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The Swedish Armed Forces, from battles to storytelling

A narrative analysis of how an authority, reliant on legitimacy and funding, employs
storytelling to convey societal relevance

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to gain a deeper understanding of how entities reliant on governmental funding employ storytelling to convey relevance. The aim is to explore the presented narratives using a qualitative method and conduct a case study of the Swedish Armed Forces's marketing campaigns. The selected and analyzed material consists of two video campaigns from the authority's own YouTube channel prior to the occurrence of external events after 2022. To dissect the storytelling strategies, a theoretical framework based on previous literature from Johansson (2005) and Axenbrant and Dennisdotter (2008) was utilized to understand how narrative elements like structure, characters, and theme are used to build a story that fosters a sense of legitimacy and relevance. Further, this thesis takes into consideration trends and events that were prevalent prior to the launch of the campaigns, allowing a deeper understanding of whether and how the narrative elements reflect ongoing societal contexts and discussions to secure societal relevance. The case study identified that despite departing from conventional storytelling in marketing, organizations can still communicate relevance by leveraging narrative elements. These include creating relatable characters that the audience can identify with, establishing emotional connections, portraying authenticity, and reflecting the societal and cultural contexts of the country in which the organization operates. While taking a stance from certain societal discussions to avoid conflicting messages. By employing these techniques, entities are able to use storytelling to simplify stakeholders' understanding of the organization, its values, and its mission, thereby enhancing their relevance and ensuring their continued service.

Keywords: *Storytelling, Narrative, Marketing Campaign, The Swedish Armed Forces, Relevance, Emotion.*

Characters: 91750

The two authors have contributed equally to the paper.

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1. Introduction

In modern society, public perception is crucial for organizations seeking to establish trust, gain a competitive edge, and establish a strong brand presence (Dahlqvist & Melin, 2010). However, entities reliant on governmental funding face additional pressure as they must cultivate a perception of legitimacy and relevance within society to maintain their economic support (Deverell & Wagnsson, 2016). These organizations often resort to marketing strategies to achieve such an image. A common approach is corporate storytelling, wherein narratives are crafted to create a compelling story that demonstrates the entity's necessity to the public (Fog et al., 2010).

In this context, storytelling refers to the content of the tale itself, while narratives encompass the methods used to construct and convey that tale by including structure, characters, and themes (Axenbrant & Dennisdotter, 2008; Silverman, 2011). Since the early 2000s, Swedish marketers have recognized storytelling as a powerful tool for establishing a trustworthy brand identity, enabling organizations to convey an internal and external image of their mission, vision, values, and evoke emotional responses (Axenbrant & Dennisdotter, 2008; Fill & Turnbull, 2016; Fog et al., 2010). The adoption of narratives and storytelling principles reflects a purposeful effort to harmonize with the expectations and behaviors of contemporary consumer citizens, signaling a transition towards consumer-oriented marketing approaches (Bailey, 2007).

Additionally, with the advent of the digital age, storytelling has further evolved into digital storytelling by conveying narratives through digital tools and platforms (Mueller & Rajaram, 2023; Axenbrant and Dennisdotter, 2008). Consequently, there has been a notable increase in the use of digital marketing campaigns aimed at conveying compelling stories (Axenbrant & Dennisdotter, 2008). By integrating narrative elements into digital marketing campaigns, organizations can stand out in the ambiance of marketing efforts and reduce the likelihood of stakeholders skipping their ads as the audience is transported into a story (Coker et al., 2021).

However, while existing literature on storytelling explores its influence on audience perception, attitude, and behavior, its specific role in building an image of legitimacy and relevance remains unexplored. This research gap underscores the need to investigate how organizations dependent on governmental funding utilize storytelling in their marketing campaigns. By examining narrative elements, such as structure, characters, and themes, and analyzing the topics and interests prevalent before the launch of specific marketing campaigns, we can gain insight into how these stories are constructed to communicate relevance to society. This inquiry is particularly relevant to the field of strategic communication, which emphasizes the purposeful utilization of communication to align with an organization's long-term goals (Falkheimer & Heide, 2023). Exploring the utilization of storytelling within this context will provide a deeper understanding and insights into how this tool is wielded to create an image of relevance and trust. Ultimately, such insights contribute to understanding how storytelling contributes to achieving the overarching objectives of an organization dependent on governmental funding. To conclude this study, an in-depth case study of the Swedish Armed Forces will be undertaken. Which will from here on be referred to as the "SAF."

1.1 Case Background

The SAF, a military authority tasked with the responsibility of defending Sweden and its people by supporting peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts, is a fascinating subject within the realm of storytelling. This is due to its dependence on legitimacy, trust, governmental funding, and future personnel for survival (Deverell & Wagnsson, 2016). Unlike other governmental organizations dependent on governmental funding, such as hospitals and schools, which maintain inherent relevance due to constant demand, the SAF faces the challenge of demonstrating its importance and necessity even when demand for its services is absent. Consequently, the SAF has evolved to resemble a brand, utilizing marketing campaigns to showcase its institutional relevance to society during periods devoid of external threats (Strand & Kehl, 2019; Deverell et al., 2015).

The SAF has actively engaged with marketing and media agencies since 2006 to recruit potential candidates (Försvarsmakten, 2022). However, following the abolition of compulsory conscription in Sweden in 2010, the organization transitioned to having to rely on voluntary registration for military training (Pliktverket, 2023). Consequently, the SAF

faced the imperative to demonstrate their societal relevance and necessity, as well as to encourage public engagement in new innovative ways. The authority thus began collaborating with award-winning agencies such as "Paradiset" and "Volt" to explore communication approaches aimed at reaching a wider audience. This initiative paved the way for the organization's new marketing campaigns, which debuted in 2011 and continued with a new launch each subsequent year, even though compulsory conscription was reintroduced in Sweden in 2017 (Försvarmakten, 2022).

The campaigns launched from 2011 and onwards showcased a new SAF, with new visuals, stories, and messages, intended to modify the authority's internal and external image from its previous "*masculine, hierarchical, and unfashionable*" image (Försvarmakten, 2022). By shifting focus from solely recruiting, to also emphasizing brand building, these campaigns aim to raise awareness of the organization, its relevance, and strengthen public trust (Försvarmakten, n.d.). Thereby, not only facilitating recruitment but also showcasing the authority's mission in general, to protect Sweden and defend its freedom (Försvarmakten, n.d.).

Additionally, the SAF has become a widely discussed phenomenon in today's society, particularly with the escalating conflict in Europe and Sweden's recent membership in NATO, marking a significant departure from the nation's long-standing reputation as a peaceful nation (Försvarmakten, 2024; Hans Blix centrum, 2022). However, despite these external factors, which automatically create public interest in the SAF, the authority reported a notable increase in public trust, awareness, and positive attitudes towards the organization as early as their 2018 annual report, expressing that the increase was believed to be related to their marketing campaigns (Försvarmakten, 2018). Thus, there's significant interest in delving deeper into the narrative elements employed by the organization in their campaigns during peacetime to captivate stakeholders and maintain relevance within Swedish society, particularly before the occurrence of external events after 2022.

1.2 Problematization

This thesis examines how entities that depend on governmental funding use storytelling to establish and maintain their legitimacy and relevance in society. It specifically focuses on a military authority, as it, unlike other governmentally funded entities, needs to demonstrate

relevance and legitimacy even in the absence of demand for its services. Thus, this thesis will take into consideration trends and events that were prevalent prior to the launch of the campaigns. Allowing a deeper understanding of the societal context that the narrative elements reflect in Sweden to secure their relevance in society during periods of peace.

Storytelling has become a significant marketing strategy to portray relevance and legitimacy, prompting the need for more profound research into its complexity and potential. This is especially true in relation to maintaining public interest and relevance during periods when direct external threats are absent. Showcasing a knowledge gap that needs to be addressed and explored further. The SAF's use of storytelling, therefore, provides an intriguing case study to examine the usage of narrative elements in marketing campaigns aimed at preserving legitimacy and government funding.

1.3 Aim and Research Question

This thesis seeks to explore how the SAF strategically employs narrative elements in its storytelling practices, particularly in its marketing campaigns. Focusing on understanding how the military authority, dependent on government funding, utilizes storytelling in these campaigns to sustain relevance and garner public support during periods without direct external threats. It also evaluates whether and how the narrative aligns with societal discussions and events to further resonate with the public to maintain social relevance.

More specifically, this research aims to dissect various narrative elements through a theoretical framework provided by Johansson (2005), which includes, *Framework of Action*, *Characters & Setting*, and *Theme*. It is accompanied by Axenbrant and Dennisdotter's (2008) seven elements of digital storytelling, with an intent to provide a deeper understanding of the role these narrative elements play in the SAF's storytelling strategies and point out any misalignments with the established framework. Also taking into consideration possible commonalities and differences between the two videos in the strategies employed to create societal relevance.

The research will concentrate on a period preceding significant external events. This allows for a deeper understanding of how narratives in storytelling serve as a tool for strategic

communication in its efforts to persuade audiences, bolster public trust, and reinforce relevance without external threats that could influence public opinion.

This thesis will therefore answer the following research question:

- *How does the SAF utilize storytelling in its marketing campaigns to maintain relevance during times of peace?*

1.4 Delimitations

To address the research question, the selection of material has been restricted to a specific timeframe: marketing campaigns presented as YouTube videos before 2022 on the SAF's official account. This decision is made to account for the external factors that emerged from 2022 onwards, such as the war in Ukraine and the new NATO membership, which inevitably influenced the level of interest in the SAF. Two specific marketing campaigns have been chosen for analysis: the official video from *You new, You free* released in 2016, and one of the two official videos from *Everything that has not happened yet* released in 2019. The campaigns were selected based on the SAF's statement that these two campaigns aimed to describe the relevance of the SAF, increase understanding of why a defense is needed, why it must be developed, and create an image as a reliable social actor who defends Sweden and its interests (Försvarsmakten, 2021; Försvarsmakten, 2020). This aligns with the aim and research question of this study, which focuses on campaigns that emphasize societal relevance rather than solely taking a recruiting perspective. Due to the limited scope of this paper, posters and other materials included in the marketing campaigns are not analyzed.

Furthermore, storytelling as a marketing tool can be divided into two main areas of research: internal and external. Storytelling within internal marketing focuses on conveying an image internally to strengthen organizational culture and motivate employees (Axenbrant & Dennisdotter, 2008). This study, however, aims to delve deeper into how entities dependent on governmental funding leverage marketing campaigns to maintain relevance and gain public support. Thus, this academic research emphasizes examining the application of storytelling in external marketing.

2. Previous Research

To gain a deeper understanding of storytelling and narratives, the forthcoming section will compile previous research in the area of storytelling and narratives in marketing, the use of narratives by military organizations, and finish off with research on the SAF's marketing campaigns.

2.1 Storytelling in Marketing: Corporate Storytelling

Storytelling has found its way into the realm of modern marketing strategies and has evolved into what is today known as corporate storytelling. Serving as a strategy for brands to differentiate themselves from their competitors by evoking an emotional response in consumers that transcends rational consumption (Fog et al., 2010; Rosenbaum-Elliott et al., 2015). Thereby, it is becoming increasingly apparent that stories related to a brand have the capacity to significantly influence the overall customer experience of the brand (Lundqvist et al., 2013).

According to Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. (2015), storytelling aids in creating and communicating a symbolic identity or image that consumers can easily relate to and incorporate into their identities. Similarly, Axenbrant and Dennisdotter (2008) highlight that storytelling in marketing revolves around crafting a positive narrative that benefits the organization's overall image rather than focusing on one specific product or service. This, in turn, simplifies consumers' understanding of the organization and its values, making the relationship between the consumer and the brand more personal and meaningful (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al., 2015). Taking this idea one step further, Mueller and Rajaram (2023) elaborate on how storytelling can effectively translate new products or phenomena into recognizable and familiar contexts. Thus providing consumers with a sense of security amidst change and innovation.

Moreover, studies indicate that brands that effectively employ storytelling have the potential to obtain numerous benefits, including increased customer satisfaction and perceived relevance. This strategy, due to its multimodal nature, also improves the likelihood of being remembered (Lundqvist et al., 2013; Axenbrant & Dennisdotter, 2008). Thereby, it enhances

customer-based brand equity through its unique marketing efforts and adds intangible value (Keller, 1993; Lundqvist et al., 2013).

However, it is crucial to emphasize the importance of perceived authenticity when creating a successful corporate story. With most consumers having a negative perception of marketing efforts, the story will not achieve success if it lacks authenticity. This does not necessarily mean that the story must be based on real events; rather, it suggests that the story and its characters must be relatable, a point that will be further discussed in Section 2.2 *Narratives in Marketing* (Axenbrant & Dennisdotter, 2008; Lundqvist et al., 2013; Fog et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2017; Green & Brock, 2000).

2.2 Narratives in Marketing Campaigns

While storytelling and narratives are often used interchangeably, they have distinct meanings. A story refers to the actual tale being told, whereas a narrative is a method used to construct and convey the story (Axenbrant & Dennisdotter, 2008). Narratives are thereby constructed using key elements such as plot, characters, and themes, which collectively shape a story (Silverman, 2011).

Narrative marketing is characterized by its storytelling format. This format primarily consists of two central components: events are presented in chronological order and a clear causality among the various elements in the story (Escalas, 1998; Kim et al., 2017). Research studies have demonstrated that narrative marketing tends to elicit more positive emotions, responses, and overall brand attitudes compared to non-narrative marketing. This finding of narrative marketing is believed to be primarily driven by the viewer's ability to identify with the character presenting the narrative and the setting in which the story unfolds (Kim et al., 2017; Dessart, 2018; Axenbrant & Dennisdotter, 2008). However, according to Panda et al. (2013), the potential issue with such marketing strategies lies in the viewer's interpretation of the story's presented narrative. The way an emotionally oriented advertisement is perceived has the potential to drastically differ based on a variety of factors, such as the viewer's perception, cultural background, and unique life experiences. Thus, it becomes clear that narrative marketing strategies are inherently more complex and more challenging to control compared to a rational approach.

To avoid such complications, research by Kim et al. (2017) emphasizes that the creation of relatable characters engages the viewer in a profound empathic process. Involving a mental stimulation that instills in the viewer a sense of being "transported" into the presented narrative of the protagonists is described as "*The feeling of being lost in a story*" (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 701). Inherently, the process creates strong emotional connections and motivation, even when the viewer is aware that the events that are presented are not real (Kim et al., 2017; Green & Brock, 2000; Dessart, 2018).

By showcasing narratives that revolve around the life experiences of other individuals and portraying a relatable protagonist, the advertisement evokes an emotive response from the viewer. Thus, infusing the marketing campaign with a higher sense of credibility is necessary, as it is difficult to disregard the lived experience of others. Ultimately, lowering possible counterarguments and critical thinking compared to non-narrative marketing efforts, which are typically structured around a central argument or explanation (Kim et al., 2017; Dessart, 2018).

2.3 Narratives in Marketing Campaigns by Military Authorities

Today, military authorities have adopted communication strategies akin to brands, utilizing emotional marketing to promote military careers and uphold their societal relevance, even in times lacking external threats (Strand & Kehl, 2019; Deverell & Wagnsson, 2016). This shift towards consumer-oriented marketing approaches, such as narratives and storytelling principles, reflects a concerted effort to align with the expectations and behaviors of contemporary consumer citizens (Bailey, 2007).

Research by Ringsmose and Børgesen (2011) highlights a positive correlation between strong narratives and public support for military authorities and their mission. They characterize a strong narrative in military institutions with four basic elements: "*Clarity of purpose, Prospect of success, Consistency, and Absence of strong competing narratives*" (p. 513-514). Freedman (2006, p. 23) further emphasizes that by utilizing persuasive stories that "... *appeals to the values, interests and prejudices of the intended audience,*" military authorities have the potential to frame their narratives in a way that influences public perception and fosters positive attitudes towards the authority. However, the portrayed values in the campaigns should depend on the country, its existing culture, and level of patriotism, to reflect the target

audience (Walter, 2022). Additionally, according to Ringsmose and Børgesen (2011), narratives presented by military authorities that emphasize the protection of national interests are more likely to garner increased public support.

Strand and Kehl (2019, p. 296) further entail that military institutions have tendencies to apply narratives of "*Distant and Dangerous Others*" to demonstrate their utility and relevance in society. Similarly, Stern (2006) suggests that in efforts to establish a sense of safety, the presented narratives often aim to evoke feelings of danger and fear. This is achieved by framing a collective "we" as a secure entity while portraying "others" as unsafe or threatening. In addition, Walter (2022) proclaims that military authorities craft narratives in their marketing campaigns centered on the appeal of adventure and positive contributions to society. These narratives often showcase exotic locations and sophisticated equipment like submarines and helicopters, portraying a lifestyle that contrasts with ordinary, everyday life. This portrayal serves both to attract recruits and to underscore the significance of the unique and impactful work undertaken by these organizations. Walter (2022) also observes a spectrum of approaches among military entities: while some maintain traditional portrayals of soldiers in ground combat, others embrace nontraditional imagery to challenge perceptions of military service as inherently masculine and violent. These narrative strategies often reflect the broader values and cultural context of the respective military institutions and the countries they represent.

2.4 SAF's Marketing Campaigns

Although there's limited research specifically on narratives and storytelling employed by the SAF, existing studies have explored the organization's marketing campaigns. Research by Deverell and Wagnsson (2016) explains that the SAF's marketing campaigns serve as commercial endeavors aimed at promoting an appealing image of the authority to instill trust among stakeholders. The organization strives to depict everyday life within the SAF to offer insights into the organization and present a realistic, authentic image that aligns with reality.

Kehl (2023) further illustrates how the SAF leverages marketing campaigns to facilitate recruitment and reshape their relevance in society. The author highlights how the SAF, in previous campaigns, has implemented LGBTQ rights as a promotional instrument to imbue their organization with value and rationalize increased rearmament efforts in their marketing

campaigns. By framing gender and sexuality as threatened and in need of safeguarding, the authority aims to broaden recruitment and focus on broadening its employer branding. Similarly, Strand and Kehl (2019) theorize that the SAF employs a *Cold War* narrative to portray itself as a protector of the Swedish population's gender and sexuality by constructing an image of it being threatened by an ambiguously defined external force.

3. Theoretical Framework

This section will introduce the theoretical framework used in the analysis of this study. It will commence by discussing narrative theory and Johansson's three-part model, followed by a further examination of digital storytelling and its key elements.

3.1 Narrative as Theory

According to Czarniawska (2004) and Johansson (2005), stories play a significant role in people's lives by serving as crucial tools through which individuals interpret and create meaning from their reality. Storytelling thus becomes a pivotal means to operationalize and categorize the vast amount of information we encounter in our everyday lives. Information is filtered through our narratives, making our reality comprehensible by analyzing relationships, suggesting causality, and shaping our identity to make sense of our surroundings (Czarniawska, 2004; Johansson, 2005). Examining narratives in marketing thereby provides insight into how brands endeavor to influence individuals' interpretation and understanding of the organization (Walter, 2022). In this case how narrative elements are utilized to convey relevance and legitimacy.

3.1.1 Johansson's Three-Part Model

While a dominant narrative theory and analysis method have yet to be established, this thesis will apply an existing narrative model presented by Johansson (2005). This three-part model dissects stories as communication activities by dividing their content into three dimensions: *Framework of Action*, *Characters & Setting*, and *Theme*. This approach provides narrative insight into how stories convey their messages.

3.1.1.1 Framework of Action

As presented by Johansson (2005), traditional storytelling follows a linear structure of action and events, consisting of:

1. Introduction
2. Complication
3. Climax/Conflict
4. Resolution & Conclusion

The introduction to a story plays a crucial role as it sets the tone for the narrative, establishes expectations, and captures the viewer's attention. Moreover, stories often feature a conflict or climax, which gives substance to the story and creates emotional involvement (Fog et al., 2010). While the norm usually displays the climax/conflict as a struggle between good and evil, it isn't required to be negative. Instead, it catalyzes propelling the narrative forward (Axenbrant & Dennisdotter, 2008). Once the climax or conflict has been resolved, the viewer expects the story to return to its initial calm state (Fog et al., 2010). Wanting an answer to the question "*Then what happened?*" which is usually predictable, emphasizing typical Hollywood endings (Johansson, 2005).

3.1.1.2 Characters & Setting

A successful story relies heavily on its characters. They play a crucial role in embodying the corporate storytelling strategy, personalizing the brand in a way that resonates with viewers by evoking an emotional response that transcends rational thought processes (Fog et al., 2010; Rosenbaum-Elliott et al., 2015). This concept is further elaborated by Kim et al. (2017) and Dessart (2018), who emphasize the positive correlation between a viewer's ability to identify with the characters presented and a positive brand attitude.

Regardless of the nature of these entities that inhabit the narrative, a story always consists of two characters: the *protagonist*, or main character, who drives the story and narrative forward. The second key character is the *antagonist*, who serves as the adversary of the protagonist. These key characters are always involved in some kind of conflict, whether it is internal or external (Johansson, 2005). However, it is important to note that an antagonist is not bound to human form, as it can be portrayed as an outside force working against the protagonist's goal (MasterClass, 2022).

Johansson (2005) concludes that a story's setting can be understood as two main components of a narrative. The first is *story space*, the environment in which the characters interact. This space not only includes the physical surroundings but also objects, often serving as symbols or metaphors, within these surroundings that provide deeper insights into the message or theme of the story. The second component is *story time*, referring to the time-bound aspect of the story that contributes to context within a specific time frame. Further, add depth to the

story by answering questions such as, *Is it nighttime or daytime?* And *What era is the story set in?* (Johansson, 2005).

Lastly, a narrative also takes into account the perspective, referred to as the *mood*. This phenomenon is divided into two categories: internal and external focalization. Internal focalization focuses on one character's narrative, while external focalization offers multiple viewpoints but maintains a coherent perspective throughout the story (Johansson, 2005).

3.1.1.2 Theme

While the *Framework of Action* provides an answer to "*Then what happened?*" The overall *Theme*, which represents the underlying ideology, communicates the moral or lesson that the story aims to impart. This should not be confused with the message of the story. *Themes* consist of psychological, social, cultural, political, and moral contexts; an idea or apprehension of how something is portrayed. A message should be interpreted as the reason why the story is being told in the first place. Without a clear message, the story becomes pointless to the receiver (Johansson, 2005).

3.2 Digital Storytelling

The rise of digital media has significantly altered the marketing landscape. As advertising increases each year, engaging consumers has become increasingly challenging. Social media channels today provide consumers with the ability to "*SKIP*" ads and control exposure through a paywall, which further complicates matters (Coker et al., 2021). Consequently, narrative transportation in digital storytelling has emerged as an alternative advertising format to capture the attention of stakeholders in an abundance of information (Coker et al., 2021).

The concept of narrative transportation—*getting lost in the story*—is a phenomenon that can be experienced to a notable extent within the context of digital storytelling (Dessart, 2018). Axenbrant and Dennisdotter (2008) emphasize a significant paradigm shift concerning how organizations can effectively communicate while simultaneously promoting engagement and motivation through the innovative communication form of video. The authors further proclaim that the multimodal nature of video enhances the overall trustworthiness, authenticity, and perceived honesty of the content as characters can verbally communicate

and show the message directly to the audience. This claim is further supported by Coker et al. (2017), who indicate that storytelling in video format heightens the likelihood of sharing, brand promotion, and positive word-of-mouth compared to argumentative ads.

When conducting a digital story, the narrative can take various forms. Ranging from a poetic, fictional, or artistic approach. However, Axenbrant and Dennisdotter (2008) profess that the foundation of digital storytelling is composed of seven key elements:

1. **Message:** This answers the critical question of why the story is being told. What is the central point or idea that the author aims to convey to the audience?
2. **Dramaturgy:** A compelling story must invariably build tension, hooking the audience and sparking their curiosity about how the story will evolve and end.
3. **Emotion:** If a story can successfully forge an emotional bond and be perceived as relatable with its receiver, the individual will be more receptive to the organization's message.
4. **Voice and choice of words:** The narrative's voice influences the audience just as much as the choice of words. By employing the right voice, an organization can convey a valuable message to its audience.
5. **Illustration:** This underscores the power of sound and image, with music playing a significant role in shaping the overall emotional sensation of the movie.
6. **Disposition:** How the storyline is dispositioned. Where organizations can manipulate their visual and auditory elements.
7. **Rhythm & Tempo:** These are arguably the most crucial elements of a successful story since these factors are believed to be the primary elements that sustain the audience's attention throughout the storyline. A high tempo is beneficial to maintain the audience's focus.

4. Method

The subsequent sections outline the scientific approach and method, case selection, and data selection. Followed by the practical application, which was implemented as a theoretical framework to analyze the selected material. The final section addresses ethical issues and credibility.

4.1 Scientific Approach & Method

This thesis is rooted in the epistemological approach of social constructionism. The approach proposes that knowledge is based on individual interpretations of reality, shaped by social interactions and personal experiences, ultimately rejecting the idea of universal truth and knowledge (Flick, 2014). The decision to adopt a social constructionist approach is twofold. Firstly, constructionism is suitable for qualitative studies as it focuses on understanding and interpreting people's perceptions and social constructs. This is sufficient when exploring complex phenomena where the perception of reality is subjective and tied to its specific context. Secondly, narrative analysis is conducted through an interpretative approach, implying that the researchers behind this thesis analyze the collected data to identify narrative elements.

Furthermore, the primary objective of this academic paper is to explore *how* storytelling is implemented in marketing campaigns to create relevance in society. This differs from analyzing *how often* these narratives are used or *how many* are implemented. Thus, following Silverman (2013) and Bryman (2018), a qualitative research method offers a more appropriate analytical orientation for our aim compared to a quantitative approach.

This thesis is grounded in theory and utilizes an established theoretical framework; thereby, we adopt a deductive approach (Bryman, 2018). However, there are some abductive elements as we make suggestions based on our interpretation of the analyzed material. The objective is to deepen our understanding of how storytelling is used to communicate relevance by an organization reliant on government funding.

4.2 Case Study & Case Selection

"A case study is a research approach that is used to generate an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of a complex issue in its real-life context." (Crowe, Cresswell, Robertson, Huby, Avery & Sheikh, 2011, p. 1).

In order to provide a comprehensive exploration of the complexities of narrative elements in storytelling, we deliberately chose to conduct a case study, as it provides a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon by examining it in a practical setting (Heide & Simonsson, 2014). This choice also aligns with Silverman's (2011) statement of favoring a case-centered approach when conducting qualitative research. Arguing that the approach offers the opportunity to uncover details that could, potentially, be overlooked in a category-centric research approach. By employing a case-centered approach, we aim to minimize the risk of overlooking details while still generating theoretical insights about general knowledge (Silverman, 2011; Flyvbjerg, 2006).

While Flyvbjerg (2006) highlights the importance that a case study's findings should not be generalized beyond their given context, he emphasizes that their findings can still provide new insights and knowledge within a specific context, thus laying the groundwork for future research.

As previously stated, this thesis focuses on analyzing the storytelling strategies employed by the SAF. The selection of the SAF as the case study stems from its prominent position as a military authority dependent on government funding for survival. The SAF therefore faces the challenge of demonstrating its importance and necessity even when demand for its services is absent. Hence, it offers valuable insights into the utilization of storytelling within organizations that are dependent on showcasing their relevance to society to continue their service. Moreover, the SAF's collaboration with acclaimed marketing agencies and their assertion that their marketing campaigns have contributed to increased public trust, awareness, and favorable perceptions make them an intriguing subject for study (Försvarsmakten, 2022; Försvarsmakten, 2018). Thus, delving into the narrative elements utilized by the SAF offers an opportunity to understand how storytelling is leveraged to convey relevance and legitimacy.

4.3 Data Selection

To answer the research question, this study's empirical material consists of two of the SAF's marketing campaigns: the *You New, You Free* campaign from 2016 and the *Everything that has not happened yet* campaign from 2019. The data was collected from the organization's own YouTube account, ensuring validity by sourcing directly from the primary information provider. Thus reducing the risks associated with handling material that may have been tampered with by a third party.

Since this academic paper operationalizes as a qualitative narrative analysis, we have stratified our material into a time-based category that we believe will answer our research question. The choice to analyze two marketing campaigns was influenced by time limitations. Additionally, the choice of campaign videos was based on the organization's own communicated objective, which was to increase relevance in society, which correlates with the research question of this study.

We find that analyzing video material aligns with our choice of method, which is narrative analysis. However, we acknowledge that a similar study could be conducted using other empirical data, such as posters or social media content. Nonetheless, the popularity of the campaign videos plays an important role in our choice of data selection.

4.3 Narrative as Analysis Method

In order to study the art of storytelling in organizations dependent on government funding, we chose to apply narrative analysis, as it allows us to examine the construction of stories used by the SAF to communicate relevance in society. The multimodal approach offers a nuanced understanding of the marketing campaigns' narrative, as it extends beyond the traditional literary aspect of narratives and brings visual and auditory elements into the analysis. By analyzing both elements, our findings will provide a more holistic result.

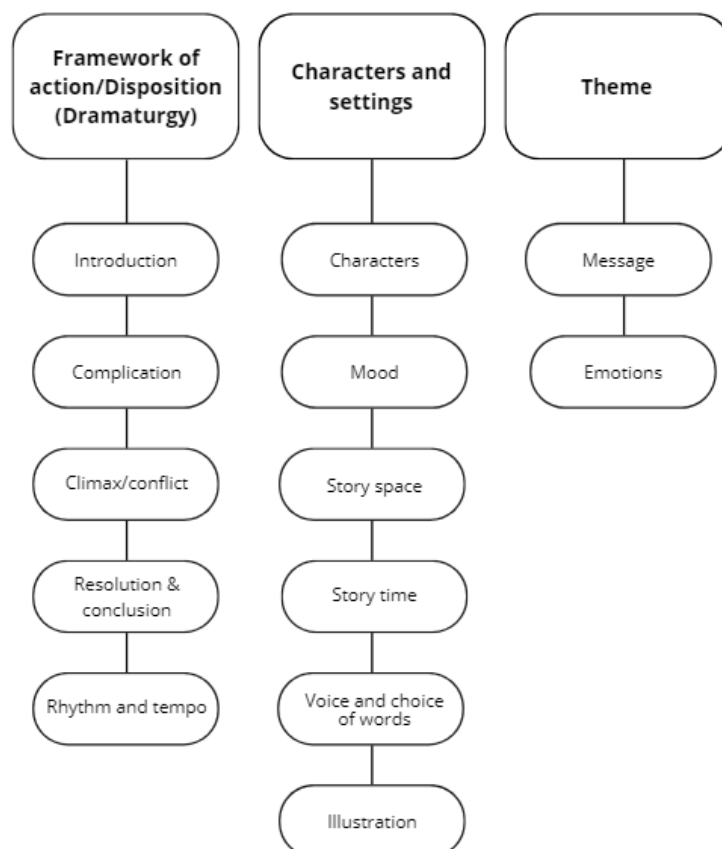
In addition, the relevance of conducting a narrative analysis resonates with Silverman's (2011) arguments regarding the nuances that narratives provide when analyzing the phenomenon of storytelling. Silverman professes that stories are a manifestation of narrative,

representing "an arrangement of events (plots) and people (characters) designed to elicit a response (a reaction from an audience)" (Silverman, 2011, p. 313).

4.4 Practical Application

As mentioned previously, the data selection for this narrative analysis consists of the *You New, You Free* campaign from 2016 and the *Everything that has not happened yet* campaign from 2019. To construct a steady foundation for this analysis, we took a collaborative approach by watching the campaigns together. We believed it was essential to have multiple perspectives on the same empirical material; therefore, we took separate notes during our initial viewing. Afterward, we discussed our separate interpretations and insights into the campaigns and compared notes. This not only enriched our understanding but also led to the emergence of new possible insights. We then rewatched the campaigns for a second time, taking further notes.

By adopting this explicit approach, we aimed to conduct a comprehensive interpretation of the campaigns, leading to a consistent analysis. This approach provided valuable insights when using our analysis framework, which combines Johansson's (2005) theoretical framework of narrative elements, based on three categories: *Framework of Action*, *Characters & Setting*, and *Theme*, with Axenbrant and Dennisdotter's (2008) seven elements of digital storytelling. The final analysis categories are outlined in the model presented below:



4.5 Credibility and Ethics

As discussed by Björklund and Paulsson (2014), the three most fundamental components of a credible study consist of validity, reliability, and objectivity. Since this thesis conducts qualitative research with a social constructionist approach, it does not claim to obtain any objective truth (Amineh & Asl, 2015). While we strive for objectivity, we understand that our background, experiences, and culture inevitably influence our interpretation and analysis. Nevertheless, according to Johansson (2005), narrative analysis is an interpretive activity. The activity does not strive to find one *true* interpretation but explores a multitude of perspectives. In this context, stories are viewed as a co-creation of sensemaking, cultivated through communication within a specific cultural and historical context (Johansson, 2005). Therefore, in correlation with Flyvbjerg (2006), the study's findings should not be generalized beyond their case study context. However, to ensure reliability for future research, the study follows Bryman's (2018) recommendation of clearly outlining the analysis process and model used, which were based on relevant literature and a theoretical framework.

Ethical considerations were taken into account during this study. In social science, these often involve issues of consent, privacy intrusion, and deception. Since the collected material is from a public organization, all data is accessible on the SAF's YouTube account. Therefore, we have not contacted the SAF for any additional comments.

5. Result and Analysis

This section aims to present the results and analysis of this study. It will begin by providing a summary of the topics and interests that were on the agenda of the Swedish population in the years before the campaigns. Continued by the analysis of the two campaigns using the framework outlined in Section 4.4, consisting of: Framework of Action, Characters & Settings, and Theme.

5.1 Swedish Trends During 2015 and 2018

In order to understand the narrative elements employed by the SAF to maintain relevance and legitimacy, it is essential to explore the prevailing interests and topics in Sweden prior to the campaigns. By contextualizing the narratives presented in the marketing campaigns within a broader societal context, their resonance with Swedish society becomes clearer. Therefore, the following sections synthesize data from the University of Gothenburg's "SOM Surveys" (Swedish Opinion Investigations in Media), along with key events that dominated the years 2015 and 2018.

5.1.1 Year: 2015

In 2015, 48% of the Swedish population expressed concern about military conflicts (SOM-Institutet, 2023, p. 17–19); additionally, 31% expressed concern regarding the Russian military (SOM-Institutet, 2023, p. 17–19) (Appendix 1). This could be attributed to the increased tensions in the Baltic Sea region, fueled by Russia's military exercises near NATO air and sea units, as well as its annexation of the Crimean Peninsula (UI, n.d.).

The same year witnessed a surge in worries concerning terrorism, with 48% expressing concern, up from 29% two years prior. This increase could be attributed to the terrorist attack in Paris in November 2015, deemed the deadliest since 2004, which claimed 130 lives (Hjertén, 2016). Additionally, Sweden's security police (SÄPO) raised the terrorism threat level for Sweden from 3 to 4 on a five-point scale (Krisinformation, 2015).

Furthermore, in 2015, the Norwegian charity organization *Care* released the short film, *Dear Daddy*, addressing violence against women and the challenges faced by girls in society (Thorell, 2016). The video depicts the journey of a girl from birth to young womanhood, highlighting the violence she encounters from various men in her surroundings. It underscores the plea for all men to protect females from the dangers associated with being born female. This video, which garnered 3.5 million views in Sweden, sparked a debate on improving protection for girls and educating boys about violence against women.

5.1.2 Year: 2018

In the year 2018, concerns over potential military conflict and the evolving situation in Russia remained relatively stable as of 2015, with a slight decrease to 46% and 27%, respectively (SOM-Institutet, 2023, p. 17) (see Appendix 1).

Additionally, fears among the Swedish public regarding the possibility of terror attacks saw a decrease, settling at 46%. However, it is essential to contextualize that 2017 was marked by several terror attacks across Europe. Notably, the terror attack on Drottningsgatan in Stockholm in April killed 5 citizens (Furusjö & Ek, 2018). Among the victims was an 11-year-old girl named Ebba, who became a symbol of this tragic event in Sweden. In light of these events, the Swedish citizenry voiced their disagreement over proposals to reduce the budget of the SAF, with a steady figure of approximately 45% opposing such reductions, a percentage that aligns with trends from previous years (SOM-Institutet, 2023, p. 65) (see Appendix 2).

Another significant societal event that shook the power structures across the globe was the #MeToo movement, active from the fall of 2017 to the summer of 2018. This movement was monumental in highlighting the widespread existence and effects of sexual violence and discrimination (North, 2019).

5.2 You new, You free

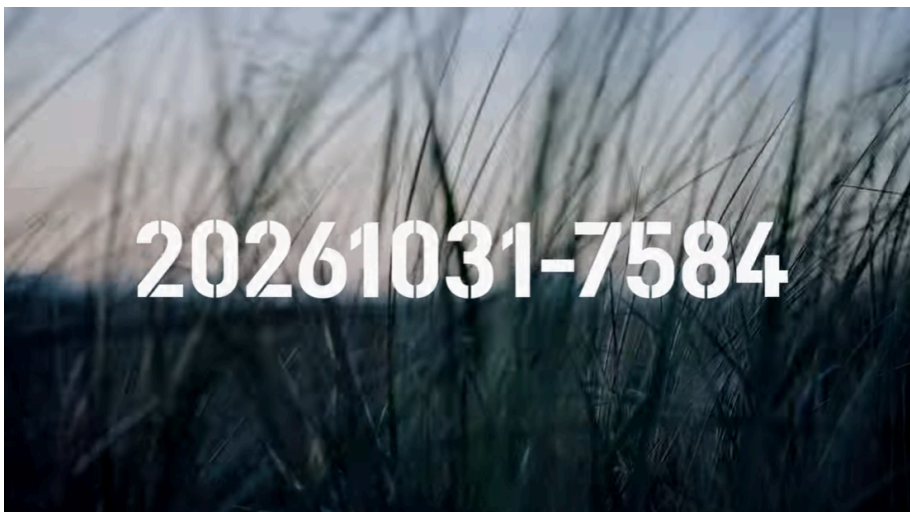
In the autumn of 2016, the marketing campaign *You new, You free* launched. Featuring a 45-second-long video, which was published on the SAF's official YouTube channel. The aim, stated by the SAF, was to increase awareness and relevance by explaining its important role as the defender of Sweden and its interests (Försvarsmakten, 2021).

5.2.1 Framework of Action

Using the framework presented in Section 4.4 *Practical Application*, the initial phase of this model focuses on exploring the *Framework of action* within the marketing campaign. This aims to reveal the core structure of the portrayed narrative.

As explained by Fog et al. (2010), a story's introduction serves as a cornerstone, setting the story's tone, and captivating the audience's attention by establishing expectations. In the case of *You new, You free*, the introduction unfolds with twelve numbers displayed on the screen against a backdrop of various scenes across Sweden. Accompanied by a narrator's voice, the audience is informed, "*On the 31st of October 2026, Sweden welcomes a new citizen. The only thing we know is that she will bear the personal number 20261031-7586*" (Försvarsmakten, 2016, time 0:01-0:13). This intriguing opening piques the viewer's curiosity, prompting questions about the significance of this unborn individual and their role in the narrative.

Time: 0:00-0:04



Picture:1. A grass field, accompanied by a personal number.



Picture: 2. A sundown with 4 people bathing, accompanied by a personal number.

Throughout the video, the number remains stationary on the screen while the background imagery shifts, depicting various locations and background characters. A mellow piano melody accompanies the visuals, while the narrator elaborates on potential paths that 20261031-7586 may traverse, remarking that she could be "*an only child or a trailing child,*" "*pray to God several times a day, or never,*" or "*not be a female at all, but views herself as male*" (Försvarsmakten, 2016, Time 0:17–0:27). The narrator continues to describe these divergent life trajectories while the imagery illustrates snippets of everyday activities featuring different individuals, including a Buddhist monk, a lesbian couple in a car, children playing outdoors, a man working in a flower shop, and a girl doing laundry, et cetera. These scenes transition rapidly, lasting only 3-5 seconds, maintaining a high tempo that keeps the viewer engaged and hooked throughout the video (Axenbrant & Dennisdotter, 2008). By refraining from establishing direct connections between the different scenes and individuals and leaving it ambiguous whether the person born on October 31, 2026, is among those depicted, the narrative achieves what Fog et al. (2010) term the climax. In this context, the narrative's progression isn't driven by complications or conflicts between characters and their actions, but rather by the narrator's exposition of the potential life journey of 20261031-7586. However, due to the multitude of video sequences, discerning whether the video follows a typical chronological order, as outlined by Escalas (1998) and Kim et al. (2017), proves challenging.

Time: 0:11-0:27



Picture: 3. Two females kissing each other in a car, accompanied by a personal number.



Picture: 4. Two girls smiling, holding on to a net, accompanied by a personal number.



Picture: 5. A man vacuum-cleaning a flower shop, accompanied by a personal number.

The video further diverges from the conventional narrative marketing framework outlined by Escalas (1998) and Kim et al. (2017), as it lacks obvious causality between various elements. Thus, the connection between the individuals shown in the video and 20261031-7586 is unclear until the narrator concludes with the statement, *"No matter who 20261031-7586 becomes, our task remains the same: to defend her right to think, act, and live as she pleases, in you new, you free"* (Försvarsmakten, 2016, time 0:28–0:40). At this point, the video reveals the text *You new, You free*, along with the SAF logo. These final moments provide clarity to the viewer, constituting what Fog et al. (2010) refer to as the resolution of the conflict or climax. The viewer now grasps the context of who person 20261031-7586 is; she is the viewer, alongside all Swedish citizens, whom the SAF is set to protect. In essence, this answers the question posed by Johansson (2005): *Then what happened?*, indicating that regardless of the individual's identity, the SAF will protect their human rights.

Time: 0:39-0:45



Picture: 6. A female getting a haircut, accompanied by the text *"You New, You Free"*.



Picture: 7. A child taking a bubble bath, accompanied by the SAF logo.

5.2.2 Characters & Setting

As highlighted by Johansson (2008) and supported by Axenbrant and Dennisdotter (2008), it is the characters that drive the narrative forward, embodying and communicating the message to viewers. In the campaign video *You new, You free*, two central characters are introduced, alongside several background characters. One of these central characters also serves as the narrator, providing an internal focalization and speaking on behalf of the SAF, articulating its mission to protect the protagonist, referred to as 20261031-7584.

While no physical attributes are disclosed for either the narrator or 20261031-7584, the narrator's voice and choice of words are evident in conveying the overall message of the campaign. The only insight into the narrator's identity comes through her voice, which is distinctly female and spoken with a soft, gentle tone as she discusses the possible identity of 20261031-7584. Her voice, accompanied by softly playing piano music, infuses the audience with a sense of calmness and safety. 20261031-7584 is referred to as an unborn girl, identified solely by her Swedish personal number. This strategic decision to withhold physical descriptions could be seen as a deliberate attempt to foster a stronger identification between the viewer and the protagonist. Leaving the physical appearance of the characters open for interpretation allows the audience to project their perceptions onto them, enhancing the possibility for emotional connection and relatability based on their personal experiences. This technique is known to immerse the viewer in the narrative, mentally transporting them into the story (Kim et al., 2017; Green & Brock, 2000; Dessart, 2018). Thus, positioning the

viewer as an integral part of the narrative enhances the level of authenticity of the narrative since nothing is more authentic than one identifying with the protagonist.

Unlike traditional narratives, as expressed by Johansson (2005), that often involve a clear antagonist to create tension, the SAF's campaign video presents an interesting twist. Instead of an antagonist or a specific challenge for the protagonist (the SAF) to overcome, the narrator references various aspects of religious and sexual freedoms, such as "*pray to God several times a day, or never;*" and "*... not be a female at all, but views herself as male*" (Försvarsmakten, 2016, time 0:20-0:27), as elements in need of protection. This approach aligns with previous research by Kehl (2023), where the SAF frames gender and sexuality as aspects in need of safeguarding to redefine societal relevance. Despite these references, the video does not explicitly identify the specific threat, whether external or internal, that Sweden and its freedoms are being safeguarded against. This ambiguity in pinpointing the threat aligns with previous research by Strand and Kehl (2019), who discuss the use of a *Cold War* narrative where the freedoms of Sweden need protection while the actual threat remains ambiguously defined. The antagonist thus becomes, as stated by MasterClass (2022), an external force without a name or tangible form. This approach further resonates with Strand and Kehl's (2019, p. 296) concept of a narrative of *Distant and Dangerous Others*, where the SAF, along with the Swedish population, is subtly portrayed as secure (*we*) in contrast to the undefined threat, depicted as dangerous (*others*). However, according to Ringsmose and Børgesen (2011), narratives by military authorities that emphasize defense against threats to national interest have a greater chance of gaining public support. This insight sheds light on why the narrative of protecting Sweden and its population is employed in the campaign, even though a clear threat or antagonist is not explicitly mentioned or shown.

While the background characters are only displayed in short frequencies, their presence serves an important role in conveying the SAF's message. By portraying a range of ethnicities, sexualities, religions, and ages, the SAF transmits a wider sense of identification of the various characters presented in the campaign (Fog et al., 2005). Thus, as stated by Kim et al. (2017) and Dessart (2018), by visually employing everyday life experiences of various background characters while simultaneously discussing the possible life and identity of 20261031-7584, it is believed to be aimed at transcending the viewer beyond their rational thought processes. Lived experiences are difficult to refute or contradict, and by tapping into this, a strong emotional connection can be fostered. Thereby, this approach has the potential

to create a strong emotional connection, credibility, and engagement, even though the viewer is aware that the campaign is based on fictional characters (Kim et al., 2017; Green & Brock, 2000; Dessart, 2018).

Moreover, Johansson (2005) states that the setting can be divided into two main areas: story time and story space. The video begins by introducing the viewer to the Swedish personal number 20261031-7584, indicating that the story time takes place in a futuristic setting in the year 2026. Thus, enhancing the message (which will be further discussed in Section 5.1.3 *Theme*) that SAF is a necessity for our citizens today and future generations. The story space, while never explicitly mentioned, is believed to be various locations around Sweden, ranging from everyday settings like a bowling alley to more exotic locales like a mountain top. Feeding into the narrative of 20261031-7584's unknown identity and possible life paths. As Axenbrant and Dennisdotter (2008) suggest, the selection of these diverse locations may represent a strategic decision aimed at enhancing relatability with the broader Swedish population.

Finally, the campaign's name, *You new, You free*, showcased in the final scene, draws inspiration from the Swedish national anthem, "*You old, You free*". This choice of words allows the SAF to present its campaign in a manner that resonates with the Swedish public. It provides viewers with a sense of security by making a connection to a familiar cultural context (Mueller and Rajaram, 2023).

5.2.3 Theme

As Johansson (2005) suggests, the theme represents the moral or lesson conveyed by the story, touching upon psychological, social, cultural, political, and moral contexts. While it may not be feasible to speculate on the SAF's intended message beyond their explicit statements, one can analyze the themes the story addresses through the narrative (Johansson, 2005). In the campaign, both the religious and sexual freedoms of Sweden are referenced. This is done through auditory and visual symbolism. Sexual freedom is represented by a lesbian couple kissing in a car, while religious freedom is depicted by a Buddhist monk. The emphasis is that, regardless of one's sexuality or religion, the SAF pledges to provide protection. The lesson learned by the campaign therefore becomes clear: that regardless of one's identity, the SAF will do anything in its power to protect one's rights.

As mentioned before, *You new, You free* subtly suggests that Sweden's human rights require protection from an unspecified threat. This theme reflects the societal contexts prevalent at the time, including heightened anxieties about military conflicts, terrorism, and Russia's involvement in the Baltic Sea. While the campaign does not explicitly mention the possibility of an attack from external military forces or terrorists, its focus on protection and safeguarding by the SAF may reflect the increased apprehensions within Swedish society during that period. Thus, one could interpret that 20261031-7584 serves as a symbol for the cherished values of peacekeeping and the preservation of ordinary life in Sweden. The video thereby triggers emotions centered around caring, safety, acceptance, and warmth, aligning with SAF's mission and addressing public concern. Despite the video's *Cold War* narrative, it establishes a sense of safety without, as noted by Stern (2006), inducing feelings of danger and fear.

The campaign's narrative also seems to echo the ongoing discourse surrounding the short film *Dear Daddy*, as it shares a similar structure. Revolving around a girl's birth, and future, and underscores the importance of her protection. Although the SAF aims to safeguard the entire Swedish population regardless of gender, the narrative's similarities to the *Dear Daddy* video are unlikely to be mere coincidences.

Incorporating emotions and social themes relevant to contemporary Swedish society allows the SAF to ensure that its story resonates with the prevailing issues of the time. This strategy, in line with insights from Axenbrant and Dennisdotter (2008), Lundqvist et al. (2013), Fog et al. (2010), Kim et al. (2017), and Green & Brock (2000), contributes to the creation of a narrative that is perceived as authentic by creating a story that relates to the public of Sweden. This approach also echoes Freedman's (2006, p. 23) emphasis on the need for a story to "*appeal to the values, interests, and prejudices of its intended audience*" to become persuasive and potentially foster positive attitudes toward the authority. Thereby, the *You new, You free* enables the SAF to position itself as a relevant entity in society by reflecting the issues and topics at the forefront of Swedish society.

Additionally, the campaign diverges from traditional military campaigns, as outlined by Walter (2022), which often emphasize adventure and exotic military equipment. It accomplishes this by refraining from incorporating military imagery and withholding the

SAF logo until the very end of the video, immersing the viewer in a narrative that may not initially appear to be connected to the SAF or resemble a typical organizational advertisement. By adopting a storytelling structure, the SAF may conceivably aim to captivate the viewer's attention and discourage premature skipping of the video, as outlined by Coker et al. (2021). However, in the introduction, a keen observer can identify the organization behind the advertisement when the distinctive SAF font, represented by the number sequence *20261031-7584*, illuminates the screen. Furthermore, the absence of military imagery is a strategy identified by Walter (2022) to challenge perceptions of military service as inherently masculine and violent. This aligns with the SAF's efforts to redefine its image as "*masculine, hierarchical and unfashionable*" (Försvarsmakten, 2022). By featuring videos of everyday men and women engaged in ordinary activities instead of soldiers in combat, this narrative seeks to resonate with the broader values and cultural context of the country the military authority represents (Walter, 2022). Sweden is a country with a longstanding reputation as a peaceful nation, and therefore it might be easier for the viewer to relate to imagery of everyday life rather than scenes of conflict to create authenticity and relevance (Försvarsmakten, 2024; Axenbrant & Dennisdotter, 2008). Thereby shifting focus from the organization itself to what it aims to protect, the Swedish public.

This idea is symbolized through the use of a Swedish personal number, which is a unique identifier that serves as an undeniable proof of being part of Swedish society. A person's number is not just a bureaucratic formality but a tangible link to their core identity as a Swedish citizen. This symbol arguably implies that the SAF aims to communicate on a deeply personal level to the Swedish viewer that it will do everything within its power to protect them. Thus, it fosters a strong emotional connection that goes beyond the rational boundaries of engagement and loyalty, creating a bond that is both personal and profound. However, the use of numerical identification rather than names or other identifiers may not translate as effectively across different nations or cultural landscapes.

Lastly, the theme shall not be confused with the message of the story, which focuses on *why the story is being told* and what the author aims to convey to the audience (Axenbrant & Dennisdotter, 2008; Johansson, 2005). At the end of *You new, You free*, the message of the campaign is clearly expressed: to explain the SAF's mission to protect Sweden and defend its freedom. Thereby, employing storytelling strategies to simplify stakeholders' understanding of the organization, its values, and its mission (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al., 2015). Rather than

highlighting specific services or activities of the SAF, the focus of this campaign is on crafting a story that enhances the organization's overall image (Axenbrant & Dennisdotter, 2008).

5.3 Everything that has not happened yet

In the autumn of 2019, the SAF launched the marketing campaign *Everything that has not happened yet*, which is described as taking a futuristic approach (Försvarsmakten, 2020). The campaign, featuring a 30-second video, aimed to underscore the authority's relevance and increase understanding of why the defense is needed today and in the future (Försvarsmakten, 2020).

5.3.1 Framework of Action

The introduction to *Everything that has not happened yet* adopts a dynamic approach, immediately immersing the viewer in action. It begins with a point-of-view from a woman running into a small tunnel, accompanied by heavy breathing. Within seconds, the viewpoint shifts to that of an observer witnessing the woman in question, a female soldier, fully equipped, crawling through the tunnel, accompanied by background shouting. In rapid succession, new snippets depict a little girl navigating through a toy tunnel. This swift-paced introduction captivates the viewer's attention, effectively transporting them directly into the story (Axenbrant & Dennisdotter, 2008).

Time: 0:00-0:04



Picture: 8. A point-of-view perspective of a tunnel.



Picture: 9. A female soldier makes herself ready to crawl into a tunnel.



Picture: 10. A young girl crawling through a toy tunnel.

Throughout the video, it maintains a fast pace, with rapid shifts of video snippets occurring every 2-3 seconds, to attain the audience's attention (Axenbrant & Dennisdotter, 2008). Initially, it highlights a female soldier engaged in various military training activities, followed by scenes of a young girl mirroring similar activities while playing. For instance, while the soldier navigates an obstacle course, the girl does so on a playground structure, accompanied by cheerful, childlike piano music in the background. As the video progresses, it continues to alternate between footage of multiple soldiers in training and scenes of two girls playfully engaging in similar activities, presenting two parallel storylines unfolding simultaneously. While the soldiers are heard shouting encouraging words to each other in a serious tone, the children are heard laughing. The sharp cuts between these sequences and the stark contrast in their content drive the storyline forward, aligning with Fog et al.'s (2010) characterization of

the climax and intensifying the narrative tension.

Time: 0:04-0:06



Picture: 11. A female soldier making her way through an obstacle course.



Picture: 12. A smiling child making her way through a playground structure.

Time: 0:19-0:21



Picture: 13. A girl goes under an obstacle on a playground structure.



Picture: 14. Four soldiers in a river, preparing to navigate an obstacle in their path.

The placing of the two distinct storylines involving soldiers and children side by side creates a contrast in the video. This contrast draws attention to the video by connecting two controversial phenomena, children and the military, that are typically considered separate by societal norms. However, having the two groups engage in similar activities suggests a potential causal relationship between the elements of the story (Escalas, 1998; Kim et al., 2017). The connection between the two parallel storylines becomes evident only at the very end of the video, with the appearance of the text *"Everything that has not happened yet, is our task to defend,"* followed by the SAF logo (Försvarsmakten, 2019, Time 0:22-0:30). This serves as the resolution of the climax for the audience (Fog et al., 2010). Consequently,

viewers gain a clearer understanding of the context and how the distinctive elements are interconnected. They can now answer the question, *Then what happened?*: The girls can embrace their childhood since the defense ensures to always proactively prepare for everything that has not yet happened to maintain their safety.

Time: 0:22-0:30



Picture: 15. Two children helping each other climb an obstacle, accompanied by the text "*Everything that has not happened yet*".



Picture: 16. Three soldiers guiding each other in a river, accompanied by the text "*is our task to defend*".



Picture: 17. Two soldiers guiding each other in a river, accompanied by the SAF logo.

5.3.2 Characters & Setting

The *Everything that has not happened yet* campaign serves as an intriguing case study in unconventional storytelling, as there's no physical protagonist who propels the storyline forward. Instead, it is interpreted that the protagonist is an abstract entity that the SAF proactively conducts training to protect from harm. According to our interpretation, the protagonist thereby represents Sweden and its population, immersing the viewer as a part of the narrative. The storyline unfolds through a range of side characters, each contributing to the overall narrative in their own unique way through an external focalization. However, among these characters, three in particular are at the center of attention.

The first two are the young girls presented playing in a playground, infusing the story with a heartwarming sense of purity through their playful interactions. The third key character is a female soldier, introduced through a point-of-view internal focalization during the opening scene, whose physical resemblance to the young girls is uncanny. The resemblance is so striking that one can speculate that the female soldier and one of the young girls are the same person, indicating that the story spans across time, from the past to the present. This implies that the SAF has been protecting the girl throughout different stages of her life, and now she is a part of the organization, helping to safeguard others. Alternatively, the two parallel storylines could unfold simultaneously in the present but at different locations within Sweden. This interpretation emphasizes the readiness of the SAF at all times, infusing a sense of security and protection. Regardless of the interpretation, the overarching focus on safety

and safeguarding remains consistent.

The campaign situates all events within a distinctly Swedish setting rather than taking an international military narrative. This could be theorized as a subtle yet strategic method of communicating the relevancy of SAF's main mission: the defense and protection of Sweden and its inhabitants by demonstrating its readiness to protect its homeland at any given moment. This not only highlights the organization's dedication but also strengthens the bond with citizens, boosting public support and societal relevance.

It is important to note that all characters shown bear a striking resemblance to a stereotypical Swede, adding another layer to its nationalistic narrative. This thoughtful detail further enhances the sense of national identity and patriotism, contributing to the overall impact of the campaign and its resonance with the Swedish populace. However, it could potentially limit identification from a multicultural perspective.

Even though these characters never explicitly interact with one another, their similarity, both in their physical attributes and the mirrored actions performed at the playground and the military base, suggests a relationship. The contrast of showcasing innocent children mirroring soldiers' movements in a playful manner intensifies their symbolic vulnerability, heightens the emotional connection, and, as proposed by Axenbrant and Dennisdotter (2008), makes the audience more open and receptive to the organization's message. However, this impactful imagery would not have been possible without the immersion of these two storylines. Separately, these storylines would have been quite ordinary—merely a video of two young girls playing at a playground and a separate video of soldiers conducting routine training. However, when showcased side by side, they create a narrative that effectively conveys an emotional connection. This is achieved not only through the sharp contrast between the innocence of the children and the gravity of military training but also through the mirroring of movements.

This story does not illustrate a clear antagonist or an external threat that the protagonist must confront and overcome to achieve their goal. Instead, the SAF employs a nuanced version of the *Cold War* narrative, where the antagonist instills itself as an unknown external *other* that the soldiers are constantly prepared to combat (Kehl, 2019). This abstract threat could manifest itself in a variety of shapes, adding a sense of uncertainty to the narrative

(MasterClass, 2022). By adopting this approach, the SAF effectively avoids potential issues highlighted by Panda et al. (2013) concerning the complexity of emotional marketing. This narrative allows viewers to construct their own antagonists, influenced by their personal experiences and perceptions, thereby creating a more personalized and relatable narrative. Consequently, it can be understood that the SAF employs the symbolic innocence of young girls to communicate their significance within society.

Furthermore, video format offers the benefit of a multimodal nature as it allows the brand to articulate its story visually and auditory. This is evident in the *Everything that has not happened yet* video, where the absence of a narrator or significant dialogue between characters does not diminish the story's impact. Instead, it utilizes a rich blend of illustration, voice, and choice of words to convey its message. As stated by Axenbrant and Dennisdotter (2008), the selection of background music plays a significant role in setting the overall emotional tone of the narrative. In this case, the uplifting character of the music, paired with the sounds of children's laughter, evokes a sense of innocence and purity that is uniquely childlike. However, the female soldiers' sharp inhales, alongside the commanding shouts, heighten the audience's attention as they create a compelling contrast between the characters.

5.3.3 Theme

In the *Everything that has not happened yet* campaign video, the moral of the story centers around the importance of the SAF's readiness and preparedness for future challenges. The campaign suggests that the SAF is committed to defending Sweden against potential threats and uncertainties, including those that have not yet materialized. Hence, the campaign subtly communicates that the peace and security enjoyed by the population of Sweden, especially highlighting a carefree childhood, is due to the SAF's endless contribution to maintaining national security.

Moreover, the *Everything that has not happened yet* campaign could be viewed as a strategic incorporation of the current societal trends in Sweden. Taking into account the influence of the #MeToo movement in societal dialogues, the campaign's choice to predominantly feature female characters not only echoes but also actively partakes in relevant societal discussions. For instance, predominantly focusing on a female soldier and displaying her determined facial expressions and evident capability paints her as equal to her male counterparts in her

ability to protect others effectively. This thoughtfully crafted narrative effectively underlines the SAF's standpoint in current societal discussions, thus broadening its relevance by leveraging societal trends.

Although a specific threat is not explicitly mentioned, using a futuristic theme to allude to what could happen in the future reflects the current concerns of the Swedish public regarding potential military conflict, Russian aggression, and terrorism. The campaign's deliberate focus on children seems to strike a resonant chord, potentially bringing to mind the heartbreaking incident where Ebba lost her life during the terrorist attack on Drottninggatan the year before. By showcasing little girls, a well-known symbol of innocence, enjoying their childhood undisturbed and freely, the campaign suggests a reassuring message: that despite the constant presence of potential threats, everyday life for the most vulnerable citizens in society, children, can proceed without interruption because the SAF is actively training and preparing to protect them. This portrayal instills confidence in Sweden's ability to safeguard itself by actively preparing for the future, aligning with Ringsmose and Børgesen's (2011) argument that successful narratives demonstrate a prospect of success. By provoking emotions of protection, safeguarding, nostalgia, and innocence, the video contributes to crafting a story that emphasizes the importance of keeping future generations safe, resonating with the values and interests of the Swedish public (Freedman, 2006). In doing so, the SAF develops a narrative centered on safety without, as suggested by Stern (2006), eliciting feelings of danger and fear. Thus, considering the societal context surrounding this campaign video, the theme, the overall lesson of the story, is to communicate the SAF's relevancy in prevailing safety for the future.

Furthermore, the video differs from traditional military campaigns featuring exotic locations and sophisticated equipment (Walter, 2022). Instead, it aligns with the findings of Strand and Kehl (2019) and Deverell and Wagnsson (2016), which suggest the implementation of emotional marketing strategies to maintain perceived relevance in the absence of an external threat. The video radiates authenticity by illustrating the unglamorous, everyday military training for soldiers, displaying heavy breathing, grunting, and determined faces as the soldiers push through their various tasks. This representation reflects a more authentic representation of the SAF's efforts to proactively maintain peace in Sweden, as it aligns with the SAF's mission. Therefore, it minimizes the risk of negative responses from the audience due to a lack of authenticity (Axenbrant & Dennisdotter, 2008; Lundqvist et al., 2013; Fog et

al., 2010; Kim et al., 2017; Green & Brock, 2000). Moreover, by showcasing military training rather than combat and incorporating the everyday activities of children, the video embraces nontraditional imagery to emphasize softer values (Walter, 2022).

The message, as described by Johansson (2005), defines the reason behind the storytelling. It aligns with the SAF's campaign's objective of maintaining societal relevance. By strategically displaying young children, who are interpreted to represent future generations, alongside soldiers engaging in military training, the message of *Always being prepared for everything that has not yet happened* becomes clear. This *Cold War* narrative implies that regardless of Sweden's long-standing peacekeeping efforts, the mission of the SAF remains the same: to prepare for everything that cannot be predicted (Försvarmakten, 2020). Ringsmose and Børgesen (2011) emphasize the importance of *Clarity of Purpose* when building a strong narrative, which the video achieves by revealing its overall message at the end. This approach fosters a co-creation of sensemaking, allowing viewers to indirectly understand the connection between the different characters and elements within the story. Strengthening the emotional connection by not explicitly *saying* what it means but instead *showing* the audience through a strong narrative. Walter (2022) suggests that this strong narrative approach positively influences public support for military authorities and their mission.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This study set out to investigate how the SAF incorporates narrative elements into its storytelling practices, particularly within its marketing campaigns. The aim was to uncover the strategic approach used to communicate the relevance and legitimacy of the SAF, especially considering its dependence on governmental funding, even when there is no immediate demand for its services. Thus, the study contributes to the research gap regarding the application of storytelling to communicate relevance based on the research question: How does the SAF utilize storytelling in its marketing campaigns to maintain relevance during times of peace?

Altogether, the analysis of the two campaigns revealed that the SAF deviated from conventional storytelling approaches typically observed in marketing campaigns. *You new, You free, and Everything that has not happened yet* lacks a linear chronological order, clear causality among elements, and distinct protagonists and antagonists (Escalas, 1998; Kim et al., 2017; Dessart, 2018). They also do not portray the stereotypical Hollywood ending, as expressed by Johansson (2005), or illustrate a definite conflict or climax between good and bad (Axenbrant & Dennisdotter, 2008). Nevertheless, the SAF employs various narrative elements such as structure, characters, and themes in similar, subtle ways in both campaigns to captivate the audience and illustrate themselves and their mission as a necessity to the Swedish public. This strategic use of narrative elements has proven successful, as evidenced by reports from the SAF indicating increased public trust, awareness, and favorable attitudes towards the organization (Försvarsmakten, 2018) and surveys conducted by SOM institutions reflecting strong dissent towards proposals aimed at reducing the SAF's budget during the time of the campaigns (SOM-Institutet, 2023, p. 65). These findings suggest that the subtle storytelling techniques employed in the SAF's marketing campaigns play a significant role in establishing relevance and legitimacy in Swedish society, particularly during peacetime. The subsequent paragraphs will discuss how the SAF establishes relevance through the adoption of specific narrative elements, based on the findings from the analysis.

To start off, both videos project a sense of relevance by employing a futuristic theme. In *You new, You free*, the narrative unfolds in the year 2026, highlighting the imperative of safeguarding future generations and their freedom to live as they choose. Conversely, *Everything that has not happened yet* centers around the SAF's proactive mission of protecting Sweden's freedom from threats that have not manifested yet. Despite depicting a time when Sweden faces no immediate danger, apart from the previously mentioned concerns, the strategic decision to allude to future threats underscores the SAF's commitment to remaining relevant. Both campaigns also adopt a forward-looking approach by spotlighting children as symbols of the future, effectively communicating the SAF's relevance in safeguarding future generations. This strategy highlights the organization's ongoing necessity for safeguarding Sweden's security both presently and in the future, which is crucial for sustaining government funding and legitimacy.

The narratives presented in the campaigns also incorporate themes from prevalent interests and topics in Sweden before the campaigns, as well as other significant events, to enhance the SAF's relevance and resonance with the audience. For instance, *You new, You free* bears a striking resemblance to the viral *Dear Daddy* campaign launched the previous year, both focusing on protecting unborn girls. Similarly, *Everything that has not happened yet* portrays women as equals to their male counterparts, thus solely leveraging the ongoing #MeToo movement to form an emotional connection with its female audience. Additionally, the little girls in the campaign could be seen as a symbol of the innocence of Ebba, a victim of the unforeseen terror attack in Sweden. Thus, the campaign's quote "*Everything that has not happened yet, is our task to defend,*" (Försvarsmakten, 2019, time 0:22-0:30) strikes a chord with the Swedish public on a profound emotional level. It can be theorized that the deliberate alignment with pivotal events such as *Dear Daddy* and the #MeToo movement serves to establish a stronger sense of cultural relevance for the campaign videos. Yet, one can argue that there is an overrepresentation of women in both campaigns, which seems incongruent with the fact that the SAF remains predominantly male-dominated. On one hand, this discrepancy may lead to a higher risk of perceived inauthenticity. On the other hand, it could be viewed as a strategic decision to prioritize the representation of women. By doing so, the campaign aims to challenge the masculine association traditionally linked with the organization and appeal to a broader audience in terms of gender.

The implementation of societal discussion can also be seen through the organization's use of a subtle *Cold War* narrative. In this narrative, the antagonist emerges as an external, unidentified threat, allowing viewers to interpret it in a manner that resonates with prevalent concerns among the Swedish public, such as military attacks, Russian aggression, and terrorism. This tactic not only resonates with the viewers on a personal level but also strategically enables the SAF to avoid the complexities involved in controlling a narrative, as demonstrated by Panda et al. (2013). Rather than dictating a narrative, the audience is invited into a process of co-creation, which in turn amplifies the perceived relevance and importance of maintaining a strong armed force, even in times of peace.

Furthermore, it is evident that the SAF deviates from the traditional military narrative that typically revolves around showcasing soldiers in ground combat. Instead, the campaigns take a distinct approach, aligning with what Walter (2022) explains as nontraditional military imagery, where the narrative centers around what the SAF swears to protect: the Swedish public and the Swedish constitutions. By showcasing the ordinary lives of various Swedish citizens in *You new, You free* the SAF instills itself as a natural part of everyday life, always present and prepared. In alignment with these findings, the *Everything that has not happened yet* campaign applies a similar approach by illustrating soldiers in training rather than in combat, accompanied by the parallel storyline of children playing. Thus, the campaigns create an everyday theme, with narratives that suggest that the viewer's ability to live the life they desire is directly correlated to the services provided by the SAF. However, putting children playing and soldiers training side by side not only creates a noticeable contrast and potential controversy but also implies that military training can be equated with children's play and a playground. By incorporating an everyday theme into the campaigns, there is a deliberate effort to tone down the seriousness associated with the SAF, an institution ultimately representing the possibility of war and soldiers willing to make sacrifices for their country. This could potentially hinder the development of trust and the creation of a positive brand attitude among the public, especially for people with military backgrounds who are fully aware of the seriousness of their roles.

Nevertheless, the strategic choice to apply an everyday theme and downplay the reality of war may resonate better with the Swedish public compared to traditional military narratives; as such, traditional narratives may be perceived as inauthentic based on Sweden's cultural values and long-standing reputation as a peaceful nation. These findings shed light on why

the SAF does not adhere to the theories proposed by Strand and Kehl (2019) and Stern (2006), which suggest fully playing on emotions like fear and danger to maintain relevance. Rather, in agreement with Walter (2022), communicating softer values and a proactive approach, in contrast to war and combat imagery, reflect the broader values and cultural context of the country the SAF represents. The strategic benefits of employing an authentic viewpoint to convey a positive brand attitude are supported by several studies and research papers (Axenbrant & Dennisdotter, 2008; Lundqvist et al., 2013; Fog et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2017; Green & Brock, 2000).

Moreover, both campaigns portray settings within Sweden and the everyday activities of its citizens, thereby deepening the sense of relatability with the Swedish public. By showcasing the SAF's role in safeguarding their ability to live normal lives, the campaigns subtly present Sweden as the SAF's primary focus, despite its involvement in international missions and collaborations with other nations. This portrayal embodies the SAF's active presence and involvement in Swedish society, fostering a sense of belonging and community between the armed forces and citizens. Consequently, by establishing a national context, these campaigns have the potential to strengthen the bond between the intended audience and the SAF. The result is likely to be heightened trust and support for the authority, thus effectively achieving the campaign's objective.

Another storytelling strategy that the SAF utilizes in its campaign is narrative transportation by showcasing relatable characters that the audience can identify and empathize with. A prime example of this can be found in the *You new, You free* campaign, which leverages the viewer's identification of 20261031-7586. This Swedish personal number, a unique identifier for every Swedish citizen, serves as a powerful tool for audience engagement. Thus, it enables all Swedish citizens to identify themselves with the main characters, as this personal number is both a symbol of their innermost identity and a symbol of nationalism. The campaign also serves as an interesting, untraditional case, as not a single soldier is displayed throughout the story; instead, it centers around 20261031-7586 putting the Swedish public in the spotlight through narrative transportation. By including a multitude of background characters, each one visualizing the various freedoms that the SAF pledges to protect, the message is further amplified through its multimodal communication. However, the choice of visual representation, or rather, the disregard of some representation, can be further discussed. While showcasing Sweden's religious freedom, a monk is displayed, which at first

glance might not strike as something unusual. But it leaves one wondering why other religions were not incorporated into the visual narrative. For example, given the unfortunate prevalence of Islamophobia in Sweden, featuring a Muslim character in the video would arguably have served to underscore more prominently the message that the SAF pledges to protect religious freedom for all of its citizens, regardless of their faith. Thus, this decision could be interpreted as a deliberate choice to avoid engaging with controversial topics within Swedish society that could affect public opinion.

Additionally, while the *You new, You free* campaign emphasizes a rich diversity of characters, the *Everything that has not happened yet* campaign takes a distinct approach by only portraying stereotypical-looking Swedes. The narrative revolves around traditional-looking Swedish soldiers pledging to protect Swedish-looking children. As the characters in a story are often seen as embodiments of the overall narrative, their visual representation plays a crucial role in how the story is interpreted by its audience (Fog et al., 2010; Rosenbaum-Elliott et al., 2015). Whereas, only featuring normative-looking Swedish characters creates a sense of what Strand and Kehl (2019, p. 296) referred to as "*Distant and Dangerous Others*," where the narrative frames a collective "we" while portraying "others" as the threat. While this might not have been intentional, one cannot argue that the narrative would have differed if there were a wider range of characteristics among the characters. Especially since this narrative arguably departs from the inclusiveness of the *You new, You free* campaign. Thus, the deviation from previous visual representations of inclusiveness could potentially risk negative word-of-mouth for the SAF, as the inconsistencies may be perceived as inauthentic when viewed in retrospect, thus altering the perception of the campaigns.

In conclusion, this study delves into the complex storytelling strategies employed by an entity that is heavily reliant on proving its relevance to society to sustain services. It illustrates that an organization can depart from conventional marketing storytelling while still creating a compelling story by leveraging narrative elements such as structure, characters, and themes as strategic communication tools for securing and retaining governmental funding as well as public support. This entails tapping into societal trends and contexts to establish relevance and fostering emotional connections through relatability and narrative transportation. While taking a stance from societal discussions that have the potential to jeopardize the organization's governmental funding. This approach also involves creating a sense of

identification and empathy for the characters presented in the narrative. However, the most predominant strategy found is the creation of an authentic story by alluding to the specific values and cultural context of the respective country and its population. By doing so, entities are able to use storytelling strategies to simplify stakeholders' understanding of the organization, its values, and its mission, thereby enhancing their relevance and ensuring their continued service.

7. Further Research

Given the shortfall of research on how storytelling is used to portray legitimacy and relevance, we propose further exploration within this field. Since this study lacks a public perspective on the campaigns, future research could incorporate interviews or surveys with the public. Such an approach would provide valuable insights into how individuals perceive storytelling efforts by organizations. By exploring the associations evoked by these narratives and examining the resulting image of an organization, a more comprehensive understanding can be attained in relation to the effectiveness of the storytelling strategies and perceived societal relevance.

Furthermore, to gain deeper insights into the underlying intentions of each campaign, interviews with the marketing team of the SAF could be conducted. This would provide a valuable understanding of the messages and stories crafted by the marketing team, as well as the motivations behind them. Thus offering a more complete picture of the planning and implementation process behind these marketing campaigns to provide further governmental funding.

Since this study had a time and word limit, only two campaign videos were analyzed. However, future research could incorporate more campaigns, stretching over a longer period, to explore how storytelling strategies have evolved to achieve various objectives. Additionally, it would have been interesting to conclude other types of content, such as social media posts and posters, for a more comprehensive understanding of how narratives create relevance and legitimacy in Swedish society.

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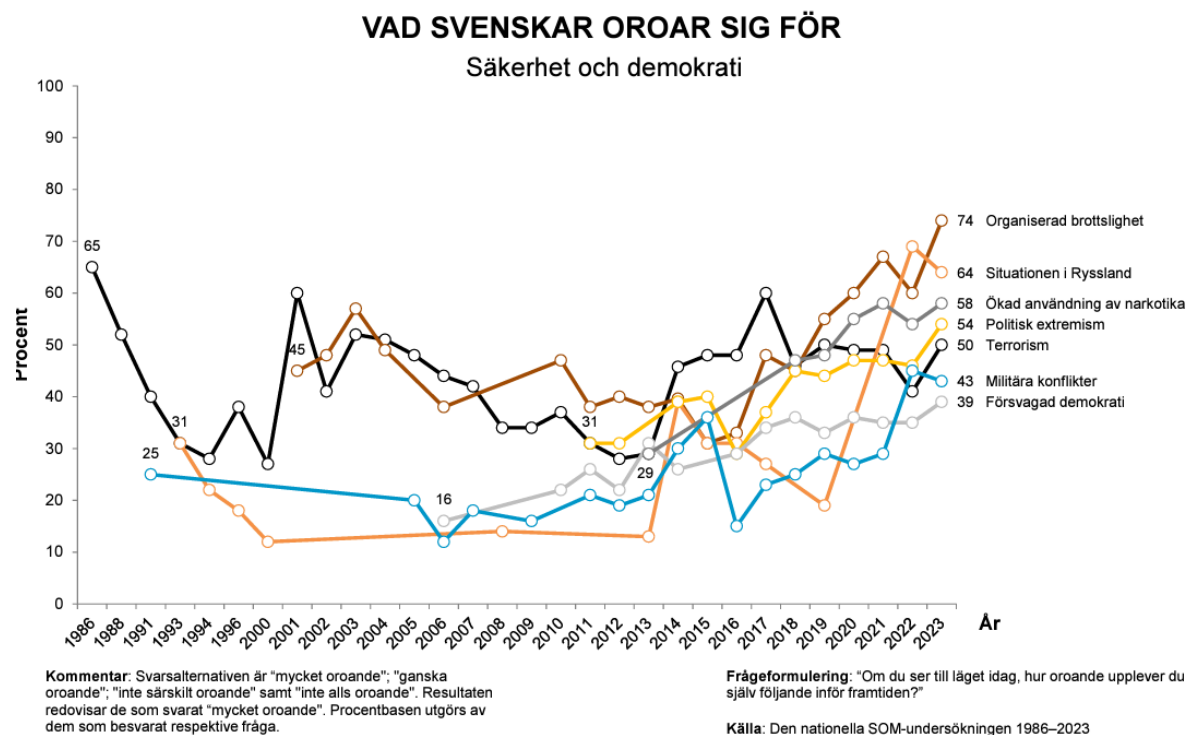
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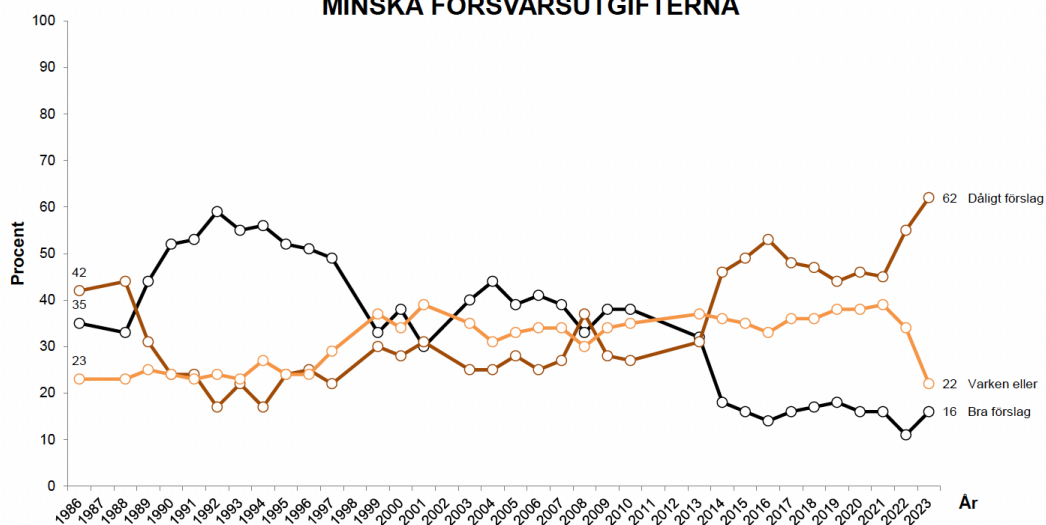
9. Appendix

1.





MINSKA FÖRSVARsutGIFTERNA



Kommentar: Svartaltemativen är "Mycket bra förslag"; "Ganska bra förslag"; "Varken bra eller dåligt förslag"; "Ganska dåligt förslag" samt "Mycket dåligt förslag". "Bra förslag" avser dem som svarat "Ganska" eller "mycket bra förslag". "Dåligt förslag" avser dem som svarat "ganska" eller "mycket dåligt förslag". Procentbasen utgörs av dem som besvarat frågan.

Frågeformulering: "Vilken är din åsikt om följande förslag? - Minska försvarsutgifterna"

Källa: Den nationella SOM-undersökningen 1986–2023