marketing advertisements and also the sending companies behind them, since they
analysed the content and information, implying a high level of involvement. This inference is consistent with the findings by Huhmann and Mott-Stenerson (2008), who found that the more involved an individual becomes, the more elaborate the processing of the provocative marketing message is developed, enhancing the individual's understanding of the marketing message. Some of the younger participants in the focus group said that the more an advertisement had been shared and discussed in the context of social media, the more involved they would become, and Dahl et al., (2003), argues that if the presentation of the marketing message is provocative, users may react and discuss the message. This could also stem from the inference by Szamosi (2006), who argues that Gen-Yers are often referred to as ‘the lazy generation’, and that in order for them to become involved, others need to share and discuss the content in social media platforms, which suggests that if provocative marketing is highly visible in the social media context, receivers from Generation Y are more likely to become involved. Individuals in Generation Y have grown up with the emergence of the World Wide Web and the phenomena of social media (Szamosi, 2006; Bristow et al., 2011), which explains why they would become more involved if the content had been shared and discussed online, since they communicate on several levels in social media (Bristow et al., 2011).

Previous experience affects how you perceive the company

According to Söderlund (2003), an individual may have a preformed attitude to the presentation of a message, which can diverge depending on the circumstances. This was something which could be seen in the empirical material, and some of the participants indicated preformed attitudes towards the two companies Tom Ford and American Apparel. The preformed attitudes which came forth during the focus group session were not positive towards the profit-seeking companies behind the four advertisements, and suggests that if a recipient has a preformed attitude of negative nature towards the profit-seeking company, it can affect how the receiver perceives the company as a whole. Furthermore, if the receiver has a negative attitude towards the company, the presentation of provocative marketing in social media can enhance the recipients negative attitude, and therefore, it can be established that a user's preformed attitude can affect how the receiver perceives the profit-seeking company. An individual's attitude can vary depending on if they have previous experience of the profit-seeking company,
which is reflected in how the recipient interprets the company and their values (Hansen & Riis-Christensen, 2007).

During the focus group discussion, it was revealed that some of the recipients had previous experience of the profit-seeking companies, which had affected their attitudes in a negative fashion. This suggests that if a receiver has previous experience of a profit-seeking company, their perception can be affected by that experience. It was apparent that some of the respondents’ previous experience with the companies Tom Ford and American Apparel made them perceive the provocative marketing advertisements differently than if they were not familiar with the profit-seeking companies, and the four advertisements enhanced their preformed attitudes. According to Hansen and Riis-Christensen (2007), previous experience can control how the recipient perceives the sending company as a whole, which corresponded with the participants’ discussion in the focus group, who highlighted negative attitudes towards American Apparel. The interpretation of this suggests that if the recipient has a negative experience of a profit-seeking company, it can affect how the recipient perceives the entire company, and even enhance this negative perception. Therefore it can be distinguished that receivers who have a negative experience of a profit-seeking company, can become even more hostile towards the profit-seeking company if they display advertisements of provocative nature in the context of social media.

**It is not as risky to use provocative marketing in social media**

During the focus group discussion it could be discerned that the participants thought it could involve quite some risk for well-known companies to use these types of advertisements in the context of social media, and according to Dens et al., (2008) and Parry et al., (2013), the use of provocative marketing appeals may be a risky venture for a company that is already established on the market. However, most participants said that it is more acceptable for well-known companies to apply provocative tactics in social media, than smaller ones, which suggests that profit-seeking companies who are established on the market may not be exposed to the same risk if they use provocative marketing advertisements in social media as they are in the traditional media setting. This finding contradicts the research conducted by Prendergast and Hwa (2003) who found that individuals are less tolerant towards provocative marketing attempts on the web than in the traditional media setting. The empirical material also implies that it
involves a larger risk for smaller companies to apply provocative marketing in the context of social media, and therefore it can be established that it is not as risky for Tom Ford and American Apparel to use provocative marketing in the context of social media, since both are large companies. Even though the respondents said it was less risky for companies of larger scale to apply provocative marketing in the context of social media, it could still make them form a less favourable view of the profit-seeking company behind the message. This is in line with the findings by Dens et al., (2008), who state that there is a possibility of individuals forming a less favourable view of the company after such techniques have been applied. This inference suggests that provocative marketing in the context of social media can still be perilous, which suggests that profit-seeking companies might want to consider their use of provocative marketing before applying it in the social media context. It was found by Hastings et al., (2004), that some profit-seeking companies tend to avoid provocative tactics in their marketing efforts to evade negative associations, and the findings of this study suggest that even if provocative marketing is not as risky in the context of social media, it can be perilous.

According to Javalgi and Traylor (1994), aspects such as how a company treats its employees and engages in social issues can affect an individual's attitude toward the sending company. The respondents in the focus group revealed that larger companies have a greater responsibility towards society, which suggests that profit-seeking companies who do not engage in social issues are more prone to be perceived negatively if they apply provocative marketing in the context of social media. Therefore, it can be established that the underlying intent from the profit-seeking company affects how individuals perceive provocative marketing advertisements in the context of social media, which conforms with the findings by Dahl et al., (2003) who argues that provocative marketing that seeks to act for ‘the greater good’ is perceived in a more favourable manner than when it comes from profit-seeking senders. The empirical material suggests that provocative marketing from profit-seeking senders in the context of social media is perceived as somewhat unethical, which implies that the respondents interpret provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies in a less favourable manner than if the four advertisements sought to benefit society. This is in line with the findings from Kotler and Zaltman (1971) who state that profit-seeking companies’
provocative marketing seeks to benefit the underlying organization, and not society at large.

**Vague advertisements can become more clear in the context of social media**

According to Baker and Lutz (1988), an individual's attitude towards an advertisement can consist of an advertisement's credibility or ability to inform. The respondents did not perceive the four advertisements as informative or credible, and said that they did not really understand what the advertisements want to convey, and therefore it can be established that the advertisements from Tom Ford and American Apparel are not informative or credible. The respondents said that the focus was on drawing attention to the sending company, which suggests that provocative marketing in the context of social media is efficient if the aim is to elicit attention to a company. If any of the four advertisements would be displayed in the social media context it would be easier to trace the sending company than in the traditional media context. The participants also said that when you know who the sender is, it could change their perception of the company, which conforms with the statement by Sabri (2012) who argues that a direct connection between the company and the message can affect how the message is perceived, and Söderlund (2003) has previously noted that individuals can have preformed attitudes based on the sender behind it. Therefore, it can be discerned that a direct connection between the company and the message can affect how the message is perceived, and that in the context of social media, it is easier to connect a vague advertisement with its sender than in traditional media settings.

**Long term exposure in social media decreases the shocking effect**

During the focus group discussion, the respondents thought that companies who apply provocative marketing techniques over a longer period of time in the context of social media, run the risk of attracting less attention. The empirical material from the focus group discussion revealed that long-term exposure to provocative marketing advertisements in social media can diminish the effect, and make it become less shocking and habitualized. This finding is in line with Tanner et al., (1991) and Hastings et al., (2004) who state that long-term provocative marketing could diminish the effect on the message and lead to habitualization. A majority of the participants
claimed that it would be more shocking to see an advertisement once than multiple times in the context of social media which corresponds with the findings by Fry (1996) and Hastings et al., (2004), who argue that provocative marketing is more efficient when used in short time periods than in longer ones. Therefore, it can be established that if provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies is displayed in social media over a longer period of time, it might receive less attention.

Another of the highlighted risks with long-term use of provocative marketing is that if the user is exposed to provocative marketing in social media for a longer period of time, there is a potential risk for a shift in focus from the product to the actual company behind the advertisement. This finding is supported by Jaspersen and Fan (2002), who state that longitudinal usage of provocative tactics could result in a misplaced focus, making the sending company the centre of attention. This implies that if the receiver is exposed to provocative marketing over a longer period of time in the context of social media, the receiver might recognize the company's name, but remain unaware of what the company seeks to sell. Based on this, it can be determined that profit-seeking companies need to be creative and innovative in order to be successful, which is in line with the findings by Childers and Houston, (1984), who argue that constant renewal is an essential element if a company applies provocative marketing appeals over a longer period of time. However, it was highlighted that this aspect might be difficult to fulfil in the context of social media, since users can easily share older content and expose users to older content, making the advertisement lose some of its vigour. What can be distinguished from the empirical material gathered, is that long-term use of provocative marketing in the context of social media can cause users to ‘shut down’ and ignore the marketing message, and form a negative outlook on the firm. Therefore, it is important that for-profit companies are aware of the long-term effects of provocative marketing tactics (Hastings et al., 2004).

**Various answers could not be connected to the participants’ gender**

According to Pope et al., (2004) and Dens et al., (2008) there is a difference between men and women in how they view provocative marketing imagery, however, the empirical material revealed that in this specific study, the answers between the four men
and the four women did not differ to a great extent. Even if the reactions and opinions varied among the respondents, it could not be connected to the gender of the respondents. Dens et al., (2008) state that women are more sensitive and hence have stronger reactions, and according to Manceau and Tissier-Desbordes (2006), women are more hostile towards images containing sexual content. However, this was not the case in this study, and the a few of the male respondents indicated stronger reactions towards the four advertisements, which suggests that differences between men and women may not be as large as inferred by Pope et al., (2004) and Dens et al., (2008). This implies that the findings by LaTour and Henthone (1994) may be correct, and that there is not a large difference in how men and women perceive provocative marketing imagery.
6. Discussion

In this chapter, the researchers discuss some of the main findings that emerged during this study. The discussion revolves around what provocation means in the context of social media.

Prior to this study there is limited empirical research regarding provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies in the context of social media. This study has found that what is viewed as provocative in traditional media differs to some extent in the context of social media. Firstly, provocative marketing is not as distinct in the context of social media as in traditional settings. The reason behind this could be that there is a large amount of provocative marketing in circulation within the social media setting, and this study found that provocative advertisements run the risk of becoming habitualized to a greater extent when depicted online. When provocative marketing is displayed in an online setting, it can be viewed for a longer period of time, since users can easily share provocative marketing content. The study obtains interesting insights regarding this implication, and what is viewed as provocative in a traditional media setting is not seen as provocative to the same extent in the context of social media. Users are more prepared for the possibility of being exposed to provocative marketing in the context of social media, and advertisements that are viewed as provocative in traditional media settings are not as surprising or provoking in social media platforms. Secondly, provocative marketing is generally more accepted in the context of social media. The findings of this study reveal that the reason behind this is that users can track the sender of the provocative advertisement with more ease and therefore avoid misinterpretations. Because of this, a central component of what makes provocative marketing provocative, it’s ambiguity, is diminished, which makes the provocative advertisement lose some of its vigour. Subsequently, the findings of this study indicate that there is higher risk of users being exposed to provocative marketing in the social media context, even if the users are underage. What is viewed as provocative in social media is that advertisements can be exposed to minors, and these types of images could affect their ideals. This finding is one of the main reasons for what makes marketing provocative in the context of social media, and the uncontrolled feed of content in social media platforms is viewed as problematic, since it can be exposed to anyone.
7. Conclusion

This chapter presents the conclusion of the study, which is based on the analysis and discussion in the previous chapters. The purpose of the study is to explore how provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies is perceived by users in a social media context. Based on the analysis of the empirical material, the benefits and risks of applying provocative marketing in the social media context have emerged, as well as important aspects that affect how provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies is perceived by the receiver.

Provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies in the context of social media is perceived as a risky technique by the receiver. However, the receiver would not be as shocked to see provocative marketing messages with sexual content in the context of social media as in the traditional media context. Furthermore, the advertisements are less equivocal in the context of social media, and social media enables a direct connection between the sender and the receiver, which influences how it is perceived. The intent behind the advertisement can provoke the receiver more than the content of the advertisement, and provocative marketing messages from profit-seeking companies in the context of social media is viewed less favourably by the receiver than provocative tactics from non-profit organizations. Moreover, provocative marketing messages from profit-seeking companies’ runs the risk of becoming habitualized if it is displayed over a longer time period in the context of social media, which could diminish its effect.

When provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies is exposed over a longer period of time in the context of social media, a shift in focus can occur from product to the company itself. If profit-seeking companies apply provocative marketing techniques in social media during a shorter period of time, the technique can be more efficient. However, it can be difficult for profit-seeking companies to manage short term provocative marketing in the context of social media, since users can easily share older content.

Just as in traditional media settings, how the message is presented by the sender affects how the message is perceived by the receiver, and the three pillar stones of distinctiveness, ambiguity and transgression of norms and taboos affect users perception of the presented advertisements. The individual aspects such as level of involvement,
attitude towards profit-seeking senders as well as demographical factors has been found to have various levels of importance to how a provocative marketing message is perceived by the receiver in the social media context. The receiver's perception of provocative marketing can depend on how involved the receiver is in social media platforms, as well as social issues of society, and a higher level of involvement generally causes a higher level of offense. How the receiver perceives provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies is also dependent on the receiver's attitude towards the sending company as well as if the receiver has previous experience of the sending company. It is also more acceptable for well-known companies to apply provocative marketing in social media than smaller ones. Even if demographical factors such as generation and gender can affect how provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies is perceived by receivers, no such conclusion can be established in this study. Provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies is perceived as a risky technique to apply by the receiver. However, in the social media context, it is not perceived to be as risky as in the traditional media setting.
8. Research implications

This study has resulted in several findings which can contribute to existent theory that concerns provocative marketing. These findings are outlines in the chapter below. Thereafter, the practical contributions that profit-seeking companies can benefit from are presented and at the end of the chapter, recommendations for future research are presented.

8.1 Theoretical contribution

This study is a contribution to the research field that concerns provocative marketing and has sought to answer how provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies is perceived by users in a social media context. The results indicate that provocative marketing is not as offensive in the context of social media as in traditional media settings, and therefore, this study contradicts existing findings which state that provocative marketing in social media is perceived as more offensive than in traditional settings. This study demonstrates that if profit-seeking companies want to attract attention, the depiction of provocative advertisements in the context of social media is not as provocative for users as in traditional media settings. Receivers are aware of the possibility of being exposed to provocative marketing messages in the context of social media, and therefore, provocative marketing is not as efficient in online settings as in traditional ones.

8.2 Practical contribution

This study has explored how provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies is perceived by users in a social media context. The analysis of the empirical material revealed that users are more prepared for provocative marketing advertisements in social media, and therefore it can be established that profit-seeking companies need to be aware that the technique is not as efficient in attracting attention as in traditional media settings. Moreover, long-term usage of provocative marketing in social media channels can lead to habitualization, and profit-seeking companies who apply provocative marketing in the context of social media need to constantly innovate and revive their advertisements to avoid tediousness. Profit-seeking companies should also consider that users may interpret provocative marketing advertisements in diverging
ways, which conforms with the fact that there should be a clear connection between the content and the context of the provocative marketing message. However, users can track the sender behind the provocative marketing advertisement much easier in the context of social media, and the ambiguity of the provocative marketing advertisement can therefore diminish, making it less offensive. The recipients’ individual aspects such as involvement, attitude and demography should to be considered by profit-seeking companies in order to achieve attention efficiently. Social media platform are frequently used by members of both Generation X and Generation Y, and in order to reach individuals from both generations, the context of social media is an efficient channel to apply for profit-seeking companies. However, if the aim is to elicit provocation, the context of social media is not preferable.

8.3 Recommendations for future research

Based on the results, the authors of this study recommends future researchers to conduct a quantitative study in order to find out more about how provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies is perceived by users in a social media context. Since this study was delimited eight respondents in one focus group, equally distributed between men and women, the results from this study cannot be generalized to an entire population. By conducting a quantitative study, the findings from this study could be strengthened and represent the population with a higher level of credibility. Since the results of this study is based on four advertisements from two profit-seeking companies, further research could apply the use of other types of marketing techniques, such as commercials. This could provide the research field of provocative marketing with further insights and deeper knowledge regarding which techniques that elicit the strongest reactions in the context of social media.
9. Limitations

This chapter presents the limitations that the authors have experienced throughout the study, which may have affected the findings and the result.

Since the purpose of this study has been to explore how provocative marketing from profit-seeking companies is perceived by users in a social media context, a qualitative research approach has been beneficial. The qualitative research approach has enabled the researchers to gather a more in-depth understanding of each individual’s thoughts and answers, as well as how the users perceived provocative marketing as a group. However, by selecting the qualitative research approach, the results of this study have become somewhat limited, and even if the researchers were able to gather in-depth data from the respondents, the possibility to generalize the results ceased. Since this study has been limited to a smaller sample of respondents, the results are not generalizable. Another aspect that needs to be taken into consideration is that the sample of the study was selected based upon a convenience sample, and therefore, the result cannot be generalized to the entire population, but can provide an indication of what the actual outcome may be. Furthermore, the results may have been affected since the respondents of the focus group were from Generation X and Generation Y, and if other generations had been present, the results might have been different. Even though the conclusion of this study is based on a relatively small sample of respondents, it contributes with both theoretical and practical framework, which can be applied in future research.

Another aspect that should be noted is the limited timeframe of the study, and because of this, the number of focus group sessions were limited to one. This may have affected the results of the study, and more focus groups might have contributed with more information. Moreover, the selection of advertisements were limited to two profit-seeking companies, and four advertisements were used. This could have affected the results of the study, and by using advertisements from more profit-seeking companies, further perceptions and variations might have been found. Furthermore, the selected advertisements depicted provocative marketing in the form of sexual appeals, which may have affected the results. Since some of the respondents had pre formed attitudes towards the chosen companies Tom Ford and American Apparel, the result might have been affected.
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Appendix 1

Questions formed for the focus group from the operationalization.

**Provocative Marketing - Presentation of the phenomena**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Presentation of the phenomena</th>
<th>1.1 According to you, what is provocative marketing?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.2 Have you ever been exposed to provocative marketing?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Provocative marketing in a social media context.</th>
<th>2.1 Are you an active user of social media?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.2 Which social media platforms do you use?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.3 Have you ever been exposed to provocative marketing in social media?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Provocative Marketing – How the message is presented by the sender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. How the message is presented</th>
<th>3.1 What do you think about these advertisements?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.2 Would you be shocked or offended by these advertisements in social media?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Distinctiveness</td>
<td>4.1 Do you think these advertisements stand out from other advertisements in social media?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Selection of colour</td>
<td>4.2 Which of these advertisements do you think is the most distinctive?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Position of the marketing message</td>
<td>4.3 Do you think colours can affect the distinctiveness of the advertisement in the context of social media?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Content of the message</td>
<td>4.4 Does the positioning of the provocative advertisement matter?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ambiguity</td>
<td>5.1 How would you interpret these advertisements in social media?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.2 Do you think these advertisements can be interpreted differently in social media than in traditional media?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Which of these advertisements do you think is the most ambiguous?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Transgression of norms and taboos</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1 Would you consider the content of these advertisements as taboo in social media?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2 Do these advertisements violate ethical issues when presented in social media?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3 Do these advertisements violate moral values when displayed in social media?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4 Which of these advertisements do you think transgresses norms and taboos to the highest degree?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>- Sexual appeals</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5 Are sexual appeals acceptable in social media?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The receiver of the message

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. Level of involvement</th>
<th>7.1 Would the presentation of these advertisements in social media be perceived differently depending on your level of involvement?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.2 What are your feelings regarding these advertisements in a social media setting?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.3 What feelings do these advertisements evoke for you when presented in a social media context?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6. Attitude towards for-profit seeking senders</th>
<th>8.1 Are you familiar with the for-profit companies that are the senders of these advertisements?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.2 Can provocative attempts from well-known companies in social media change your perception of that company?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.3 Do you think provocative marketing in social media is risky for well-known companies to apply?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.4 Can social issues and management style affect your attitude towards for-profit seeking companies?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.5 Does the intent behind the provocative marketing message affect your attitude towards the for-profit seeking company?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitude towards the advertisement</strong></td>
<td>9.1 What do you think of these advertisements in social media?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.2 Do you think these advertisements are credible when presented in social media?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.3 Do you think these advertisements are informative when presented in social media?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Long-term use of provocative marketing** | 10.1 If you are exposed to these advertisements during a longer period of time in social media, would that affect your perception? |
|                                           | 10.3 Do you think there is a difference between short-term and long-term exposure to these advertisements in social media? |
|                                           | 10.3 When using long-term provocative tactics in social media, do you think the focus can shift from the message to the organization? |
Appendix 2

Advertisement no.1

Advertisement no.2

Advertisement no.3
Advertisement no.4