The Friend, the Influencer, the Lawyer: a Qualitative Case Study of IKEA's Identity Expressions on Facebook

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Abstract

With the increased loss of control over the organizational identity (OrI) in social media, research has started to encourage organizations to hand over control of the OrI to the creation and distribution of stakeholders. This has created challenges for the strategic communicator in managing the OrI internally, as the employees adapt to the OrI in the mind of the stakeholder rather than the OrI set by the dominant coalition. In order to provide new knowledge on how to remain in some control over the organizational identity in social media, and indirectly control the organizational identity in the mind of the employees, this case study has sought to understand how "*external third-party stakeholders*" make sense of IKEA's expressed OrI. Through qualitative focus group interviews with IKEA stakeholders born between 1950 – 2000, the participants discussed their interpretations of conversations between IKEA and their stakeholders on Facebook. Through the lens of social constructivism, a thematic analysis was conducted on the empirical material retrieved from the focus groups, using impression management theory and sensemaking theory. One of the study's results suggests that when the organization express a response to their stakeholders that "*the external third-party stakeholder*" interpret as a diverting manoeuvre, they create a story to understand the identity expression. A process that risks creating an image far from the organization's original intention, hence, their control. The study concluded that in order to remain in control over the OrI on Facebook, the medium should be managed by a communication practitioner in a strategic role.

Keywords: *Organizational communication, Corporate identity, Organizational identity, Sensemaking, Impression management, Marketing, Social media, Identification*

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1. Introduction

1.1 Organizational Identity Management on Facebook – A Challenge for the Practice of Strategic Communication

Social media has enabled brands to speak directly to their stakeholders and interact on a daily basis (Yun et al., 2019), leading organizations to invest more resources and time in applying social media to their daily operations (Kim et al., 2017). IKEA is a good example of an organization that has invested in its workforce to interact with its stakeholders in the digital domain. Currently, IKEA Sverige has official accounts on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, where they share weekly posts from the organization. Moreover, the open social media platforms allow stakeholders to comment and express their thoughts and feelings about IKEA's operations, promoting interaction and creating a dialogue between the organization and social media users - a process IKEA has embraced. However, social media interaction is not a straightforward process to manage. It has been highlighted that social media has allowed conversations between stakeholders and the organization to reach hundreds or thousands of potential or existing customers, leading to new meanings and values attached to a brand beyond the organization's control (Xia, 2013). Particularly, Facebook has been deemed difficult to manage because stakeholders have control on this platform, which can result in a distorted brand image despite organizational efforts (Mingione et al., 2019).

The followers of organizational Facebook webpages can be divided into two stakeholder groups; (1) the people who actively voice their opinions and (2) the people that act as neutral observers of the interaction (Lillqvist & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013). This study is particularly focused on neutral observers, henceforth referred to as "external third-party stakeholders", since Facebook allows them to observe the organizational page without following it, which can result in certain topics being spread to other arenas beyond the organization's insights (Lillqvist & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013).

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Despite the lack of organizational control on Facebook, it is increasingly important to remain involved in social media interaction as an organization to foster stakeholder relationships and in doing so, create and communicate the organizational identity, henceforth referred to as OrI (Ozdora-Aksak & Atakan-Duman, 2015). According to Albert and Whetten's (1985) original definition in Cayla and Penaloza (2012), OrI is defined as the employees' shared understanding of what they consider to be distinctive, enduring and central about their organization (Cayla & Penaloza, 2012; reference to Albert & Whetten, 1985). Yet, the early definition has been criticized for being too unspecific (He & Brown, 2013), leaving different definitions of the OrI in research (see Eger, 2019; Hatch & Schultz, 2002). In this study, OrI is defined in line with Hatch and Schultz (2002) definition, presented in the next paragraph.

Hatch and Schultz (2002) created the Organizational Identity Dynamics (OID) model in order to conceptualize stakeholder involvement. The model defines the OrI as a product of the employees' sensemaking processes of identity which is influenced by the deep cultural structures of the organization. This is conveyed to the external stakeholders, who make sense of the expressed identity to form an image (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). Furthermore, the image is, by definition, a set of meanings attached to an object that helps people depict, remember and relate to it (Dowling, 1986). The culture and image formation is a reciprocal phenomenon in which the external stakeholder and the internal employee are constantly exchanging interpretations, causing the development of the OrI. A process that is described as:

"mirroring (the process by which identity is mirrored in the images of others), reflecting (the process by which identity is embedded in cultural understandings), expressing (the process by which culture makes itself known through identity claims), and impressing (the process by which expressions of identity leave impressions on others)" (Hatch & Schultz, 2002, p. 199)

When organizations convey their OrI to their stakeholders, it is common to use strategies that imbue the brand with personality traits and attributes (Frandsen, 2017), leading the stakeholder to view the brand as a person rather than an object (Aaker, 1997). With the new perspective of viewing the OrI as a reciprocal prod-

uct that arises with the involvement of stakeholders, and the lack of organizational control, I argue that the practice of strategic communication faces new obstacles in managing the OrI on Facebook. Specifically, because this platform allows for two-way communication (Sharma & Verma, 2018), for example, between the stakeholder and the organization.

Recent research suggests that stakeholders play an active part in circulating personality traits about organizations (Lopez et al., 2020) and social media managers are encouraged to let stakeholders create their own brand personality around the organization, thus, contesting the official brand personality that the organization live by (Bange et al., 2020). Furthermore, Dawson (2018) found that social media managers tend to observe the image circulating about the organizations online and adapt their external communication accordingly. For example, if the practitioners are aware of their image as a "friend" on social media they restrain their communication in order to fit the image of "the friend" (Dawson, 2018). The process of the employees adapting to the external stakeholder image, also known as mirroring (Hatch & Schultz, 2002), is a phenomenon referred to as *hyper-adaptation* (Ravasi & Phillips, 2011). Hyper-adaptation means that members of an organization deviate from the OrI strategy, which is set by the dominant coalition, to reinforce themselves toward the external audience with whom they interact. A phenomenon that in the short run, has positive implications for the organization's OrI and the stakeholders' expectations, yet in the long run, can have a negative impact on the strategic alignment within the organization (Ravasi & Phillips, 2011).

In sum, social media has opened a new arena where different stakeholders can interact and influence each other's image of organizations - such as IKEA. As an example, the Rhetorical Arena Theory (RAT) depicts how external stakeholders together make sense of organizational communication without the involvement of the organization (Frandsen & Johansen, 2010). From an organizational perspective, the sensemaking of who we are as an organization becomes more open to accepting new meanings for sensemaking around the identity, depending on how the external stakeholder view and treat the organization (Weick et al., 2005). As such, the external stakeholder holds extensive power in influencing the cues that organizational members use to make sense of the OrI (Weick et al., 2005). The new shift, in which hyper-adaptation and stakeholder distribution of the organizational

image takes place, requires more research into how the OrI is made sense of by the "external third-party stakeholder" as it impacts the sensemaking cues of the organizational members as well. Neglecting this insight could lead to the organization sending out identity expressions that impact the image in a way that indirectly affects the organization's sensemaking of their identity - resulting in a destabilized OrI (Weick et al., 2005). As such, I argue that studying how identity expressions are made sense of, can provide the strategic communicator with knowledge in how to strategically manage their OrI on social media platforms before giving the interpretation away to the control of the stakeholders, pro-actively stabilizing their internal sensemaking of their OrI.

1.2 Aim and Research Question

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into how "external third-party stakeholders" make sense of the organizational identity (OrI) based on the conversation between organizations and their stakeholders[1] on social media, and more specifically, Facebook. The aim is to provide the field of organizational brand communication with a new understanding of how OrI expressions influence how "external third-party stakeholders" make sense of the OrI and subsequently form an image of the organization. Through the purpose and aim of this study, I intend to develop new knowledge of how organizations' social media interaction plays a part in influencing the stakeholder's image of the OrI. To reach my purpose, the following research question has been formulated:

RQ: In what way do "external third-party stakeholders" make sense of the OrI that IKEA expresses when the organization communicates with their stakeholders on Facebook?

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[1] **Stakeholders:** In this study, groups of people who are affected by an organization's decisions or whose decisions impact the organization are considered stakeholders (Steyn & Puth, 2000). This study is specifically targeting stakeholders who have had prior connections with IKEA as customers.

1.3 The Case Organization

With origins in Älmhult, a small community in Småland, IKEA has grown to become a global furniture brand with warehouses all over the world (IKEA, n.d.-b). The founder of IKEA, Ingvar Kamprad, was an important public representative for the organization throughout his life. His business model has substantially impacted the culture surrounding IKEA - solving small everyday problems with innovative solutions and a touch of frugality. To this day, IKEA continues to hold on to its vision of supplying furniture that anyone can afford (IKEA, n.d.).

IKEA, as a brand, has successfully created and sustained relationships with its consumers over the years. Something that has been achieved through " *revolutionary retail brand experience, technological and sustainable innovations, as well as with its memorable marketing campaigns*" (Rodrigues & Brandão, 2020, p. 79). According to past research about IKEA, it was found that the organization work strategically with marketing expressions that are humoristic, casual, and simple to favour a family-friendly image (De Roeck et al., 2013). The OrI expression towards stakeholders is guided by core values of pragmatism and being down-to-earth (IKEA, n.d.). An OrI that is also portrayed in IKEA's special customer membership club called IKEA Family, with the idea to promote a direct dialogue with customers and gain insight into their needs and ideas (IKEA, n.d.-a). As such, IKEA has applied a strategy in which they seek to form close connections with their stakeholders by expressing an OrI that relates to the common man.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Bridging the Field of Corporate Identity and OrI

Research on identity has historically been studied from the corporate and the organizational perspective. More specifically, research in the corporate identity domain views identity as a production of management techniques determined and implemented by the dominant coalition to control the external image of the stakeholders (Balmer, 2001), such as infusing the brand with different personality traits (Aaker, 2010). In contrast, identity from the organizational perspective is viewed as a product that originates from the employee's understanding of "who we are as an organization" (Balmer, 2001). Thus, the former has origins in the field of marketing studies, whereas the latter can be traced to organizational studies (Schultz et al., 2002). Despite being divided into different fields of research, Schultz et al. (2002) argue that the concept of identity is treated as the same phenomenon in both disciplines, which creates a need for bridging the two fields of research. The main argument for this is that it has become increasingly difficult to differentiate the stakeholder groups that take part in the identity creation of the different fields, i.e., the employees, the external stakeholders and the dominant coalition. In order to merge the two fields and include all relevant stakeholders, Schultz et al. (2002) found it necessary to create a new conceptualization of identity by relating the phenomenon to culture and image, leading to the development of the OID model (Hatch & Schultz, 2002) (see chapter 1). Consequently, since this study is based on the OID model with connections to two different fields of research, it is necessary for the remaining parts of the literature review to address relevant research from the perspective of OrI (see chapter 2.2) and of corporate identity (see chapter 2.3).

2.2. Identity and Identification

Identity is a concept that has been studied in relation to the process of *identification* (see Büyükdağ & Kitapci, 2021; Casidy et al., 2018; Krishna & Kim, 2021;

Podnar et al., 2011). More specifically, *identification* is the discursive process in which *identity* is constructed i.e. it is the process that converts, shapes and expresses the structural collective identities that are produced from sensemaking activities from organizational members (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002), and stakeholders outside of the organization (Scott & Lane, 2000). A growing amount of research has started to explore how the processes of OrI and identification are formed in the external context. Huang-Horowitz and Evans (2017) investigated how small development companies express their OrI to gain legitimacy in their industry. The authors found paradoxical tension which suggests that organizations face issues when they, for example, must differentiate themselves in relation to competitors, but at the same time not differentiate themselves too much to belong to the image of the industry. To overcome the paradoxical tensions, the authors of the article argue that organizations should avoid following the temptation to keep a consistent OrI to deal with these paradoxes and instead try to stay flexible and manage a complex OrI (Huang-Horowitz & Evans, 2017). Similarly, Fombelle et al. (2011) found that when an organization can unlock synergies that resonate with the identification process of the stakeholder, the stakeholder will find it easier to identify with the OrI. Thus, the more identities the company can convey, the more impact it will generate on creating the OrI (Fombelle et al., 2011). Applying an equivocal image that resonates to many stakeholders' is advocated for by Price et al. (2008) as well. However, the authors of the article argue that an OrI is not determined by fixed attributes, but rather by the labels associated with them. These labels may remain consistent over time but can also change in meaning depending on the context (Price et al., 2008). By way of illustration, my interpretation is that an organization can have a public image of being 'family friendly', but through the lens of identification, the collective structure that forms the 'family friendly' identity in the minds of the stakeholders can change.

2.3. Brand Personality and Social Media

As the previous part of the literature review has mainly explored the area of identity in relation to the OrI, this section will address research related to *brand personality* as it is a concept often intertwined with that of identity (Abdullah et al., 2022). The personality of a brand is defined as "*a set of human characteristics as-*

sociated with a given brand. Thus, it includes such characteristics as gender, age, and socioeconomic class, as well as such classic human personality traits as warmth, concern, and sentimentality" (Aaker, 2010, p. 141). Aaker (1997) developed a framework consisting of different personality traits of a brand, specifically a *"reliable, valid, and generalizable"* (p. 353) quantitative scale to measure the different dimensions. The framework consists of personality traits that stakeholders associate with a brand, presented as (1) sincerity: down to earth, honest, wholesome, cheerful (2) excitement: daring, spirited, imaginative, up-to-date (3) competence: reliable, intelligent, successful (4) sophistication: upper class, charming, and (5) ruggedness: outdoorsy, tough (Aaker, 1997). To put it differently, the theory suggests that individuals tend to attribute human traits to brands, also known as personification (He et al., 2021), by cognitively forming opinions based on, among others, the marketing, country of origin, company image, and/or celebrity endorser (Aaker, 2010, p. 146). To address the issue of Aaker's personality theory being limited in its cross-cultural applicability, new research has created a simpler measurement tool with five dimensions. These are: responsibility (down-to-earth, stable, responsible), activity (active, dynamic, innovative), aggressiveness (aggressive, bold), simplicity (ordinary, simple), and emotionality (romantic, sentimental) (Geuens et al., 2009). This study will enhance the current frameworks of brand personality by utilizing the dimensions introduced by Geuens et al. (2009) for the sampling of IKEA's OrI expression on social media. Through this approach, the research will provide a qualitative perspective to the dimensions of brand personality.

Indeed, theory on brand personality is frequently found in research, more specifically in quantitative studies (see Béal & Grégoire, 2021; Kim et al., 2017; Kuo & Huo, 2017; Lopez et al., 2020; Mora Cortez & Ghosh Dastidar, 2022; Nadeau et al., 2020; Ning et al., 2022; Simiyu et al., 2019; Xia, 2013), mixed methods (see Ham & Lee, 2015; Masiello et al., 2020) and qualitative studies (see Feng et al., 2021; He et al., 2021; Robertson et al., 2019). Consequently, quantitative research in scholarly literature is widely acknowledged, resulting in a relative underrepresentation of qualitative research, which often employs content analysis as a method. Conducting additional qualitative research would be useful to investigate how organizations, such as IKEA, express brand personalities. This research would complement existing quantitative studies on brand personality expression

in social media within the context of interactions between organizations and their stakeholders, which will be presented in the following chapter.

2.3.1 Brand Personality and the Expectations of Stakeholders

A brand's personality is not created based on the product that the organization sells, but by the way, the organization interacts on social media (Kim et al., 2017). Social media interaction has a positive effect on the awareness of a brand (Lopez et al., 2020), and an organization that allows its online community to identify with them create room for oppositional brand loyalty i.e., stakeholders' intention to turn against the organization's competitors (Kuo & Huo, 2017).

Research has investigated how stakeholders respond to organizational comments on social media in relation to brand personality traits. For example, stakeholders react differently to the organizational responses depending on the normative expectation that stakeholders already have of the company in terms of personality (Xia, 2013). Stakeholders tend to show more acceptance of a defensive response if the brand is regarded as "perfect", whereas a "sophisticated brand" is perceived as more authentic if they respond vulnerably (Xia, 2013). Also, research indicates that interpreting the organization's communication on social media depends on the stakeholder's personality. For example, if a stakeholder identifies with an organization that is exciting and that organization acts trustful, this was shown to have a negative impact on the word of mouth of the stakeholders as they no longer can identify with this personality (Lopez et al., 2020). Furthermore, a brand's use of either aggressive or kind humor yields different responses, depending on the personality of the brand in the cognitive consciousness of the stakeholders (Béal & Grégoire, 2021). More specifically, research indicates that kind humor i.e. laughing with the stakeholder, fostered more positive online relationship activities from the social media audience, compared to aggressive humor that laughs at the stakeholder, but that this was also dependent on the expectations that the stakeholder had of the organizational expression (Béal & Grégoire, 2021). Despite the potential benefits of humor as a communication strategy when used appropriately, other research shows that if an organization acts informal and funny, this can decrease the level of trust from organizational stakeholders (Kim et al., 2017).

In sum, the expected personality of the brand, as well as the personality of the individual stakeholder, are factors that influence the reaction to OrI expressions on social media, as shown in previous research. However, research has not yet explored in detail the sensemaking process around how an OrI expression, conveyed through brand personality attributes, is formed in the mind of the stakeholders, which this study will focus on. Furthermore, for this study, this raises interesting questions such as: how is IKEA, with a strong image of being "family-friendly", expected to answer on social media platforms, such as Facebook? And what happens when a large and established organization perform OrI expressions that contradict the stakeholder's expectation?

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Sensemaking

"Sensemaking is the individual construction and reconstruction of meaning based on available information and experiences; it is the process by which stakeholders seek to understand what has happened, and to develop a sense of what should be done moving forward." (Weber et al., 2014, p. 70).

Wiley (1988, as quoted by Weick, 1995, p. 70) explains sensemaking as a phenomenon which can be divided into two micro and macro levels. From the micro level, *intersubjectivity* takes place on an individual level when an individual's ontological assumption about reality becomes altered through interaction (Weick, 1995). The process of this alteration takes place when the "I" of the individual constantly shift into the "you" i.e the other self that arises in every moment of time (Pierce, 1955, as quoted in Wiley, 1988). Hence, the "you" is not the other humans taking part in the interaction *"but your own 'mirror image'"* (Bakker, 2011). Furthermore, Weick (1995) explains that the interaction in which such a process take place is not a result of compliant norms based on societal structures, but rather an emergent or mutual understanding of reality. Furthermore, s*ocial structures* are levels in which intersubjectivity gives way to *generic subjectivity* which means that sensemaking, especially within the organization, takes place in a structured setting in which rules and standardized work procedures rule. This result in leaving the "I" behind yet applying intersubjectivity in some cases when gaps occur that cannot be explained by standardized ways of working (Weick, 1995). In sum, the concept of intersubjectivity and generic subjectivity are important pillars for the following analysis of this study, as it provides a framework to explain the sensemaking between individuals and other macro-factors that might have an impact on the sensemaking processes. It's important to note that sensemaking isn't necessarily about discovering the exact interpretation, but rather about arriving at a reasonable explanation with (Weick, 1995). Consequently, the

analysis of this study cannot account for an exact sensemaking process of IKEA´s OrI. I can only try to come as close as possible to an interpretation in the minds of the stakeholders.

3.1.1 Sense-giving and Sensemaking from a stakeholder approach

Sense-giving is as relevant as sensemaking in the reciprocal production of the OrI between the organization and the stakeholders (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). More specifically, sense-giving is defined as "*the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others towards a preferred redefinition of organizational reality*" (p. 442). Thus, it is something that occurs when either the organization or the stakeholders have created new interpretations, through a sensemaking processes, that they want to influence the other party with (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Previous research has involved both sensemaking and sense-giving processes between the organization and its stakeholders in terms of leadership and management communication (see Foldy et al., 2008; Gigliotti, 2020; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007), especially during crisis situations (see Joshi & McKendall, 2016). However, it has been criticized that the view of sensemaking, in relation to the creation of the OrI, should not only be studied in relation to major disrupting events, but to everyday activities (Oliver & Vough, 2019) such as interaction on social media. Thus, there is a need for future studies to investigate both sensemaking and sense-giving processes in relation to the OrI, taking place in ordinary everyday organizational practices, which is of focus in this study.

Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) theorize the relationship between sensemaking and sense-giving between an organization and their stakeholders by describing the process in terms of four concepts. (1) Envisioning (cognitively): the sensemaking of the individual who must convey a vision towards stakeholders. (2) Signaling (action): sense-giving of the visions to concerned stakeholders. (3) Re-visioning (cognitively): the stakeholders attempt to make sense of the sense-giving activities. (4) Energizing (action): The stakeholders' interpretation is transferred back to the organization through sense-giving, to influence the original vision. As the model suggests, sense-giving activities are often a phenomenon in which an actor seeks to impact the ongoing sensemaking processes, whereas sensemaking processes deal with understanding (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) of an event that cre-

ates ambiguity and uncertainty in the rational everyday life (Weick, 1995). Building on this theory, Weber et al. (2014) found that the information included in the sense-giving activities from an organization could develop into different stories depending on the stakeholders who participate in the sensemaking process. Indeed, this could potentially result in several parallel stories in which the organization fail to notice in the signaling stage (Weber et al., 2014), affecting the organizational ability to manage its image (Abolafia & Hatmaker, 2013).

In the process of constructing the OrI, organizations send out cues to their stakeholders, with the intention to portray a specific identity (Levine Daniel & Eckerd, 2019). Moreover, when the stakeholder receives the organization's cues, they " *internalize their own distinct and diverse perception of the organization's identity* " (Levine Daniel & Eckerd, 2019, p. 214). As such, the organization is very much part in the stakeholder's sensemaking of the OrI, yet the cues that are involved in the sensemaking process are biased in the sense that individuals' sensemaking are dependent on extracted cues, thus parts that have familiar structures for them (Weick, 1995). To simplify it, they only make sense of a phenomenon based on parts of their context and other points of reference. Thus, not all cues that organizations send out will be part of the stakeholder sensemaking of the OrI. In addition, research suggests that cues can be a result of other societal influences, for example, the media (Hatch & Schultz, 2002) or the impressions of other stakeholders (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991).

Furthermore, another important aspect that influences the process of sensemaking is the theory of *retrospective* thinking (Weick, 1995). The concept entails that people can only make sense of what they have done after they have done it - meaning that reality can never be captured in a specific moment, as the intellectualization of that reality always happens after the moment in which reality occur (Weick, 1995). Retrospective thinking means that the cues that the individual receives will always be memories, and when the individual search for the memory that they want to make sense of, the act of remembering will trigger other interpretations and memories that will impact the event that is subject to sensemaking (Weick, 1995). Adapting frames from previous experiences, also known as *bracketing* (Weick et al., 2005), means that the person makes the situation comprehensible by, for example, relating it to their professional role (Holt & Cornelissen, 2013) adapting storytelling to facilitate interpretation (Colville et al., 2012) relat-

ing it to previous experiences of similar emotions (Weick, 1995), or comparing it to items with similar properties (Edgerly, 2021). As such, retrospective thinking provides the sensemaking process with different frames of reference that impact the interpretation of the sense maker.

In sum, the theory of sensemaking is valuable for this research as it will allow me to explore how "external third-party stakeholders" make sense of IKEA's OrI expression. Consequently, the theory is central to answering the research question.

3.2. Impression Management and Identity

Identity is the self-appraisal of attributes that individuals ties to themselves in terms of " *physical and cognitive abilities, personal traits and motives, and the multiplicity of social roles including worker, family member, and community citizen*" (Whitbourne & Connolly, 1999, p. 28). Thus, identity is a result of both individual and societal constructs (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002) in which the person mentally decides his or her unique identity traits and the societal group of belonging (Proudfoot et al., 2017). Furthermore, in the process of establishing an identity, the individual seeks to influence their identity by managing the impressions of others (Proudfoot et al., 2017), hence, the perception of the identity in their minds.

Impression management is based on the idea that an actor's actions, performances, engagements, etc. have underlying intentions that can be revealed by the audience, either intentionally or unintentionally (Picone, 2015). Furthermore, the main purpose of impression management is to reveal the strategies an actor uses when trying to change or control the audience's perception (Picone, 2015). Organizational performances on social media can have several different agendas, such as information distribution or dialogue prior to decision-making (see Heavey et al., 2020). The process of influencing stakeholders with organizational values, strategies, frame of reference or a common vision is by research described as the process of *evangelization* (Heavey et al., 2020). The concept entails that the organization use storytelling, images, messages, language, and other rhetoric in a way that is meant to alter audience perception, attitude, and behavior. For example, it has been found that organizations who seeks to maintain social acceptability on Facebook apply impression management strategies that depict "*conventional*

politeness, moral discourses and diversion" (p. 19) when replying to topics that might have a negative impact on the image of the organization (Lillqvist & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013). As such, the organization, i.e., the performer, can adopt certain strategies to come across a certain way in the mind of the receiver.

To summarize, I believe that impression management theory is applicable to this study, along with the theory of sensemaking and sense-giving, since the investigation may be enriched with a more nuanced understanding of the intentions behind the OrI expression of IKEA. Thus, enabling a more insightful and comprehensive analysis. Consequently, the next section will explain Goffman's impression theory in depth, also providing argumentation for how it applies in the digital context.

3.2.1 Goffman's theory and its application to social media

The presentation of personalities can be traced back to Goffman's (1959) theory, explaining how individuals express themselves, intentionally or unintentionally, and how these expressions leave impressions on others. The expressions can take different forms; firstly, verbal symbols that are used to convey the specific information. Secondly, a variety of actions by the sender that might make the audience think that there is an unspoken meaning behind what is being said. Another key aspect of Goffman's (1959) theory is that the performance of the individual's 'self' takes place in a frontstage and backstage. More specifically, this means that the performance, i.e., when the individual expresses a certain role, takes place in the front stage with the audience, whereas the individual goes out of character when joining backstage. For example, when an employee of an organization interacts with stakeholders, he or she adapts a character that is later left behind when he/she re-enters the organization i.e. backstage. In contrast, when the frontstage performance occurs, Goffman (1959) argues that the different participants who interact do so according to informal and formal frames established for the communication. When the face-to-face interaction takes place the, different actors "*suppress its candid view of itself and of the other team, projecting a conception of self and a conception of other that is relatively acceptable to the other*" (Goffman, 1959). As such, the different actors assist each other in accomplishing the impres-

sions that they are trying to promote. Consequently, the identity is constantly changing depending on the audience that takes part in the performance.

Similarly to individuals, organizations engage themselves in performances before their audiences in diverse contexts (Allen & Caillouet, 1994). Indeed, Goffman's theory is not only about managing the audience's perception of the self, but also about managing the perception of the team (Picone, 2015), i.e., the organization. Furthermore, the rise of social media has developed a new public domain in which users can evaluate the character of an organization, through the exchange of opinions, views and experiences (Etter et al., 2019). Ross (2012) argues that the new situational context of social media has blurred the performer/audience perspective of Goffman´s theory, just as it has disabled the face-to-face interaction that is a prerequisite for performance processes. By applying Meyrowitz (1985) theory to Goffman´s theory, Ross (2012) solves this issue by arguing that the situations of interactions in a mass-mediated society are not tied to a physical location, but rather " *types of behaviour that are available to other people's scrutiny and that inform the roles played by participants in a given setting* " (Ross, 2012; p. 166). As such, the performer does not perform a role based on direct face-to-face interaction. Instead, an organization makes inferences about the total audience based on the stakeholders with whom they have had interaction, together with their previous experience, which acts as the basis for their role performance to the intended audience. The role performance can also be influenced by intermediated communication, i.e. that the organization listen to a representative of the audience and adapts the performance according to him/her. Nevertheless, Ross (2012) emphasizes that when the performance takes place on social media, the producers and audiences should not be viewed as separate ontological actors, but as categories that individuals assume in specific situations. And the outcome of the interaction can only be reached if you view the audience as a social construct (Ross, 2012). Consequently, research on how identity formation is created and made sense of, can provide a future understanding of organizational role enactment as a reply to social audience construct, and thereby, broaden the theoretical understanding of role enactment in a social media context.

4. Methodology

The aim of this study is to provide the field of organizational brand communication with a new understanding of how organizational identity (OrI) expressions are made sense of by "external third-party stakeholders" to answer the following research question:

RQ: In what way do "external third-party stakeholders" make sense of the OrI that IKEA expresses when the organization communicates with their stakeholders on Facebook?

4.1. Research Approach

To answer the research question, a qualitative case study was applied. A qualitative case study is a good way of gaining an in-depth understanding about a phenomenon that you cannot reach without incorporating contextual factors that are of importance to the phenomenon (Yin, 2009). In this case, the creation of the image based on the interpretation of OrI cannot be studied without involving an organization, such as IKEA. Furthermore, since the research question specifically sought to understand the sensemaking processes of individuals, it was necessary to find a method that could accommodate this goal. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) focus groups are a good way of getting an insight into how participants share and alter their understanding after hearing the views of others. As such, I argue that focus groups are a good way of observing a sensemaking process, since sensemaking is an immediate phenomenon that occurs when people experience a disruption in everyday life, leading them to try and understand the situation (Weick, 1995). Thus, the process of sensemaking would be difficult to retrieve when occurring in the mind of the participant as it probably would have already occurred. In contrast, the focus group could make it easier to observe this process, since hearing the view of other participants could spark sensemaking in the present.

Focus group interviews are naturally socially constructed as a result of the interaction between the participants, implying that this way of collecting data applies a constructivist perspective (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Thus, this research will ontologically view reality as something that is constructed when individuals interact with their social world. Epistemologically, knowledge is reached through meaning-making processes between individuals when trying to make sense of their reality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

4.2. Data Collection

When selecting a case for the study, three criteria were set to be fulfilled (1) a well-known brand, (2) a brand with a substantial online presence, and (3) a Swedish brand. Thus, I first looked at a list of Sweden's highest-ranked brands in terms of indexes of trust, quality, reputation, value for money, recommendation and customer satisfaction during 2022 (Keldsen, n.d.), resulting in 10 large corporations to choose from. Next, I looked through the corporation's social media presence on Instagram and Facebook, more specifically, the level of interaction they had with their stakeholders in the comment sections. According to Yin (2009), only applying one case means that the researcher must select the case that is believed to produce the most material for the study. IKEA had a high level of interaction on Facebook and a high ranking on the index. Subsequently, IKEA was a good candidate to use to answer the research question of this study. Furthermore, I observed the interaction on both Facebook and Instagram and concluded that Facebook had more information-rich interaction. LinkedIn was ruled out as it presumably applies to communicating with a specific target audience, i.e., prospective employees.

4.2.1 Sampling of Material from IKEA's Facebook

The sampling began by going through all posts on IKEA's official Swedish Facebook page, dating from the 16 of August 2022 to the 15 of January 2023. I made the active decision not to include posts that were published while the study took place. This decision was done as a response to the dynamic nature of social media, in which more comments can appear on newer posts, which can impact the sampling. Before the focus group interviews, I carefully monitored the company to

ensure no factors were affecting how they communicate with their stakeholders in their daily business. In addition, close observation was made to current posts on social media, concluding that the nature of the comments was like previous months - leading to a saturation in the material.

I retrieved comments between IKEA and its stakeholders by taking print screens of the conversation, leaving out comments that only consisted of emojis or the phrase "answer in PM". The print screens were categorized, in Trello (website), according to the nature of the stakeholder comments since these directly impacted the communication from IKEA. More specifically, the categorization was done as follows: (1) *Help:* stakeholders asking for help in certain matters eg. about furniture, opening hours etc. (2) *Crisis response:* comments that risk affecting IKEA's long-term image. (3) *Goodwill:* positive comments and appreciation posts from stakeholders. (4) *Unsatisfied customers:* stakeholders who have had a bad experience at IKEA and are disappointed. (5) *Feedback:* Positive/constructive/negative feedback about IKEA's business. Furthermore, the *Feedback* category differed from the *Unsatisfied customer* by not being tied to a specific event.

Through *theoretical purposeful sampling*, entailing that research select material based on categories in existing theory (Gentles & Vilches, 2017), I selected 16 comments through categorization according to Geuen's et al. (2009) brand personality framework (see chapter 2.2) (see Appendix 3). The material was compiled into a compendium which was then shown to the participants in the focus group interview. One quality that signifies qualitative research is that the researcher often is the primary instrument for collecting data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Furthermore, this implies that the sampling of the material could fall subject to the researcher's biases, which could risk the study´s results being influenced by my decisions to eliminate certain comments and incorporate others to favour the result of my study. To reduce my subjective impact, I constantly reflected on why I left out certain comments in favour of others. In the end, all of the comments could be used, but I decided to retrieve the comments that I thought represented the comments in the same category the most, which was then presented to the focus group.

4.2.2 Sampling of Focus Group Interview Participants

According to Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) the participants in focus groups must be willing to provide the information needed by the researcher while being representative of the population being studied. Consequently, the participants in this study needed to have former knowledge about the case being studied and, thus, represent IKEA´s stakeholders. In this study, the stakeholders of IKEA are regarded as anyone affected by an organization's decisions (Steyn & Puth, 2000), in this case, their consumers. As this study focuses on external stakeholders, the employees were left out. As such, the sampling for the focus group interview offered a broad scope of possible candidates. However, it is the older generations, particularly those born between 1950 and 2000, who use Facebook most frequently on a daily basis (Andersson et al., 2022). Therefore, it was reasonable to examine this group of stakeholders since they are likely the primary "*external third-party stakeholders*".

As a result of the broad range of possible candidates, together with the timeframe for this study, the participants were selected through *snowball sampling*. This sampling method involves the researcher inquiring with some of the participants if they know anyone else who would be interested and qualified to participate in the research (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). The participants that were asked to participate were friends of friends and distant acquaintances of my family members, i.e., work colleagues and old university friends. I sent the participants an e-mail explaining the research topic and the requirements for participating in the study, i.e., having a previous relationship with IKEA. They were in turn, asked if they knew anyone who might also be willing to take part in the study. The sampling strategy resulted in homogenous groups where all participants belonged to the same socioeconomic background, i.e. Swedish white-collar workers. According to research homogeneity, it is not a problem since focus groups advantageously are paired based on similarities, since differences could lead to participants feeling uncomfortable expressing their opinions (Krueger, 1994). I also assessed that homogenous groups were an advantage for the study since it was important that the participants felt comfortable talking and sharing their way of reasoning with like-minded people. Furthermore, the participants were divided to be close in age. Having a homogenous age group can be a disadvantage because it limits the range of perspectives and information that can be shared in discussions

(Morgan, 1997), which suggests that it would have been preferable to structure the groups differently. However, due to the different schedules of the participants, this was not possible for the time limit of this study.

The *snowball sampling* strategy resulted in 4 groups in which people were acquainted with each other – in total, three of the focus groups had at least one couple taking part, and the rest were distantly acquainted with each other. The advantage of forming groups where the participants know each other is also another way of making them feel more comfortable participating in the debate (Morgan, 1997). On the other hand, the fluent and comfortable discussion could be a result of an already prepared framework in which the individuals have established topics that are off-limits to talk about, preventing the researcher from retrieving information that could be important for the study. Yet, it is emphasized that finding strangers could be difficult, and therefore, the ultimate criteria should be that the group is able to discuss in a way that is useful for the researcher (Morgan, 1997). By comparing the pros and cons, I decided that it was most important for the participants to be comfortable with each other while forming the focus groups since the topic of the conversations was most likely not of limits to discuss.

Each of the four groups contained four individuals. Although this contradicts the literature recommendations of having a minimum of 6 participants (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990), it has been emphasizes that it is possible to conduct a successful focus group interview with less than four participants, and that the amount of people in each interview comes down to the purpose and limitations of the situation (Morgan, 1997). As this research sought to create in-depth discussions regarding IKEA interactions, I assessed that the interview would benefit from having fewer participants since this allows more people to express their opinion. In sum, seven males and nine females took part in the study, presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Demographic information of focus group interview participants.

Participant nr	Group nr	Age	Gender	Previous attitude towards IKEA
Participant 1	1	48	Female	Positive
Participant 2	1	60	Male	Positive
Participant 3	1	61	Female	Positive
Participant 4	1	58	Male	Positive
Participant 5	2	41	Female	Positive
Participant 6	2	40	Female	Both negative and positive
Participant 7	2	54	Male	Positive
Participant 8	2	35	Female	Both negative and positive
Participant 9	3	63	Female	Positive
Participant 10	3	64	Male	Positive
Participant 11	3	63	Female	Positive
Participant 12	3	57	Female	Both positive and negative
Participant 13	4	27	Male	Positive
Participant 14	4	27	Male	Positive
Participant 15	4	25	Female	Positive
Participant 16	4	27	Male	Positive

4.3 Focus Group Interview Procedure

The focus group interview was initiated by explaining some ground rules. In accordance with Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) recommendations, I made it clear that there were no right or wrong answers and that participants should feel comfortable expressing themselves openly without fear of disagreeing with each other. I also revisited some of their rights from the consent form to ensure that they understood the implications of participating in the study. Finally, the participants had the opportunity to ask questions before the interview began. Thereafter, I started the recording on my mobile phone. During the interview, I followed my interview guide (see Appendix 2), which I designed in accordance with a semi-

structured interview, allowing me to interview by alternating between more and less structured questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I began the interview by asking three general warm-up questions to stimulate reflections and discussions to gain insight into their previous image of IKEA (see Appendix 2). After a while, I introduced the compendium with IKEA comments, sorted into categories, which we went through systematically (see Appendix 3). This part was more structured than the initial interview phase. However, while creating the manual, I designed the questions to be open enough to enable participants to make interpretations that *"are most memorable, important, or salient to them"* (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990, p. 63) as well as short and easy to understand (Gentles & Vilches, 2017). Furthermore, a semi-structured guide allowed me to act on the current situation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and ask follow-up questions to the new ideas that the participants introduce (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). If the participant mentioned a topic that I found intriguing and worthy of further investigation, I would inquire about it by asking additional questions that were not initially included in the guide. However, I constantly questioned my involvement in the discussion to prevent myself from asking biased questions that risked supporting my own preconceived opinion.

4.4 Data Analysis

In order to understand the sensemaking processes occurring in the focus groups, I transcribed the recordings myself without using any websites or tools. I carefully reviewed the transcript twice to make sure it accurately represented the recording. Upon conducting the initial focus group, I came to the realization that showcasing 16 comments did not provide the thorough examination that I was aiming for. Furthermore, it was evident that the vast quantity of content caused the focus group participants to lose direction after a certain period of time. Subsequently, I decided to reduce the number of comments on each category and present the comments that I thought were most representative (see Appendix 3 for the eliminated comments). It could be argued that altering the material presented to the focus group makes the results non-comparable, hence, inapplicable to the analysis. After close reflection and consideration, regarding how the usage of the material from the first focus groups would impact the analysis and comparability to the other focus

groups, I decided to maintain the material from the first group in the analysis. In the coding process, I marked the parts where the participants had used an example from the deleted comments, and I made sure not to compare any dissimilarities; only material that strengthened the other focus groups' interpretations was used. As such, the material from the first focus group was applied to strengthen the rationale rather than comparing differences and tensions.

The data analysis was performed during the same time as the focus group interview took place. This allowed me to alter my data collection to suit the problem that my research addressed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). More specifically, the process took inspiration from Lochmiller's (2021) framework for thematic analysis, specifically tailored for focus group material. The analysis and coding process will be presented in-depth in the next paragraph.

The focus group interviews took place from the beginning of March to the beginning of April. The theoretical sampling of IKEA's Facebook posts provided me with initial themes before the analysis and coding process took place. Yet, the themes where not set in stone, and I therefore started the analysis phase by, in line with Lochmiller (2021), familiarizing myself with the text by highlighting words, phrases and statements, also known as in-vivo coding (Daymon & Holloway, 2011), that I thought were interesting for the research question as well as the previous research. As such, by familiarizing myself with the data through an open and intuitive approach to the transcript while comparing the data with theory, I alternated between applying an inductive and deductive work process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Furthermore, during the initial coding, I found metaphors and analogies that the participants used to explain IKEAs OrI expression, resulting in five different images; *"The shallow and over-friendly influencer", "the experienced and arrogant lawyer", "the human and daring youth", the "sympathetic grown-up", and "the genuine friend",* which provided the structure for the analysis. In the second coding round, I went back to the material and, in line with Lochmiller (2021), looked at the previous codes to find categories that explained the initial themes. During this process, I established open codes, allowing me to describe the phrases and categories (Daymon & Holloway, 2011) highlighted during the first coding round. Furthermore, during this process, I eliminated certain codes that I did not find relevant to the theory or the research question (Lochmiller, 2021). The remaining parts of the open codes and the quotes were

placed in a matrix (see appendix 4). In the presentation of the themes and their categories and sub-categories, I took inspiration from Lochmiller's (2021) thematic analysis structure, in which the overall themes are presented by the categories that describe them.

By relying solely on myself as the primary tool for analysis, there is a risk of inherent human biases affecting the accuracy of the analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During the analysis process, I was aware that I had my own interpretation of IKEA's expressions, and that I risked using the participants' expressions as a way of confirming my own image of IKEA. To avoid an analysis that is subject to my biases, I constantly wrote down my interpretations of the expression before interpreting the quote of the participants. This allowed me to look beyond my own scope of interpretation, yet the reader of this research should be aware of potential biases in the result.

4.5 Methodological Reflection

Focus group interviews, or individual interviews, are recommended when a study seeks to explore how individuals talk about a certain phenomenon (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990), which made both methods applicable for this study. Comparing the two methods, research shows that focus group interviews produce only 60-70 % of the number of ideas that they would have generated if they had taken part in individual interviews (Morgan, 1996) – indicating limitations in the empirical material of this method. However, researchers argue that focus groups have the unique ability to not only look into people's ideas and opinions but also to provide sources for the motivations behind these expressions (Morgan, 1996). As such, focus group interviews require the participant to provide a rationale argument for their view, which I argue is key to exploring the sensemaking occurring as a response to IKEA's OrI expressions. Consequently, I made the assessment that focus group interviews were applicable to this research despite its limitations.

Since this research was performed in Sweden, the interviews were performed in Swedish. This meant that I was obliged to translate the quotes from Swedish to English, which could impact the trustworthiness of my analysis (Brennan, 2022). To provide an accurate representation of the participants, I tried to remain as close to the original quotes as possible by using Google Translate. If

the generated translation of the quote was unclear, I made slight modifications to it. However, I was careful not to get too involved, as that could have affected the study's outcome.

Despite the detailed description of the research process, which can provide future researchers with guidance on how to conduct a similar study in other contexts, the small sample size in this research does not allow me to use statistical generalization (Yin, 2009). Thus, I refer to analytical generalization in which the reader is responsible for assessing the extent to which this study can be applied to another setting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

4.5.1 Ethical Consideration
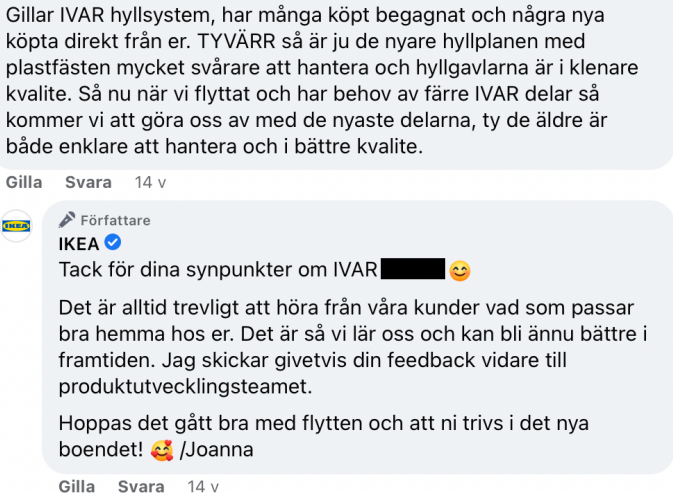
By studying social media conversations between IKEA and its stakeholders, I involved individuals in a research project without their knowledge. Using messages from digital forums is associated with many ethical considerations (Smedley & Coulson, 2018) that I had to address throughout the study. In line with Kosinski et al. (2015) conditions for attaining Facebook material without consent, I made sure that: (1) it was reasonable to assume that the comments were published by the individual knowing that it was public. (2) The data was anonymized after the collection. (3) I made sure that the comments of the participants did not attain personal information that could identify them. (4) That there is no previous interaction between me and the individual responsible for the social media comment (Kosinski et al., 2015).

Conducting focus group interviews entails that the participants are not anonymous towards each other, which can lead to discomfort if having to address a topic that is of sensitive nature to the individual (Krueger, 1994). To address this ethical dilemma, I created a document of consent inspired from Trinity College Dublin (n.d.). The consent form provided the participants with information regarding rights, anonymity, and the topic of the research before entering the discussion (See Appendix 1). I also paid extra attention to the expressions of the participants during the focus group interview and was prepared to intervene if I felt that someone expressed discomfort.

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5. Analysis

The analysis is structured from themes that emerged from the transcript through the first round of coding. The different images that are presented were coined by the participants; more specifically: "*The shallow and over-friendly influencer*", "*the experienced and arrogant lawyer*", "*the human and daring youth*", the "*sympathetic grown-up*", and "*the genuine friend*" will be presented.

5.1 The Shallow and Over-Friendly Influencer

Figure 1a:	English translation:
Gillar IVAR hyllsystem, har många köpt begagnat och några nya köpta direkt från er. TYVÄRR så är ju de nyare hyllplanen med plastfästen mycket svårare att hantera och hyllgavlarna är i klenare kvalite. Så nu när vi flyttat och har behov av färre IVAR delar så kommer vi att göra oss av med de nyaste delarna, ty de äldre är både enklare att hantera och i bättre kvalite. Gilla Svara 14 v **Författare** IKEA ✓ Tack för dina synpunkter om IVAR ▮▮ 😊 Det är alltid trevligt att höra från våra kunder vad som passar bra hemma hos er. Det är så vi lär oss och kan bli ännu bättre i framtiden. Jag skickar givetvis din feedback vidare till produktutvecklingsteamet. Hoppas det gått bra med flytten och att ni trivs i det nya boendet! 🥰 /Joanna Gilla Svara 14 v	**Sender:** I like IVAR shelving systems and have bought many second-hand and some new ones directly from you. Unfortunately, the new shelves with plastic mounts are much more difficult to handle and the shelf ends are of poorer quality. So now that we have moved and need fewer IVAR parts, we will get rid of the newest parts, because the older ones are both easier to handle and of better quality. **IKEA:** Thank you for your comments on IVAR *name*! It is always nice to hear from our customers what works well in your home. That's how we learn and can be even better in the future. I will of course pass on your feedback to the product development team. I hope the move goes well and that you enjoy your new home.
Figure 1b:	English translation: **Sender:** Love fish and chips, but at your place (in Karlstad) you always get lukewarm

Älskar fish och chips, men hos er (i Karlstad) får man alltid ljumma pommes frites och fisk med tjock panering, också ljummen. Nej usch. Däremot vill jag ge en eloge till ert julbord, mycket gott, en hel del vegetariskt att välja på och otroligt prisvärt. Gilla Svara 11 v 👍 4 🖊 Författare **IKEA** ✅ Fish & Chips är en favorit hos många! 😍 Tack för din feedback, jag kommer att ta detta vidare till IKEA i Karlstad direkt. 😊 Det gör oss glada att höra att du uppskattar vårt julbord ▇▇▇ 🌲 /Elin Gilla Svara 11 v 👍 2	fries and fish with thick breading, also lukewarm. No, yuck. However, I want to give a praise to your Christmas table, very good, a lot of vegetarian to choose from and is incredibly affordable. **IKEA:** Fish & chips are a favourite of many! Thanks for your feedback, I will take this to IKEA in Karlstad right away. It makes us happy to hear that you appreciate our Christmas table *name*

Figure 1: Print screens of Facebook conversations between IKEA and their stakeholders. The comments for this image were sampled per Geuen's et al. (2009) brand personality measurement representing the **activity** *category.*

When the first image was presented to the participants, it became clear that the image[2] of IKEA evolved due to an expression that did not comply with the sender's[3] messages. More specifically, the overall result of this category is that the participants tended to create a negative image of IKEA when the organization did not express[4] the expected organizational identity (OrI)[5]. The findings indicate that the image of "*the shallow and over-friendly influencer*" was a result of three different categories: (1) *Retrospective sensemaking through comparison to IKEA's original image*, (2) *Sensemaking through different stakeholder frames* and (3) *Conflicting OrI cues in the same performance.*

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[2] *The image* evolves in the mind of external stakeholders when the organization express organizational identity (OrI) claims that leave impressions on the stakeholders (Hatch & Schultz, 2002).

[3] *The sender* in the analysis refers to the stakeholder who is responsible for sending the message that IKEA replies to.

[4] *Expressing* occurs when the organization express their cultural understanding of the OrI. The expressions are in turn used to impress the image in the mind of the stakeholder (Hatch & Schultz, 2002).

[5] The *OrI* is a product of the expressed cultural understanding of the organization's identity, which in turn impresses the organizational image in the stakeholder's mind. The created image acts as a mirror for the organization in which they adapt the reflection for their sensemaking of the OrI. As such, the OrI evolves in a reciprocal process between the organization and the stakeholder (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). In this analysis, the stakeholder is represented by the focus group participants, and the organization is represented by IKEA.

5.1.1 Retrospective sensemaking through comparison to IKEA's original image

The retrospective comparison to IKEA's original image was developed from two categories found in the material (see Figure 1); (1) By indicating that they are making comparisons to what they previously considered to be IKEA's image and relating it to real-life role performances, and (2) by trying to find explanations for why IKEA does not respond as expected.

Comparison to IKEA's original image and real-life role performance

In my data (see Figure 1), I found patterns that point towards sensemaking processes, which indicated that the dissatisfaction with IKEA's response resulted from comparing the performance with previous real-life experiences where the participants experienced similar emotions (Weick, 1995). Just as you would have been disappointed with a friend who fail to live up to your expectations of that friendship, my interpretation is that the image of the influencer was a result of the participant's feeling that they expected an OrI expression from the organization which they did not receive. This created the feeling of IKEA acting just as a shallow person in real life would have acted i.e., someone who wants to give the impression that they care but really, they are just responding for the act of responding. As such, IKEA's replies in Figure 1 expressed that they do not intend to form a deeper relationship with the stakeholder as they did not, in fact, listen to the content in the sender's message. In focus group 1, one of the participants tried to explain this view by making analogies to a real-life conversation between two people, in which one of them had a complete lack of understanding and care for the other person:

"It's like two people would stand and talk and one says 'how are you' and the other says 'It's a bit of a shame, I've been in hospital […] this week.' and then the other says 'great, we have been on holiday". (Participant 4)

The failure to live up to stakeholders expectations could result from stakeholders comparing the OrI expression to their original image of IKEA. Xia (2013) argued that a stakeholder's perceived personality traits of the organization impact how the stakeholder expects the organization to respond. Participant 4 previously expressed that he viewed IKEA as a welcoming and family-friendly organization,

which indicates that he had an expected norm of how the organization should reply. Similarly, in focus group 3, another participant possessed an original image of IKEA in a positive light by considering them to be a caring, older family member who was considerate and often cared for the rest of the family. When she read IKEA's reply, she compared it to how a family member would disregard what is being said in a conversation.

"I think it's quite ignorant. Nothing concrete comes back, if you had been a family [...] it's just 'yes I hear what you're saying, I'll pass it on.'" (Participant 9)

Consequently, building on Xia's (2013) research, when IKEA failed to convey an OrI that aligned with the original image of the participants, my finding suggests that external third-party stakeholders make sense of an OrI expression by relating it to real-life experiences in this case, how they expect a family member to reply or someone that is welcoming and has a family-friendly personality. Since the sensemaking processes made them construct an image that is misaligned, and even a counter pool with the OrI that IKEA has worked many years to create, I argue that it is in the organization's interest to try and avoid these sensemaking processes from occurring at all. For the strategic communicator, this entails that a clear representation of the original OrI needs to be conveyed in social media replies. On the other hand, it seems that an already established and strong image is not as prone to being altered through misaligned social media replies - something that the next section will explore.

Trying to Find an Alternative Explanation

The misalignment between IKEA's original image, and IKEA's role performance on social media, lead to a discussion about the fundamental reason behind the gap. The results indicate that the participants chose to look for an alternative explanation in order to understand why IKEA acted the way they did. The discussion resulted in the participants feeling that IKEA was not liable for the answer. Rather than altering their image, they concluded that the employee who speaks on IKEA's behalf is not familiar with IKEA's culture and operations. In focus group 2 one participant felt that the responses came from a young individual who was separated from the organization, inexperienced and disconnected from 'the IKEA

way of working'. An opinion that the other participants in the focus group agreed with:

"It's like someone sitting there who has nothing to do with the organization." (Participant 6)

"It's some young person who is employed just to write there and has no insight into how things work at IKEA." (Participant 6)

I think the quotes are interesting as they suggest that rather than creating a new image from the expression, they seem to disregard the conflicting OrI impression[6] to maintain the original image. Furthermore, this contradicts the model from Hatch and Schultz (2002), which suggests that an OrI is a product of a reciprocal exchange of image and culture between employees and stakeholders. It also indicates that IKEA, a large organization that presumably has an established and fundamentally strong image, is not as sensitive to changing the OrI as small developing companies (Huang-Horowitz & Evans, 2017). I interpret the findings to indicate that IKEA is indeed an organization that has succeeded in creating an image so strong that stakeholders are not prepared to accept expressions of an OrI that go against it. On the other hand, this also entails that if the strategic communicator has the desire to alter an already established image, OrI expressions on Facebook do not seem to create a substantial impact.

   In sum, when the image of "*the shallow and over-friendly influencer*" was created, the participants felt that IKEA did not directly respond to the comments from their audience. The discussions imply that the participants made retrospective connections to their original view of IKEA as a welcoming family-friend, which is the opposite of a shallow and over-friendly influencer. Yet rather than altering their original image, the participants made sense of the conflicting OrI expression by creating excuses for the performance. Cognitively they formed an image of a young and inexperienced employee who does not represent IKEA and its identity.

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[6] Impression occur when the organization seeks to influence their OrI expression to their stakeholders' (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). A strategy to accomplish this is to infuse the brand with personality traits (Frandsen, 2017).

5.1.2 Sensemaking from a stakeholder and organizational perspective

When the participant made sense of IKEA's image, by reading the Facebook conversations, two categories emerged – (1*) the participants who put themselves in the position of the individual who wrote to IKEA in the first place and (2) the participants who made sense of the OrI by relating to his/her own experience as an employee.* The sensemaking processes of the perspectives will be further presented in the next paragraphs.

Research on sensemaking emphasizes that individuals sometimes tend to become too connected to certain frames in their interpretation of a situation, resulting in a rigid sensemaking process in which the interpreter fails to respond to the situation in a less structured and rational manner (Holt & Cornelissen, 2013; with reference to Weick, 1993). My result suggests that the participants tend to make sense of IKEA's image by being tied to certain frames of reference, such as 'the sender' in which the participants relate to their own experiences of being an external stakeholder that tries to communicate with an organization. In these situations, IKEA's shallow and overly friendly OrI expressions, towards the sender's subdued voice and negative critique, triggered a negative response from the participants. This was reflected in their way of discussing the interactions by positioning themselves in the shoes of the sender:

In focus group 1 this was highlighted as "*I just get annoyed. I would have been super annoyed if I had received this answer* (a reference to IKEA's expression)." from participant 1, followed by:

"No comment that it was thick breading and no it was bad, but it is more like 'oh fish and chip, it is a favorite of many'. I could not care less. That's not why I wrote to you, to find out that others have fish and chips as a favorite. I don't care about that. Mine was terrible that I got, I guess that's what annoys me." (Participant 4)

The second category that emerged depicted a more positive response to IKEA's way of expressing itself. Here, one of the participants chose to move away from their own experience as an external stakeholder and related to the experience of being part of an organization, making them more inclined to accept IKEA's answer. In doing so, it can be argued that the participants adapt generic sensemaking, in which the individual abandons his/her own beliefs and instead rely on

the rules of an organization (Weick, 1995). The frame of "the employee" was depicted in the participant's way of making sense of the situation with regard to their professional life. More particularly, by putting the same scenario in their organization:

"*I think it's a professional answer to both of them. The first is a matter of product development and there is only so much you can answer when you're sitting in a company because you can't promise anything, given that it takes many years before any new production, new drawings and so on come in.*" (Participant 10)

When another participant in the group gave critique to the response, arguing that it was a vague response and not very informative, participant 10 stated:

"*I can agree that not everything is optimal, but to change the product is like a five-year perspective, what should I say to the outside world, I can't promise anything.*" (Participant 10)

Consequently, interpreting IKEA's OrI on social media becomes an arbitrary phenomenon that is made sense of depending on the frame that the interpreter has established. In a similar vein as previous research, this suggests that the image is not a result of the OrI expression from the organization but of the different meanings that different interpreters attach to the sense-giving cues. Consequently, this supports Price et al. (2008) rationale in which they conclude that an equivocal image could usefully be adapted to meet the demands of the varied external audience. As this analysis depicts, the participants use a variety of frames for their retrospective sensemaking, resulting in both negative and positive images arising from the same cues. From an organizational perspective, it can be argued that most stakeholders who both participate in and observe an interaction between an organization and its stakeholders belong to 'the sender frame'. Indeed, it can be assumed that the majority of people on social media have inevitably adopted the role of an organizational stakeholder, for example a consumer, at some point in their life. As such, the practitioners are more likely to create a positive image if an organization express themselves in a way that resonates with the "*sender frame*".

In sum, as the analysis depicts, stakeholders have different frames of reference when they make sense of IKEA's image. When applying the frame of the sender, a more negative image is formed, compared to adapting the frame of an employee, resulting in a positive image when the OrI of the "*The shallow and over-friendly Influencer*" was expressed. As such, the produced image largely depends on the frames of the stakeholder who make sense of social media communication.

5.1.3 Expressions of OrI creating the image of "The Shallow and Over-Friendly Influencer"

The coding process identified two categories that depict the cues the participants choose to acknowledge when making sense of "*the shallow and over-friendly influencer*". It seems that the image evolved when IKEA expressed a formal and standardized answer in conjunction with applying informal expressions and emojis. The conflicting OrI expressions will be further explained in the next section.

Contradictory Performance

I interpret the responses of the participants to be a result of IKEA's attempt to make a certain impression, but the mixture of cues does not provide the favored image. According to Goffman (1959), the actor that seeks to make an impression, whether true or false, must use appropriate expressions that do not contradict the impression one seeks to make. In this case, my result indicates that the focus group participants partly interpreted IKEA's response to be formal when the organization used standardized expressions, such as "*I will, of course, pass on your feedback to the product development team.*" (see Figure 1a). This was expressed, in focus group 1, by making analogies to the feeling that the response was produced by an AI or a robot; "*A robot, it's just like a standardized answer. It feels like you could teach a robot to do that, you know*?" (Participant 2). Followed by a deeper description saying "It's *like picking keywords and putting them together in a text.*"(Participant 4). And "*It's so straightforward ... It's somewhat unsympathetic*" (Participant 1).

The same feeling of an OrI expression that felt standardized and formal was discussed in focus group 4. Here, the participants made sense of the OrI expression in the mid-section of Figure 1a by referring to the feeling of a copy-paste an-

swer; *"It feels like they send it to everyone"* (Participant 14). Followed by "*Yes, it feels like such a copy-paste*" (Participant 13). As such, my interpretation is that IKEA created an OrI expression with the intention of portraying themselves as caring, but by using expressions that felt copy-paste and non-human i.e., AI-generated, the expression had the opposite effect. In an attempt to make the OrI expression more personal, I argue that IKEA adapts emojis and tries to address the sender by using their names and mentioning the content in the original message. However, my results suggest that this attempt does not have the desired effect when the participants already doubt the performance. Instead, they expressed that the usage of emojis was a tactical move by IKEA to try and smooth over the situation, which made them feel that the information would not be taken any further. In focus group 3, one of the participants stated:

" […] I think it's not really serious, when you take it in a somewhat flamboyant way (referring to the usage of smileys and personal expressions) *... we don't care much about what you say really, it's just a bit too frivolous."* (Participant 11)

Similarly, the same issue was raised in focus group 2:

"And then when there are a lot of smileys as well, it can give the impression that okay, now we've glossed over this issue, so it won't be passed on to any product development unit at all." (Participant 8)

As the analysis depicts, IKEA is sending out conflicting cues that contradict each other in the same message – the formal and non-human expressions mixed with personalized and informal emojis make the audience question the entire performance. In this instance, the mixture of cues created an image of IKEA as someone who tries to express that they care, but the performance itself makes the audience doubt this, leading them to consider IKEA to come across as shallow. By way of illustration, if I were to put on the same performance as IKEA in a real-life setting, then I would stand and express my gratitude for their feedback in a formal and serious way, but at the same time, I would smile and do so happily, indicating that I do not really care about the other person's concerns nor do I take them fully seriously. For practice, this indicated role performance in social media also needs

to consider not sending out cues in the same performance that contradict the original performance that one seeks to make as an organization.

5.2 The Experienced and Arrogant Lawyer

	English translation:
Som medlemsgåva skulle jag gärna vilja se att ni skriver under **#internationalaccord**. Det behövs ett juridiskt bindande avtal NU! Kom igen! Gilla Svara 14 v **IKEA** ✓ Hej ▇▇▇▇▇▇ Vi uppskattar att ni ställer krav och vi lyssnar ödmjukt på kritiken. Vi tycker att det är bra att det i Bangladesh finns en överenskommelse om brand- och byggnadssäkerhet genom Bangladesh Accord-avtalet. Det är också fantastiskt att fler företag arbetar för bättre säkerhet för alla. För säkerhet och bra arbetsvillkor är helt avgörande för oss. Redan år 2000 införde vi vår uppförandekod för leverantörer, IWAY, vilken alla våra leverantörer måste följa. Tack vare IWAY har vi inte bara tydliga säkerhetskrav, motsvarande Bangladesh Accord, dessutom har vi system som säkrar ett bredare utbud av rättigheter för alla medarbetare samt ett skydd för miljön. Med det sagt, väljer vi att fokusera på det robusta system som vi har byggt upp i över 20 år och som våra leverantörer är bekanta med. Vi tror att IWAY, som gäller alla IKEA-leverantörer, är det bästa sättet att ytterligare bidra till att öka säkerheten i vår värdekedja. Läs gärna mer om detta här: https://about.ikea.com/.../building-a-better-business.... Tack för ditt engagemang! Vänligen, Erica	**Sender:** As a membership gift, I would like you to sign **#internationalaccord**. A legally binding agreement is needed NOW! Come on! **IKEA:** Hi *name* We appreciate your demands and we humbly listen to your criticism. We think it is good that in Bangladesh there is an agreement on fire and construction safety through the Bangladesh Accord. It is also fantastic that more companies are working towards better safety for everyone. Because safety and good working conditions are crucial for us. Already in 2000, we introduced our supplier code of conduct, IWAY, which all our suppliers have to follow. Thanks to IWAY, we not only have clear safety requirements, equivalent to the Bangladesh Accord, but we also have systems in place to ensure a wider range of rights for all employees and the protection of the environment. That said, we choose to focus on the robust system that we have built up over 20 years and that our suppliers are familiar with. We believe that IWAY, which applies to all IKEA suppliers, is the best way to further contribute to the security of our value chain. Read more about this here: *link* Thank you for your commitment! Sincerely, Erica

*Figure 2: Print screen of Facebook conversation between IKEA and their stakeholder. The comments for this image were sampled per Geuen's et al. (2009) brand personality measurement representing the **responsibility** category.*

"*The experienced and arrogant lawyer*" will be presented in the next part of the analysis. The first chapter will explain how the evolution of the image was made sense of by the participants. The next chapter will highlight the categories that I found to be the fundamental reason for the image that was created.

5.2.1 The Evolvement of "The Experienced and Arrogant Lawyer"

The initial positive image

The image of 'The experienced and arrogant lawyer' evolved as a response to what I interpret to be IKEA applying impression management strategies that are diverting yet polite. As argued by Lillqvist and Louhiala-Salminen (2013), these are tactics that organizations often apply when they seek to support their social acceptability. More specifically, in IKEA's case (see Figure 2), they politely express their gratitude for the engagement and the demands from the stakeholder, at the same time as they use diverting techniques in which they carefully give an account of what they themselves do instead of addressing the reason for why they have not signed the Internationational Accord (n.d.)[7]. From a sensemaking process, all of the groups initially respond positively to the OrI expression that IKEA sought to impress them with. Some interpreted the response to be informative and explaining in the sense that they provide a link to further information as emphasized by two participants in focus groups 1 and 4:

"It feels better. You get answers to things. Then you can investigate what IWAY is for something. You get a link here to that as well." (Participant 1)

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[7] International Accord is a legally binding agreement between garment brands and trade unions to ensure safe working conditions for factory workers in the industry (International Accord, n.d.)

"Well, personally, I think this is a pretty perfect answer, it's spot on. This is how I would have liked an answer. It's informative but also links to a website or further so you can read more about this. "(Participant 16).

Some also considered IKEA's answer to be personal in the sense that the organization respond directly to the sender's question, as depicted in the following quotes expressed in focus group 1.

"it's kind of more follow-up (referencing to following up on the sender's message) […].*"* (Participant 1)

" […] personal, I think. Here you answer back to what you have asked questions about." (Participant 4)

The image change

Yet, the discussion evolved, and IKEA's OrI expression was perceived as increasingly non-transparent and diverting, according to focus group 4. The participants felt that IKEA responded to the question in a way that allowed them to touch upon the subject without explaining the reason for avoiding signing the International Accord agreement (see Figure 2). As interpreted by the participants, this was performed by only discussing what IKEA does at the moment, instead of addressing the reason for not complying with the wish of the stakeholder, i.e., diverting responsibility, as depicted in the following discussion:

"the information is good, but it doesn't really answer the question or the statement." (Participant 13). The discussion went on in the group, and later followed a response again from participant 13:

"Well, the person writing this wants them to sign a legally binding agreement. You don't comment on that, you just comment on how things are at the moment. This is what we do and then nothing more, you don't really answer. Then it is, of course, a very businesslike answer, it is certainly not to stick your neck out and so on" (Participant 13)

"And then we have our way so we don't have to sign because we do enough already." (Participant 14)

Arrogance as a result of comparison to other organizations

Furthermore, in focus group 3, one of the participants stated that IKEA's way of expressing the diverting strategy - by marketing their own program, yielded an image that she thought was arrogant: " […] *for me this signals that we have our own and it's actually better than all the others"* (Participant 12). In making sense of the communication, she compared IKEA to other companies, in this case, Patagonia, which she held in high regard. She felt that if Patagonia had received a similar request from their stakeholders, they would have signed the agreement for the sake of a better world through cooperation between large companies. By only being willing to work on their own program, she felt that IKEA did not take the same responsibility, leading to a negative image of them. This indicated that "the external third-party stakeholder" makes comparisons to other organizations that they feel strongly about while observing the online conversation between an organization and its stakeholder. Though cognitively drawing parallels to other organizations, the sensemaking of a conversation is, I argue, interesting from a social media perspective. Since digital platforms allow stakeholders to compare the OrI expressions of organizations against each other, they can be more prone to form more or less positive images by comparing different expressions. Because why should IKEA not be able to sign an agreement if another company with a similar work ethic might express their willingness to do so?

Sensemaking through stories

So far I have tried to account for the fact that the participant's initial sensemaking of IKEA's reply yielded a positive image of IKEA's OrI expression. But as the discussion evolved, focus group 3 and focus group 4 started to indicate that the OrI expression was arrogant in the sense that they chose to market their own program without the desire to do more than that. When trying to make sense of IKEA's decision to express itself in this manner, the participants in focus group 4 started to draw comparisons to a legal department. Through intersubjective sensemaking, the participants designed a story about the person responsible for posting IKEA's reply. As such, rather than connecting to retrospective frames from previous events, they made sense of the OrI expression by creating a story designated

to work as a frame, providing them with meaning-making cues for the situation (Colville et al., 2012). The narrative leads them to turn the image of IKEA into an image of a lawyer. A person who uses standardized and well-formulated answers that the dominant coalition has approved to avoid a crisis or image destruction, as described in the following discussion:

"She works in a legal department at IKEA" (Participant 13)

"*Yes, and there's a very good flow to the text, so it's not like one sentence and then a smiley and then the next sentence, it's short. The writing is quite detailed."* (Participant 14)

"*It feels like this has been raised at the board and so it has…*" (Participant 13)

"Has been processed a few times" (Participant 16)

"Been approved and then you kind of use it." (Participant 13)

Thus, my interpretation is that when an organization applies diversion impression management strategies (Lillqvist & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013), the participants become inclined to create a story to be able to understand and make sense of the OrI expression. This is interesting as it, from a theoretical standpoint, suggests that even if an organization adapts impression management strategies to save its reputation, the stakeholders can see through these efforts. Also, by creating a story as a sensemaking frame, the stakeholder might be more prone to create a narrative that is not true. For the organization, this entails that applying certain impression management strategies could prove problematic as the stakeholders form a narrative performance about the backstage of the organization that is untrue. As such, strategies that intend to save the organization might yield the opposite effect. In focus group 4, one participant changed their opinion about IKEA's OrI expression from positive to negative due to the discussion.:

"*When you read it the first time, I thought you got a rather positive picture, 'yes but that's good, you have a system you work according to'* [...] *but then when you*

think about it, or talk about it as we did now, you get a slightly more negative picture." (Participant 14)

In sum, my interpretation is that the role of the "experienced and arrogant lawyer" evolved from the impression management strategies that IKEA employed to avoid a potential crisis to occur. Initially, the participants in all focus groups responded well to their OrI expression and almost exclusively agreed that the response contained rich information and felt personal. However, as the discussion progressed, the participants in two focus groups started to unravel the reply, feeling that IKEA's informative response that markets their own program, might be a way of trying to avoid addressing the real issue that could potentially lead to an image crisis. Not dealing with the real issue left one of the participants feeling that IKEA communicated arrogantly, comparing the expression to how she believed other organizations would have acted. When trying to make sense of why IKEA's diversionary strategies, the participants started to formulate stories to use as sensemaking frames – leading them to interpret IKEA's OrI expression as an arrogant lawyer.

5.2.2 Communicative cues for "The Experienced and Arrogant Lawyer"

This section attempts to explain the cues that I interpret as the main cues that made the participant form the image of "the experienced and arrogant lawyer". Firstly, I will account for how the participants´ started to look for cues beyond the text, and secondly, I will explain how the image of someone who is experienced emerged.

Implicit cues

When the organization creates a role performance that tries to avoid answering the audience's question straight, I interpreted focus group 3 and 4 to make sense of the expression by focusing on cues between the lines, thus, looking for underlying meanings that is not directly stated. This is exemplified by focus group 4 who had the following debate:

"They wrap it up by saying this is what we do […]*."* (Participant 13)

"But between the lines, they are actually saying that they don't need to sign this agreement." (Participant 16)

Similarly, in focus group 3, the participants interpreted that IKEA declined to sign the International Accords agreement without saying it outright. Instead, they felt that the answer implicitly was there to be interpreted. The avoidance of providing a straight answer to the question and allowing the audience to read between the lines is, I argue, a substantial part of the image creation of the lawyer. Connecting it to the roles of society, I view a lawyer to be someone who tries to protect their clients by strategically managing what they say in questioning. Also, a lawyer is a figure that operates to control the outcome of an event, both in the present and the future. Not providing a straight answer in favour of different interpretations allows IKEA to strategically provide a reply without risking backlash that might impact their organization, just as a lawyer would have operated. This was also confirmed by one of the participants who felt that a straight answer could potentially result in the organization being put in the media's spotlight: *"they don't want that because 'oh, IKEA has signed here now that they don't believe in this"* (Referencing to IKEA stating that they do not believe in International Accord, which could cause a media frenzy) (Participant 9). Consequently, by structuring a message that allows for interpretation between the lines allows the organization to answer and, at the same time, protect themselves from potential damage that could happen if they provided a direct response – just as a lawyer would to protect his/her client.

Furthermore, another interesting aspect is that the sensemaking of cues that do not appear in plain sight could result from the participant's desire to look beyond IKEA's frontstage appearance. By doing this, it can be argued that the participant rejects the performance that the organization seeks to make, feeling that the impression is false. Goffman (1959) argues that if the performer finds that the audience has formed a bad impression, then the performer can adapt certain strategies to save the performance. However, social media requires the organization to communicate based on making inferences about the wider population (Ross, 2012). Moreover, due to social media's nature in which the organization experience the absence of social cues, such as tone of voice (Richey et al., 2016), it might be more difficult to apply strategies for saving the performance in the social

media realm. My finding is interesting as it suggests that individuals are more inclined to reject the impression from an organization if it opens to interpretations beyond the words that are said. As such, when an organization aims to get the audience to accept their performance on social media, they should avoid communicating in a way that opens up to alternative cues.

An experienced image

When discussing IKEA's OrI expression, the participants in focus group 1 expressed that they envisioned the person responsible for the statement to be an older and more educated person compared to the image of 'the shallow and over-friendly influencer". More specifically, they highlighted that the lack of emojis, together with the informative and substance-rich descriptions reminded them of an older person: "*It feels like it's an older person who answered and it was a younger person on the first one.*" (Participant 2). When I asked the participant what it was in the reply that made them do this connotation, they replied that the information felt more factual compared to the previous OrI expression (see "the shallow and over-friendly influencer"), which they described as being "*fuzzier*" (participant 2). In addition, they felt that using expressions such as 'sincerely' at the end of IKEA's message made them think of an older person: "*They also say 'sincerely Erica'. It is an older way of [...] expressing oneself."* (Participant 3). Consequently, I interpret that providing a logical rationale, information richness and using expressions that are formal result in the external third-party stakeholder forming an image of someone that is older and has experience.

However, in contrast, some of the participants felt that the formal way of expression did not necessarily have to have the expression of an older person: "*I don't think you need to categorize age; this could be a 20-year-old as well.*" (Participant 16). Similarly, another stated that he thought IKEA's expression indicated to portray the identity of an educated individual with a high rank within the organization: " *For me, it might as well be different levels in the organization [...] a more educated person.*" (Participant 4). Nevertheless, the analogy to someone that possesses a higher ranking and education, I argue, indicates that the participants view the identity expression as someone who is old enough to be well-educated and has had time to climb the corporate ladder. With this in mind, my interpreta-

tion is that the image of the lawyer is connected to possessing the identity of someone that has experience.

In sum, 'the experienced and arrogant lawyer' is a result of implicit cues that the external third-party stakeholder makes sense of by looking beyond the explicit cues that are sent out from the organization. In addition, factual language that is less fuzzy made the participant think of IKEA's OrI expressions as a product of someone that is older and has experience in the working life.

5.3 The Human and Daring Youth

Figure 3a:	English translation: This is a conversation in which Swedish words are used in a fun way. This makes it difficult to depict the real conversation in English. The text is a direct translation.
Garanterat enorm succé! Gilla Svara 14 v ingen fattade det enorma skämtet tydligen.... Gilla Svara 14 v nä , tyckte själv det var lysande men BOAffärens följare verkar lika svårfångade som sir väs. Nu vet de iallafall var den gömmer sig men får inte tag i den. Kan man inte bara slänga in en rep-til honom Gilla Svara 14 v Författare IKEA ✓ Han gömde ju sig där för att snoka lite, man ser väl allt lite ljusare därifrån /Samira Gilla Svara 14 v	**Sender:** Guaranteed to be a huge success! **Sender:** No one got the huge joke apparently. **Sender:** Well, I thought it was brilliant, but the followers of the BOA affair seem to be as elusive as Sir Väs. At least now they know where it's hiding but can't get hold of it. Can't you just throw in a rope-to him? **IKEA:** He was hiding there to snoop around, you can see everything a bit brighter from there. /Samira
Figure 3b: Haha, bänkhörnskåpskarusell kan ju vem som helst få panik över. <3 Gilla Svara 10 v 5 Författare IKEA ✓ Haha, eller hur! Man får alltid tänka en extra gång innan man säger det. / Beda Gilla Svara 10 v	**English translation:** **Sender:** Haha, anybody can panic over a carousel of countertops! **IKEA:** Haha, right! You always have to think an extra time before you say it. /Beda

Figure 3c:	English translation:
Hårdaste och den mest obekväma soffa man kan tänka sig! Gilla Svara 19 v Författare IKEA ✔ Ajdå! Smaken är som baken brukar vi säga. Det är tur ibland att vi alla tycker olika 🤗 /Gabriella Gilla Svara 19 v	**Sender:** Hardest and most uncomfortable sofa you can imagine! **IKEA:** Ouch! It's all in the eye of the beholder, we say. Fortunately, sometimes we all think differently.

*Figure 3: Print screens of Facebook conversations between IKEA and their stakeholders. The comments for this image were sampled per Geuen's et al. (2009) brand personality measurement representing the **aggressiveness** category.*

"*The human and daring youth*" is an image that I interpreted to evolve when IKEA decided to adapt humor in their interaction with their stakeholders. From the data, three different categories emerged, indicating that different sensemaking processes occurred amongst the older participants in groups 1 and 3, and the group with the younger participants in groups 2 and 4. More specifically, the older participants made retrospective links to understand why they had trouble accepting IKEA's expression by drawing parallels to the discourse of their children. In contrast, the younger groups adapted certain frames that made them interpret IKEA's expression differently (i.e., the frame of the sender and the frame of the external third party-stakeholder). The sensemaking processes will be presented in the next sections, followed by other interesting findings regarding image and legitimacy.

5.3.1 Retrospective Sensemaking Amongst the Older Participants

When making sense of IKEA's humoristic OrI expression, some of the participants who took part in focus groups 1 and 3 initially expressed dissatisfaction with IKEA's way of interacting. In their view, an organization should avoid conversing in a humoristic manner on social media, as they think it decreases the feeling of a professional organization. Two of the participants started making sense of why they had this approach towards humoristic organizational communication.

More specifically, they initiated a sensemaking process by drawing analogies to communication that involved their younger children:

""It could have been a conversation with me and `name of child´ like 'yeah right blah blah blah and before […] smiley hihi!" (Participant 1)

"Whenever I look in 'name of child' or 'name of child' feeds ... I kind of don't understand what they are writing in like their feeds." (Participant 12)

I interpret the retrospective analogies to the young children to be a sensemaking process that allows the older generation to understand IKEA's expression as an organization. The act of trying to figure out why IKEA conducts a performance that does not comply with them, I think, shows that stakeholders have the willingness to accept that some performances are not aimed towards them at a target audience. From a strategic communication perspective, I think this is interesting as it suggests that an organization has the possibility to express a dynamic identity without risking an image collapse.

5.3.2 Frames for sensemaking from the younger generation.

In contrast to the older generation (groups 1 and 3), taking part in focus groups 2 and 4, the younger generation accepts the OrI expression that IKEA makes; something that is depicted by their first sensemaking frame that I interpret them to adapt. More specifically, I found that when the OrI expressions yield a positive image described as being "*human*" (participant 16), *"easygoing"* (participant 13), "*a common man*" (Participant 14) and "*daring*" (Participant 6), the participants adopted a frame in which they positioned themselves as the "*external third-party stakeholder*", who thought that all conversations (see Figure 3a, 3b, 3c) were entertaining to read: *"If you are neutral in this conversation, it becomes quite funny."* (Participant 16).

However, as the discussion evolved, the participants became more prone to discuss IKEA's expression in Figure 3c, which they found to be problematic in the sense that IKEA responded in a way that did not align with the message of the sender. In concrete terms, they felt that the sender expressed a negative statement

and that answering in a humorous way made IKEA feel "*frivolous*" (Participant 15). I interpret the participants to adopt a sensemaking frame where they put themselves in the perspective of the sender who was responsible for making the comment to IKEA in the first place. Moreover, this was done by comparing the situation to a real-life scenario:

"*I don't know if I would be so happy if I came to IKEA's customer service in person.*" (Participant 16)

"*Stand there with their sofa* […]" (Participant 13).

"*Well, I would not have been so happy as a customer if I had received that answer.*" (Participant 16)

The different frames that the young generation adopts are interesting as they suggest that the response to a humoristic expression is dependent on if "the external third-party stakeholder" chooses to stay in his/her original role or relate to the frame of the sender. The analysis indicates that the participants were more prone to adopting the sensemaking frame of the sender if they felt that the organization adopted an identity that did not have the same jargon as the sender. Similarly to Béal and Grégoire (2021), stakeholders seem more prone to react negatively to humor that laughs at the observer (see Figure 3c). However, expanding on their results, I argue that this mainly depends on the frame the external third-party stakeholder decides to adopt. If he or she stays in the role of the "external third-party stakeholder," then the participant might not be as inclined to form a negative image when an organization expresses aggressive humor.

5.3.3 Other interesting findings – Image and Legitimacy

Kim et al. (2017) argued that acting informal and funny on social media can decrease the level of trust in a brand. I, however, found that some of the participants in focus groups 1 and 2 felt that the context of social media made them feel more accepting towards using an informal and fun OrI expression.

"*That's exactly how it is on Facebook when things get going.* (Referring to the jargon of the humor) […] *Here they use humor in its proper context.*" (Participant 7)

In particular, one participant in focus group 1 made sense of IKEA's expression by comparing it to other media. If the same expression were to be put in another context, such as customer service, he felt that the organization's legitimacy would become more questioned. This was an opinion that the other participants unanimously agreed on.

"*It doesn't affect my view of IKEA, it's just a forum that* [...] *they* (referring to the sender) […] *write for the sake of writing. If I have a serious complaint, I would never take it to Facebook* [...] *if it had been a customer service on other channels, I would have been worried.*" (Participant 4)

As such, I interpret the *context* of IKEA's humoristic OrI expression as a substantial factor that allows and provides acceptance for informal and fun expressions. By placing the expression in relation to other media, it can be argued that the humoristic approach is viewed more positively. Through bracketing (Weick et al., 2005), one of the participants was able to relate Facebook to other more or less serious media, which made him label Facebook as less serious. This is, I interpret, the fundamental background for being able to accept the OrI expression without feeling that it impacts the trust towards IKEA.

5.4 The Sympathetic grown-up

	English translation:
	Sender:
	I ordered goods online a few weeks ago. Paid by credit card. Selected the delivery day and time. Scheduled it so I could be at home to receive the goods. Have now been waiting since 13:00 for my goods to be delivered between 13:00 and 16:00.
	At 15:11 I receive an SMS that the delivery has been postponed!?
	How incredibly bad! You have no forward planning at all. It costs me time and money to plan for the receipt of goods and I expect to be

Jag beställde varor online för någon vecka sedan. Betalade med kontokort. Valde leveransdag och tid. Planerade så jag kunde vara hemma och ta emot varorna.
Har nu väntat sedan klockan 13:00 på mina varor som skulle levereras mellan 13:00 och 16:00.
Klockan 15:11 får jag ett SMS att leveransen blivit framflyttad?!
Så otroligt dåligt! Har ni ingen framförhållning alls. Det kostar mig både tid och pengar att planera in mottagandet av varor och jag förväntar mig att bli underrättad om förändringar av leveransen INNAN den ska ske.
Fruktansvärt uselt!

Gilla Svara 14 v   😲😡 3

✏ Författare
IKEA ✔
Hej ▮▮▮▮

Vad tråkigt att höra att din order inte har levererats som planerat! Det är klart att du ska bli underrättad om något ändras i din bokning.

Vi har inte möjlighet att hantera ditt ärende direkt här över Facebook och därför skulle jag vilja be dig att kontakta vår leveransavdelning för bäst hjälp: www.ikea.se/kontakt. Vi kikar gärna närmare på din beställning den vägen!

Önskar dig en trevlig tisdag!

Vänligen,
Erica

---

notified of changes to deliveries BEFORE they happen.

Terribly bad!

IKEA:
Hi *name*
Sorry to hear that your order has not been delivered as planned! Of course, you should be notified if anything changes in your booking.

We are not able to handle your case directly here on Facebook and therefore I would like to ask you to contact our delivery department for the best assistance: *link* we will be happy to check your order there!

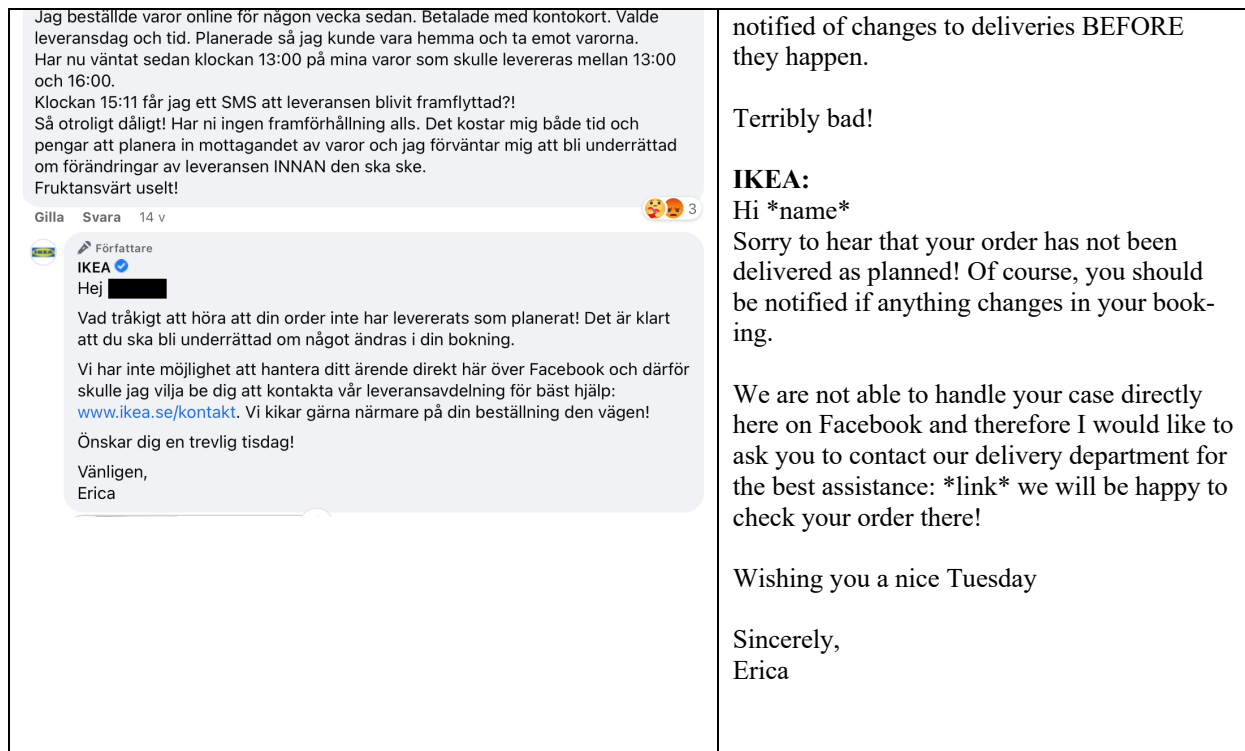Wishing you a nice Tuesday

Sincerely,
Erica

*Figure 4: Print screen of Facebook conversation between IKEA and their stakeholder. The comments for this image were sampled per Geuen's et al. (2009) brand personality measurement representing the **simplicity** category.*

"*The sympathetic grown-up*" was created by participants making sense of IKEA's response compared to the content of the senders' message. In this specific case, the participants perceived the sender to have an underlying agenda to speak ill about IKEA, which made them form an image of IKEA as the grown-up in the conversation by their way of replying. The next sections will highlight three categories that I interpret lead the participant to form the image of "the sympathetic grown-up", particularly, *why the feeling of ill-will from the sender? How to act as a grown-up, and the act of replying.*

5.4.1 Why the feeling of ill-will from the sender?

The participants in focus groups 1 and 4 acknowledged that there must be a hidden agenda behind the sender's act of posting a comment regarding an unsuccessful delivery because such a problem cannot be solved via Facebook (see Figure 4). However, by going to a public forum, the sender was able to express his/her dissatisfaction in the public eye.

"This is the kind of question […] *you never ask on Facebook. It doesn't belong on Facebook."* (Participant 4)

"Posting a comment on Facebook is really a way to perhaps get a quick response but also to smear the company." (Participant 16)

5.4.2 How to act as a grown-up

Considering the sender's ill will, participants in groups 2 and 3 felt that IKEA put on the performance of acting like *"the grown-up in the room"* (Participant 7). This was expressed by highlighting positive cues in IKEA's reply, such as responding neutrally to an opinionated message.

"*This is a person (*the sender) *who is fishing for 'this is really bad'. But she's* (IKEAs employee) *very objective, so that's very good."* (Participant 12)

Also, by not adopting any smileys, IKEA shows that they take it seriously.

"*But this one* (IKEAs employee) *is an adult* […] *and answers seriously, no smileys* […]" (Participant 6)

5.4.3 The act of replying

It became evident that some of the participants in groups 1 and 4 felt that the actual *act* of replying to such as message and providing help by directing the sender to the right department, depicted a company that took the high road.

"Yes, they do not leave him, but they want to help him in the best possible way." (Participant 1)

"That says a lot about the company. Managing their customers and appealing to customers as well [...] *They could have just written here that they were sorry to hear that you haven't received your order."* (Participant 14)

In conclusion, IKEA's expression shows that IKEA has managed to create a strong relationship with its stakeholders. In this specific scenario, the organization could face a potential image crisis, but the stakeholder chooses to accept the organization's OrI expression. It can be argued that the sender's expression in which he/she criticizes IKEA for being untrustworthy goes against the values that IKEA has historically expressed, namely the values of leading by example and taking responsibility (see Chapter 1.2. The case organization). When stakeholders see IKEA performing their values, they will be inclined to accept their performance as opposed to the sender's expression. As such, the "external third-party stakeholder" becomes inclined to refer back to IKEA's communicated identity, indicating that social media responses should align with the overall OrI.

5.5 The Genuine Friend

Figure 5a:	**English translation**
Jag hat köpt 10 regnbåge kassar. De är extremt fina och står för solidaritet, kärlek och medmänsklighet. 🏳️‍🌈🏳️‍🌈🏳️‍🌈🏳️‍🌈🏳️‍🌈 Gilla Svara 16 v 👍 6 ✏️ *Författare* **IKEA** ✅ Så fint att höra att du tycker om STORSTOMMA och allt de står för! 😍 Tack för att du bidrar! 💜💙💚💛🧡❤️ /Joanna Gilla Svara 16 v ❤️	**Sender:** I have bought ten rainbow bags. They are extremely beautiful and stand for solidarity, love and humanity. **IKEA:** How nice to hear that you like STORSTOMMA and everything they stand for! Thank you for contributing!
Figure 5b:	**English translation** **Sender:**
Vill ge en stor eloge till er kundtjänst! Jag har den senaste månaden varit i kontakt med ett antal kundtjänster på olika företag och även med er kundtjänst ett antal gånger. Varje kontakt har fungerat utmärkt och ni har löst mina problem/frågor med en härlig serviceinställning! Eftersom jag varit i kontakt med andra kundtjänster vet jag att detta inte är att ta för givet och vill därför ge en STOR ELOGE till era kundtjänstmedarbetare! De gör ett fantastikt bra jobb och gör livet som kund så mycket bättre! TACK! Gilla Svara 9 v ✏️ *Författare* **IKEA** ✅ Hej ▇▇▇▇ tack snälla för de fina orden! 😍 Vad glada vi blir att du tycker om oss på kundservice! 💙 Jag ska se till att framföra detta till alla. ⭐ /Hanna	Congratulations to your customer service! In the last month I have been in contact with a number of customer services of different companies and also with your customer service a number of times. Every contact has been excellent and you have solved my problems/questions with a great service attitude! As I have been in contact with other customer

	services, I know that this is not to be taken for granted and therefore want to give a BIG PRAISE to your customer service staff!
	They do a fantastic job and make life as a customer so much better! THANK YOU!
	IKEA: Hi *name*
	Thank you for your kind words! We are delighted that you like our customer service! I will make sure to pass this on to everyone / Hanna

Figure 5c:	**English translation:**
	Sender: I skip the vegetable balls/vegetable sausages. The plant balls "Huvudroll" they are the best so good! IKEA's spaghetti with vegetarian meat sauce that you have had for a long time it is very good!
	IKEA: I'm glad you're sharing your thoughts *name*!
	HUVUDROLL is a big favorite of mine too! /Clara

*Figure 5: Print screens of Facebook conversations between IKEA and their stakeholders. The comments for this image were sampled per Geuen's et al. (2009) brand personality measurement representing the **Emotionality** category.*

"The genuine friend" was an image that evolved from two identified categories in the data. Firstly, the participants reacted positively to IKEA, expressing an identi-

ty performance that they interpreted to align with the performance of the sender. Secondly, the participants thought that when IKEA adopted the role of the friend, the messages felt tailored to the sender's message, making IKEA's OrI expression more genuine. These categories will be explained in more detail in the next two sections.

5.5.1 Alignment of identity expressions

When reading the conversations, the participants in group 3 expressed that they gained a positive image of IKEA through their way of expressing themselves. Reviewing the data, I found that they often returned to pointing out how IKEA both mirrors and adapts a tone that matches the performance of the original sender. More specifically, this was mentioned by one of the participants by referring to the similar usage of emojis in both the sender and IKEA's response in Figure 5a, which the other participants in the group agreed with:

"*It is the rainbow colours and* [...] *this person (*the sender) *has added quite a few rainbow flags* [...] *Here she* (referencing to IKEA's expression) *actually picks up on the rainbow flags*" (Participant 12)

Furthermore, two of the participants in focus group 3 highlighted that IKEA expressed a similar tone of voice as the sender, in their way of mimicking an identity expression that the participants experienced as positive and bubbly.

"*To have this kind of personal relationship with customers [...] that 'I have to go on Facebook to tell IKEA how good they are' with this [...] and bubbles over.*" (Participant 9)

"*Yes, and then you want to get back some bubbling over.* "(Participant 12)

In sum, I interpret the response of the participants to be a result of an organization that has succeeded in aligning its performance to the original performance of the sender. Similarly to Goffman's (1959) role theory, I interpret this to be a social media performance in which the organization mimic the role of the audience, con-

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firming the performance of the sender. As the quotes depict, this resonates well with the "external third-party stakeholder" as they feel that the OrI expression of the organization is just right for the interaction that occurs. This suggests that an organization has to consider the communication of their stakeholders and confirm their expressions and performance to yield and sustain a positive image.

5.5.2 "Feels Like a Text Message Conversation"

When creating the image of the friend, the participants made retrospective sense-making to their private friendship experiences. This was done by drawing parallels between the social media dialogues, to dialogues from their own experiences with friends. One of the participants in focus group 3, for example, described how the conversation was very similar to how she would have a conversation with a friend whom she had met for coffee, indicating that she could relate the conversation to her personal life. Similarly, other participants expressed that it felt like the conversation was taking place between two private persons in a closed text-message conversation.

"[…] *It is more like a private one, i.e. between two private people talking.*" (Participant 14)

" […] *This is perhaps more like a text message conversation than a comments section.* " (Participant 16)

Consequently, my interpretation is that the role of a friend develops due to individuals finding similarities between conversations on social media and private conversations they have had with their friends. This is interesting as it suggests that the stakeholders compare role performances on social media with other scenarios where they have encountered the same role in real life. The results may point to a solution on how the strategic communicator can best adapt their performance in social media where they lack a confirmatory audience (Richey et al., 2016) and must rely on making inferences for their conversation (Ross, 2012). By creating a performance that resembles scenarios where they think the stakeholder has encountered the same role, the communicator might be able to initiate a sense-

making process that compares to that moment, which might lead to better precision of the expression.

5.5.3 Other Interesting Findings - How to be Genuine

Mimicking the same expression as the sender seems to positively affect the credibility of IKEA's expression. As one of the participants in focus group 4 highlighted – when the organization adapts similar words and confirms the information in the sender's message, it indicates that the organization genuinely cares about their stakeholders, as it is not possible to adapt standardized answers.

"[...] *In that they use words that they* (the organization) *have received from the comments* (senders) *before* [...] *feels like they* (the organization) *put some time and energy into the answer than to just have an auto-answer* [...] *Because they are different really, all the answers."* (Participant 16)

In sum, my analysis indicates that applying the role of a friend on social media requires the organization to adapt a similar performance that mirrors the expression of the sender. If the organization does so successful, then the organization might come across as more genuine since the expressions become more tailored to the specific stakeholder.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This study has sought to answer the following RQ: *In what way do "external third-party stakeholders" make sense of the OrI that IKEA expresses when the organization communicates with their stakeholders on Facebook?*

Through focus group interviews, I retrieved data that led me to gain knowledge of how expressions from an organization on Facebook form complex and sometimes paradoxical images in the mind of the "*external third-party stakeholder*". The findings allow me to provide the field of organizational brand communication with a new understanding of *how* OrI expressions are made sense of, providing the practice of strategic communication with tools to remain in control over the OrI. In this part, I will present my research findings, apply them to the practice of strategic communication and lastly, present suggestions for future research.

6.1. Contributions of This Study

Through studying the sensemaking processes occurring in the focus group interviews, the analysis has explored several trends that expand previous research and provided theoretical contributions to the field of organizational brand communication.

Firstly, the findings revealed that when IKEA expressed a role performance that was perceived by "*external third-party stakeholders*" to be incongruent with their initial image of the company, such individuals were able to make sense of the expressions by situating it in real life context. Specifically, this was done by making an analogy between the experience of interaction and the feeling of having a personal acquaintance, such as a family member or friend, who disregard one's opinions. This resulted in a negative reaction from the participants. Previous research on organizational communication on social media has found that stakeholders' attitudes towards organizational responses are closely connected to how they expect the organization to respond depending on the preconceived per-

sonality that is attached to the brand (see Xia, 2013). Expanding on this research, my results provide new knowledge as to how an organization that has a family-friendly image is not expected to reply. Furthermore, my research indicates that in instances where "*the external third-party stakeholder*" engages in the process of comparing an incongruent expression with an original image of an established organization, such as IKEA, they tried to find excuses for the expression by explaining that the performance was made by someone who was unaware of IKEA's work practice and culture. Given IKEA's substantial investment in relationship-building activities, it can be argued that this is a result of an organization that has succeeded in establishing loyal stakeholders. For the theoretical Organizational Identity Dynamics (OID) - framework (Hatch & Schultz, 2002), this result indicates that the reciprocal exchange of image and culture in the formation of the organizational identity (OrI) is less dynamic when the OrI belongs to an organization that has a strong stakeholder relationship. As such, applying relationship-building strategies that are of similar nature to IKEA could provide the strategic communicator with a strong foundation that makes the image less sensitive to social media communication in everyday practice. However, previous research suggests that the social identification processes advocate for a dynamic OrI that allows the organization to keep a flexible image over a longer period of time to resonate with many stakeholders (see Fombelle et al., 2011; Price et al., 2008). Therefore, managing a rigid image in a wider context may not be preferable, as it makes the OrI more vulnerable to not being able to keep up with societal changes.

Secondly, this research has provided insight into how "*external third-party stakeholders*" apply different sensemaking strategies when taking over the construction of the OrI. My analysis depicts that sensemaking, when observing the interaction between IKEA and its stakeholders on social media, makes the "*external third-party stakeholder*" adapt different frames of reference such as "*the sender*", "*the employee*", and "*the external third-party stakeholder*". Depending on the frame that the "*external third-party stakeholder*" decides to adapt, the results indicate that it affects the image of the organization positively or negatively. Furthermore, in the image construction of "*The genuine friend*", when IKEA communicated in a way that resonated positively with the "*external third-party stakeholders*" (see chapter 5.5.2), the participants drew parallels to real-life scenarios where they experienced similar conversations to take place. In this case, they expressed

that the social media conversation reminded them of a text message conversation between private individuals. Previous research has argued that social media communities allow the stakeholder to take over the creation and circulation of the brand personality (Bange et al., 2020). By providing the field of organizational brand communication with an understanding of how stakeholders make sense of organizational communication between IKEA and their stakeholders, I provide the practitioner of strategic communication with knowledge of the sensemaking frames that might be at play when the control of the image is handed over to the "*external third-party stakeholder*". With this knowledge, the practitioner can alter his/her communication in a way that allows them to exert some strategic control of the image.

Thirdly, the result of the analysis suggests that when IKEA applied expressions that were perceived by participants as polite but harbouring an underlying meaning, the "*external third-party stakeholders*" made sense of the expression by constructing a story around IKEA's expression to find alternative explanations for the performance, a story that in turn impacts the OrI. Previous research, conducted by Lillqvist and Louhiala-Salminen (2013), argued that impression management techniques that are polite, yet divergent, might not resonate with the sender of the message but with the wider audience that observes the organizational reply. As such, Lillqvist and Louhiala-Salminen (2013) encourage such techniques for a company to maintain social acceptance with a wider audience. In contrast, I argue that from an OrI perspective, my results indicate that impression management techniques of this nature seem to make the "*external third-party stakeholder*" more prone to disregard the performance in search of underlying reasons. Furthermore, I believe this exposes the organization to unnecessary risk in terms of image dissemination and alternative explanations that might not be consistent with the actual rationale behind the organizational response. As such, the practice of strategic communication should take caution when implementing divergent expressions that facilitate alternative interpretation, as this may harm the company's image.

Fourth, the results of my analysis provided interesting observations in relation to the usage of humor on social media. The results indicate that when the younger focus groups (nr 2 and 4) interpreted IKEA's expression through the frame of the observing "*external third-party stakeholder*", they regarded them all

as fun, despite acknowledging that one expression was not compliant with the expression of the sender. Béal and Grégoire's (2021) quantitative research revealed that external observers responded negatively to instances of more aggressive humor employed by organizations, specifically those instances in which the organization appeared to be laughing at the observer rather than with them. Building upon the findings of Béal and Grégoire (2021), my result indicates that when the younger generation observes the interaction, they still find the interaction humoristic. The negative reaction appeared when the participant made sense of the communication by applying the frame of the sender in the communication. Consequently, the result indicates that there is a reaction to aggressive humor, yet a negative response seems to be dependent on the frame of sensemaking that the "*external third-party stakeholder*" adapt. For the strategic communicator, this entails that aggressive humor does not necessarily harm the OrI. Still, considering that it is likely that most people who observe the interaction at some point have been customers at IKEA, it could be more probable that the "*external third-party stakeholder*" used the frame of the sender when observing the interaction. As such, using aggressive humor should be performed after close consideration.

Furthermore, previous research regarding organizational communication in social media argues that acting informal and fun could decrease the level of trust from stakeholders (see Kim et al., 2017). In the case of IKEA, my analysis indicate that "*external third-party stakeholders*" make sense of the organizations fun and formal expression by putting the Facebook discourse in relation to other media. This led to the conclusion that expressions of Facebook are rightfully informal and fun, and therefore do not affect the trust of "*external third-party stakeholders*". For the practice of strategic communication, this implies that social media may serve as a suitable platform for practitioners aiming to cultivate a brand personality that is characterized by informality and humor.

Lastly, this research has provided insight into how "*external third-party stakeholders*" make sense of different OrI expressions of IKEA. The analysis indicates that different OrI expressions, sampled through Geuens et al. (2009) framework, develops to different images in the minds of the stakeholders, such as: "*The genuine friend*" or "*The shallow and over-friendly influencer*". With this research, the communicator is in more control over how different identity expressions are made sense of in the mind of the *"third-party stakeholder"*. As such, I

argue that the interaction between the organization and its stakeholders on social media should be managed by a communication practitioner in a strategic role and not by an employee without this background since this might increase the risk of completely letting go of control over the OrI which, according to Weick et al. (2005), indirectly destabilizes the internal OrI.

6.2. Future Research

As this case study research is limited to qualitative data from one organization, more research on this topic is encouraged. Firstly, conducting the same research project on a smaller and less established organization would be interesting since my findings suggest that a fundamentally strong image is not as prone to be affected by multiple OrI expressions. Yet, as my study is taking place in a specific context during a specific period, it could be interesting to study how social media identity expressions impact a strong organizational image in stakeholders' minds over time since they could provide different results. Also, one of the shortcomings of this study is that the sample of participants does not represent all spectrums of society. Thus, conducting a study with individuals from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds would be beneficial to broaden the scope of research.

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Appendix

Appendix 1:

This appendix presents the Consent form e-mailed to the participants approximately one week before the focus group interview took place. The participants either signed the consent form electronically or handed the form to the researcher before the interview.

Study About Organizational Identity

This is a consent form to take part in research conducted by Sara Fregert at the Department of Strategic Communication at Lund University. The consent form is an agreement between the researcher and the research participant outlining the roles and responsibilities they are taking towards one another throughout the research process.

Description of project: Understand how stakeholders make sense of organizational identity through organizational interaction on social media. The participants will take part in a **focus group discussion**.

By signing this agreement, I agree to the following terms:

- I (name of participant)…………………………………………… voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.

- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use quotes within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

- I understand that participation involves discussion with three other participants, and the researcher present acting as a moderator.

- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.

- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.

- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in the researcher's computer until the approval of the thesis.

- I understand that a transcript of my interview, in which all identifying information has been removed, will be accessed by the examinator.

- I understand that I am entitled to access the transcript, within three weeks after the discussion took place. I understand that I am entitled to read and alter the transcript before the analysis takes place (Please contact the researcher in this case).

- I understand that in any report on the results of this research, my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of the people I speak about. However, my age and gender will be revealed since it might impact the results.

- I understand that disguised extracts from what I say during the discussion may be quoted in a published report and a final examination presentation.

- I understand that I will <u>not</u> be anonymous to the other group participants, and I have the right to decline to answer any question if I feel uncomfortable.

- I have read the consent and agreed to it.

- I have been given a copy of this document.

- I understand that I must spend 1.5 - 2 hours participating in this study.

Contact information:
Sara Fregert
076-196 18 43
Sa2552fr-s@student.lu.se

Signature of research participant

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Signature of participant   Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

---------------------------------------   ---------------------

Signature of researcher   Date

Appendix 2:

This is the interview manual that was used for the focus group interviews. The manual was designed to start with three open questions and then become more structured after the compendium of questions was introduced.

Question 1:

Let's talk briefly about what a brand is. If I make it concrete: If you have two jackets in front of you that are in the same price range and similar qualities - one is Peak Performance and the other is a Monclere. Then it is only the brand that separates the jackets, what is it that makes you choose one or the other?

*Note that after the first focus group interview, I changed to comparing clothing brands. In the first interview, I asked them to reflect on why they choose Skånemejerier instead of, for example, Arla (milk brands).

Question 2:

So the organization we are going to talk about today is IKEA. I'd like to start by going around and hearing about everyone's past relationship with IKEA. What is your previous image of them?

Question 3:

When you talk about brands, you sometimes mention that you often link them to human attributes. Almost like when you describe a company, it can sometimes sound like you're talking about a person. For example, if you look at Absolut Vodka, that brand is often described as a cool, hip and contemporary 25-year-old, while Stoli vodka is described as a more intellectual, conservative older man.

If you were to look at IKEA as a person, how would you describe the soft values around them as a company and brand?

Questions after the introduction of the compendium
1. How do you interpret this answer based on personal characteristics? What associations, feelings etc. do you get?
2. What image do you get of Ikea when they communicate like this?
3. Do you think they answered good, or should they have answered differently?
4. Interesting to ask: Legitimacy.

Questions after going through all of the categories presented to the group:
1. Through these comments, you have seen many different identity expressions of Ikea. It has perhaps conveyed a rather diverse and sometimes even contradictory identity. How do you perceive Ikea's image now? Has it altered?
2. Do you feel that the expression of different identities affects you in any particular way?

Appendix 3:

The compendium was presented to the participants during the focus group interviews. The compendium is the original, presenting all 16 comments that were selected from the sampling. I have marked the comments that were excluded after the first focus group interview took place.

Kategori 1:

1.

Gillar IVAR hyllsystem, har många köpt begagnat och några nya köpta direkt från er. TYVÄRR så är ju de nyare hyllplanen med plastfästen mycket svårare att hantera och hyllgavlarna är i klenare kvalite. Så nu när vi flyttat och har behov av färre IVAR delar så kommer vi att göra oss av med de nyaste delarna, ty de äldre är både enklare att hantera och i bättre kvalite.

Gilla   Svara   14 v

    ✏️ Författare
    IKEA ✅
    Tack för dina synpunkter om IVAR ▮▮▮ 😊

    Det är alltid trevligt att höra från våra kunder vad som passar bra hemma hos er. Det är så vi lär oss och kan bli ännu bättre i framtiden. Jag skickar givetvis din feedback vidare till produktutvecklingsteamet.

    Hoppas det gått bra med flytten och att ni trivs i det nya boendet! 🥰 /Joanna

    Gilla   Svara   14 v

2.

Älskar fish och chips, men hos er (i Karlstad) får man alltid ljumma pommes frites och fisk med tjock panering, också ljummen. Nej usch.
Däremot vill jag ge en eloge till ert julbord, mycket gott, en hel del vegetariskt att välja på och otroligt prisvärt.

Gilla   Svara   11 v   👍 4

Författare
IKEA ☑
Fish & Chips är en favorit hos många! 😍 Tack för din feedback, jag kommer att ta detta vidare till IKEA i Karlstad direkt. 😊
Det gör oss glada att höra att du uppskattar vårt julbord ▮▮▮▮▮ 🌲 /Elin

Gilla   Svara   11 v   👍 2

3. Excluded

Har en liten fråga till er **IKEA** , varför säljer ni inte rexbegonia cooling pad i sverige? Hade varit underbart att kunna köpa sånna

Gilla   Svara   21 v   👍 5

Författare
IKEA ☑
Hej ▮▮▮▮▮   Vad kul att du gillar REXBEGONIA. Ja men visst hade det varit skönt med kylande lager på din kudde eller madrass! Jag tar din feedback vidare till ansvarig avdelning att det är en önskad produkt här i Sverige.😊
/ Tim

Gilla   Svara   21 v   👍 8

4.

Som medlemsgåva skulle jag gärna vilja se att ni skriver under **#internationalaccord**. Det behövs ett juridiskt bindande avtal NU! Kom igen!

👍 7

Gilla   Svara   14 v

✏️ Författare

IKEA ✅

Hej ▮▮▮

Vi uppskattar att ni ställer krav och vi lyssnar ödmjukt på kritiken.

Vi tycker att det är bra att det i Bangladesh finns en överenskommelse om brand- och byggnadssäkerhet genom Bangladesh Accord-avtalet. Det är också fantastiskt att fler företag arbetar för bättre säkerhet för alla. För säkerhet och bra arbetsvillkor är helt avgörande för oss.

Redan år 2000 införde vi vår uppförandekod för leverantörer, IWAY, vilken alla våra leverantörer måste följa. Tack vare IWAY har vi inte bara tydliga säkerhetskrav, motsvarande Bangladesh Accord, dessutom har vi system som säkrar ett bredare utbud av rättigheter för alla medarbetare samt ett skydd för miljön.

Med det sagt, väljer vi att fokusera på det robusta system som vi har byggt upp i över 20 år och som våra leverantörer är bekanta med. Vi tror att IWAY, som gäller alla IKEA-leverantörer, är det bästa sättet att ytterligare bidra till att öka säkerheten i vår värdekedja.

Läs gärna mer om detta här: https://about.ikea.com/.../building-a-better-business....

Tack för ditt engagemang!

Vänligen,
Erica

5. (Excluded)

Anders Johnsson

Kommentarerna i den här tråden innehåller massiv kritik mot er (IKEAS) beslut att hålla delar av verksamheten öppen i Ryssland... och ni bemödar er inte att svara med ett enda ord! Jag skäms som svensk för er skull! En omläggning av er Rysslandspolitik med stängning av ALLT i Ryssland skulle ge er 100% mer goodwill än den löjliga reklam ni skickar ut här. Tänk om, gör rätt!!!

Gilla   Svara   7 v   👍 7

✏️ Författare

IKEA ☑️

Hej ████,

Det här är egentligen inte en fråga för IKEA Sverige då vi endast driver våra varuhus i Sverige.

När det gäller diskussionen kring 14 MEGA Centres, som drivs av Ingka Centres i Ryssland, är de fortsatt öppna för att kunna tillhandahålla nödvändiga mediciner och livsmedel till befolkningen.

I mars 2022 stängde IKEA sina varuhus i Ryssland.

Vänligen,
Clara

😡❤️ 5

6. (Excluded) Kontext: Kommentar till Ikeas prishöjning på korv, från 5 kr till 7 kr.

75

Ha ha så ni vek ner er. Ingvar hade oavsett utspel inte uppskattat hur ni missbedömde mottagandet. Han hade förmodligen också hunnit stoppa iden med att ha olika priser och höja köttkorvens pris om det absolut inte är en nödvändighet. Halva poängen med korven är att få kunder till varhusen som inte är hungriga. varje mätt kund genererar mer försäljning i ett annat led. Men Biltema fick lite extra PR och möjlighet att nyttja situationen på ett fingertoppskänsligt vis.

Gilla   Svara   18 v   Redigerad   👍😆 13

Mest relevant är valt så vissa svar kan ha filtrerats bort.

> 🎙 Författare
> **IKEA** ✅
> Många har hört av sig – och vi är både smickrade och lite förvånade över uppmärksamheten. För att dels visa att vi lyssnar, dels behålla fokus på det absolut viktigaste – vårt arbete att aktivt driva utvecklingen mot mer vegetarisk för fler – avstår vi från de två kronorna och fortsätter nu att sälja vår vanliga korv med bröd för 5 kronor. / Beda
>
> **Gilla   Svara**   18 v   👍 2

7. Kontext: Ikea döpte sin lampa till Virrmo och beskrev den som ormsäker som ett svar på ormrymningen på Skansen.

Garanterat enorm succé!

Gilla   Svara   14 v

▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓   ingen fattade det enorma skämtet tydligen....

Gilla   Svara   14 v

▓▓▓▓▓ nä , tyckte själv det var lysande men BOAffärens följare verkar lika svårfångade som sir väs. Nu vet de iallafall var den gömmer sig men får inte tag i den. Kan man inte bara slänga in en rep-til honom😣

Gilla   Svara   14 v

🔧 Författare
IKEA ✅
Han gömde ju sig där för att snoka lite, man ser väl allt lite ljusare därifrån 🙂
/Samira

Gilla   Svara   14 v

8.

Haha, bänkhörnskåpskarusell kan ju vem som helst få panik över. 😃<3

Gilla   Svara   10 v   👍😆 5

🔧 Författare
IKEA ✅
Haha, eller hur! Man får alltid tänka en extra gång innan man säger det. 😢 /
Beda

Gilla   Svara   10 v

9.

Hårdaste och den mest obekväma soffa man kan tänka sig!

Gilla   Svara   19 v

🔧 Författare
IKEA ✅
Ajdå! Smaken är som baken brukar vi säga. Det är tur ibland att vi alla tycker olika 🤗 /Gabriella
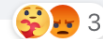
Gilla   Svara   19 v

10.

Jag beställde varor online för någon vecka sedan. Betalade med kontokort. Valde leveransdag och tid. Planerade så jag kunde vara hemma och ta emot varorna.
Har nu väntat sedan klockan 13:00 på mina varor som skulle levereras mellan 13:00 och 16:00.
Klockan 15:11 får jag ett SMS att leveransen blivit framflyttad?!
Så otroligt dåligt! Har ni ingen framförhållning alls. Det kostar mig både tid och pengar att planera in mottagandet av varor och jag förväntar mig att bli underrättad om förändringar av leveransen INNAN den ska ske.
Fruktansvärt uselt!

Gilla   Svara   14 v   🥰😡 3

> 🖊 Författare
> **IKEA** ✔
> Hej ▮▮▮▮
>
> Vad tråkigt att höra att din order inte har levererats som planerat! Det är klart att du ska bli underrättad om något ändras i din bokning.
>
> Vi har inte möjlighet att hantera ditt ärende direkt här över Facebook och därför skulle jag vilja be dig att kontakta vår leveransavdelning för bäst hjälp: www.ikea.se/kontakt. Vi kikar gärna närmare på din beställning den vägen!
>
> Önskar dig en trevlig tisdag!
>
> Vänligen,
> Erica

11. (Excluded)

~~Madde Andersson~~
Haft glutenintolerant i familjen i 13år. Första tiden va de kanon.
Fanns både fikabröd, pannkakor, köttbullar, glasstrutar och korv med bröd. Inget av de har ni längre ni blir sämre och sämre för varje år.
Trodde ni va ett mångfaldigt företag. Men allergier och sjukdomar är inte välkomna.

Gilla   Svara   13 v   👍

> 🖊 Författare
> **IKEA** ✔
> Hej ▮▮▮▮
>
> Tråkigt att höra att du inte är nöjd med matutbudet på våra IKEA restauranger. Vi vill såklart kunna erbjuda en så bred meny som möjligt som tilltalar alla kunder.
>
> Jag tycker du skall prata med restaurangpersonalen nästa gång du besöker IKEA, säg att du vill ha glutenfritt alternativ så fixar de detta åt dig😍 👍
>
> Hälsar Jörgen

Gilla   Svara   13 v

12.

Jag hat köpt 10 regnbåge kassar. De är extremt fina och står för solidaritet, kärlek och medmänsklighet. 🏳️‍🌈🏳️‍🌈🏳️‍🌈🏳️‍🌈🏳️‍🌈

Gilla   Svara   16 v   👍 6

> 🎤 Författare
> **IKEA** ✓
> Så fint att höra att du tycker om STORSTOMMA och allt de står för! 😍 Tack för att du bidrar! 💜💙💚💛🧡❤️ /Joanna
>
> Gilla   Svara   16 v   ❤️

13.

Vill ge en stor eloge till er kundtjänst! Jag har den senaste månaden varit i kontakt med ett antal kundtjänster på olika företag och även med er kundtjänst ett antal gånger. Varje kontakt har fungerat utmärkt och ni har löst mina problem/frågor med en härlig serviceinställning! Eftersom jag varit i kontakt med andra kundtjänster vet jag att detta inte är att ta för givet och vill därför ge en STOR ELOGE till era kundtjänstmedarbetare! De gör ett fantastikt bra jobb och gör livet som kund så mycket bättre! TACK!

Gilla   Svara   9 v

> 🎤 Författare
> **IKEA** ✓
> Hej ▮▮▮▮, tack snälla för de fina orden! 😍 Vad glada vi blir att du tycker om oss på kundservice! 💙 Jag ska se till att framföra detta till alla. ⭐ /Hanna

14.

Grönsaksbollarna/ Grönsakskorven de skippar jag 😋 Plantbollarna "Huvudroll" de är bäst så goda! Ikeas spagetti med vegetarisk k*ttfärssås som ni haft länge den är väldigt god!

Gilla   Svara   13 v   👍

> 🎤 Författare
> **IKEA** ✓
> Vad kul att du delar dina tankar ▮▮▮▮! HUVUDROLL är en stor favorit hos mig med! 😍 /Clara
>
> Gilla   Svara   13 v   🥳

15. (Excluded)

Ikeas marknadsförare är som vanligt genier! ✨ Älskart!

Gilla Svara 14 v 👍 7

> 🖊 Författare
> **IKEA** ✅
> Kärlek till dig! Vi sitter här och fnissar åt alla era briljanta orm-skämt i kommentarerna ❤️ /Gabriella
>
> Gilla Svara 14 v 👍❤️ 3

16. (Excluded)

Det vore trevligt med laktosfria alternativ.

Gilla Svara 20 v

> 🖊 Författare
> **IKEA** ✅
> Vår smarriga jordgubbskaka är helt laktosfri, den är även vegansk! Vår kladdkaka är också laktosfri om man väljer denna utan grädde. 😍 /Samira
>
> Gilla Svara 20 v

Appendix 4:

The coding process took place from the beginning of March to the middle of April 2023 and was carried out by the researcher (Sara Fregert). The coding scheme presented in this appendix is the final version of my coding, depicting the categories that were the foundation for the themes after excluding the codes that I did not find relevant to my research.

"The shallow and over-friendly Influencer"

Quote	Code	Description of code
"It's like two people would stand and talk and one says 'how are you' and the other says 'It's a bit of a shame, I've been in hospital […] this week.' and then the other says 'great, we have been on holiday". (Participant 4)	**Misalignment**	- Message that does not respond to the message of the sender. - The message does not align with the previous image of Ikea. - Shallow
"You do not really look at the writing of the consumer, really it's just talking" (Participant 1)		
"…You should give feedback to the problem you have had, some kind of comment…" (Participant 4)		
"I think it's quite ignorant. Nothing concrete comes back, if you had been a family […] it's just 'yes I hear what you are saying, I'll pass it on." (Participant 9)		
You could also say that they don't match the comments, had there been a lot of smileys and so on in those comments and a lot of personal ones. (Participant 8)		

"It's like someone sitting there who has nothing to do with the organization." (Participant 6) *"It's some young person who is employed just to write there and has no insight into how things work at IKEA."* (Participant 6)	**Alternative explanation**	- Trying to understand the performance by trying to find an explanation. - Someone who is young and do not understand Ikeas' way of working.
"I think it's so incredibly presumptuous, fish and chips are a favorite of many and then this emoji with a heart, well it's not at all professional." (Participant 9)		
"It's just that it's a bit flat because it's obvious that someone hasn't thought it through." (Participant 6)		
"a young person with poor directives." (Participant 7)		
"I just get annoyed. I would have been super annoyed if I had received this answer" (Participant 1)	**Sender perspective**	- Putting themselves in the sender's shoes by way of expression. - Negative towards the expression.
"No comment that it was thick breading and no it was bad, but it is more like 'oh fish and chip, it is a favorite of many'. I could not care less. That's not why I wrote to you, to find out that others have fish and chips as a favorite. I don't care about that. Mine was terrible that I got, I guess that's what annoys me." (Participant 4)		
"If you had these, like the first person here		

who has taken the time to write this comment on a, ´you have been annoyed by this system so much, you get this standard response all the way and then hope that the move goes well and you enjoy the new accommodation and then a heart smiley´. There's a risk that one would have gotten annoyed.”		
“I can agree that not everything is optimal, but to change the product is like a five-year perspective, what should I say to the outside world, I can't promise anything.” (Participant 10)	**Organizational perspective**	- Putting him-/herself in the shoes of an employee that is working in the organization. Using expressions such as I and refers to the own experiences. - More forgiving to the expression.
“I think it's a professional answer to both of them. The first is a matter of product development and there is only so much you can answer when you're sitting in a company because you can't promise anything, given that it takes many years before any new production, new drawings and so on come in.” (Participant 10)		
“And then when there are a lot of smileys as well, it can give the impression that okay, now we've glossed over this issue, so it won't be passed on to any product development unit at all.” (Participant 8)	**Smileys**	- The reaction to smileys. - Feeling of frivolity. - Smoothing over the problem.
“ […] I think it's not really serious, when you take it in a somewhat flamboyant way […] we don't care much about what you say really, it's		

just a bit too frivolous.” (Participant 11)		
“If you change, it should have been instead, it doesn't sound good that you experienced this in Karlstad. It is of course something we will look at, uh, remove the humor or this smiley bit and all that bit.” (Participant 7)		
“A robot, it's just like a standardized answer. It feels like you could teach a robot to do that, you know?” (Participant 2).	**Standardized answer**	- Referring to copy paste. - Refering to the feeling of being written by AI. - Non-emotional.
It's *like picking keywords and putting them together in a text.”*(Participant 4).		
“It's so straightforward ... It's somewhat un-sympathetic” (Participant 1)		
“It feels like they send I to everyone” (Participant 14).		
“Yes, it feels like such a copy-paste” (Participant 13).		

The Experienced and Arrogant Lawyer

Quotes	Code	Description of code
“It feels better. You get answers to things. Then you can investigate what IWAY is for something. You get a link here to that as well.” (Participant 1)	**Informative**	- Reference to the link. - Positive.
"Well, personally, I think this is a pretty perfect answer, it's spot on. This is how I would have liked an answer. It's informative but also links to a website or further so you can read more		

about this. "(Participant 16).		
"it's kind of more follow-up […].*"* (Participant 1)	**Alignment**	- Feelings of replying to the senders' message
" […] personal, I think. Here you answer back to what you have asked questions about." (Participant 4)		
" Detailed answer to the question itself" (Participant 6)		
"That it feels like they are responding seriously to the question." (Participant 7)		
"[…] *but I think that here you have, here you really show that you care about the question-er, I think. And answers properly."* (Participant 11)		
"the information is good, but it doesn't really answer the question or the statement." (Participant 13)	**Misalignment**	- Message that does not respond to the message of the sender. - The message does not align with the previous image of Ikea.
"Well, the person writing this wants them to sign a legally binding agreement. You don't comment on that, you just comment on how things are at the moment. This is what we do and then nothing more, you don't really answer. Then it is, of course, a very businesslike answer, it is certainly not to stick your neck out and so on" (Participant 13)		
"And then nothing more, you just don't really respond." (Participant 13)		
"I think that you kind of dismiss this and think		

that, well, we have our IKEA ways and that's great." (Participant 12)		
"And then we have our way so we don't have to sign because we do enough already." (Participant 14)		
[…] for me this signals that we have our own and it's actually better than all the others." (Participant 12).		Comparison to other organization – Patagonia.
"When you read it the first time, I thought you got a rather positive picture, 'yes but that's good, you have a system you work according to' [...] but then when you think about it, or talk about it as we did now, you get a slightly more negative picture." (Participant 14)		
"I miss, as I said, a direct association with the issue. International Accord, why don't you want to sign it. You don't say that, you don't say that we can't sign this because it is, it has actually, it should actually be smaller" (Participant 12)		
"She works in a legal department at IKEA" (Participant 13) *"Yes, and there's a very good flow to the text, so it's not like one sentence and then a smiley and then the next sentence, it's short. The writing is quite detailed."* (Participant 14) *"It feels like this has been raised at the board and so it has…"* (Participant 13)	**Alternative explanation**	- Trying to understand the performance by trying to find an explanation.

"Has been processed a few times" (Participant 16)		
"Been approved and then you kind of use it." (Participant 13)		
"they don't want that because 'oh, IKEA has signed here now that they don't believe in this'." (Participant 9).		-
"They wrap it up by saying this is what we do [...]." (Participant 13)	**Implicit cues**	- Feeling that the organization do not really express the truth.
"But between the lines, they are actually saying that they don't need to sign this agreement." (Participant 16)		
"We have Ikea everywhere and we're going to do much more concrete things, so they kind of say it implicitly. And then you can't write it too clearly, that we don't believe in this." (Participant 9)		
"It's crystal, yes, but you can, you read that. I mean they have something much better, much more. And there is no answer that they will do this, but they do it instead, they have chosen a path. They don't believe in this International Accord." (Participant 9) *"It's only implicit, it's not stated anywhere."* (Participant 12) *"No, but I interpret it that way."* (Participant 9)		

"It's more blunt, so it's more blunt language." (Participant 2)	**Experience**	-Older - Formal language - No emojis
"So it's just, they're not emojis." (Participant 2)		
"it feels like an older person answered and a younger person answered the first one." (Participant 2)		
"more facts and less fuzzy if I say so." (Participant 2)		
"It's also "Sincerely Erica" as well. It's a more old-fashioned way of" (Participant 3) *"Expressing oneself"* (Participant 3)		
" It could be different, but for me it might as well be different levels in the organization." (Participant 4) *"That there is a more educated person sitting there answering."* (Participant 4) *"Yes, yes."*(Participant 2, 3) *"More back office so to speak."* (Participant 2) *"Yes, more back office."* (Participant 4)		- Educated
"I don't think you need to categorize age, this could be a 20-year-old as well." (Participant 16)		
"For someone who is new to the job and hasn't worked for very long, they have to answer these kinds of questions that can be kind of a		

mess." (Participant 14)

"Yes, a legal soup." (Participant 13)

Human and daring youth

Quote	Code	Description of Code
"So this is more like a friend who is, answers. This is really, especially number eight is like, it could have been a conversation with me and my daughter or something like "or how blah blah blah and before you say it like smiley hihi!"(Participant 1)	**Retrospective sensemaking- older generation**	- Connection to children's discourse
"Whenever I look in 'name of child' or 'name of child' feeds ... I kind of don't understand what they are writing in like their feeds." (Participant 12)		
"Light-hearted, but these are light-hearted comments, so it's fun to be a little light-hearted back, as long as you don't go out of your way and stick your nose out too much." (Participant 13)	**Description - younger generation**	
"there's a bit more humanity behind it. It feels like a person is sitting and writing." (Participant 16)		
"Here's someone who knows what he's doing and dares to joke back" (Participant 6) *"Yes."* (Participant 8) *"You should be a little braver when you."* (Participant 6)		

"It makes the company more humane, meaning that you feel that a company is like a person instead of a large company." (Participant 14)		
"A bit of a frivulous answer." (Participant 15) *"Well, you don't take it seriously here."* (Participant 13) **"No."** (Participant 15) *"No, but the ninth is a bit different from the other two, that in the other two, in the seventh and eighth g, it's more of a."* (Participant 16) *"A jargong. The jargong is there. "* (Participant 13)	**Misalignment**	- Do not respond in line with the sender.
"If you are neutral in this conversation, it becomes quite funny." (Participant 16).	**Neutral sense-making frame**	- Positive towards the identity
"I don't know if I would be so happy if I came to IKEA's customer service in person." (Participant 16) *"Stand there with their sofa […]"* (Participant 13). *"Well, I would not have been so happy as a customer if I had received that answer."* (Participant 16)	**Sender sense-making frame**	- Negative towards IKEA:s way of expression. - Put themselves in the shoes of the sender by way of wording.
"That's exactly how it is on Facebook when things get going […] Here they use humor in its	**Legitimacy**	Reference to Facebook

proper context.” (Participant 7)		
“It doesn't affect my view of IKEA, it's just a forum that [...] *they write for the sake of writing. If I have a serious complaint, I would never take it to Facebook* [...] *if it had been a customer service on other channels, I would have been worried*.” (Participant 4)		

The Sympathetic grown-up

Quote	Code	Description of Code
“This is the kind of question […] *you never ask on Facebook. It doesn't belong on Facebook.”* (Participant 4)	**Alternative explanation**	- Trying to understand the performance by trying to find an explanation.
“Posting a comment on Facebook is really a way to perhaps get a quick response but also to smear the company.” (Participant 16)		
“This is a person who is fishing for 'this is really bad'. But she's very objective, so that's very good.” (Participant 12)	**Good reply**	- Positive towards the organization's reply.
“the grown-up in the room” (Participant 7).		
“But this one is an adult […] and answers seriously, no smileys […]” (Participant 6)		
“Yes, they do not leave him, but they want to help him in the best possible way.” (Participant 1)	**The act of replying**	- Good response to answering despite hidden agenda from sender.
“That says a lot about the company. Managing their customers and appealing to customers as well [...] *They could have just written here that they were sorry to hear that you haven't re-*		

ceived your order." (Participant 14)

The Genuine Friend

Quote	Code	Description of Code
"It is the rainbow colours and [...] *this person (*the sender) *has added quite a few rainbow flags* [...] *Here she actually picks up on the rainbow flags"* (Participant 12)	**Alignment**	Feelings of replying to the senders' message
"To have this kind of personal relationship with customers who really [...] that 'I have to go on Facebook to tell IKEA how good they are' with this [...] and bubbles over." (Participant 9) *"Yes, and then you want to get back some bubbling over. "*(Participant 12)		
"[...] It is more like a private one, i.e. between two private people talking." (Participant 14)	**Text-conversation**	- Anology to a private real life conversations.
" [...] This is perhaps more like a text message conversation than a comments section. " (Participant 16)		
*"You're bubbly and happy because you have, if I've been to *name* for tea then maybe I have."* (Participant 9) *"Yes, what fun it was."* *Skratt*. (Participant 11) *"So I wrote, god what good scones you baked yesterday, wow."* (Participant 9)		

"Yes it is." (Participant 11) *"Four tomorrow then."* (Participant 12)		
"[...] *In that they use words that they* (the organization) *have received from the comments before* [...] *feels like they put some time and energy into the answer than to just have an auto-answer* [...] *Because they are different really, all the answers."* (Participant 16)	**Genuine**	Different answers in all comments