

MA Thesis

The effects of storytelling and business customer interaction on brand experience.

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Abstract

Nowadays, social media is an important part of the daily lives of many individuals worldwide. Individuals are exposed to stories, narratives, promotions, or any other marketing activities on a daily basis online and offline. With social media as a platform that is always around, the emergence of social media gave new insights into the concept of telling and sharing stories. Telling stories is at the one hand, a tool for marketers to engage with their (potential) customers, but on the other hand, a challenge in which brands and marketers are struggling to make storytelling work for their own goals and values. In order to make this study meaningful and tangible, three interesting concepts formed the basis, storytelling, business customer interaction and brand experience. Storytelling consisted out of rhetorical and narrative implications, business customer interaction was divided into three different categories illustrating the type of interactivity between the marketer and the customers. Brand experience describes how customers are experiencing a brand in terms of sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioural conceptual elements. The aim of this study is to understand how storytelling and business customer interaction interact to affect the brand experience of individuals on social media. The methodological approach for this study, is quantitative by nature and consisted out of an online experiment (N=151). The business customer interaction model has been manipulated by means of a cover story. For this cover story, Blue Apron figured as a brand to give the story a meaningful body. The study was built upon six manipulated conditions. The cover story was formulated as a Facebook post, therefore, the focus of social media platform for this study is set on Facebook. The foundation of the methodological approach lies in the carefully formulated research question and hypotheses. The main findings for this study showed that storytelling has a positive effect on how customers are experiencing a brand. An explicit distinction is found in the difference between rhetorical and narrative storytelling. However, business customer interaction seems to not affect brand experience at all. Remaining measures in this study were demographical and social elements which were used to measure any other effects and implications regarding

brand experience. Additionally, interaction effects between business customer interaction and storytelling were not found within the study. The findings and conceptual notions within this study contribute to the understanding of social media as a medium for transporting stories.

Keywords

Storytelling; business customer interaction; brand experience; social media sensemaking; Facebook.

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1. Introduction

Writing, telling and sharing stories, there is a long history of individuals who are reading stories to immerse themselves into the narrative as if they could experience and feel the lives of other individuals (Wang, Kim, Xiao and Jung, 2017). The emergence of social media gives the audience a new platform for developing stories and narratives, more than billions of individuals are using social media (Nail, 2009). Social media is, as defined by Kaplan and Haenlein “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (p.61, 2010). Based on this definition, this study conceptualizes social media as an internet platform where individuals and brands can create and display their own content and the content of others, for example, stories and narratives. As stated above, not only individuals are using social media to distribute stories, on for example their daily lives. Brands are using social media as a marketing platform to tell their corporate stories, or narratives regarding their products and services more than ever (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Surprisingly, up to 85% of customers prefer to be in contact with a brand on social media to listen to their stories (Nail, 2009). The notion of telling stories, characterized by a beginning, a plot and an ending, is combined in the concept of storytelling where stories or narratives transport different feelings and cognitions to the audience (Green and Bock; Lundqvist, Liljander, Gummerus and van Riel, 2000; 2012). However, marketers and brands are still struggling to make storytelling and social media work for their brand or company (Singh and Sonnenburg, 2012). Individuals all have their own set of reactions towards a brand. This behaviour is illustrated by the different feelings an individual can have towards a brand (Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantello, 2009). The concept of brand experience focuses on these feelings. Brand experience will form the main element of this research study. The study of Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantello resulted in a model which will be applied for this research (2009).

Storytelling connects in its existence with the article of Green and Brock (2000), who introduced the transportation theory in public narratives. This article will form the basis of one of the measures for this research. This article goes hand in hand with the research of Lundqvist et al (2012). This study focuses on the notion of storytelling in relation to brand

experience, this study forms the foundation for this thesis, however, this study only focuses on the notion of storytelling. As described in the previous paragraph, brand experience is related to the feelings and connections a customer has with the brand. According to Singh and Sonnenburg (2012), storytelling is a tool for inducing and enhancing the connection a customer has with the brand. This connects the concepts of storytelling and brand experience.

In an attempt for brands to affect the behaviour of individuals, brands can rely thus, on using stories (Singh, Sonnenburg, 2012). Brands engage in stories on, for example, Facebook to connect people to their brand, and to trigger any interaction with the brand, there are numerous of brands which are using stories for this purpose (Gummerus, Liljander, Weman and Pihlstrom, 2012). For example, Nike uses stories on their channels to win over their audiences frequently. Starting in the 90s already with using Michael Jordan, which is a basketball athlete and also a hero for many people, as their spokesperson. Another interesting story is the 'The Change' ad which illustrates the story of a young soccer player in New York City. The goal of this story is to remind us, that there is always a change to become the best, if you wear Nikes (Barbour, 2016). Narratives are, as described by Abbot (2002), a set of descriptions of events and characters, which act in a way to entertain individuals, or even enlighten them. The problem, according to Lundqvist et al (2012) here is that companies do not always have the knowledge how customers perceive branded contents and narrative related posts. For this study, narratives and social media will be combined in relation to the concept of digital storytelling. Successful stories can connect individuals with brands and can have an effect on the feelings and behaviour of these individuals (Lundqvist et al, 2012).

In order to connect with customers, social media planners, marketers or strategists have to approach their audience in a way in which they focus on a designated target group (Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke, 2015). The study of Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke investigated how social media managers mentally think of marketing processes in regards to social media. The authors of this article developed a model of business customer interaction consisting out of four different elements. This study will make use of three out of four elements to keep the study relevant and to ensure the validity of the research. However, this study aims to use this developed model by Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke (2015) and to apply it in coherence with the studies of storytelling, transportation theory and brand experience to examine whether storytelling and the different mental models have an effect on how a brand is experienced by the customer. These mental models implicate a strategy of how a brand is using social media.

This notion of strategy and cognitive choices is connected to brand experience in terms of the outcome of the chosen strategy. The chosen strategy of a brand has an effect on the interaction and engagement of the audience, thus brand experience (Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke, 2015; Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantello, 2009). For example, Dove created a campaign which focused on real people where other individuals can relate with, instead of just promoting 'soap', Dove goes further in telling a compelling story about a father which is simply wishing to see his child for the first time. This video works on the emotional side of the brand experience. It is not about promoting a specific product, but about creating a bond with the brand Dove (Ashraf, 2016). This is one form of experiencing a brand.

The focus of this study is to examine how storytelling and business customer interactions are influencing brand experience. This thesis is based on the notion of brand experience which is connected to the concepts of storytelling and business customer interaction, to fill the research gap of how storytelling and business customer interaction can influence brand experience. This study will take the perspective of the customer to see how individuals are affected by manipulated conditions regarding storytelling and business customer interaction related elements. This perspective is focused on a created cover story which helps the customers to participate in this experimental study. This study will emphasize on the concepts of storytelling and business customer interaction in the theoretical part of this document.

The scientific relevance of this thesis entails the combination of the articles and studies as explained in the former paragraphs. By extending and using these former studies in combination with each other, this thesis opens up new insights. The emergence of storytelling and social media opens up gaps to examine how storytelling and business customer interaction influence brand experience (Singh and Sonnenburg, 2012). The integration of the business customer interaction model allows this research to focus on the different approaches brands can take and how this is perceived eventually. The integration of the business customer interaction model is an integral part for the relevance of the study, this model allows the researcher to measure how brand experience is affected by choices in terms of storytelling. Were previous studies only focused on one element, this research emphasizes on multiple related elements to go more in-depth into the material. The scientific relevance is strengthened due to the complexity of the three main concepts; storytelling, business customer interaction and brand experience. Storytelling which is divided into narrative and rhetorical

storytelling, explains how stories can be interpreted and understood in terms of branded content on social media (Lundqvist et al, 2012). Business customer interaction describes how three mental models influence how marketers and brands interpret and interact with their customers on social media platforms (Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke, 2015). Brand experience figures as a scale to measure how concepts as storytelling and business customer interaction scientifically impact the experience of the customer regarding a brand (Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantello, 2009). These three scientific articles figure as the core for this study. In addition to these articles, concepts as brand identification, interactivity and transportation theory increase the relevance of this study in terms of science.

Besides having a relevance for science, this study has an impact on society. In terms of marketing and advertising, this study can open up new insights for marketers and brands to reach and interact with their (potential) customers. The article of Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke (2015) is the basis of this social perspective. The mental models of business customer interaction will act as a tool to examine whether storytelling can influence the brand experience of the customers. Therefore, this study can have an impact on the choices made by brands and marketers. On the other hand, the findings of this study can make customers aware of the techniques that brands are using in their storytelling to manipulate the behaviour of the customer. Since social media is a dynamical landscape which is still evolving, outcomes of this study can help to understand how brands on social media use stories and interactivity to engage with their (potential) customers (Nail, 2009). According to Johannes Wilbertz (2013), there are two main elements in which researchers can test whether a study is relevant in terms of social and societal aspects. Firstly, identification of relevant questions, in other words, is their significant overlap between a problem society faces today and the main research question of this thesis. Regarding social media, brands and storytelling, researchers (Lundqvist et al, 2012) identified the problem of brands concerning engagement with their customers on social media platforms. Main question for these brands is how they can use, for example, storytelling to their benefit. The research question of this thesis, which will be explained in the following paragraph, adds towards this question formulated by Lundqvist et al (2012). Secondly, Wilbertz (2013), argued if the outcomes of previous studies contributed towards society which are linked towards this thesis. The studies of Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke, Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantello, Lundqvist et al (2015; 2009; 2012) all showed significant results which gave in-depth information concerning storytelling, social media and

brand experience. This thesis tends to build upon these previous results. Therefore the researcher argues that this thesis is relevant for society.

In order to connect all these articles and to actually gain more understanding for using storytelling on social media, this study will have the following research question: *To what extent does storytelling and business customer interaction affects brand experience?* This research question will act as a tool to cover the complexity of the raised issue. This study will form a set of hypotheses to gain an understanding of the direction of the study. These hypotheses will be formulated in the theoretical section of this thesis. To answer this research question, the method in this study entails an experimental online survey which will be distributed via Facebook since the research is mainly focused on this social media platform. The respondents will face six different conditions in which storytelling and business customer interaction are manipulated accordingly. Storytelling consists out of two categories: rhetorical and narrative storytelling. While business customer interaction is divided into three categories: business to customer, business with customer and business for customer. The manipulation material is based on a sustainable ingredient and recipe supplier, which is based in New York, Blue Apron. This brand is chosen due to its similarity with previous studies regarding brand experience, for example, the study of Lundqvist et al which studies the effect of storytelling as a wide singular concept alone on brand experience (2012).

In the following chapter, chapter two, this thesis focuses on how the concepts of storytelling and business customer interaction are understood in previous literature along with the understandings of surrounding concepts such as brand identification and transportation theory. Lastly, this chapter contains the different hypotheses which are formed for this study. The different concepts are operationalized in chapter three, where the research design is explained and described. The methodological section highlights how these concepts are used in order to develop an experimental study which is suited for answering the main research question. Chapter four provides an overview of the findings which are relevant for this thesis. These findings will be presented in alignment with the methodological guidelines for the MA thesis. The following chapter will further analyse how these findings relate to the previous examined literature and how these findings relate to the research question. Chapter six presents the used literature for this thesis in order to keep the study relevant and to ensure credibility and validity of the research. The first appendix for this thesis is focused on the protocol, which is used for the experimental survey. Additionally, the six manipulation

conditions are presented in the final appendix of this thesis along with the statistical output of SPSS in appendix C. These appendices complete this thesis and add to the analyses which are done. The statistical output which is found in appendix C only consists out of the most relevant and important data for this thesis.

2. Theoretical framework

In this chapter the relevant concepts are explained. The main concepts of brand experience, transportation theory, storytelling, business customer interaction and brand identification are the focus of this chapter to get an understanding of the underlying process and concepts for this thesis. These concepts will be linked together in order to connect the different notions which are used to strengthen the methodological approach and the final results of this thesis.

2.1 Brand experience

In order to gain knowledge or skill, individuals are seeing, feeling or affected by internal or external factors. This process is defined as experience (Ha and Perks, 2005). For example, if you are starting your fifth university study, you can define yourself as an experienced scholar. Being an experienced scholar gives you more insight into the process of a study than a first time student. For this study, the process of experience is related towards the presence of brands and marketing on social media, leading to the concept of brand experience. Brand experience is mainly about measuring the feelings and cognitive thoughts of (potential) customers. Essentially, a brand experience consists of all the sensations, feelings, cognitions and behavioural responses evoked by brand-related communications (Lundqvist et al, 2012). Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009) conceptualize brand experience as "...subjective customer responses that are evoked by specific brand related experiential attributes in such settings" (p.65). This is in line with the definition stated by Ha and Perks (2005), where brand experience is linked back to the notion of experience alone. "Experience is defined as displaying relatively high degree of familiarity with a certain subject area, which is obtained through some type of exposure" (Ha and Perks, 2005, p.440). For example, a customer which goes through a positive process of buying a certain product, decision making and product usage would be considered to be experienced. Padgett and Allen argue that brand experience is a combination of symbolic meaning parsed into behaviour, thought and feelings that occur during the process a customer is experiencing the brand (1997). The study of Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009) took these concepts a step further from these thought and feelings and conceptualized a model which can measure brand experience.

According to Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009), brand experience is built on four dimensions: sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioural. First, the sensory dimension illustrates how a brand appeals to the senses of the customers; this can be visual, audio, or cognitive in the way that a customer finds a brand interesting. For example, the use of visuals to speak to the customer as Old Spice in their ‘The man your man could smell like’ campaign in which the brand used clips, billboard and photos of a muscular man in order to speak towards woman (Elle and Co, 2016). Secondly, the affective dimension explains how emotional connections relate to the brand and how customers feel emotionally towards the communications of the brand. Nike illustrates again how storytelling can be used in terms of emotional connections in their campaign about the villain and the hero where they illustrate the internal struggle of individuals to get in shape and to overcome their weaknesses (Payne, 2017). The third-dimension touches upon the behavioural aspects of brand experience, for example, does the customer react physically as a reaction on the branded communications? For example, when customer decide to buy the promoted product or service. Lastly, intellectual, this element entails the way in which customers think of the brand after experiencing the brand and its communications. For example, does the brand stimulate curiosity within the customer? (Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2009). The concept of brand experience is key for this research and, building also on the study of Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009), the current study aims to contribute to a better understanding of brand experience.

In order to emphasize the importance and relevancy of brand experience, this thesis also briefly elaborates on the conceptual model regarding the relationship of brand experience with other factors as developed by Ha and Perks (2005). Their study examined whether brand experience has an impact on brand familiarity, satisfaction and brand trust. Brand familiarity is conceptualized as a store of favourable knowledge and experiences concerning a brand (Ha and Perks, 2005). The concept of brand familiarity is strongly connected with the notion of brand identification which is explained in paragraph 2.5. Brand satisfaction is defined as the extent in which customers have previous positive experiences with a brand product or service (Ha and Perks, 2005). Lastly, brand trust is conceptualized by the authors as the willingness of the customer to rely on the brand to perform the stated functions and features, these functions or features can be for example, the quality of a certain product or service and the consistency of it, or the commitment of a brand towards its customers. (Ha and Perks, 2005).

The authors proved in their study, that there are several important positive relationships regarding brand experience and the previous stated elements. To summarize, Ha and Perks (2005) found that brand experience has a positive impact on familiarity, satisfaction and trust. As these outcomes are very important for marketers and contribute to keeping brands competitive, it is important to better understand brand experience. These outcomes illustrate the effect of brand experience and the importance of studying this concept for this study. As described brand experience is a powerful concept which can affect other elements such a familiarity, satisfaction and trust. In this regard, it is worthwhile to investigate relevant antecedents of brand experience. An important antecedent regarding brand experience, is the brand experience of a certain product on a website. According to Ha and Perks (2005), brand experience has more impact than product features and benefits on its own. Brand experience produces deeper meaning and it can be more memorable. In line with this notion is business customer interaction, which will be a focus for this study, business customer interaction encompasses four mental models which illustrate how marketing managers are thinking concerning engagement with the customer (Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke, 2015). These models can influence how a brand is portrayed on this particular website. Business customer interaction will be discussed in paragraph 2.3.

To connect this with brand experience, the second important focus for this study is storytelling. Storytelling is a tool for marketing managers to induce their customers with a narrative to enhance, for example, brand experience (Lundqvist et al, 2012). With storytelling marketing managers can enhance their products or services on their website or social media account by assigning a narrative to the product or service. The following paragraph will introduce the concept of storytelling in relation to transportation theory.

2.2 Transportation theory and storytelling

The concept of storytelling starts with a story that consists of a beginning, middle and end, where events will unfold in mostly a chronological sequence (Lundqvist et al, 2012). Storytelling is an evolved concept out of the transportation theory as conceptualized by Green and Bock (2000). “To the extent that individuals are absorbed into a story or transported into a narrative world, they may show effects of the story on their real-world beliefs. We conceptualized transportation into a narrative world as a distinct mental process, an

integrative melding of attention, imagery, and feelings” (Green and Bock, 2000, p.701). This underlying theory regarding storytelling helps to understand how these narratives are being absorbed by customers, taking also into account the effects of the story that are reflected on their everyday life (Green and Bock, 2000). In short, the transportation theory entails the capability of a story or narrative to transport the story and its components such as feelings and imagination towards other individuals such as the (potential) customer. Take the Nike example into mind where Nike told a story in which the brand wanted to transport the feeling that everyone is capable of being a professional athlete. This is a correct example of how the transportation theory can work in social circumstances.

According to Lundqvist et al, the key components of a successful story are the following: brand stories need to be credible, the audience should be able to identify him or herself with the characters, the story should only convey one single and clear message and, in the end, it should engage the listener in an authentic way (2012). Narrative transportation is essentially about how a story can transport a certain narrative to customers in order to influence the brand experience of the customer. These narratives help customers to interpret the meaning of the brands (Lundqvist et al, 2012). When executed properly, marketers can use stories to appeal to their customers’ emotions and dreams. Stories are also helpful for brands to display their value proposition. Value proposition is defined here as the core of the company in which it illustrates its key benefits towards (potential) customers (Doyle, 2016). “Storytelling generates positive feelings in customers and is perceived as more convincing than facts, thereby increasing brand trust, raising awareness and making the brand unique” (Lundqvist et al, 2012, p.286). Particularly, the study of Lundqvist et al (2012) examines if brand experience differs between customers who are exposed to a brand story in comparison with customers who are not exposed to a brand story (2012). Lundqvist et al found out that a well-crafted story may create positive associations with the brand and eventually the willingness to purchase the product. According to Lundqvist et al, stories do not have to be an accurate reflection of reality, fiction is a possibility. However, a story should never be experienced as deceiving. Pretending that fictional stories are reality can lead to loss of brand trust (2012), brand trust is defined as the willingness to rely on the brand (Alhaddad, 2015). This related back to the study of Ha and Perks (2005). The current thesis extends on the research of Lundqvist et al (2012) who took a qualitative approach. The method that was used by the authors consisted out of an experimental case study of an international cosmetics

brand. The authors worked in close relation with the company owning the brand. After the half of the participants were exposed to a story, they were asked to test fifteen products of the brand and to express their thoughts aloud. This study was a qualitative study by nature and the authors used the three steps of coding: open, axial and selective. For this research, a small sample was used and was comprised of only twenty urban-centred women. The current research design of this thesis aims to extend this by adopting a quantitative approach with an extended population which will be explained in chapter 3.

The articles of Lundqvist et al (2012) and Green and Bock (2000) distinguishes between two types of storytelling: narrative, and rhetorical. For this thesis, these two types of storytelling are examined in-depth. Comparing these two kinds of storytelling, a clear distinction between the two elements is made. Firstly, rhetorical storytelling, defines the type of storytelling that is mainly text-based (Green and Bock, 2000). Green and Bock argue that in rhetorical storytelling, transportation is less likely to occur. This is because narrative storytelling may be held to different truth standards than rhetorical storytelling according to the authors. So, non-fiction (rhetorical storytelling) versus fiction (narratives storytelling). The second type of storytelling is narrative storytelling which emphasizes the visual and fictional element as illustrated by Green and Bock and Lundqvist (2000; 2012). Lundqvist emphasizes the need of a narrative to be based on real events, customers show more interaction when they can relate to certain characters or elements within a narrative (2012). This refers to the notion of fiction versus non-fiction as described by Green and Bock (2000). The following two sections will emphasize more on the two forms of storytelling.

2.2.1 Narrative storytelling

A study of Delgado and Escalas (2004) elaborates on narrative storytelling and it focuses on how memory and attitudes are affected when individuals are exposed to narrative storytelling. Their overall conclusion illustrated the lack of attitude changing behaviour. Respondents of the study were not experiencing biased opinions after viewing a narrative. Meaning, narrative storytelling does not influence experience or memory of individuals. What the researchers did find was that brands and individuals are talking in a narrative when communicating experiences and features of products and services, this emphasizes on how relevant storytelling is, since it is an important way of communicating. However, this study

connects to the study of Lundqvist et al (2012) and the concept of brand experience in the sense that attitude and memory as emphasized by Delgado and Escalas (2004) correlates with the model of brand experience as defined by Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009). Therefore, narrative storytelling, in comparison with brand experience is an interesting research field since the previous study of Delgado and Escalas (2004) gave insights for other researchers since they acknowledged the importance of storytelling in communication. The study of Delgado and Escalas (2004) provides some contrasts to the study of Lundqvist et al (2012) regarding customer attitudes and memory which are interesting for this study since the results of Delgado and Escalas (2004) concerning brand experience emphasize on the fact that not every story has the capability to transport attitudes and memory changes. Denning, describes narrative storytelling as choosing the right narrative and focus to achieve a particular goal through the use of narratives that transport certain feelings or ideologies (2006). This connect back to the Nike example as described in the previous paragraph where transportation occurs. When referring to rhetorical storytelling, however, according to Green and Bock (2000), it lacks the function to transport the story. Which is in contrast with narrative storytelling where transportation is likely to occur.

2.2.2 Rhetorical storytelling

To explain why transportation does not occur in the case of rhetorical storytelling one should consider the traditional ties of rhetorical storytelling (Iversen, 2014). Iversen argues that rhetoric discourses take the focus of presenting arguments with the use of textual symbols (2014). Rhetoric in this case, is defined as the exploitation of persuasive effects in speaking or in text (Baldick, 2015). This connects to the studies of Green and Lundqvist (2000; 2012), where the authors argue that rhetorical storytelling is based mainly upon static textual elements instead of visual elements. The notion of rhetorical storytelling can also be understood in the light of classical thinking most notably the one represented by Aristotle and Quintilian, who argued about the power of stories to move audiences (Iversen, 2014). This classical thinking connects towards the transportation theory as described earlier (Green and Bock, 2000). An example of rhetorical storytelling is the solely use of static text in a narrative, for example fact-based elements, which will be further explained in the following paragraph.

A study regarding affective arguments in rhetorical and testimonial message from Keer, van den Putte, de Wit and Neijens (2013), provides interesting insights into the characteristics of both rhetorical and narrative storytelling. The authors divide messages into two different types, testimonials and fact-based messages. Testimonials are messages that present information in a personal format which includes experiences regarding a certain brand or product (Keer et al, 2013). These testimonial messages are more likely to evoke emotional responses and experiences from customers. Furthermore, testimonial messages are experienced as narrative communication and stand therefore in close relation with the concept of narrative storytelling which is also focused at transporting certain narratives in order to evoke empathy and identification with the story character (Keer et al; Lundqvist et al; Green and Bock, 2013; 2012; 2000). Another type of message which Keer et al distinguishes, is the notion of fact-based messages (2013). This type of messages entails the use of arguments which rely on static facts, such as press releases, or other well sourced arguments in messages (Keer et al, 2013). This type of rhetorical communication is believed by Keer et al to have a lesser ability for evoking emotional responses on customers (2013). However, the authors also believe that when using the correct arguments, there is a possibility of affecting thoughts and feelings of the customers who are affected by the messages (2013). This type of messages is closely related to rhetorical storytelling as introduced by Lundqvist et al and Green and Bock (2012; 2000).

To summarize the two factors of storytelling, narrative storytelling focuses more on the visual, personal and dynamical aspects (Lundqvist et al, 2012) and testimonial elements (Keer et al, 2013) of storytelling and is more likely to have the ability to transport the story towards the audience than rhetorical storytelling, which is more based upon traditional ties including textual symbols and (Lundqvist et al, 2012) and fact-based arguments (Keer et al, 2013). Both narrative and rhetorical storytelling may have an impact on brand experience. In the light of the set of the characteristics that each of these types of storytelling have, the following hypothesis can be formed:

H1: Narrative storytelling results in higher levels of positive brand experience than rhetorical storytelling.

2.3 Mental models of business customer interaction

Social media emerged on a worldwide scale, this has an impact on how and when businesses use social media for promotional ends. Businesses are experiencing pressure to engage with their (potential) customers on different social media platforms (Baird and Parasnis, 2011). In 2018, 3.196 billion people are using social media, three billion of these people use social media at least once a month (DeMers, 2018). Organizations are spending up to \$17.34 billion dollars on social media marketing in only the United States (DeMers, 2018). This indicates how important social media already is for businesses and organizations, not only in the United States as in the previous example, but also on a worldwide scale. This shift of social media usage need to be supported by businesses, embracing new strategies can be an important point of interest for these businesses (Baird and Parasnis, 2011). An important aspect here is that businesses need to understand what their customers value and how the company can connect and engage with these customers. The research of Baird and Parasnis (2011) illustrates some strong opinions of customers regarding the social media use of businesses and brands. Baird and Parasnis also examined how social media in general is evolving (2011). Firstly, the engagement of customers all over the world is on an occasional basis, despite the quick explosion of social media channels, only a small percentage of the consumers actually interact with businesses. Secondly, social media is about family and friends, not brands. According to the authors, half of the customers do not even consider interacting with a business via social media channels. Thirdly, customers seem to expect certain tangible artefacts, such as discounts or promotional items in turn for their time, engagement and personal data. Lastly, businesses need to find creative ways to engage with the social media community. Of importance for these notions is that businesses need to have a management that is aware of the different needs of the customers and the shifting expectations of social media (Baird and Parasnis, 2011). This connects to the article of Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke, which describe how four different mental models in total, can influence how managers or brands interact with customers on social media (2015).

The concept which is introduced by Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke, is business customer interaction (2015). Business customer interaction is described as the way in which brands or marketer interact and communicate with their (potential) customers (Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke, 2015). The empirical research of business customer interaction by Ryden, Ringberg

and Wilke shows how four separate mental models of business customer interaction affects how social media is conceptualized in marketing activities. The mental models are created from a careful and semi-structured eliciting process and a subsequent close analysis and coding of the narratives. The authors proceeded with interviews to conduct this research. After the interviewing process, the researchers coded the transcripts in an exploratory perspective (Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke, 2015). The interviewer showed the respondents different pictures and asked them to categorize and prioritize them according to their thoughts and feelings about business customer interactions. The respondents were asked to explain and carefully define their choices. According to Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke, a mental model operates like a gatekeeper that decides what is included and excluded from the view of the manager (2015). A gatekeeper is referred in this study as someone who control the access to information (Calhoun, 2002). The relevance of this article regarding mental models lies in the fact that it provides empirically grounded insights within a field which is typically concept driven according to Gary and Wood: “Despite substantial evidence of mental models' influence on strategic decision-making, there is limited empirical evidence for the link between mental model accuracy and performance “(2011, p. 569). Strategic decisions making refers to, for example, the decision to use a form of storytelling on social media (Gary and Wood, 2011).

The four components of the mental model of business customer interaction are: business to customer, business with customer, business for customer and business from customer (2015). The first mental model, business to customers is about the promotion and selling of goods on social media. Messages on social media which are created with this kind of model in mind are selling oriented and emphasize on the design, quality and comfort of a product (Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke, 2015). This mental model encompasses a one-way communication as a mediated communication direction. The managers who adopt and/or work in mind with this mental model do not recognize any potential interest in engaging with customers or creating a dialogue. According to the authors, even bigger companies tend to use social media to rely on one-way communication (Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke, 2015).

The second mental model, business with customers involves the customers getting more emotional and practical attachment towards the brand. While the first model focuses on real time purchases, this model emphasizes the need of crafting a bond with the customers in order to seal a ‘lifetime’ deal with the potential customers (Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke,

2015). This mental model also emphasizes on the co-creation of customers when it comes to value. “Marketers used to seek people to consume their products, now they seek people to produce the value they seek to leverage” (Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke, 2015, p.9.). Therefore, value is of importance for this mental model, and is illustrated as the relationship between the brand and the customer. This notion of continual communication is beneficial for both the customer, and the brand itself (Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke, 2015). The authors speak here, of a two-way communication with the customer. In short, the business with customer mental model elaborates on the need to encourage customers to become involved mentally and emotionally with the brand, social media is a suited tool for this mental model since the possibilities of co-creation with social media are in place (Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke, 2015).

Lastly, the third mental model this thesis aims to investigate in relation to brand experience is called business for customers and elaborates on the value creation of the brand in collaboration with the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR). This model focuses on customer empowerment. CSR is defined as the notion that a company has responsibilities to society that go beyond its legal obligations and its duties to shareholders (Law, 2016). For example, environmental and sustainability matters. Messages on social media which are related to this model focus on the value that is created for the customers. The well-fare of customers is an important factor considering this approach (Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke, 2015). Social media strategists which apply this mental model are focused on creating transformation through political and value-based initiatives that focus on the welfare of customers and surrounding society and community. For example, matters which are related to sustainability and organic food (Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke, 2015). To conclude this description of the business for customers model, the focus of this approach is to create an organic whole between a brand and its customers, focused on relationships with stakeholders to create meaningful communication which contributes to society. As described above, both business with customers as well as business for customers are based on two-way communication, allowing more interaction between sender and receiver (Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke, 2015).

While these first three models present relevance from an external communication perspective, the fourth model is about listening and learning from the customers and it is called business from customers. This model reflects on how a brand is gathering customer information and how it is listening to the customers in order to explore their needs, feelings

and preferences (Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke, 2015). This can entail the observations on the internet and writing reports by the social media strategist, but it is also common for a brand to invite several customers to test their new developed homepage or social media website. Because the communicational dimension is less evident in this latter mental model (Ryden, Ringberg & Wilke, 2015), the current thesis focuses solely on the first three mental models presented. The three mental models on business customer interaction which constitute the focus of this thesis are therefore related to external brand-related communications whereas the other mental model (business from customer) focuses on the internal communication process of the company, which is not the focus of this study. However, it is important to keep in mind that listening and observing is an important step in engaging with your customers. Building on this body of literature, the following hypothesis is formed:

H2: A business customer interaction enhancing a two-way communication on social media (i.e., either business with customers or business for customers) results in higher levels of positive brand experience than a business customer interaction enhancing a one-way communication on social media (i.e., business to customers).

2.4 Interaction effects

Reflecting back to the study of Lundqvist et al, the authors state in their limitations section of the article, that it would be interesting to examine whether cognitive and mental elements come into place when experience a narrative (2012). The research design of this thesis aims to fill this gap with the focus of the mental models of business customer interaction. Ryde, Ringberg and Wilke, studied the mentally relevant ways in which social media marketing managers think when experiencing brand-related communications (2015). Brand-related communications, are activities that can influence the customer its opinion of the company or/and its products (Cambridge University Press, 2017). This led to the previous showed mental models of business customer interaction. Since storytelling is a key tool for companies to show their brand on social media (Singh and Sonnenburg, 2012), this approach of customer interaction and the approach of storytelling proposed by Green and Bock (2000) is an interesting combination to study. The connection between the concepts of storytelling and mental models of business customer interaction on social media is found in the strategic

decision-making part as described by Gary and Wood (2011), social media managers have to choose their approach regarding a strategy. This is related, as mentioned before, to the notion of the four mental models of business customer interaction. More simply stated: storytelling is a tool for social media managers to express their strategy.

Before focussing on the different interaction effects that can occur for this study. It is important to emphasize on the concepts of one-way communication and two-way communication. When a certain message only flows in one direction, from example, from sender to receiver, there is one-way communication (Nagy, 2005). According to Nagy, two-way communication consists out of interactivity and engagement between for example the sender and the receiver. This type of communication is often correlated with engagement and multiple messages between both mediums back and forth (2005). The one-way communication model in business-customer interaction (business to customer) is considered to be a traditional model which originally relates back to the era before social media and increased interactivity (Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke, 2015). Interactivity is operationalized and defined for this study as “the degree to which a person actively engages in advertising processing by interacting with advertising messages and advertisers” (McMillan and Hwang, 2002, p.31). The essence of interactivity, as described above is connected to two hypotheses which are both speaking about a positive difference between one-way communication and two-way communication towards social media posts using narrative storytelling.

The following two hypotheses at the end of this paragraph, argue that due to the combination of narrative storytelling and a business customer interaction model which its communication is two-way oriented, higher levels of brand experience will occur. As described in this chapter, both business with customer and business for customer are mental models of business customer interaction which entail two-way communications, meaning respectively, creating an emotional bond with the brand and illustrating CSR values and other related value creation elements (Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke, 2015). The arguments for the hypotheses H3a and H3b are based on the research of Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke (2015), which argue that two-way communication oriented mental models are connected towards more interactivity between the receiver and the sender. This correlates in with the study of McMillan and Hwang which found in their study that new media advertisements (as for example social media) are more focussed on interactivity, thus two-way communications (2002). These ‘new media advertisements’ are defined in this thesis as the factor of narrative

storytelling, since rhetorical storytelling is a more traditional way of communicating and branding (Lundqvist et al; Green and Bock, 2012; 2000). The study of de Vries, Gensler and Leeftang (2012) illustrates some interesting results which strengthen the two following stated hypotheses. The authors argue that, when a brand is aiming to increase the amounts of engagement and brand experience (likes and comments on a post) on Facebook, the brand should invest more in content which makes the post more interactive. For example, asking questions, creating a bond, increases the amount of comments on a Facebook post, while creating value around the brand itself correlates with more Facebook likes. The two above mentioned mental models of business customer interaction entail these characteristics which are mentioned by de Vries, Gensler and Leeftang (2012). Two hypotheses are formed as a result from this body of literature:

H3a: The business with customers mental model (enhancing a two-way communication on social media) results in higher levels of positive brand experience than the business to customers mental model (enhancing a one-way communication on social media), for social media posts using narrative storytelling.

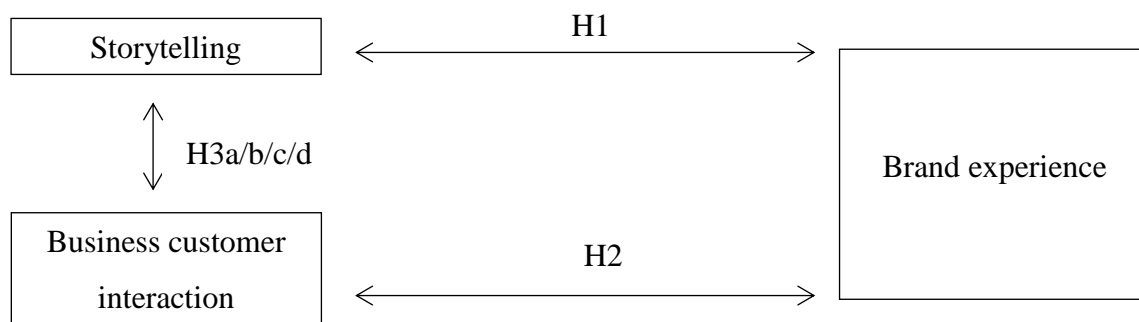
H3b: The business for customers mental model (enhancing a two-way communication on social media) results in higher levels of positive brand experience than the business to customers mental model (enhancing a one-way communication on social media), for social media posts using narrative storytelling.

On the other hand, this thesis focuses on another factor of storytelling, rhetorical storytelling, which is more text-based. Since this approach of storytelling is more traditional and one way oriented (Green and Bock, 2000). Keeping the previous paragraphs into mind, the following two hypotheses are formulated:

H3c: The business with customers mental model (enhancing a two-way communication on social media) results in lower levels of positive brand experience than the business to customers mental model (enhancing a one-way communication on social media), for social media posts using rhetorical storytelling.

H3d: The business for customers mental model (enhancing a two-way communication on social media) results in lower levels of positive brand experience than the business to customers mental model (enhancing a one-way communication on social media), for social media posts using rhetorical storytelling.

To conclude, as described above the two mentioned mental models' business for customers and business with customers are more focused on interactivity than the business to customers model which emphasizes on the one-way communication of promoting solely the services or product related to the brand (Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke, 2015). Therefore, hypotheses H3c and H3d argue that both two-way communication oriented mental models of business customer interaction will not work together in a sufficient way with rhetorical storytelling since these two mental models have the characteristics which pair in a more efficient way with narrative storytelling than rhetorical storytelling (de Vries, Gensler and Leeftang, 2012). In addition to this statement, the business to customer model is expected to have higher level of brand experience in combination with rhetorical storytelling than both two-way oriented mental models since the business to customer model is more focused on traditional advertising, which corresponds with the characteristics of rhetorical storytelling (Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke; Green and Bock; 2015; 2000). An overview of the theoretical model including the hypotheses for this study, is found in Figure 1.



[FIGURE 1]

2.5 Brand identification

Closely related to brand experience is the phenomena of brand identification. Stokburger, Ratneshwar and Sen (2012) studied how brands have the ability to embody, inform and

communicate desirable customer identities. According to the authors, brand identification can be defined as the following: “a customer's perceived state of oneness with a brand, is a valid and potent expression of our quest for identity-fulfilling meaning in the marketplace of brands” (Stokburger, Ratneshwar and Sen, 2012. p. 407).

Brand identification is relevant since it is long recognized that people strive to distinguish themselves from others in social context theories. This notion of distinctiveness suggests that individuals “...attempt to resolve the fundamental tension between their need to be similar to others and their need to be unique by identifying with groups that satisfy both needs. The expression of such needs for distinctiveness in the consumption realm is perhaps best reflected in the construct labelled as customer’s ‘need for uniqueness’, defined as an individual's pursuit of differentness relative to others that is achieved through the acquisition, utilization, and disposition of customer goods for the purpose of developing and enhancing one's personal and social identity” (Stokburger, Ratneshwar and Sen, 2012. p. 408). In other words, customers tend to seek this uniqueness and distinctiveness among brands in order to enhance their own identity and to utilize it for, for example, personal needs. Therefore, it is relevant, to consider brand identification as an interesting factor when examining brand related research elements.

Since the notion of narratives in this study relates to a brand, and therefore a possible past “oneness” with the brand, the measures introduced by Stokburger, Ratneshwar and Sen will be used to control brand identification for this thesis (2012) in order to eliminate this potential confounding variable. According to the study of Stokburger, Ratneshwar and Sen, their research and introduced measures gave insight in how brand identification is shaping the needs and wants of customers. It is important to take in mind that brand identification is a social construct which is relevant to consider in the current research to account for potential influences on the main relationship under investigation. A factor such as culture is not taken in consideration for their study because the focus of this study does not lie in cultural values. Future research could extend on this thesis by going more in-depth in values regarding culture. Furthermore, the study of Stokburger, Ratneshwar and Sen (2012), will be used as a tool for indicating possible brand identification, while the limitations will be monitored and will be taken in consideration.

2.6 Conclusion

To conclude this theoretical framework, the different previous studies and papers gave insight in the field of social media and storytelling. Brand experience illustrates the amount of experience an individual can have considering different categories (senses, affection, intellect and behaviour). Brand experience is key for this study since this concept measures how customers experience a brand in terms of sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioural elements. In connection with brand experience, there are two relevant factors. Firstly, storytelling which is divided into rhetorical and narrative storytelling. They encompass respectively the main use of text and visual based stories or content. These two factors will be supported by the study of Keer et al (2013) which introduced testimonial and fact-based messages. Narrative storytelling is expected to contribute more towards the transportation of feelings from brand to customer, and to be more suited for two-way communications enhancing more engagement between brand and (potential) customer. Rhetorical storytelling in its turn, is expected to correlate with more traditional ways of advertising, being less capable of transportation and interactivity between brand and (potential) customer. One-way communication tends to be more suitable when talking about rhetorical storytelling.

The second factor is the business customer interaction model which consists out of four mental models which illustrate how social media content is interpreted by social media marketer and brands, before it is placed on different social media platforms. Three out of four mental models of business customer interaction are relevant for this thesis, business to customer, business with customer and business for customer. While the first represent one-way communication ideals, the second and third model consists out of characteristics which are closely connected to two-way communication ideals. As described above, business customer interaction models involving two-way communication are expected to be more likely to transport a story and to increase interactivity and engagement. This directly connects to the type of storytelling, rhetorical or narrative. Business customer interaction is also an important element for this research since it connects to storytelling and brand experience and its capability to extend on previous literature in terms of engagement and social media.

Additional concepts such as brand identification and interaction effects are described in this chapter. Brand identification is defined as how individuals historically relate to certain brands and their accompanying cognitive feelings and senses in relation to the examined

brand. The concept of brand identification is introduced in order to control the notion of familiarity and to enhance the validity and credibility of the research. Brand identification can influence related concepts such as brand experience due to previous feelings of individuals towards a brand or marketing activity. Interaction effects entail the relationships between one-way and two-way communication-oriented business customer interaction models and the two types of storytelling. As described before, the distinction between one-way and two-way communication is important for this study since it describes the relation between traditional advertising and social media advertising.

This theoretical framework described a set of three hypotheses which summarized previous statements and thoughts concerning the field of storytelling and social media. Interaction effects are examined closely in accordance to previous research and additional literature. The variables within this research gave room for in-depth hypotheses and possible interaction effects. The following chapter will emphasize on how these hypotheses and interaction effects are tested and how this theoretical framework is operationalized in terms of methodological principles.

3. Method

In order to answer the main research question, this study will use an online experiment in the form of a digital survey. The research design, sample, procedure, dependent measures, independent measures, cover story, data collection and statistical analysis (Babbie, 2015) are going to be presented in this section.

3.1 Research design

This study chose for a quantitative approach because the researcher wants to investigate how storytelling can or cannot influence brand experience based on statistical measures. Since previous related studies were mainly qualitative, this study complements these previous studies by taking a quantitative and more analytical perspective on the matter. To conduct this research, the choice is made to conduct an online experiment. According to Babbie, an experiment consists out of two parts, taking action and observing the consequences of that action (2015). The researcher selects a group of subjects, manipulates an element and finally he will observe the effect of what was done. The foundation of the choice for conducting an experiment is connected towards the formulation and testing of causal relationships between the earlier mentioned concepts (Babbie, 2015). The testing of casual relationships is of importance for this study in order to answer the main research question and to test the previous formulated hypotheses. As mentioned above, the benefits for choosing an experimental approach, lies in the testing of causal relationships and the possibility to examine the concepts of storytelling and business customer interaction in a quantitative way. Another strength of the online experiment, according to Babbie (2015) is that the distribution of the experiment is time saving and the replication is done automatically and wide spread, which is of importance for this research in order to collect a sufficient number of respondents. The issue of artificiality is also dealt with, with the choice of an online experiment since respondents can complete the experiment anywhere they want without influencing their opinions. For example, a laboratory may impact the responses of the respondents (Babbie, 2015).

The research design is carefully formulated in order to maintain internal and external validity of the experiment itself. Internal validity is referred to as the notion that there is no stimulus, except from the experimental stimulus which can affect the dependent variable. In order to maintain internal validity, this experiment takes a couple of precautions. Firstly, respondents are not aware they are participating in an experiment, since the study is set up to look like a survey, according to Babbie (2015), an experiment is strengthened when respondents are not aware that they are tested or manipulated. Secondly, the measures which are used, are of high reliability and are used for previous similar studies as explained in section 3.4. Lastly, the choice of sampling is grounded in the focus on social media, and in particular, Facebook as explained in section 3.2, and therefore does not complicate or limit the study as a whole. In addition to internal validity, external validity also plays a role in formulating experiments (Babbie, 2015). External validity relates to the generalizability of the findings of the experiment in relation to the ‘real world’ (Babbie, 2015). Apart from the operationalization, the most important aspect, regarding to Babbie (2015) is the population which is chosen to be examined for the experiment. The research design of this study, allows the experiment to carefully measure what is needed to measure in terms of sampling. The process and choices in the sampling process are described in section 3.2. To reflect back on the operationalization of this study, the design of the experiment is as follows.

The experiment involves a three (storytelling: rhetorical vs. narrative) x two (business-customer mental model: business to customer vs. business with customer vs. business for customer) experimental design and the table below (Table 1) illustrates how the different experimental groups are constructed. Leading up to six different conditions which will be explained in section 3.4.

Table 1. Experimental conditions

Mental Model	Rhetorical storytelling	Narrative storytelling
Business to customer	<i>N</i> =26	<i>N</i> =22
Business with customer	<i>N</i> =25	<i>N</i> =28
Business for customer	<i>N</i> =25	<i>N</i> =25

3.2 Sampling and data collection

The six different experimental groups consisted out of approximately 25 respondents, coming up to a total of 151 respondents in total for the whole experiment. Sampling for this research was convenient sampling via Facebook. The distribution of the experiment was handled via the Facebook channels of the researcher and relevant groups which were affiliated to the study or other media-oriented groups. For this research, it is not relevant to have a distinct target group in term of characteristics and specific individual types, in order to measure the dependent variable of brand experience. According to Bryman (2012), research criteria of the participants in this study narrowed down the probability of a too large variety in the acquired findings, which made the research less superficial. However, a precise target group can make it tougher to generalize the findings to other participant groups (Bryman, 2012). Therefore, this study presents a clear balance regarding sampling. Since the specification of Facebook is precise, other conditions are not specifically targeted, but are randomly sampled.

Facebook is chosen as platform for distribution for the experiment because of the relevance with storytelling and the perspective of the study itself. Facebook is one of the biggest platform where brands are performing marketing activities which are linked to storytelling (Lambert, 2013; Vries, Gensler and Leeﬂang, 2012). This type of random sampling ensures the validity and credibility of the chosen methods of data analysis, ANOVA and MANOVA. This will be further explained in paragraph 3.5.

3.3 Procedure

The experiment was conducted in the form of a digital survey (found in Appendix A) and is distributed electronically via Facebook. The experiment was created via the digital survey platform, Qualtrics. The experiment makes use of a cover story in order to keep the respondents interested and to make the research more relevant (Zimmerman, Glaser, 2001). This developed cover story is about how Blue Apron as a brand decided to make use of certain social media content. This cover story is of importance for the study since it was the basis for the different manipulations and measurement of the dependent and independent variables.

The protocol of this experiment is build up out of several elements. Starting with an introduction and clear instructions which are relevant for the respondents. After these two elements, the respondents will face a general introduction into the cover story stating a basic description of the brand Blue Apron and its main features. The next step is to get more in-depth in to the manipulations of the experiment, the respondent will face either manipulation 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 or 6, which will be evenly distributed by Qualtrics. Each Facebook post was appearing on the respondent's screen for a minimal of 60 seconds before the respondent could click next, this was done to ensure that every respondent had all its focus towards the Facebook post. After carefully examining this material, the respondent is guided towards the instructions for the answering of the questions regarding the manipulation and the dependent variable, brand experience. The manipulation check questions measured how the respondent was experiencing the given manipulation on both storytelling and business customer interaction (paragraph 3.4). When completed, the respondent faced questions regarding the dependent variable, brand experience. Secondly, respondents were asked to answer some control questions regarding the cover story in order to give the story a reasonable flow. After the questions regarding brand experience, respondents were asked to state how familiar they are with the brand of Blue Apron in order to check for biased respondents. Followed (if the respondent stated 'yes'), by additional questions regarding brand identification as developed by Stokburger, Ratneshwar and Sen (2012). The demographical questions were placed at the end of the survey, these questions entailed: age, gender and highest completed level of education of the respondents. Lastly, the survey asked respondents concerning their social media presence and use. Two articles will form the basis for the formulation of these questions (Correa, Hinsley and Zuniga, 2010; Gummerus, Liljander, Weman and Pihlstrom, 2012). After completing these questions, the respondent was kindly asked to save the survey in order to store the results.

To make the different manipulations tangible and credible, the material is focused on the brand of Blue Apron as briefly mentioned before. Which is a New York based company that offers high quality and sustainable ingredients in a monthly plan in combination with different recipes (BlueApron.com, n.d.) since the company has just started up and is based in New York, the expected brand identification is small, this corresponds with the findings in the former paragraph. Therefore, this brand is found suited as a basis for the manipulation material. Also, according to the standards of Lundqvist et al (2012), Blue Apron fits the same

standards as the material used in their study. A brand as Blue Apron, which specializes in food and ingredients is, according to the authors, an excellent measure for storytelling and brand experience, since people are familiar with the concept of food and recipes (2014). The manipulation is build out of two parts, the first part entails a written manipulation consisting out of a cover story including characteristics of both storytelling and the mental model. The second part is the image of the corresponding Facebook post. These Facebook posts are diverted and edited from the official Facebook page of Blue Apron. In order to keep the study simple and valid, the same image is used for each corresponding manipulation. In this way, the study measures what it wants to measure and eliminates the chance of additional confounding variables, which will be explained later in the chapter. Every separate manipulation covers the same message and tone in relation with the three different mental models. Each text is manipulated in accordance to the different manipulations. Manipulation 1, 2 and 3 each entail a more static, rhetorical text which is based upon a press release as stated in the study of Keer et al (2013). Manipulation 4, 5 and 6 are more focused on a narrative, testimonial tone but are still communicating the same content as manipulation 1, 2 and 3.

In order to decrease the chance of language issues, or other structural problems within the experiment, a pilot test was conducted among ten respondents in order to discuss their experiences and suggestions for improving the validity of the study. The data of this pilot study was not saved since the emphasis for this pilot was to examine whether the experiment was clear and doable. As a result, the pilot showed that in general, the experiment is complete in its notion. However, there were two notable adjustments that need to be made. Firstly, some grammatical errors which were needed to be solved in order to make the study understandable for every respondent. Another point of interest was the amount of time that every respondent had to look at the Facebook post, which was originally 60 seconds, as a result of the pilot, this was decreased to 30 seconds, since all the pilot respondents stated that 60 seconds was to long for them to keep their attention. The goal of this pilot study was to enlarge the reliability and validity of the study.

3.4 Measures and operationalization

3.4.1 Independent variables

The experiment which is conducted entails two different independent measures to examine the different relevant concepts. First, storytelling, which is based on the previous studies of Lundqvist et al (2012) and Green and Bock (2000). The second independent variable in this study, business customer interaction, is based on the research of Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke (2015). As a result, the authors developed the mental model framework of business customer interaction. Three out of four will be included for the research as described in the previous section. The operationalization of this study builds up from the manipulations which are used. These manipulations entail the factor of storytelling and the factor of the mental models as described in the theoretical framework. Firstly, the variable storytelling is described in the following paragraph.

The independent variable of storytelling is divided into two factors, rhetorical and narrative. As described in the theoretical framework, rhetorical storytelling includes stimulus material which is mainly based on fact-based elements, this means that the three manipulations containing rhetorical storytelling, are characterized by fact-based arguments, for example the use of 'press release' to notify the content is from a credible source. To manipulate rhetorical storytelling, respondents were viewed a Facebook post which was based on a press release containing fact-based content. Narrative storytelling includes stimulus material which is based upon testimonial elements, which means that personal experience will be the focus of the different manipulations texts in the category of narrative storytelling. For example, the emphasis on how customer reviews and personal experiences are helping to make Blue Apron a better and sustainable company. To manipulate narrative storytelling, respondents were viewed a Facebook post which was based on a testimonial message containing personal content. The second independent variable for this study, entail the concept of business customer interaction.

Business customer interaction was manipulated due to three conditions, which were, business to customer, business with customer and business for customer. These three models were manipulated in the introduction text before the respondents were viewed the actual Facebook post. For business to customer, the introductory text described a setting were Blue

Apron's main goal was to promote its products and to increase sales. For business with customer, the introductory text described a setting where Blue Apron's main goal was to connect and collaborate with customers and to create interactions. Lastly, business for customers, were the introductory text described the main goal of Blue Apron as empowering the customers and illustrating the brand as a sustainable and environmentally friendly brand.

In total there are six groups on manipulations for this study. In Table 2 the groups are illustrated as a whole including the shortened name. The first three groups are focused on rhetorical storytelling in combination with the mental models, business to customer, business with customer and business for customer. These first three groups are thus focused on fact-based rhetorical storytelling, while the other three groups are focused on testimonial narrative storytelling.

Table 2. Manipulations conditions numbered

Name of condition	Nr
Rhetorical storytelling + business to customer	1
Rhetorical storytelling + business with customer	2
Rhetorical storytelling + business for customer	3
Narrative storytelling + business to customer	4
Narrative storytelling + business with customer	5
Narrative storytelling + business for customer	6

3.4.2 Dependent variables

The dependent variable, brand experience is measured according to the conceptual model of Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009). The model is used for the formulation of the questions in the survey of the experiment. This model connects to the method in terms of the different dimensions which are categorized in different types of questions which allows the researcher to measure how brand experience is constructed by the respondents. These questions were statements which are measured with a one to seven Likert scale on 'strongly disagree' and 'strongly agree'. This measure relates back to the different notions of the studies of Delgadillo, Lundqvist, Brakus and Green (2004; 2012; 2009; 2000).

The model of brand experience consists out of four different dimensions; sensory, affective, behavioural and intellectual. Each dimension has its corresponding questions to measure every element of brand experience. Firstly, sensory, which asks if the brand makes a strong impression the respondent's visual sense. The questions which were asked for this dimension were: 'This brand makes a strong impression on my visual sense', 'I find this brand interesting when looking at it.', 'This brand does not appeal to my senses.'. The last question here, is reversed since the nature of the answer is the opposite then the other questions. Secondly, affective, which measures if the brand induces feelings or sentiments. The questions which were asked for this dimension were: 'This brand induces feelings and sentiments.', 'I do not feel strong emotions for this brand.', 'This brand is an emotional brand'. Here, the second question is reversed. Thirdly, behavioural, which indicates if the respondent is triggered to act as a result of experiencing the brand. The questions which were asked for this dimension were: 'I am likely to buy the brand.', 'I am likely to change my behaviour in any way because of the brand.', 'The intention of this brand is to trigger an action'. And lastly, intellectual, which asks if the respondent is thinking about the brand in any way. The questions which were asked for this dimension were: 'I engage in a lot of thinking when I encounter this brand.', 'This brand does not make me think.', 'This brand stimulates my curiosity and problem-solving capabilities'. Here, the second question is reversed.

For the statistical analysis of this study, all the values of the questions for brand experience are computed into a new variable, 'MeanBrandExperience' ($M= 3.55$, $SD= 1.12$), where how lower the value, how lower the overall brand experience, how higher the value, how higher the brand experience in a scale of one to seven. To test the reliability of the twelve different questions of brand experience, a reliability test was conducted. The Cronbach's Alpha= .678 which indicates an acceptable reliability for this conceptual model.

3.4.3 Additional measures

This research also has to deal with some additional measures. Firstly, brand identification, which could bias the results of this study since the potential experience with a brand before, or the lack of experience with a brand can influence the outcomes of the experiment (Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2009). Therefore, the experiment also contains

control questions which measure the identification and familiarity of the respondent with the brand. The second additional measure, which is of importance, is the likelihood of the respondents to engage with the Facebook post.

Brand identification was measured in this study to control for the situation in which respondents would recognize the brand (name) used in the manipulation conditions of this study. Firstly, all respondents ($N=151$) answered the question on whether they were familiar with the brand (name) used in the manipulations of the study, the BlueApron. Only 9.3% of them stated that they are familiar with BlueApron as a brand ($N=14$). The respondents which were familiar with the brand were asked to answer a set of five questions on a Likert scale of one to seven. For these five items, a new variable was computed measuring the total score of brand identification (TotalScorebrandidentification) for the fourteen respondents which were familiar with the brand ($M=2.29$, $SD=1.13$). This mean also indicates, that the respondents which were familiar with the brand, do not feel identification with the brand on a high basis. This study conducted an ANOVA for the variables of brand identification and brand experience to test any significance between the two variables. The outcomes of this test of variance resulted in the claim that brand identification has no significant impact in this experiment for brand experience, $F(9, 4) = 3.50$, $p = .120$, partial $n^2 = .887$. However, the study has to keep in mind that the sample size ($N=14$) was small for respondents which were familiar with the brand. As stated above, since the remaining 90.7% is not familiar with the brand ($N=137$), it is safe to state that there was low identification with the brand for the majority of the respondents. And the respondents are not biased due to former familiarity and identification with the brand. The Cronbach's Alpha value of brand identification, .805, shows a good reliability of the five measures.

The experimental survey also entails questions concerning the engagement of the respondents on the shown Facebook post of Blue Apron. The respondents were asked three questions; 'How likely is it that you would like the Facebook advertisement', 'How likely is it that you would comment on the Facebook advertisement', and 'how likely is it that you would share the advertisement'. With these three questions, one variable was computed (Likelihoodofsocialmediainteraction). Statistical measures of this variable are found in the findings sections of this study. The Cronbach's Alpha for these three questions is .867, which indicates a good reliability.

Additional validity and reliability of this study lies in the basis of the survey and the concepts which are driving the experiment, the measures in the study itself are based on previous literature as previously described in this chapter and the variables therefore are relevant and valid measures for this study. The reliability of the experiment is granted with the inclusion of the measures for the confounding variables which are already identified. Also, the different reliability tests (Cronbach's Alpha values) indicated reliable measures as described in the previous paragraphs.

3.5 Analytical approach

Data which will result from this research will be analysed with SPSS and focusses on the variance of the dependent variable. The statistical method which will be used, will be the ANOVA and MANOVA. The ANOVA is a statistical procedure which is used to analyse data which is based on interval or ratio scale data (Privitera, 2015). An ANOVA is conducted in order to determine if the means in each experimental group significantly vary (Privitera, 2015). For this analysis the two-way between-subjects, this test is used when there are two or more group means at stake, according to Privitera (2015). Between-groups variation is the source of variation which forms the basis for the different hypotheses that are stated for this thesis. The null hypotheses for this analysis are always statements which states that each mean is the same as or equal to the others (Privitera, 2015). In order to keep the ANOVA valid and credible, the four following assumptions are granted for (Privitera, 2015). First, normality, which assumes that the data is sampled is normally distributed, this research will take this into account when collecting the data. Second, random sampling, as stated before, the data of for this research is acquired randomly in the population. Third, independence, the probabilities of each measured outcome in the study are independent or equal. Using random sampling satisfies this assumption (Privitera, 2015). An MANOVA is conducted to test the manipulation of business customer interaction, with the dependent variable consisting out of the manipulations check items, which corresponds with business customer interaction. If there is a significantly difference between the groups, post hoc tests will be conducted in the form of an independent sample T-test, which is used to measure the variance between means, between two groups only (Privitera, 2015). Comparisons between the experimental groups will be made to measure where the significant difference is occurring. These described

procedures will therefore be used to measure the hypotheses which are stated in the theoretical sections of this thesis. Other statistical analysis entails the use of frequency tables, descriptive statistics and reliability tests.

3.6 Conclusion

To conclude this methodological section, this quantitative study tends to complement the previous studies which are qualitative in their nature. The choice for an experimental study is based on the testing of casual relationships which is of importance for testing and answering the formulated hypotheses and main research question. The experiment consists out of six conditions which are evenly distributed among the respondents. The sampling of the study is done via Facebook. Facebook is relevant in terms of marketing purposes and its popularity among brands for telling stories and narratives. This connects to the conceptual variables related to the experiment. As a dependent variable, brand experience measures how respondents are experiencing the chosen brand, Blue Apron, in a positive or negative way. This variable consists out of four different dimensions. The independent variables for this experiment entail the following: storytelling and business customer interaction. As a possible confounding variable, brand identification is identified beforehand. The experiment uses the concept of brand identification in order to maintain validity and reliability of the study. Other additional measures, such as the likelihood of sharing, are integrated in order to dive more into the concepts of social media and engagement. Lastly, in terms of statistical procedures, ANOVA and MANOVA are conducted to test the hypotheses and to answer the main research question.

4. Findings

In this chapter, all the findings of the study, are presented and analysed; SPSS outputs of these analyses are presented in the Appendix. First, this chapter will present the sample characteristics and the main descriptive statistics. Further on, the main findings related to hypothesis testing will be presented. Finally, additional findings will be presented as well.

4.1 Sample characteristics

4.1.1 Demographics

In total, this study collected 201 respondents. After close examination of the data, 49 (24.38%) respondents dropped out right after the manipulation without answering any question, including the demographical questions, failing to complete the survey. Given these reasons, this study chose to leave these 49 respondents out from the actual analysis. The resulted sample included 152 respondents; one other respondent was left out since the age of this respondent was 166, interpreted as being unrealistic, potentially being an error; the oldest person alive is 122, according to Guinness World Records (2018). In the end, a total of 151 respondents is used in the analyses. The random assignment of respondents to each of the six experimental conditions was made practically possible by using Qualtrics. The six manipulation conditions were evenly distributed. Rhetorical storytelling + business to customer, 17.2% (N=26), rhetorical storytelling + business with customer, 16.6% (N=25), rhetorical storytelling + business for customer, 16.6% (N=25), narrative storytelling + business to customer, 14.6% (N=22), narrative storytelling + business-with customer, 18.5% (N=28) and narrative storytelling + business for customer, 16.6% (N=25).

To make a distinction, between the two independent variables, storytelling and business customer interaction, the variable of manipulation is also split up into two new variables. The first variable which encompasses narrative (N=75) and rhetorical (N=76) storytelling: storytelling (N=151). Secondly, the other variable consists out of the three types of business customer interaction: BusinessCustomerInteraction (N=151). Furthermore, basic statistics entail first gender, and second, age. For gender (N=149), it is surprisingly to see that,

apart from two missing values, the distribution of male and female is almost exactly the same. Where male respondents are present with a percentage of 49.7% (N=74), female respondents are covering 50.3% (N=75) of the total respondents. Regarding age, there are a few interesting points to cover. The average respondent has an age of 30.58 years ($SD=11.61$). The skewness of age is 1.34, which indicates a positively skewed direction for this variable. The kurtosis value is .668. With the minimum age at 18 and a maximum age of 66. The most occurring age, the mode, is the age of 23 years old, with a percentage of 10.6%.

When it comes to the level of education, the third demographical value for this study, is education (N=147) The education direction of HBO is the most popular with a valid percentage of 38.1% (N=56). University Bachelor, 24.5% (N=36) and MBO, 17.7% (N=26) are the two following values. The least occurring values are high school, 12.9% (N=19), masters, 6.1% (N=9) and PhD, .7% (N=1).

4.1.2 Social media use and additional measures

This part of the basic statistics paragraph consists out of the variables which are affiliated with social media use and the engagement of respondents on social media. Respondents were asked about their activity on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, WeChat, Tumblr, LinkedIn and WhatsApp. From the total of 151 respondents, only one respondent failed to complete these questions, leading to one missing value. Firstly, the use of Facebook resulted in high frequencies for the values of ‘more than 5 times a day’ (N=80) and ‘1-4 times a day’ (N=33). Twitter has the highest frequency for the value ‘never’ (N=74). Instagram has the highest group of users for the value of ‘more than 5 times a day’ (N=63). 32 of the respondents answered ‘never’ on the question how often they use Instagram. Snapchat scores relatively low with the highest frequency for ‘never’ (N=55). The second highest frequency is for the value of ‘more than 5 times a day’ (N=37). The findings for the use of WeChat are clear, 131 respondents never used WeChat, the same for Tumblr (N=116). LinkedIn is more evenly distributed: ‘more than 5 times a day’ (N=16), ‘1-4 times a day’ (N=21), ‘most days’ (N=22), ‘a few times a week’ (N=26), ‘about once a week’ (N=21), ‘less often than weekly’ (N=16) and ‘never’ (N=28). YouTube three highest frequencies are for the values of ‘more than 5 times a day’ (N=29), ‘1-4 times a day’ (N=27) and ‘most days’ (N=29). WhatsApp scores the highest on ‘more than 5 times a day’ of all the values (N=123).

In terms of social media engagement (Likelihood of social media interaction) ($M=2.10$, $SD=1.06$) the skewness of this variable is .721 and the kurtosis -.432. This variable is composed out of three variables. ‘how likely is it that you would like the Facebook advertisement’ ($M=2.32$, $SD=1.22$), ‘how likely is it that you would comment on the Facebook advertisement’ ($M=2.07$, $SD=1.20$) and ‘how likely is it that you would share the Facebook advertisement’ ($M=1.89$, $SD=1.17$).

4.2 Descriptive statistics and correlations

Table A shows the different means, standard deviation and intercorrelations of both dependent and independent variables.

Table A.

	Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1	Brand Experience	3.55	1.12	-			
2	Social media engagement	2.10	1.06	.762**	-		
3	Brand Identification	2.29	1.13	.547*	.455	-	
4	Age	30.58	11.61	-.263**	-.151	-0.77	-

** $p < .01$

* $p < .05$

According to the table above there is a strong significant positive correlation between social media engagement and brand experience. Regarding age and brand experience there is a significant strong negative correlation.

4.3 Manipulation check items

To check whether the manipulation of storytelling and of the business-customer interaction mental model were successful, ANOVAs were conducted. First, checking how successful the manipulation of storytelling was, a one-way ANOVA was conducted with storytelling as an independent variable and the manipulation check item for storytelling (“the advertisement on

social media I saw was telling a story or narrative”) as a dependent variable. The model was not found to be significant, $F(1, 149) = .021, p = .885$, partial $n^2 = .000$. Even though the means were in the expected direction (narrative storytelling, $M=3.93, SD=1.61$ vs. rhetorical storytelling, $M=3.89, SD=1.66$), it can be concluded that the manipulation of storytelling proved to be unsuccessful.

Second, checking how successful the manipulation of the business-customer interaction mental model was, a MANOVA was conducted. Examining the Wilks’ Lambda, this test is also not significant, $F= .718, p = .633$, partial $n^2 = .015$. However, when studying the means of business customer interaction in comparison with the manipulation check items. The means show the correct direction. Question one, display a higher mean for business to customer ($M=5.19, SD= 1.38$) than business with customer ($M=5.08, SD= 1.33$) and business for customer ($M=4.72, SD= 1.52$). Question two shows a higher mean for business with customer ($M=4.06, SD= 1.57$) than business to customer ($M=3.83, SD= 1.81$) and business for customer ($M=3.86, SD= 1.57$). Lastly, question three shows a higher mean for business for customer ($M=4.24, SD= 1.80$) than business to customer ($M=4.23, SD= 1.83$) and business with customer ($M=4.19, SD= 1.44$).

Even though the manipulations proved to be unsuccessful, the decision is made to continue with the main analysis of testing the hypotheses due to the correct directions and to examine whether there were any significant results.

4.4 Hypotheses testing

This paragraph will entail the analysis which focuses the most on the different formed hypotheses for this study. Brand experience is the dependent variable in this study and to examine the effect of both storytelling and business customer interaction on brand experience, an ANOVA was conducted. This manipulation variable consists out of the six different conditions which the respondents were faced. Firstly, all the six manipulations are used in one variable to test the significance of both manipulations at once. As stated above, an ANOVA analysis was performed in which the effects of storytelling and business-customer interaction in connection with brand experience were examined. The statistics above state that there is no significance between the independent and the dependent variable, $F(5, 145) = 1.49, p = .198$, partial $n^2 = .049$.

However, it is interesting to test whether storytelling or business customer interaction as a stand-alone has a significant impact on brand experience in order to test *H1: Narrative storytelling results in higher levels of positive brand experience than rhetorical storytelling*. To test this hypothesis, an ANOVA of both independent variables, starting with storytelling was conducted. Storytelling was found to be a significant variable for the total score of brand experience, $F(1, 145) = 6.63, p = .011, \text{partial } n^2 = .044$. Examining the means of brand experience regarding narrative and rhetorical storytelling, the score of brand experience is higher in the conditions consisting out of narrative storytelling ($M=3.78, SD= 1.13$) than rhetorical storytelling ($M=3.31, SD=1.07$). Therefore, H1 is accepted.

For the second hypothesis, *H2: A business-customer interaction enhancing a two-way communication on social media (i.e., either business with customers or business for customers) results in higher levels of positive brand experience than a business-customer interaction enhancing a one-way communication on social media (i.e., business to customers)* an ANOVA was conducted to test the new computed variable of business customer interaction for significance with the total score of brand experience (Table 6 in appendix). Business customer interaction is not found to be significant, $F(2, 145) = .151, p = .860, \text{partial } n^2 = .002$. Therefore, H2 is rejected. However, the direction of the means of the variables indicate that, the total means of business with customer ($M= 3.60, SD= .990$) and business for customer ($M=3.58, SD=1.12$) are slightly higher than business to customer ($M=3.46, SD=1.27$) (Table 5 in appendix).

The following hypotheses, include the interaction effects of the different manipulation conditions with each other. The test for these possible interaction effects include a 2x3 ANOVA test. Since the interaction effect between the variable of business customer interaction and storytelling was not significant, $F(2, 145) = .147, p = .863, \text{partial } n^2 = .002$, *H3a, H3b, H3c and H3d* are all rejected directly, furthermore the means will be compared to check the direction of the variables. *H3a: The business with customers mental model (enhancing a two-way communication on social media) results in higher levels of positive brand experience than the business to customers mental model (enhancing a one-way communication on social media), for social media posts using narrative storytelling*. And *H3b: The business for customers mental model (enhancing a two-way communication on social media) results in higher levels of positive brand experience than the business to customers mental model (enhancing a one-way communication on social media), for social*

media posts using narrative storytelling. Business for customers + narrative storytelling ($M=3.87$, $SD=1.12$) and Business with customer + narrative storytelling ($M= 3.81$, $SD=.901$) scores higher than Business to customer + narrative storytelling ($M= 3.65$, $SD=1.41$), meaning, the directions of these hypotheses are correct.

The remaining hypotheses are the following: *H3c: The business with customers mental model (enhancing a two-way communication on social media) results in lower levels of positive brand experience that the business to customers mental model (enhancing a one-way communication on social media), for social media posts using rhetorical storytelling*. And, *H3d: The business for customers mental model (enhancing a two-way communication on social media) results in lower levels of positive brand experience that the business to customers mental model (enhancing a one-way communication on social media), for social media posts using rhetorical storytelling*. For this analysis, the overall brand experience score will be compared per condition. The means of brand experience for business with customers and business for customers + rhetorical storytelling is respectively 3.35 ($SD=1.05$) and 3.28 ($SD=1.05$). For business to customers + rhetorical storytelling this is 3.30 ($SD=1.14$). Therefore, the direction of H3c is not correct, but the direction of H3d is correct.

Finally, it was tested whether age, gender, educational level and social media use could be used as covariates in the analyses; the correlations with the dependent variables were tested, the independence with the independent variables was tested and the homogeneity of the regression slopes was examined. Results showed that none of the variables could be used as covariates in this study, making further analyses unnecessary.

5. Discussion

The experimental survey of this study examined whether storytelling and business customer interaction had any effect on the concept of brand experience as described in the theoretical framework. Building up from the theoretical foundation of the three main concepts, this study emphasized on potential effects of storytelling, business customer interaction and brand experience. The main finding is that storytelling has a significant effect on brand experience, narrative storytelling increases the amount of brand experience for users of Facebook. The other concept, business customer interaction resulted to not have a significant effect on brand experience. The main research question entailed: *To what extent does storytelling and business customer interaction affects brand experience?* The answer of this research question is elaborated in-depth within the following paragraph (5.1). An overview of the different hypotheses and results can be found in the findings section of this study. Overall, this study connects storytelling and business customer interaction variables to examine how individuals experience a brand and to measure the effect on brand experience.

5.1 Theoretical and practical implications

The findings of this study contain important theoretical and practical implications. The first finding addresses the effect of storytelling, both narrative and rhetorical, on brand experience. Respondents which were showed a Facebook post based on narrative storytelling turned out to score significantly higher on brand experience in comparison with respondents which were showed a Facebook post based on rhetorical storytelling. From a theoretical perspective, this finding relates back to the study of Lundqvist et al (2012) which concluded a positive result of storytelling as a whole, on brand experience. The findings of this study add to the literature, since Lundqvist et al (2012) only examined storytelling as one concept. This study divides storytelling into two concepts, narrative and rhetorical storytelling in order to dive more into the complexity of the concept. The interplay between narrative and rhetorical storytelling this study found, is a valuable addition for previous studies such as Lundqvist et al (2012) and Delgadillo and Escalas (2004). The findings of this study illustrate how the concept of storytelling is complex in its existence. On the other hand, zooming in, on only rhetorical

storytelling, the findings of this study correlate with a previous study of Iversen (2014), which introduced rhetorical storytelling as a more static and textual form of communication with less capabilities of transporting a message as defined in the transportation theory (Green and Bock (2000). Diving more in the transportation theory, which formed the basis for concepts based on the transportation of narratives, all the findings concerning storytelling as described above, relate back to this theoretical concept. Lastly, the addition of testimonial and fact-based elements in the experiment as proposed by Keer et al (2013) and described in the theoretical framework, connects the findings regarding storytelling to a wider theoretical notion, it enhances the findings of this study and provide a theoretical backbone.

The second finding of this study addresses the effect of business customer interaction on brand experience. The statistical analysis for the corresponding hypothesis resulted in no significance between the two variables. The means of both two-way communication (the model of business with customer and business for customers) were higher than the means of the model concerning one-way communication (business to customer). However, since the two variables of brand experience and business customer interaction had no significance, further examination was not applicable in this situation. Reflecting back to the theoretical part of the concept of business customer interaction, these findings add to the previous literature in terms of understanding how the three mental models work in relation to brand experience. This study showed that the way in which brands are interacting with their (potential) customers does not affect the brand experience significantly. Therefore, this study argues that each element of engaging (business to customer, business with customer and business for customer) can be applied by a brand to engage with their (potential) customers without significantly impacting the brand experience of the individual. However, previous literature of Nagy (2005), argues that one-way communication has less interacting capabilities than two-way communication. Also, McMilland and Hwang (2002) concluded in their study that two-way communication is directly connected towards more interactivity. As stated before, the means do correlate with these theoretical claims. Therefore, the results of this study are interesting in terms of interaction and engagement since there is no significance between the two variables. Furthermore, it is interesting to examine whether interaction effects are in place for the variable of business customer interaction, storytelling and brand experience.

The studies of Nagy (2005) and McMilland and Hwang (2002), indicate that interactivity is strongly connected to two-way communications. Reflecting back on the studies

of Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke (2015), Lundqvist et al (2012) and Green and Bock (2000) narrative storytelling also correlates on theoretical basis, with a higher amount of interactivity. One-way communication is perceived as a traditional way of communicating with lower levels of interactivity. One-way communication therefore, links directly to rhetorical storytelling. This study examined whether these connections are significantly connected. Since business customer interaction was not significant, all the corresponding hypotheses regarding interaction effects were immediately rejected. However, the means were compared to examine in which direction the one-way and two-way communication possible interaction effects were guided. Regarding narrative storytelling, two-way communication results in higher levels of brand experience, this corresponds with the previous theoretical implications. Examining rhetorical storytelling, two-way communication results partly in lower levels of brand experience, this also corresponds with the previous theoretical implications. Meaning that narrative storytelling works at its best with two-way communications model of business customer interaction, and rhetorical storytelling works better with one-way communication models of business customer interaction. Literature of de Vries, Gensler and Leeflang (2012) add to this statement with their findings that when a brand is aiming to increase the amount of comments on a Facebook post, creating a bond, increasing interactivity directly strengthens the brand experience of the brand. An interesting insight of the findings of this thesis is that business customer interaction models does not have any impact solely on brand experience, but whenever business customer interaction is combined with storytelling it results in a clear positive or negative direction in relation to brand experience depending on which type of storytelling is the focus. However, this study needs to keep in mind that no significance was found between brand experience and business customer interaction.

In short, as an answer on the main research question, brands can increase brand experience by using narrative storytelling as a backbone for their social media communications. In terms of business customer interaction, there is no significant relation with brand experience, meaning that either two-way or one-way communication can be used to communicate as a brand without directly losing brand experience on the side of the customers. However, the directional interaction effects illustrated that when using storytelling and business customer interaction as a couple, the combination can affect brand experience. Since business customer interaction is not significant, these combinations are not statistically proved. As a result, narrative storytelling results in higher levels of brand experience when

enhancing a two-way business customer interaction model. And rhetorical storytelling results in lower levels of brand experience when enhancing a two-way business customer interaction model. To conclude, linking back to the main research question; *To what extent does storytelling and business customer interaction affect brand experience?* When taking the body of text above into consideration, the study found out that storytelling affects brand experience in terms of the type of storytelling that is used, narrative storytelling results in higher levels of brand experience. And business customer interaction does not affect brand experience in terms of higher or lower levels when comparing the three types of mental models of business customer interaction.

5.2 Limitations and strengths

Firstly, this study wants to acknowledge that using a sample which is acquired via Facebook in a convenient way, may limit the generalizability of the findings to other social media platforms. In addition, sample wise, the high number of young respondents and low number of respondents above 50 years, illustrate the not evenly distributed demographic of age among the respondents. However, since Facebook was the main focus regarding the study in its whole, the population fits the research goals which were drafted beforehand regarding choice of social media platform. Secondly, this study needs to critically assess the used manipulations for the conducted experiment. In order to check if the manipulations worked out correctly for the two independent variables, business customer interaction and storytelling, respondents were asked to answer one manipulation check item for storytelling, and three manipulation check items for business customer interaction. Both business customer interaction and storytelling resulted in not significant manipulations. The manipulations therefore did not work appropriately. This study chose to continue at that point with the analysis because of the correct directions of the corresponding means. Since the manipulations did not work, this heavily impacts the results of the study which are discussed in the previous paragraph. This decreases the reliability of the study. There are several reasons which can figure as the possible cause of the failing manipulations, these will be explained in the following paragraph.

Starting with storytelling. For this variable, only one manipulation check item was in place, this limits the room for error and the capability to reflect more widely on the manipulation of storytelling. To get more in-depth on the manipulation of storytelling itself,

this variable was manipulated in terms of testimonial and fact-based content. The different Facebook posts which were manipulated for storytelling encompassed two versions, one which stated personal experience, and the other included fact-based percentages. The main body text and picture were chosen to be the exact same for validity reasons. Reflecting critically on this choice, a possible cause for the failing manipulation can be the correlation and resemblance between the posts causing confusion among the respondents.

The second manipulated variable, business customer interaction entailed three elements in which respondents needed to scale which of the three items was most applicable for the shown introduction text and Facebook post. These items were clearly defined and pilot tested in order to check if the respondents understood the questions. However, the manipulation of this variable was done in the last introductory text before the Facebook post was shown to the respondents. In this text, the strategy of the brand was explained in the form of one of the three models for business customer interaction. Taking a critical perspective, respondents may have skipped through this introductory text since they already were bored by reading, or if they just wanted to complete the survey on the go in little time. For example, respondents who were completing the survey on a mobile phone, do not want to read and possibly scrolled directly through the introduction text because they had a little amount of time. Taking this in mind, the reason of the failed business customer interaction manipulation can be found in the presenting of the manipulated text.

Lastly, the researcher received feedback on the study from a couple of the respondents which completed the survey. The most interesting comment was the complexity of the survey. For example, some respondents were not familiar with certain concepts which were used in the questions. But more important, since the sample on Facebook was mainly consisting out of native Dutch speaking individuals, some were not proficient enough with reading and answering in the English language. Taking this in mind, regarding the sample, manipulations could have lost their power since not every respondent caught the essence of the study and the corresponding questions. However, this does not mean the complete experimental study failed, regarding brand identification and also the directional means, this study still had some interesting strengths and statements to tell, which will be described in the following paragraph.

The experimental approach of this study allowed testing for causal relationships between the variables. This contributes to a better understanding of the study and the

statistical findings which are described before. These casual relationships collaborate with previous literature to enhance the quality and reliability of the statements made within this study. Secondly, the qualitative nature of this study complements previous studies which were taking a qualitative approach. The choice of quantitative research opens up new insights within the concepts of social media and storytelling. Another strength of this study is the controlled variable of brand identification. Brand identification played an important role in this study since this study wanted to eliminate the cofounding variable of familiarity as much as possible without harming the cover story or chosen brand. The study needed a tangible brand, such as Blue Apron to keep the study realistic. Only fourteen respondents stated they knew the brand before participating in the study. Those fourteen respondents (9.3%) scored an average of 2.29 on brand identification on a scale of seven, which indicates that even when the respondents were familiar with the brand, their personal identification is low, which means that the majority of the respondents is not biased with previous opinions which could contaminate the outcome of the study. Furthermore, the reliability of the variables of brand experience (MeanBrandExperience), social media engagement (Likelihoodofsocialmediainteraction) and brand identification (TotalScorebrandidentification) were tested positive, which indicates the reliability of the chosen measures.

Additionally, the findings of this study are relevant because the data which was acquired for the experiment is collected via Facebook, on this platform, storytelling and interactivity is important in the current marketing era. The experimental approach of this study continues on the previous study of Lundqvist et al (2012), Ryden, Ringberg and Wilke (2015) and Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009). Current findings can help marketers to understand more about the connection between storytelling, business customer interaction and brand experience. However, this study opens up for follow-up studies to shed more light on the complexity of the issues.

5.3 Future research

Further research should test whether the findings in this study are applicable when the manipulation is significant. In this way, the manipulated conditions get more value and new insights will come to the surface. Therefore, there are certain elements which need to be taken into consideration which could improve or enhance this study. Firstly, different samples in terms of demographics, especially age, can be used to improve the generalizability of the

research since the age was not evenly distributed within this study. Also, the method of sampling can be enhanced by selecting respondents which are more familiar with the works within social media. For example, a population could be used which only consists out of marketers to test their implications and feelings towards this topic. Secondly, the population can be shifted towards another social media platform to test whether there is any difference in social media platform regarding brand experience. For example, Instagram or LinkedIn, which are both platforms where branded content is used for interaction with (potential) customers. Thirdly, the manipulation of business customer interaction needs to be stronger. A stronger manipulation can enhance the impact and significance of the study to test whether there is an effect of business customer interaction on brand experience. For example, a clearer distinction in the manipulated conditions between the different types of business customer interaction instead of briefly mentioning these types. As described before, the lack of independently manipulating business customer interaction can be solved in further research. By doing so, the concept of business customer interaction can increase its value with the study. In addition to improving the manipulation of business customer interaction, the concept of interactivity (one-way and two-way communication) can figure as a tool to make an explicit distinction between the three types of business customer interaction since there is correlation between these two concepts. Lastly, further research could investigate how other variables come into place which could or could not affect brand experience. Research could also look at how storytelling and business customer interaction effect brand experience on an offline basis, for example, thinking of concepts as word of mouth and print design. It is interesting to examine how the online and the offline world correlate with each other in terms of these concepts since there are still brands which are mainly focussing on offline marketing. For example, business-to-business (B2B) brands which are in need of a different approach. Further research could examine how B2B brands are constructed in terms of storytelling, business customer interaction and brand experience.

To conclude, it is clear that this study extends on the current literature and brings new insights which can be used for further studies to dive more into the complexity of storytelling and business customer interaction. This study found out that storytelling has a significant impact on brand experience and that when using narrative storytelling, brand experience tends to increase. More important, the variable of business customer interaction opens up for further research since the findings of this study turned out to not be significant. Also, as described in

the previous paragraph, business customer interaction in its notion, is an interesting and complex concept which can be further enhanced as a manipulation to enhance the research in its whole. One-way and two-way communication adds to this concept since interactivity is an important notion when talking about brand experience and engagement with the brand. Other interesting elements for further research which can be enhanced entail sample, social media platform and population choices. Strengths of this study are found within the qualitative and experimental approach, in the addition of brand identification and the strong formulated research question and hypotheses. Lastly, to conclude this study, these results are promising and open up many interesting touch points for further research.

6. Literature

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Appendix A: Protocol

Welcome to this study!

I am Sebastiaan Brouwer and I am a Master student at the Erasmus University of Rotterdam.

This is a study about social media content planning, it takes approximately 5 minutes to complete.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to participate in an online experiment in which you are invited to take the role of a social media strategist, reviewing social media content for a company's Facebook page.

I will use the material from the study exclusively for academic work, such as further research, academic meetings and publications.

You are always free not to answer any particular question, and/or stop participating at any point.

I want to thank you in advance for completing this questionnaire.

Good luck!

Click on next to start with the study.

About the study

As announced on the previous page, the study is about social media content planning and you are invited to take the role of a social media strategist, reviewing social media content for a company's Facebook page. You will thereafter be shown social media content and first asked

to answers questions regarding your content selection decisions. You are also going to be asked about your experience with the brand and about your social media use. Some questions regarding demographics (such as your age, level of education) will be asked in the end of the study as well.

Make sure you carefully read what the study is about before you click on next.

[1. **Rhetorical** storytelling + *business to customer*]

For its social media strategy, the company is interested in using **facts-based content** for its Facebook posts to *speak about its business, to tell people what the company can offer and provide to its customers, to promote its products and recipes, to increase sales and stimulate customers' purchasing behaviour.*

[2. **Rhetorical** storytelling + *business with customer*]

For its social media strategy, the company is interested in using **facts-based content** for its Facebook posts to *connect and collaborate with customers, to create informal and personalized interactions and to facilitate the flow of ideas, allowing customers to become more emotionally and practically involved in the "business".*

[3. **Rhetorical** storytelling + *business for customer*]

For its social media strategy, the company is interested in using **facts-based content** for its Facebook posts to *create value for its customers, promoting the brand as a sustainable and environmentally-aware company, to empower the customers to connect and have interactions based on mutual interest, respect, and support for the local community as a whole.*

[4. **Narrative** storytelling + *business to customer*]

For its social media strategy, the company is interested in using **testimonial-based content** for its Facebook posts to *speak about its business, to tell people what the company can offer and provide to its customers, to promote its products and recipes, to increase sales and stimulate customers' purchasing behaviour.*

[5. **Narrative** storytelling + business with customer]

For its social media strategy, the company is interested in using **testimonial-based content** for its Facebook posts to *connect and collaborate with customers, to create informal and personalized interactions and to facilitate the flow of ideas, allowing customers to become more emotionally and practically involved in the “business”*.

[6. **Narrative** storytelling + business for customer]

For its social media strategy, the company is interested in using **testimonial-based content** for its Facebook posts to *create value for its customers, promoting the brand as a sustainable and environmentally-aware company, to empower the customers to connect and have interactions based on mutual interest, respect, and support for the local community as a whole*.

Below, you are shown a social media advertisement. Please **read and look at it carefully**. Once you click <<Next>>, you will be asked a set of questions.

[See manipulation for the picture in separate appendix] -> displayed for at least 30 seconds.

→ Next

Instructions

Based on the advertisement on social media you have seen previously, please answer the set of questions on the next page:

Manipulation check questions

1. The advertisement on social media I saw was telling a certain story or narrative?

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **Strongly agree**

2. Do you think the advertisement on social media invites the users to comment/reply on social media?

To a little extent 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 To a large extent

3. I would prioritize this type of content to be displayed on the Facebook page of this company.

To a little extent 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 To a large extent

4. Please state how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly agree
The social media strategy of this brand aims to promote its products to its customers and increase sales.									
The social media strategy of this brand aims to enhance the emotional bond with its customers.									
The social media strategy of this brand aims to promote sustainable corporate values to its customers.									

Questions regarding brand experience

Instructions

The following questions will ask you to indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding your first experience with Blue Apron as a brand, as a result from the previous showed content.

		Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly agree
Sensory	This brand makes a strong impression on my visual sense.									
	I find this brand interesting when looking at it.									
	This brand does not appeal to my senses.									
Affective	This brand induces feelings and sentiments.									
	I do not feel strong emotions for this brand.									
	This brand is an emotional brand.									
Behavioural	I am likely to buy the brand.									
	I am likely to change my behaviour in any way because of the brand.									
	The intention of this brand is to trigger an action.									
Intellectual	I engage in a lot of thinking when I encounter this brand.									
	This brand does not make me think.									

	This brand stimulates my curiosity and problem-solving capabilities.										
--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Brand identification

1. Are you familiar with this brand?

a. Yes

b. No

If yes, go to question 2, if no, skip to the following block (demographics).

2.

	Strongly disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly agree
I feel a strong sense of belonging to Blue Apron.									
I identify myself strongly with brand Blue Apron.									
Blue Apron embodies what I believe in									
Blue Apron is like a part of me									
Blue Apron has a great deal of personal meaning for me									

Social Media based questions

The following questions will ask you concerning your previous experiences with social media and your further preferences.

1. How likely is it that you would...

	Extremely unlikely	Slightly unlikely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Slightly likely	Extremely likely
Like the Facebook advertisement					
Comment on the Facebook advertisement					
Share the Facebook advertisement					

2. How active are you on the following social media platforms?

	More than 5 times a day	1-4 times a day	Most days (4-6 days a week)	A few times a week (2-4 days a week)	About once a week	Less often than weekly	Never
Facebook							
Twitter							
Instagram							

Snapchat							
Wechat							
Tumblr							
Linkedin							
YouTube							
Whatsapp							

Demographical questions

1. What is your age?
 - a.

2. Which highest type of education did you complete at this moment?
 - a. None
 - b. High school
 - c. MBO
 - d. HBO
 - e. University Bachelor
 - f. Masters
 - g. PhD

3. Gender
 - a. Male
 - b. Female


If you see this screen it means you are at the end of the questionnaire. Thank you!

Thank you for your participation in this study. If you have any questions or comments regarding this study, you can email it to: s.brouwer@student.eur.nl

Click next to save this questionnaire!

Appendix B: Manipulation images


Manipulation 1



Blue Apron
Sponsored

Like Page


Blue Apron is recommending this recent cooking book, launched by experts in the industry with hundreds of recipes used by the most renowned restaurants in the world. Readers of this book get to learn about the science of good cooking; 87% of the recipes presented are described by the physical sciences in terms of food preparation and cookery.



876 344 Comments 68 Shares


Like Comment Share

Manipulation 2







Blue Apron

Sponsored


 Like Page


Blue Apron is recommending this recent cooking book, launched by experts in the industry with hundreds of recipes used by the most renowned restaurants in the world. Readers of this book get to learn about the science of good cooking; 87% of the recipes presented are described by the physical sciences in terms of food preparation and cookery.




   876

344 Comments 68 Shares

 Like

 Comment

 Share

Manipulation 3

Blue Apron
Sponsored

Like Page

Blue Apron is recommending this recent cooking book, launched by experts in the industry with hundreds of recipes used by the most renowned restaurants in the world. Readers of this book get to learn about the science of good cooking; 87% of the recipes presented are described by the physical sciences in terms of food preparation and cookery.



👍❤️😱 876 344 Comments 68 Shares

Like Comment Share

Manipulation 4



Blue Apron
Sponsored

Like Page

Blue Apron is recommending this recent cooking book launched by enthusiastic visitors of the most renowned restaurants in the world. Readers of this book get to learn about the experiences of people who like tasty food and are inspired by fancy flavors.



876

344 Comments 68 Shares

Like Comment Share

Manipulation 5



Blue Apron
Sponsored

 Like Page

Blue Apron is recommending this recent cooking book launched by enthusiastic visitors of the most renowned restaurants in the world. Readers of this book get to learn about the experiences of people who like tasty food and are inspired by fancy flavors.



   876

344 Comments 68 Shares

 Like  Comment  Share

Manipulation 6



Blue Apron
Sponsored

Like Page

Blue Apron is recommending this recent cooking book launched by enthusiastic visitors of the most renowned restaurants in the world. Readers of this book get to learn about the experiences of people who like tasty food and are inspired by fancy flavors.



   876

344 Comments 68 Shares

 Like  Comment  Share

Appendix C: SPSS output

Table 1. Manipulation conditions

	<i>N</i>	Valid percent
Rhetorical storytelling + business with customer	25	16.6
Rhetorical storytelling + business for customer	25	16.6
Narrative storytelling + business to customer	22	14.6
Narrative storytelling + business with customer	28	18.5
Narrative storytelling + business for customer	25	16.6
Total	151	100,00

Table 2. Business customer interaction manipulation check descriptive statistics

	BusinessCustomerInteracton	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
The social media strategy of this brand aims to promote its products to its customers and increase sales.	Business to customer	5,19	1,379	48
	Business with customer	5,08	1,328	53
	Business for customer	4,72	1,526	50
	Total	4,99	1,417	151
The social media strategy of this brand aims to enhance the emotional bond with its customers.	Business to customer	3,83	1,814	48
	Business with customer	4,06	1,574	53
	Business for customer	3,86	1,565	50
	Total	3,92	1,643	151
The social media strategy of this brand aims to promote sustainable corporate values to its customers.	Business to customer	4,23	1,825	48
	Business with customer	4,19	1,442	53
	Business for customer	4,24	1,802	50
	Total	4,22	1,681	151

Table 3. Multivariate BusinessCustomerInteraction manipulation check

Effect		Value	F	Error <i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	,943	801,995 ^b	146,000	,000	,943
	Wilks' Lambda	,057	801,995 ^b	146,000	,000	,943
	Hotelling's Trace	16,479	801,995 ^b	146,000	,000	,943
	Roy's Largest Root	16,479	801,995 ^b	146,000	,000	,943
BusinessCustomerInteracton	Pillai's Trace	,029	,724	294,000	,631	,015
	Wilks' Lambda	,971	,721 ^b	292,000	,633	,015
	Hotelling's Trace	,030	,718	290,000	,635	,015
	Roy's Largest Root	,024	1,185 ^c	147,000	,318	,024

Table 4. Univariate dependent variable brand experience total score

Source	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	F	<i>p</i>	η^2
Intercept	1887,069	1	1887,069	1525,552	,000	,913
Manipulation	9,190	5	1,838	1,486	,198	,049
Error	179,361	145	1,237			
Total	2087,035	151				

Table 5. Brand experience total score descriptive statistics

Storytelling	BusinessCustomerInteraction	Mean	SD	N
rhetorical	business to customer	3,2981	1,14362	26
	business with customer	3,3533	1,04673	25
	business for customer	3,2800	1,05379	25
	Total	3,3103	1,06906	76
narrative	business to customer	3,6477	1,40834	22
	business with customer	3,8125	,90057	28
	business for customer	3,8733	1,12117	25
	Total	3,7844	1,12915	75
Total	business to customer	3,4583	1,26999	48
	business with customer	3,5959	,99012	53
	business for customer	3,5767	1,11776	50
	Total	3,5458	1,12116	151

Table 6. Univariate dependent variable brand experience total score

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	η^2
Intercept	1887.069	1	1887.069	1525.552	.000	.913
storytelling	8.204	1	8.204	6.633	.011	.044
BusinessCustomerInteraction	.374	2	.187	.151	.860	.002
storytelling * BusinessCustomerInteraction	.364	2	.182	.147	.863	.002
Error	179.361	145	1.237			
Total	2087.035	151				