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Influencing Consumer Engagement: Entrepreneurial Marketing in Social Media

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List of Abbreviations

KPI	Key Performance Indicator
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprises
SMM	Social Media Marketing

Abstract

The study investigates how small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) entrepreneurial marketing activities on social media instigate cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspects of customer engagement. Using a qualitative research design and conducting semi-structured interviews, the study explores how these marketing strategies instigate different types of consumer behaviours and engagement levels. By examining the role of entrepreneurial marketing activities on customer engagement and perceptions, through social media, the research provides practical insights for SMEs seeking to effectively leverage social media marketing.

The findings reveal the intricate ways in which entrepreneurial marketing activities on social media shape consumer perceptions and interactions. Through an analysis of interactive content, co-creation initiatives, and strategic product releases, the study highlights the importance of innovative approaches in driving cognitive and behavioural engagement among customers. Additionally, the research showcases how SMEs, exemplified by Caia Cosmetics, strategically utilise the social media platform Instagram to transform traditional brand-customer relationships, fostering personalised engagement and strong emotional connections. Caia Cosmetics excels in understanding their target audience, which enables the creation of entrepreneurial marketing activities that resonates with customers desires and aspirations. Through portraying an aspirational lifestyle and embodying qualities that customers aspire to emulate, Caia Cosmetics cultivates strong emotional connections and genuine affection towards the brand.

By addressing gaps in existing literature and offering insights into the impact of entrepreneurial marketing on consumer engagement, this study provides valuable recommendations for SMEs aiming to enhance their consumer interactions through innovative digital marketing strategies. The research not only advances knowledge in the field but also provides practical implications for developing effective marketing practices in the evolving digital landscape.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the Research Topic

In today's dynamic business landscape, effective marketing strategies are crucial for the growth and success of companies (Barbosa et al., 2022). Conventional marketing strategies prioritise effectiveness, market penetration, and efficiency, thriving typically in stable markets among established firms. However, the significance of marketing is arguably even more important for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), where the gain or loss of a single customer often can determine the firm's survival (Becherer et al., 2012).

Many existing marketing theories are primarily based on the practices of large corporations. Consequently, the high failure rates observed among SMEs are often attributed to a lack of understanding within marketing frameworks regarding the unique dimensions of their operations (Jones & Rowley, 2011). New businesses often face both uncertain market conditions and limited resources for marketing endeavours (Becherer et al., 2012). In such situations, entrepreneurs must adopt innovative approaches to navigate these constraints while pursuing new opportunities (Becherer et al., 2012). Furthermore, entrepreneurs typically lack expertise in marketing theory, leading to unawareness around its vocabulary and principles. A common issue in SMEs is a lack of understanding about the marketplace and planning.

However, they recognise the importance of effective marketing outcomes and the value of successful marketing activities (Martin, 2009). Acknowledging the importance of the interface between entrepreneurship and marketing has led to the development of entrepreneurial marketing. While some experts argue that entrepreneurial marketing is relevant for all types of organisations, including both large and small ones, it is recognised that it holds particular importance in the context of SMEs, due to their specific characteristics (Jones & Rowley, 2011). SMEs frequently operate in dynamic and volatile market conditions, often facing constraints in terms of resources available for marketing (Becherer et al., 2012). The concept of entrepreneurial marketing explicitly defines the marketing approach embraced by SMEs and emphasises the importance of recognising their unique needs and circumstances (Jones & Rowley, 2011).

Unlike traditional marketing approaches designed for larger, more established firms operating in stable markets, entrepreneurial marketing acknowledges and embraces the unique challenges and opportunities that characterise SMEs. This perspective underscores the adaptability and innovation inherent in entrepreneurial marketing, allowing SMEs to leverage their agility and creativity to navigate market uncertainties and resource limitations effectively (Martin, 2009).

Central to entrepreneurial marketing strategies, lies the concept of customer engagement. In this study, our focus is on three dimensions of customer engagement: cognitive, emotional, and behavioural engagement, recognised for their role in fostering strong relationships between customers and brands (Trunfio & Rossi, 2021). Through a comprehensive understanding of customer engagement, SMEs can identify loyal customers and advocates who act as brand ambassadors, thereby stimulating positive word-of-mouth (van Doorn et al., 2010). By analysing customer interactions across different touchpoints, SMEs can develop targeted campaigns that resonate deeply with customers, facilitating stronger connections and heightened engagement levels. Additionally, this approach provides valuable insights into customer satisfaction levels and areas for improvement (Waqas et al., 2021). By engaging with customers, businesses can create emotional connections and interactions that foster loyalty and satisfaction (Bowden, 2009). Prior research has indicated that strong customer relationships stand out as one of the most crucial aspects for SMEs to attain improved firm performance (Majovski & Davitkovska, 2017).

However, over the past years the marketing dynamics have undergone a rapid transformation. Internet usage has rapidly expanded worldwide, with digital platforms becoming increasingly crucial for gaining a competitive advantage in marketing (Heggde & Shainesh, 2018). Social media platforms have changed how customers and businesses interact, offering digital spaces for sharing and engaging. By allowing users to comment, review, create and share content, social media provide customers direct access to brands and opportunities for co-creation processes. This accessibility not only allows businesses to interact more intimately with their customers base but also nurtures the development of authentic relationships built on transparency and shared value creation (Trunfio & Rossi, 2021). Furthermore, social media serves as an important platform for influencing consumers' shopping and purchasing behaviour, as they actively share product reviews, service experiences and product usage tips.

These platforms are specifically vital for building brand awareness and generating excitement around brands (Mason et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, when it comes to implementing social media strategies, it is essential for employees to have the necessary knowledge and skills to execute these techniques successfully (Leeftang et al., 2014). However, when implemented proficiently, social media marketing can serve as a game-changer for SMEs, enabling them to increase brand awareness. Although previous research has shown that SMEs recognise the importance of social media marketing, they often fail in their implementation due several reasons. These challenges include insufficient analysis of their external environment and lack of investment and training needed to develop and maintain effective marketing strategies on social media. Based on these findings, recommendations are made to assist SMEs in enhancing their utilisation of social media marketing (Malesev & Cherry, 2021).

1.2 Purpose and Research Question

In today's digital age, social media has become an important part of marketing strategies for businesses, especially for SMEs striving to establish their presence and engage with their target audience effectively (Sharma & Sharma, 2023). Focusing on SMEs provides insights into the specific obstacles they encounter in their marketing and interactions with their customers through social media. This understanding enables the development of tailored recommendations to support SMEs and optimising their entrepreneurial marketing activities.

While existing research has generally explored entrepreneurial marketing in SMEs (Becherer et al., 2012; Jones & Rowley, 2011; Martin, 2009) and the challenges SMEs face in making effective use of social media (Krisnanto et al., 2023; Malesev & Cherry, 2021), there is a specific gap in understanding how entrepreneurial marketing activities and strategies on social media instigate cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspects of customer engagement.

Furthermore, there is no previous research on the phenomena from the customers' perspective. Studying customer engagement and perception provides valuable insights into how target audiences interact with marketing activities on social media, and therefore enables an understanding of which strategies are most effective. By focusing on this gap, the aim of the study is to investigate how SMEs entrepreneurial marketing activities on social media

instigate different forms of customer engagement. Gaining insights into customer engagement and perceptions provides valuable understanding of how entrepreneurial marketing strategies effectively foster diverse forms of engagement and cultivate loyalty. In addition, entrepreneurial marketing in the context of social media involves the proactive and innovative use of digital strategies to connect with consumers, build relationships, and drive engagement.

However, social media serves as a medium through which SMEs can communicate and facilitate customer engagement. Instagram has been chosen as the primary platform of interest due to its extensive user base and influence in the marketing landscape in terms of impact (Dixon, 2024). Additionally, the study focuses on young adults in the ages of 18-29 as they represent a significant portion of active users across popular social media platforms such as YouTube, TikTok and Instagram (Wong, J.D., 2023).

For SMEs it is crucial to understand which entrepreneurial marketing practices prove effective and influential in fostering different forms of customer engagement and loyalty. This awareness is pivotal for achieving diverse successful outcome goals, ultimately leading to profitability and growth. Therefore, the research question examined in this study is as follows:

How do SMEs entrepreneurial marketing activities on social media instigate different forms of customer engagement?

Through this investigation, our study aims to provide valuable insights for SMEs to optimise their marketing strategies and achieve improved customer engagement outcomes on social media platforms. By examining how customer engagement is influenced by SMEs' entrepreneurial marketing activities on social media, the objective is to gather insights into their preferences, attitudes and behaviours.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Entrepreneurial Marketing

Entrepreneurial marketing represents an intersection between entrepreneurship and marketing, describing the marketing process of firms often operating in uncertain market conditions and resource-constrained environments (Becherer et al., 2012). To understand the essence of entrepreneurial marketing, it is essential to first determine the concepts of marketing and entrepreneurship.

2.1.1 Marketing

Marketing, as defined by Kotler, is the “science and art of finding, keeping, and growing profitable customers” (Kotler, 2012). According to the American Marketing Association, marketing encompasses a broad spectrum of activities, institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that hold value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large (AMA, 2017). Traditionally, marketers aim to harmonise product, price, promotion, and distribution decisions to create an integrated mix that surpasses competitive offerings in meeting target customers’ needs (Becherer et al., 2012).

However, this conventional marketing approach has faced various criticism (Morris et al., 2002). Critiques of modern marketing practices encompass several key points. These includes an excessive dependence on traditional methods and formula-based thinking, as well as the lack of clear accountability regarding marketing spending. Additionally, there is an overemphasis on promotional activities within the marketing mix. Furthermore, there is criticism regarding the tendency to prioritise fleeting consumer trends over long-term innovation, a preference for imitating rather than innovating and a focus on existing markets rather than exploring new ones (Morris et al., 2002).

2.1.2 Entrepreneurship

Despite numerous efforts to establish a universally accepted definition of entrepreneurship, consensus has not been achieved. Consequently, diverse studies have adopted varying definitions. According to Landström (2020), three primary approaches to defining entrepreneurship emerge: viewing entrepreneurship as a market function, conceptualising the

entrepreneur as an individual and understanding entrepreneurship as a process. These approaches highlight different aspects of the entrepreneurial phenomenon.

Some perspectives define entrepreneurship as innovative and change-oriented behaviour, while others consider it to encompass task-related motivation, expertise, and the expectation of personal gain (Davidsson, 2005). In the business landscape an entrepreneur embodies a multifaceted role with several key attributes. Often, they are described as individuals willing to undertake risks associated with uncertainty and someone who identifies and capitalise on opportunities, often through innovative ideas and solutions (Westhead & Wright, 2013).

Entrepreneurship is often understood as an organisational mindset characterised by three key dimensions: innovativeness, calculated risk-taking and proactiveness (Linton, 2019).

Innovativeness involves seeking out creative solutions to problems and needs. Calculated risk entails being willing to invest resources in opportunities that may involve a reasonable chance of failure, but also involves creative efforts to reduce or share these risks (Guo & Jiang, 2020). Moreover, proactiveness means taking initiative and making things happen through any means necessary (Kuratko, 2010). The level of these dimensions exhibited by a firm determines its degree of entrepreneurship (Linton, 2019). Therefore, entrepreneurship is not simply a yes or no scenario, it is rather a matter of degree (Morris et al., 2002).

The entrepreneurial process involves a series of activities vital for recognising an opportunity, formulating a business concept, evaluating and securing the essential resources, and then manage and profit from the venture (Morris et al., 2002). Recognising and seizing the right opportunities for a new venture is one of the most critical abilities for an entrepreneur. The opportunity recognition process typically begins when entrepreneurs become more alert to potential opportunities, which occurs when several factors combine. These factors include personal qualities such as creativity and optimism, relevant experiences, and strong social connections (Ardichvili et al., 2003).

2.1.3 The Entrepreneurship and Marketing Interface

The intersection of entrepreneurship and marketing is crucial for understanding business performance, particularly in the context of SMEs. They operate under unique circumstances characterised by resource constraints, market uncertainties, and dynamic customer landscapes (Becherer et al., 2012). Entrepreneurial marketing is therefore essential for navigating the

complexities of these environments. Morris et al. (2002) offer a widely embraced definition of Entrepreneurial marketing, describing it as the “proactive identification and exploitation of opportunities for acquiring and retaining profitable customers through innovative approaches to risk management, resource leveraging, and value creation.”

Entrepreneurial marketing serves as a comprehensive framework encompassing key entrepreneurial elements such as proactivity, opportunity identification, risk-taking, and innovativeness, alongside fundamental marketing principles like customer-centricity, resource optimisation, and value creation (Majovski & Davitkovska, 2017). This framework offers insight into the operation of marketing in rapidly changing and complex environments where resources are limited, and thereby combines key aspects of developments in marketing with entrepreneurial perspectives to create a comprehensive approach.

2.1.4 Dimensions of Entrepreneurial Marketing

According to Morris et al. (2002), the Entrepreneurial marketing framework consists of seven different key dimensions. These dimensions include proactiveness, calculated risk-taking, innovativeness, and opportunity focus, rooted in the concept of entrepreneurial orientation. Another important dimension is resource leveraging and additionally, customer intensity and value creation that aligns with the market orientation (Ouragini & Lakhal, 2023).

Proactiveness

Companies constantly seek new ways to gain a competitive advantage by adjusting their methods of production, sales, and distribution. In traditional marketing, the focus is on understanding existing or expected environmental conditions and adjusting marketing strategies accordingly. However, Entrepreneurial marketing takes a more proactive approach. Instead of passively reacting to the environment, it seeks to actively shape it. This involves efforts to reduce uncertainty and make the firm less dependent on external factors by actively influencing the conditions in which it operates (Sodhi & Bapat, 2020)

Calculated risk-taking

Entrepreneurship involves taking calculated risks by actively identifying and managing risk factors. Within Entrepreneurial marketing, it is crucial to manage the company’s risk profile, by reshaping elements of the external environment to reduce uncertainty and decrease

dependency (Sodhi & Bapat, 2020). Moreover, it is important to manage resources to enhance flexibility, enabling quick allocation or withdrawal from new projects (Morris et al. 2002).

Innovativeness

Innovativeness in a firm refers to its willingness to embrace new ideas and creative processes, and consistently generating and implementing those into products, services, and processes, where marketing is a central driver (Majovski & Davitkovska, 2017). Entrepreneurial marketing emphasises significant innovations, in various areas such as segmentation, pricing, brand management, customer communication, logistics and service levels (Morris et al. 2002). Due to limited resources, many entrepreneurial ventures rely on innovative marketing approaches.

Opportunity focus

Entrepreneurial firms are characterised by their continuous pursuit of emerging opportunities and focus on discovering new markets (Majovski & Davitkovska, 2017). Opportunities represent unexplored market positions with sustainable profit potential, arising from market imperfections. Understanding these imperfections and how to exploit them, distinguishes Entrepreneurial marketing (Morris et al., 2002).

Resource leveraging

The lack of resources is a significant challenge for new businesses, which can restrict their marketing activities. However, entrepreneurial firms adopt a creative approach to leverage the resources effectively (Becherer et al., 2012). At its core, leveraging involves maximising output with limited resources and minimise potential threats (Sodhi & Bapat, 2020).

Customer intensity

Customer intensity is a crucial driver for marketing activities within and it involves employing innovative methods to establish, nurture, and maintain customer relationships. Today's costumers have higher expectations, promoting entrepreneurial firms to continuously assess the market and adapt to changing customer demands by innovating new relationship-building approaches or leveraging existing relationships to create new markets (Majovski & Davitkovska, 2017).

Value creation

Value creation is crucial for entrepreneurial marketing as it determines a firm's success. Entrepreneurial firms must craft unique resource combinations to generate value, especially in dynamic markets where the value equation evolves continuously (Ouragini & Lakhali, 2023). Entrepreneurs are therefore constantly exploring different aspects of their marketing to find new ways to create value.

2.1.5 Entrepreneurial Marketing in Small and Medium sized Businesses

The behaviour of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in marketing often diverges from larger corporations, challenging conventional marketing theories. SMEs typically rely heavily on the expertise of their owners, who are often generalists rather than specialists in management and marketing (Jones & Rowley, 2011). Instead of adhering strictly to traditional marketing doctrines, successful SMEs frequently leverage their inherent advantages as small entities.

Entrepreneurial marketing within SMEs often revolves around networking for success, facilitating customer connections, and fostering word-of-mouth recommendations through personal relationships (Jones & Rowley, 2011). Unlike larger firms, SMEs' marketing strength lies in the close relationship between entrepreneurs and customers. Consequently, entrepreneurs must possess exceptional communication skills and adeptly understand and influence customer needs (Martin, 2009). These small businesses capitalise on their unique strengths, with co-creation emerging as a crucial strategy.

Co-creation entails collaborative efforts where stakeholders, including customers, actively participate in value creation (Chandna & Salimath, 2022). SMEs thrive by nurturing customer connections through personal interactions, underscoring the intimate relationships between entrepreneurs and their customers (Rialti & Zollo, 2023). Effective communication, a deep understanding of customer needs, and persuasive influence are paramount skills for entrepreneurs in this context.

For SMEs to achieve enhanced firm performance, it is essential to manage not only a market orientation but also strong customer relationships, innovative practices, and entrepreneurial strategies (Majovski & Davitkovska, 2017). Alongside with evidence highlighting the

significance of networks, word of mouth recommendations, and value creation through innovation, it becomes clear that customer orientation is a crucial dimension of entrepreneurial marketing (Jones & Rowley, 2011). The research of Zontanos & Anderson (2004) suggests that SMEs have a marketing advantage due to the close relationships' entrepreneurs establish with their customers. These relationships are built on trust, which includes confidence in the entrepreneur's competence and personal trust. Furthermore, the process of building and maintaining these relationships both adds value for the business and fosters loyal customers (Zontanos & Anderson, 2004).

2.2 Customer Engagement

Customer engagement is a crucial concept in marketing that focuses on building strong relationships between customers and brands (Trunfio & Rossi, 2021). It goes beyond mere transactions to create emotional connections and interactions that drive long-term loyalty and advocacy. Understanding customer engagement involves recognising the various dimensions and levels of engagement that customers exhibit towards a brand or company (Hennig-Thureau et al., 2010). Engaged customers are more likely to make repeat purchases, recommend the brand to others, and actively participate in brand-related activities.

2.2.1 Dimensions of Customer Engagement

Customer engagement encompasses various dimensions crucial for building strong relationships between customers and brands (Bilro & Loureiro, 2020).

One key dimension is **cognitive engagement**, which pertains to the level of attention, interest, and comprehension that customers exhibit towards a brand's offerings and messages (Hollebeek et al., 2014). This dimension reflects the extent to which customers actively process and engage with the information provided by the brand, indicating their cognitive involvement in the brand experience.

Emotional engagement plays a significant role in customer-brand relationships by capturing the emotional responses, attitudes, and attachment that customers develop towards a brand (Magids et al., 2015). This dimension goes beyond rational considerations and delves into the realm of feelings and sentiments that customers associate with the brand. Emotional

engagement fosters a sense of loyalty, trust, and affinity towards the brand, influencing customers' overall perception and behaviour.

Behavioural engagement focuses on the observable actions and interactions that customers undertake with the brand (Bilro & Loureiro, 2020). This dimension encompasses a range of behaviours, including purchases, referrals, participation in marketing campaigns, and other forms of engagement that demonstrate customers' active involvement with the brand (Verhoef et al., 2010). Behavioural engagement reflects the tangible manifestations of customers' commitment and connection to the brand, showcasing their willingness to interact and transact with the brand on various levels.

In essence, the dimensions of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural engagement collectively contribute to shaping the depth and quality of customer relationships with brands (Athanasopoulou, 2009). By understanding and nurturing these dimensions, organisations can cultivate meaningful and enduring connections with their customers, driving loyalty, advocacy, and long-term value creation.

2.2.2 Importance of Customer Engagement Measurement

Understanding and measuring customer engagement play a central role in shaping a successful marketing strategy in today's competitive business landscape (Hennig-Thureau et al., 2010). By delving into the depths of customer interactions, businesses can unlock a broad variety of benefits that contribute to long-term success.

One of the key advantages of Customer engagement measurement is its ability to identify loyal customers and advocates who serve as brand ambassadors, driving positive word-of-mouth marketing (van Doorn et al., 2010). These individuals not only engage actively with the brand but also influence others to do the same, creating a ripple effect of brand advocacy and loyalty.

Moreover, customer engagement measurement enables businesses to craft personalised marketing strategies tailored to individual customer preferences and behaviours (de Oliveira Santini et al., 2020). By analysing data on how customers interact with the brand across

various touchpoints, businesses can create targeted campaigns that resonate with customers on a deeper level, fostering stronger connections and driving higher engagement levels.

In addition to identifying brand advocates and personalising marketing activities, measuring customer engagement provides valuable insights into customer satisfaction levels and areas for improvement in products or services (Waqas et al., 2021). By monitoring customer feedback, analysing engagement metrics, and conducting surveys, businesses can proactively address issues, enhance product offerings, and elevate the overall customer experience.

Furthermore, customer engagement measurement guides decision-making processes by evaluating the impact of marketing campaigns and initiatives on customer engagement levels. By tracking key metrics, businesses can assess the effectiveness of their strategies, identify successful tactics, and optimise future campaigns to drive better engagement and conversion rates (van Doorn et al., 2010).

By analysing the various dimensions of engagement and leveraging both quantitative and qualitative metrics, businesses can cultivate strong relationships with customers, enhance brand loyalty, and drive sustainable growth (van Doorn et al., 2010). Customer engagement measurement serves as a compass that guides businesses towards building lasting connections, fostering brand advocacy, and ultimately achieving success in the ever-evolving marketplace.

2.3 Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing (SMM) has revolutionised the way businesses engage with their target audiences in the digital age (Heggde & Shainesh, 2018). Unlike traditional marketing approaches, SMM leverages various online platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn to connect with consumers in a more interactive and personalised manner.

One of the key distinctions between SMM and regular marketing lies in the two-way communication facilitated by social media platforms (Li et al., 2021). Instead of broadcasting messages to passive audiences, social media allows for real-time engagement, and to create direct communication between brands and consumers. This dynamic interaction enables businesses to build relationships, gather insights, and tailor their marketing strategies to meet the evolving needs and preferences of their target market (Appel et al., 2020).

Additionally, SMM offers a cost-effective way to reach a global audience, target specific demographics, and measure the impact of marketing campaigns in real-time, providing businesses with valuable data to optimise their marketing activities (Li et al., 2021). By implementing well-defined SMM, companies can enhance their online presence, connect with their target audience on a more personal level, and drive meaningful business outcomes in today's digital age (Li et al., 2021).

2.3.1 Social Media Marketing for Small Businesses

In today's digital age, SMM has emerged as a powerful tool for SMEs to enhance their brand presence, engage with customers, and drive business growth (Sharma & Sharma, 2023). Social media platforms offer SMEs a cost-effective way to reach a wider audience, build brand awareness, and establish meaningful connections with customers (Li et al., 2021). By creating compelling content and engaging with followers, businesses can cultivate a loyal customer base and drive sales.

To succeed in SMM, SMEs need to develop a strategic approach tailored to their target audience and business goals (Li et al., 2021). This includes identifying the right social media channels, creating engaging content, and maintaining a consistent brand voice across platforms. Furthermore, social media provides SMEs with a platform to showcase their unique brand identity and values (Appel et al., 2020). By sharing authentic stories, behind-the-scenes glimpses, and customer testimonials, businesses can humanise their brand and connect with customers on a personal level.

However, SMM goes beyond broadcasting promotional messages; it involves actively engaging with customers through comments, messages, and interactive content (Hamilton et al., 2016). It is essential for SMEs to track and measure the performance of their SMM activities. By analysing key metrics such as engagement rates, click-through rates, and conversion rates, businesses can refine their strategies and optimise their social media campaigns for better results (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016).

In conclusion, SMM presents SMEs with a valuable opportunity to connect with customers, drive brand awareness, and boost sales (Li et al., 2021). By adopting a strategic and customer-

centric approach to SMM, SMEs can effectively leverage these platforms to achieve their business objectives and thrive in the competitive digital landscape.

2.3.2 Challenges Social Media Marketing for SMEs

While SMM offers numerous benefits for SMEs it also presents several challenges that can hinder their success in leveraging these platforms effectively (Kelly & Ekene, 2022).

Understanding and addressing these challenges is crucial for SMEs to maximise the impact of their SMM activities. A common challenge faced by SMEs is the constraint of limited resources including budget, time, and manpower, which can hinder their ability to fully engage in SMM (Wu et al., 2022).

As SMEs often operate on relatively small budgets, this leaves little room for substantial marketing investments. Furthermore, the absence of a dedicated department solely focused SMM, adds to the difficulty of allocating enough time to social media tasks. This can make it challenging to create and maintain a consistent presence on multiple social media platforms, develop high-quality content, and engage with followers effectively (Marolt et al., 2022). Engaging with the target audience and building a loyal following on social media requires time, effort, and creativity. SMEs may struggle to generate engaging content regularly, respond to customer inquiries promptly, and foster meaningful interactions with followers, leading to reduced engagement and impact (Dwivedi et al., 2023).

In addition, social media trends and user preferences evolve rapidly, requiring businesses to stay agile and adapt their strategies accordingly (Pellegrino & Abe, 2023). SMEs may struggle to keep pace with changing trends, leading to outdated content, reduced engagement, and missed opportunities to connect with their target audience. Moreover, the social media landscape is highly competitive, with businesses competing for the attention of the same target audience (Marolt et al., 2022). SMEs may encounter difficulties in distinguishing themselves amidst the crowd, particularly when competing with larger brands with more extensive resources and established online presence (Dwivedi et al., 2023).

Addressing these challenges requires SMEs to develop a strategic approach to SMM, prioritise engagement and authenticity, allocate resources effectively, stay informed about platform changes, and continuously evaluate and adjust their strategies based on performance

data. By overcoming these challenges, SMEs can harness the power of SMM to enhance their brand presence, connect with customers, and drive business growth.

3. Methodology

In this chapter, the research methodology employed for the study is presented. The research design and approach are discussed, emphasising the rationale behind the chosen design and its alignment with the research question. Subsequently, the specifics of data collection methods are detailed, including the sampling strategy, procedures for obtaining informed consent, and the conduct of interviews. The analysis of the collected data is then explored.

Furthermore, Section 3.5 provides a tight overview of the measures taken to ensure the trustworthiness and rigour of the study. Strategies employed to enhance credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are highlighted. Finally, attention is given to the examination of any limitations that may have impacted the study's findings.

3.1 Research Gap

So far, a gap in the research exists regarding the understanding of how entrepreneurial marketing activities by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) on social media instigate customer engagement. While existing research has generally explored entrepreneurial marketing in SMEs (Becherer et al., 2012; Jones & Rowley, 2011; Martin, 2009) and the challenges SMEs face in making effective use of social media (Malesev & Cherry, 2021), there is a specific gap in understanding the phenomenon from the customer's perspective. Furthermore, there is no previous research on how entrepreneurial marketing activities on social media directly impact customer engagement.

This thesis aims to address this gap by investigating the relationship between entrepreneurial marketing activities and customer engagement. Specifically, it seeks to explore how SMEs' marketing activities shape customers' experiences, the resulting impact on engagement, and the outcomes that emerge. To achieve a comprehensive understanding, the study adopts a qualitative approach, collecting rich and detailed data through interviews rather than relying solely on statistical data.

3.2 Ontology and Epistemology

The research approach in this thesis was guided by philosophical foundations that shape the understanding of reality and knowledge within the digital realm (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Within this context, the dynamic nature of social media platforms like Instagram were

recognised as dynamic and interactive spaces where SMEs and customers engaged in the creation and interpretation of meaning. The existence of subjective realities and diverse interpretations of entrepreneurial marketing activities and consumer engagement online was acknowledged from this perspective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017).

Moreover, a collaborative view was embraced, emphasising the joint creation of knowledge through interactions among researchers, SME (Caia Cosmetics), and customers. It was recognised that knowledge about entrepreneurial marketing strategies and consumer engagement on social media was socially constructed and influenced by various contexts and perspectives.

By embracing this collaborative perspective and acknowledging the evolving nature of reality in the digital landscape, the aim was to uncover detailed insights into how entrepreneurial marketing activities impacted different forms of customer engagement on Instagram. Through this lens, the study sought to contribute valuable knowledge to the discussion on effective strategies for SMEs to navigate social media platforms successfully, foster meaningful customer relationships, and drive business growth.

3.3 Research Design

In this research, a qualitative study was conducted using semi-structured interviews as the primary method for data collection. Semi-structured interviewing allowed the interviewers to stray from the interview guide and, in addition, created a casual environment (Bell et al., 2022). This provided an extensive amount of information to analyse and interpret. By delving into the context and social dynamics, this research aims to contribute valuable insights to the field of entrepreneurial marketing and customer engagement through social media.

Additionally, text analysis was employed alongside interviews to gain deeper insights into the subject, with a specific focus on Caia Cosmetics' Instagram account. Text analysis systematically examines textual data from social media platforms, such as Instagram, to reveal patterns, sentiments, and recurring themes within the content. By integrating interview data with text analysis of Caia Cosmetics' Instagram account, a comprehensive understanding of consumer behaviour and brand communication was achieved (Yang, 2021).

Abductive reasoning, closely related to inductive reasoning, guided the investigation. Abduction begins with observing a phenomenon, treating it as a “puzzle to be solved,” and then constructing an explanation by iteratively combining theory and data (Bell et al., 2022). The empirical puzzle addressed in this study lies in the uncharted territory where EM activities of SMEs intersect with the multiple layers of customer engagement on cognitive, emotional and behavioural level on social media. Given the exploratory nature of the research, an abductive research design was deemed appropriate to delve into a research question that had not been thoroughly explored.

3.3.1 Selection of Study Object

Caia Cosmetics has been selected as a focal point for our study due to its alignment with the criteria defining an SME. The rationale for selecting Caia Cosmetics lies in its pronounced presence within the Instagram platform and the evident efficiency of its entrepreneurial marketing activities. The company employs a diverse array of entrepreneurial marketing strategies to engage with its customer base, including interactive content such as user-generated content, contests, challenges as well as strategic influencer partnerships.

Moreover, Caia Cosmetics adopts a transparent approach by offering behind the scenes glimpses into its operations and notably engages its audience in product development, fostering a sense of co-creation. The comprehensive utilisation of entrepreneurial marketing by Caia Cosmetics underscores its relevance for our investigation into how customers perceive the entrepreneurial marketing activities of SMEs on social media and their consequential impact on engagement.

3.4 Data Collection

In our research, semi-structured interviews were employed as the primary method for data collection. Ten interviews, each lasting approximately one hour, have been conducted to provide flexibility, allowing for an in-depth exploration of our research topics. Widely used in exploratory studies, semi-structured interviews provided valuable participant feedback and established a robust knowledge base (Bell et al., 2022). By framing our questions openly, we uncovered unexpected insights while minimising any bias in participants’ responses.

In combination with interviews, text analysis was conducted by studying behaviours and engagements on Caia Cosmetics' Instagram account, where comments and interactions from customers and other users were documented and analysed. The analysis involved systematically examining different types of posts on Caia Cosmetics Instagram account that received high number of likes and comments. This process included categorising posts based on their content, format and topic. The text analysis provided insights into how different customers interact and engage with Caia Cosmetics' entrepreneurial marketing on Instagram. A systematic review was conducted to gain an in-depth overview and identify patterns.

To ensure consistency and reliability, an interview guide was prepared containing targeted questions aligned with our study's areas of interest. As the study progressed, this guide was refined based on insights gained from the initial interviews. The interviews were conducted by both researchers to prevent potential reliability challenges, with the prepared interview guide helping to maintain measurement consistency. This collaborative approach ensures content validity, as the researchers complemented each other, preventing important aspects from being overlooked or straying into irrelevant areas beyond the study's scope. To ensure accuracy and prevent any misinterpretations or limitations due to translation, all interviews were conducted exclusively in English and transcribed with the help of AI.

The interviews were conducted via the Google Meet platform to overcome geographical barriers between researchers and interviewees. This choice of platform facilitated participation from individuals who might otherwise have declined due to logistical constraints.

The interview questions focused on understanding participants' experiences and perceptions regarding engagement with Caia Cosmetics on Instagram. Participants were asked to reflect on their thoughts and interaction with Caia Cosmetics and elaborate on their experiences on Instagram. By analysing participants' reactions to various types of posts or content from Caia Cosmetics, entrepreneurial marketing practices that resonated with them were identified. Participants were also asked to recall instances where Caia Cosmetics' content elicited specific emotions or a sense of connection and trust, capturing signals of emotional engagement. Furthermore, participants' likelihood of engaging with Caia Cosmetics' product details and reviews, assessing cognitive engagement cues, was explored. Additionally, they were asked about specific instances where they had taken actions, providing insights into

behavioural engagement. For the final version of our interview guide, please refer to Appendix 1.

In conducting the text analysis, random sampling of posts was employed to ensure an impartial representation of the content and engagement levels on Caia's Instagram page. Additionally, multiple researchers were involved in the data collection process to cross-validate the results and reduce individual biases. Consensus among researchers was sought to ensure the reliability and validity of the collected data.

For data collection, purposive sampling — on purpose selection of interviewees — was employed. This method allowed researchers to collect data efficiently based on the screening questions we employed beforehand to assure the specific characteristics relevant to the research question and objectives given time and resource constraints (Ames et al., 2019). The data obtained through purposive sampling helped explore initial findings and patterns related to entrepreneurial marketing activities by SMEs and the engagement of customers via Instagram.

The study's sample consisted of 10 participants from Northern European countries, selected based on specific characteristics relevant to achieving the study's objectives. The selection criteria included:

1. Age (participants were within the 18-29 age range)
2. Gender (participants were women)
3. Have an active Instagram account where they follow or interacted with SMEs
4. Followed Caia Cosmetics for a period over 1 month.

The study concentrated on young adults aged 18-29 since they represent a substantial demographic of engaged users across social media platforms (Wong, J.D., 2023). Considering gender, given that Caia Cosmetics primarily targets women with its products and marketing efforts, it was essential for our study to focus solely on female participants. Instagram was chosen as the primary platform of interest because of its extensive user base and significant influence on marketing (Dixon, 2024). Despite being a growing company, Caia Cosmetics fell within the criteria for a SME as it has fewer than 250 employees and a turnover of 50 million euro or less (European Commission, 2024). Caia Cosmetics was selected due to its notable presence on Instagram and the evident success of its entrepreneurial marketing activities.

These criteria were established to ensure that the collected data directly addressed the research topic and targeted the relevant demographic and context of SMEs entrepreneurial marketing on Instagram.

Participant	Age	Nationality	Months following Caia Cosmetics
1	22	Swedish	36
2	23	Luxembourgish	6
3	24	Dutch	10
4	25	German	24
5	25	Dutch	8
6	24	Dutch	7
7	24	Swedish	18
8	27	Swedish	48
9	23	Swedish	24
10	24	Swedish	36

Table 1: Detailed Sample Overview

3.5 Data Analysis

The interview transcripts have been subjected to a thematic analysis to extract qualitative insights. This methodology uncovered recurrent themes, subjects, notions, and patterns of significance through accurate research of the data. A well-formed inductive thematic analysis was employed, as it permitted the data to dictate the emergent topics and was congruent with the abductive approach of the research. To strengthen the validity and reliability of the study, the six stages of thematic analysis were adhered to: familiarisation, coding, theme generation, theme evaluation, theme definition and naming, and finally, the articulation of the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The process of familiarisation involved a deep dive into the data. This was achieved by the researchers through the transcription of audio, thorough reading of the text, and comprehensive data review. The next step, coding, required the marking of important text sections in various colours, with each colour and specific content being assigned a label. Relevant data included repeated elements, metaphors and analogies, transitions, points of similarity and difference, linguistic connectors, missing data, and material related to the

theory. The codes that were generated were then reviewed, patterns were identified, and themes were created. These themes, which were more encompassing than the individual codes, grouped multiple codes under a single overarching theme. To ensure the accuracy and trustworthiness of the analysis, the researchers returned to the data to create a final list of clearly outlined and defined themes.

For the text analysis a thematic analysis was conducted in order to identify recurring themes or patterns in the observed interactions between Caia Cosmetics and its audience on Instagram. This involved systematically coding the data to categorise it into meaningful themes related to customer engagement, such as types of content, levels of interaction, emotional responses, and behavioural cues. By aligning the text analysis with the themes derived from the interviews, validation and deepening of the writer's understanding of the brand's interactions with its audience on Instagram were pursued.

Furthermore, the content of Caia Cosmetics was analysed to assess the effectiveness of various entrepreneurial marketing activities within the framework of the themes identified from the interviews. This analysis involved categorising content based on its format, messaging, engagement tactics and audience reactions. By integrating the text analysis with the themes identified from the interviews, we aimed to identify which types of content generated specific forms of engagement and trends or correlations between content characteristics and audience responses. This integrated approach allowed us to leverage both qualitative data sources effectively, providing a more comprehensive assessment of Caia Cosmetics' marketing strategies on Instagram.

Below in figure 1, the Gioia method and its three stages – first order themes, second order themes and aggregate themes – illustrates the data structure (Gioia et al., 2024). The first order concepts originate from the various interviews conducted. Initially, 29 first-order concepts representing various facets of customer engagement within the entrepreneurial marketing context were identified. By refining these initial concepts into distinct topics based on common patterns, the volume of material was streamlined (Gioia et al., 2024). These themes were synthesised into 8 second-order themes, each encompassing multiple first-order concepts. Following this, efforts were made to identify common patterns among these themes to consolidate them into aggregate themes. Subsequently, these second-order themes were categorized into one of the three levels of engagement. This approach provides a systematic

framework for understanding customer engagement with Caia Cosmetics on Instagram within the context of entrepreneurial marketing.

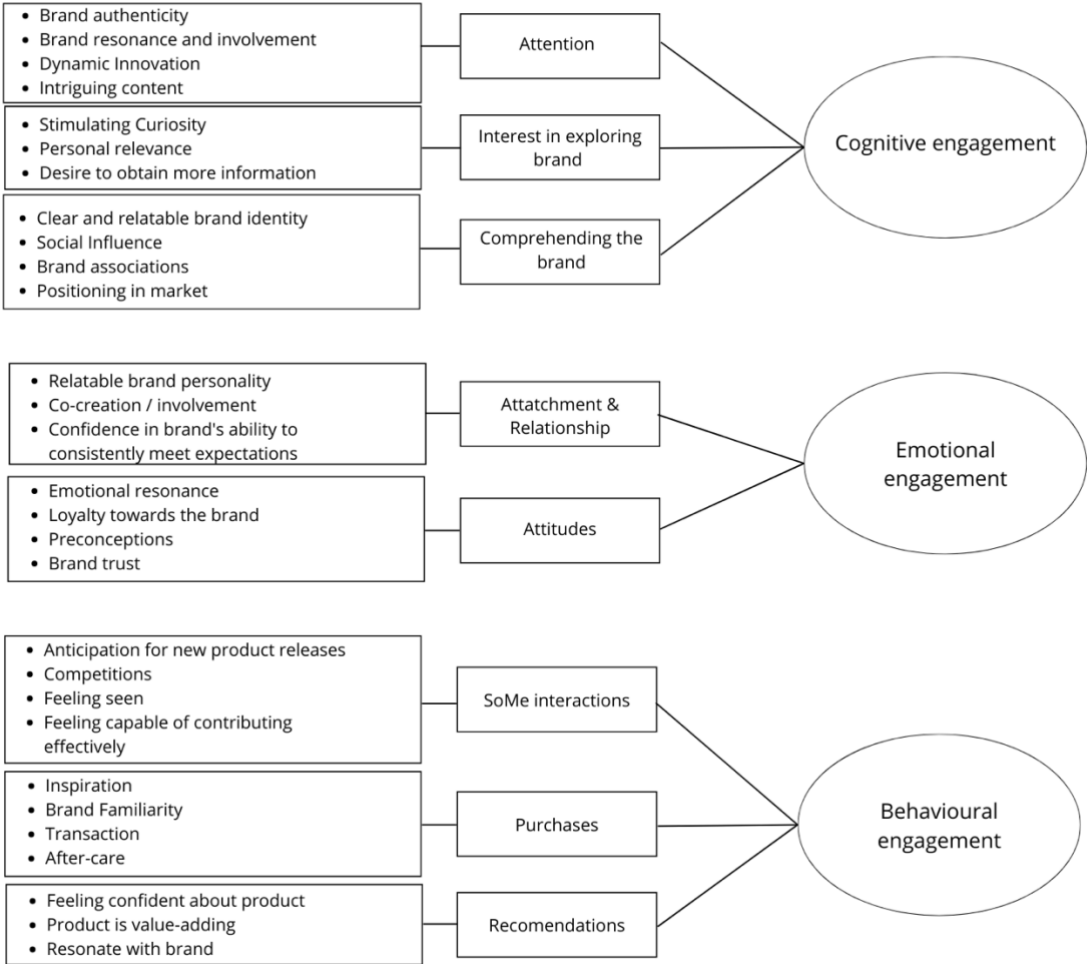


Figure 1: Data Structure

3.6 Trustworthiness and Rigour

Ensuring the trustworthiness and rigour of our qualitative research study is paramount to producing credible and valuable findings and is anchored in four key criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Bell et al., 2022). To establish credibility, we utilised two primary data sources: Ten in-depth interviews and text analysis. This approach provided diverse perspectives and reduced the risk of bias associated with relying solely on one data source.

Furthermore, all interviews were transcribed and then shared with participants for respondent validation. While achieving complete transferability in qualitative research poses challenges,

we endeavoured to include a diverse group of 10 young women from Northern European countries. Although our sample size was restricted, the inclusion of participants from diverse backgrounds and experiences enhances the richness of our findings. However, the potential for increased transferability through a larger sample size in future studies is a consideration.

We maintained dependability through systematic data collection and analysis methods. Utilising semi-structured interviews and observational techniques ensured consistent data collection, complemented by a transparent and systematic approach to data analysis. To preserve confirmability, the interview questions were framed openly to encourage participants to express their perspectives freely. Additionally, our analysis was conducted transparently, enabling independent verification of findings. Moreover, the involvement of multiple researchers and respondent validation further enhanced confirmability by mitigating potential researcher bias. These criteria aim to assess the relevance of our study's conclusions in various settings, guaranteeing precision and reliability while maintaining objectivity through the reduction of personal biases.

3.7 Limitations

Bell et al. (2022) outline several limitations of qualitative research, emphasising the challenges in reproducing consistent results. They argue that reproducing a study with consistent results proves difficult due to researchers' inherent subjectivity and in data collection and study design. Individual interpretations of relevance vary, leading to potential differences in the final outcomes. Therefore, it is crucial to continuously evaluate data selection and quality throughout the research process.

Moreover, Bell et al. (2022) highlights a limitation regarding generalisation. Simply because Caia's entrepreneurial marketing is perceived in a particular way does not ensure similar perceptions for all SMEs employing similar activities. Industry dynamics, product characteristics and target audience demographics can influence these perceptions. It is essential to recognise that perceptions about Caia Cosmetics entrepreneurial marketing activities on Instagram are subjective and subject to social trends. Therefore, our study focuses on how Caia's entrepreneurial marketing activities are currently instigating different types of customer engagement, considering contemporary social trends and available

technology. Moreover, individual contributing to public opinion may change their views over time.

Furthermore, relying solely on Caia Cosmetics, their entrepreneurial marketing and their followers' perceptions limits the diversity of perspectives compared to analysing multiple cases. Nevertheless, it is still possible to identify overarching patterns and principles. Moreover, single case studies are susceptible to researcher bias, underscoring the significance of maintaining awareness and objectivity when defining and generalising results.

4. Empirical Findings

This chapter presents the findings of our research efforts, offering a comprehensive summary of the insights gathered from 10 in-depth, semi structured interviews, as well as text analysis. The aim of these conversations was to explore how Caia's entrepreneurial marketing activities on Instagram instigates different types of customer engagement.

The evolving data structure as shown in the methodology, highlighted three different types of engagement: cognitive engagement, emotional engagement, and behavioural engagement including first order themes. These dimensions serve as the foundation of our comprehension of the entrepreneurial marketing activities and the impacted engagement towards Caia, and they are elaborated upon below.

4.1 Cognitive engagement

All participant exhibited some degree of cognitive engagement, however with varying levels of attention, interest and perceptions regarding Caia's entrepreneurial marketing activities. A majority actively processed and engaged with the information presented by the brand. Moreover, they proactively sought our additional information on their own. Various forms of entrepreneurial marketing activities instigate cognitive engagement. Specifically, Caia's campaign videos, featuring an innovative approach to value creation and crafted to resonate deeply with target customers, capture attention and shape perception effectively. Caia's strategic and innovative product launch approaches, which incorporates co-creation and proactive listening to customer needs, foster exploration and attention. Furthermore, the personal touch conveyed by influencers like co-founder Bianca Ingrosso, who showcases and discusses products, generates attention and encourages exploration of the brand.

4.1.1 Attention

The interviews provided insights into how participants attention is captured by Caia's campaign videos, their innovative approach, competitions, and videos featuring familiar personalities showcasing the products.

Participants emphasised their interest in Caia's longer and inspirational campaigns, particularly the campaign videos. They highlighted how these videos consistently captured their attention. P8 brought this forward by saying:

When they release a new collection or something new, is really when I think they are good, because they are very creative in the way they hype it up and build up the release date and then when the day comes, I am almost sitting there waiting at the exact time they said they would release it. So, I am drawn to their way of campaigning, and I think it really stands out at grabs my attention.

Some participants highlighted how Caia's campaigns diverge from traditional advertising methods, making them feel more authentic and some interviewees even mentioned that it does not even feel like it is advertisement. P8 states, "*What I think they do so well is that they manage to make very appealing marketing without it feeling like advertising*". Participants noted that the campaigns tease about the products without directly showcasing them, which generate curiosity and captures attention. P10 elaborates on how the campaign videos and their unique aesthetic diverge from the typical expectations associated with makeup brands. She finds it refreshing to encounter something new and different. According to P10 these types of campaign videos prompt the realisation that Caia Cosmetics is more than just makeup, embodying a broader lifestyle and identity. Additional participants praised the visually appealing and inspiring elements of the campaigns, suggesting they portray a desirable lifestyle or an aspirational identity. Overall participants conveyed their appreciation of the human presence visible in Caia's content despite the brand primarily selling products.

P1 noted that Caia excels at capturing attention due to their innovative approach. She admired Caia for continuously expanding and exploring new possibilities, being quick to adapt to emerging trends, and demonstrating attentiveness to their customer's feedback. P1 exemplifies this by stating:

They are very innovative, and they are always very early on to new trends and innovations. They are also good at being where we are, if I am on Tik Tok, Caia is there, if I am on Instagram Caia is there as well. I think this makes them good at capturing a lot of customers.

P5 also mentioned:

They're really hopping on the trends. So I see a meme that's being used very much and I heard a voice that's also being used very much right now on TikTok and Instagram, but remember that they were very fast with it.

Furthermore, content featuring videos demonstrating the application of products tends to gather attention. P7 exemplifies how videos of a familiar face talking about the product and showcasing the transformation from a clean face to full glow captures her attention. Additionally, P1 elaborates on how these videos effectively highlight the quality of the products while also serving as a source of inspiration, surpassing the impact of static images showcasing products in a staged setup. Moreover, P1 expresses that seeing someone applying makeup feels more personal and therefore enjoyable.

The presence of competitions and challenges is another element that captivates participants attention. Multiple participants mentioned the recent Easter Egg Hunt, where followers received clues via Instagram and eagerly embarked on hunt to uncover hidden eggs containing Caia products. Participants found this competition engaging and enjoyable and felt a desire to get the eggs.

4.1.2 Exploration

Our findings showcase how participant exploration is instigated by several factors, including Caia's creative new product launches, influencers and co-founders showcasing the products, and content that resonates with the target audience, sparking curiosity.

During the interviews, all participants were asked about their likelihood of exploring the details of a new product from Caia, providing insights into their interest in exploring brand offerings and their engagement with the information provided by the brand. A majority of the participants expressed their likelihood to do so if they were actively seeking that specific product. P10 remarked, *"Well, it depends on if it is a product I am actively looking for..."*. P1 considered their mood, stating, *"This totally depends on if I am in the mood of buying something, but also if I am looking for something special"*. However, participants later conveyed how they felt a desire to learn more due to Caia's approach in showcasing and

describing their products through content, effectively teasing customers to explore further.

P10 stated:

I think they are good at capturing your interest and make you want to know more. Often when they post a product on their social media, they don't put the price and things like that, so if you're a bit tempted to buy, I think you want to click through to know what it is and what it costs.

Through text analysis, it has become evident that Caia employs a strategic approach when launching new products. They typically tease customers well in advance through short videos or images, providing subtle hints without revealing the product outright. Each product launch from Caia showcases distinct aspects of their brand that resonate with their target audience, adapting to various events throughout the year, emerging trends, or entirely new concepts. This approach ensures each release is fresh and engaging. When the products are finally released, it is accompanied by an engaging video featuring music and an aesthetic fitting to the product and the launch concept. This is followed by content demonstrating how the products are used and its appearance on various individuals, presented through both video and images. Text analysis reveals that these types of posts receive a lot of attention and overall engagement. Entrepreneurial marketing activities and content related to new product releases notably captures participants attention, leading to a desire to delve deeper and seek additional information. P8 emphasises a heightened desire to purchase new products from Caia. When Caia releases a new product, P8 tends to seek out additional information, relying on both the company's website and user-generated content.

During the interviews it emerged that seeing others use the products, influencers for instance, made participants more inclined to learn about and listen to the details of new products. P9 expressed the impact of seeing influencers, notably Bianca Ingrosso, showcasing and discussing products on their own channels rather than on Caia Cosmetics official page. This encourage P9 to engage further by clicking on links or delving into additional exploration. Furthermore, P1 stated, *"It is really helpful to see videos demonstrating how to use the product, like a review"*. Participants proactively sought out reviews or instructional videos on how to use the products before making any purchasing decisions. Furthermore, the interviews also indicate that reviews and user generated content on Instagram can motivate participants to visit the website to explore further reviews and information.

4.1.3 Perception

Perception is predominantly influenced by Caia's brand persona, which serves as a consistent theme throughout all their entrepreneurial marketing activities. However, the role of Bianca Ingrosso, one of the brand's founders and a successful influencer in Sweden, significantly contributes to building trust and credibility among customers. During the interviews, participants were asked about their perceptions of Caia. Many responses had similar sentiments highlighting a positive attitude, quality products, the association with the colour pink, depiction of a successful, confident, and beautiful woman and the presence of inspiring and playful imagery.

Another significant finding is that participants perceive Caia not just as a brand, but as a person, fostering a personal connection and perception. This sentiment appears to be largely influenced by the consistent brand persona that runs as a common thread through all of Caia's entrepreneurial marketing activities. Another aspect highlighted by P1 is Caia's portrayal of an admirable lifestyle that she aspires to take as an example. This portrayal attracts her to the brand and fosters a perception of Caia as an actualisation of success in achieving this aspirational lifestyle. This perception is predominantly shaped by Caia's Campaign videos featuring beautiful women in appealing environments. P1 mentioning:

I really like their long advertising videos. I like that it is very high quality, and they are very inspiring to me even though the life they are presenting is very far away from mine. It almost makes me feel like I can buy this product and it will get me closer to this lifestyle that I want to have in my future. It is a lifestyle that I really admire, and therefore I think I get inspired by that type of content, it is more than just watching someone doing their makeup.

Moreover, P8 elaborates: "*Thinking about Caia, I imagine a real power woman, lots of pink and confidence*". Similarly, P10 concurs that Caia surpasses the conventional definition of a brand and expresses:

They are more than just a makeup brand. They talk about Caia as a person. That you should be Caia and Caia is your friend. So I think a lot about their story, they are truly a strong brand and not just a makeup product.

Moreover, P1 elaborates on Caia's ability in illustrating their brand identity and core values, noting their clear and creative approach to doing so. She emphasises the importance of social media and highlights how Caia effectively showcases their personality through different types of content on Instagram, thus influencing customer perceptions of the company. In pictures, videos, competitions, and campaigns, Caia consistently presents a cohesive brand persona that resonates effectively with their target audience and their aspirations. This unified brand persona is reflected in their tone of voice as well as in their visual elements. P1 exemplifies that her perception of Caia is entirely dependent on how the brand presents itself on Instagram.

4.2 Emotional engagement

In our interviews, we delved into a deeper dimension of engagement known as emotional involvement, a crucial aspect of Caia Cosmetics' entrepreneurial marketing strategy. This dimension encompasses feelings of attachment, relationship, and attitudes towards the brand, representing a higher order of connection where customers develop profound emotional bonds with the brand, influencing their loyalty. By examining emotional involvement alongside cognitive engagement, we can highlight the significant differences between these levels of engagement and their impact on customer-brand relationships.

Caia Cosmetics demonstrates a profound understanding of its target customers, an important factor of successful entrepreneurial marketing. This understanding enables the development of a brand persona that resonates deeply with customers, building trust, influencing attitudes and fostering attachment, aligning with the research of de Oliveira Santini et al. (2020).

Moreover, Caia's engagement in co-creation and active listening to customer needs, characteristic elements of entrepreneurial marketing, promotes attachment and fosters relationships. Additionally, the trust established with co-founder and influencer Bianca Ingrosso also cultivates stronger relationships and fosters a positive attitude towards the brand. Overall, interviewees expressed a stronger bond with Caia Cosmetics compared to other brands. They described a sense of being part of the brand's journey and feeling acknowledged as valued customers. This emotional connection significantly contributes to their affinity for the brand.

4.2.1 Attachment & Relationship

In this section, the multifaceted relationship and attachment between customers and Caia Cosmetics is explored with a focus on the various dimensions of attachment and emotional connection fostered by the brand's entrepreneurial marketing strategies. The interviews provided insights into the depth of the relationship participants have with Caia Cosmetics, highlighting their interactions with the brand, the brand persona, Bianca, and the involvement they feel when Caia actively asks for input in the creation of a new product. Participants expressed a profound sense of engagement with the company, often describing the feelings of being emotionally connected and valued. Words such as 'feeling seen' and 'thinking of you' were commonly used to articulate their experiences. P2, for instance, associated her attachment with the brand's commitment to diversity and customer-centric approach stating:

I feel a strong sense of connection with Caia Cosmetics, because they make me feel genuinely regarded and cared for. Their openness to diversity and focus on addressing various customer needs make me feel like I'm interacting with a trusted friend, rather than just a brand.

Another participant highlighted that you can really recognise that they are truly caring about you as customer as described by p3: *"it feels like they're thinking of you. Like, we didn't make this blush to make money. We made it because you need to look awake for example."* P1 adds to this point by stating that Caia makes customers feel valued by actively involving them in the brand's processes, thereby fostering trust. Caia actively engages in co-creation with its customers, allowing followers to participate in determining which new products the company will release. This is exemplified by P1:

They started with makeup and then people said they wanted the perfect self-tan, and then they created and launched that. So they listen to their customers and try to adapt after them.

For instance, Caia developed an entirely new product with the input from their Instagram followers. Through polls on Instagram, decisions such as the product type, colour and other aspects were made entirely based on the feedback and suggestions of the followers. P10 commented on this aspect, stating:

It is an excellent way to use your followers in a very strategic way. Involving them in creating their own product that they miss. I remember being very impressed by that.

Additionally, P1 expressed that it is uncommon for a company to allow its customers to create a new product, and this initiative fostered a sense of involvement.

Another aspect influencing participant loyalty is their relationship with Bianca Ingresso. Participants who have an established relationship with Bianca, often extend this trust to Caia Cosmetics, viewing it as an extension of the trust in her. P8 exemplifies this by stating, *“I have followed Bianca for so long now and know that she would never develop products just to make money”*. P10 further emphasises the significance of Caia for Bianca, highlighting her deep involvement in product development and her commitment to only producing products that she believes in and trusts.

Moreover, Bianca plays a crucial role in shaping the admirable brand persona of Caia Cosmetics, an important factor in fostering brand attachment. P10 expresses that this persona is profoundly inspiring and resonates with her personally. She also notes that Caia maintains remarkably consistent in its messaging. P10 continues, *“From start they have been so sure about what they want to communicate. Like that Caia is a friend, a companion, a sister, someone that is always by your side”*. P8 reinforces this claim, stating that Caia has constructed a persona that she and others strongly resonate with or strive to embody. P1 also perceives Caia’s persona as an example for future aspirations, thereby getting inspired by the brand. According to participants, the creation of the persona and lifestyle primarily stems from the campaign concepts but is a red thread through the entire brand.

Furthermore, it has been highlighted by 6 out of 10 interviewees that Caia Cosmetics actively encourages its followers to become more involved with the brand. For instance, they share behind the scenes content, introduce followers to the individuals working at the office and produces products they wish for. P3: *“I think it's just the best way and you're not only making your customers aware, but you also include them in the process.”* This approach makes Caia feel more personable and relatable, and according to participants, it is enjoyable to see how they operate behind the scenes. Additionally, P10 highlights Caia’s comprehensive transparency, extending beyond mere operational insights. The brand also prioritises

transparency regarding ingredients and the dedication of producing high quality products. This commitment fosters trust for P10.

It becomes evident that for participants to remain loyal, Caia's products must meet the expectations set by the brand's communication efforts. Despite this expectation, all participants had tried Caia Cosmetics makeup and expressed satisfaction with the products, leading them to revisiting the brand for future purchases. P1 exemplifies this sentiment, stating, "*When I run out of a product and need a new one, I come back to Caia because I know they are good*". Furthermore, P10 points out, "*Of course Caia is always an option when I want to buy a new product*". During the interviews, all participants (10 out of 10) highlighted their trust in Caia, both in terms of product quality and as a company. P1 exemplifies this trust by stating that she would confidently recommend Caia, including products she has not yet tried, based on her belief in the brand's overall quality and standard.

4.2.2 Attitudes

In this section, the impact of Caia Cosmetics' entrepreneurial marketing strategies on participants' attitudes towards the brand is examined. Participants frequently express a profound sense of admiration and inspiration towards Caia, perceiving the brand as a symbol of beauty and empowerment. This sentiment is notably influenced by entrepreneurial activities such as involving followers in product launches, showcasing an admirable lifestyle and store openings, which enhance consumer engagement and brand loyalty. Moreover, the persona projected by Bianca Ingrosso, plays a significant role in shaping participants' attitudes.

Numerous participants conveyed that they find Caia highly inspiring, often portraying beautiful women and an appealing lifestyle. In the interviews P1 articulated, "*Some content makes me longing for a certain type of lifestyle and gets me really inspired*". It becomes evident that the sense of inspiration, as expressed by several participants, appear from Caia's longer campaign videos and their visually captivating campaign photos. These campaign videos not only instigate attention and shape perception but also influence attitudes towards the brand.

Additionally, the findings indicate a strong association between participants' perceptions of Caia and its co-founder, Bianca Ingrosso. During the interviews, P9 elaborates on the

connection between Bianca and Caia, highlighting that this association is likely shared by many other as well. P9 states, *“It can be an advantage, but if you don’t like Bianca, you probably won’t like Caia Cosmetics either”*.

Even participants who have favourable sentiments towards the brand, align it closely with Bianca, as exemplified by P10: *“Their marketing stands out, with Bianca being the face of it”*. However, P10 brings up another perspective, noting that Caia has become increasingly independent over the years and less reliant on its connection to Bianca. While acknowledging the success of this transition, she also perceives that the company is still linked to certain influencers whose actions occasionally have a negative impact on the brand.

While certain participants convey their disapproval of the persona portrayed by Caia, others express that it is precisely this persona that serves as a source of inspiration and fosters a sense of resonance with the brand.

When asked about the specific emotions evoked by Caia, the majority of participants articulate positive feelings. P8 remarked, *“Definitely a lot of joy, happiness and a bit of success, I would say”*. Additionally, P1 described experiencing happiness coupled with an admiration for the brand. The participants generally hold a positive view of Caia, expressing that the brand effectively communicates the brand values and aesthetic through its entrepreneurial marketing activities, thereby evoking favourable emotions.

Through careful text analysis, these positive sentiments are consistently reflected in the comments on Caia Cosmetics Instagram posts. The brand receives significant engagement across all posts, with comments often expressing excitement or positive feedback about the products. It becomes evident that key moments such as product launches, restocks and significant announcements like store openings tend to drive engagement. These types of content frequently generate a considerable number of likes, comments, and shares.

4.3 Behavioural engagement

During our interviews, we explored how people engage with Caia Cosmetics beyond just their feelings, examining their actions driven by the brand's entrepreneurial marketing efforts. We focused on their actions—what they did because of the brand's marketing, such as interacting with the brand, making purchases, and recommending it to others. This exploration highlighted the tangible outcomes influenced by Caia's entrepreneurial marketing strategies, such as innovative product launches, interactive social media campaigns, and influencer collaborations. By diving into these real-life actions, we gained deeper insights into the effectiveness of Caia's entrepreneurial marketing initiatives in driving consumer engagement.

4.3.1 Social Media Interactions

During text analysis, it was visible that Caia Cosmetics consistently engages with their audience by promptly responding to every message they receive under their posts, often with emojis or informative replies. This proactive interaction aligns with the objectives of entrepreneurial marketing, aiming to foster strong connections with customers. Additionally, Caia employs interactive strategies such as sharing sneak peeks of upcoming product launches and prompting followers to guess in engaging ways, generating significant traffic on Instagram and encouraging people to share their thoughts. During the interviews, participants commonly described their interactions with Caia as 'personal', 'responsive', and 'engaged'. For example, P2 shared: *"They commented back I think within an hour, which I really liked because it feels like you're talking to a person instead of a company."* Furthermore, they frequently ask questions to their customers P5:

They make use of question stickers in their stories, and I think it's really nice way to ask the opinion of their customers because it's way more attracting to fill in a small question sticker than a big survey and I like to fill them in as I would love to have a voice in upcoming projects and launches.

Through text analysis, it becomes clear that content involving co-creation significantly boosts engagement, manifesting in high volumes of likes, comments, and shares. Additionally, Caia stands out for its innovative strategy of involving followers through competitions and challenges. A recent example is their Easter egg hunt in Stockholm. These posts cultivate a strong sense of community among their followers and sparks behavioural engagement by

making people participating in this on Instagram, as well as literally by doing the egg hunt in person. These posts generated numerous positive comments from enthusiastic customers. One comment stated, “OMG, I need this!”, while another expressed, “WOW, I want these”. Additionally, P10 remarked, *“I like the Easter egg hunt, I think it’s fun and exciting”*. Furthermore, P1 shared, *“I really like the Easter egg hunt, it creates a desire for the products and a feeling that you want the eggs”*.

4.3.2 Purchases

Within the scope of behavioural engagement, exploring the correlation between consumers' engagement with a brand and their subsequent purchasing decisions provides valuable insights. In our study, we focused on assessing how engagement with Caia Cosmetics on social media platforms influenced participants' buying behaviour, particularly examining the entrepreneurial marketing tactics employed by the brand. By interviewing individuals who have been following Caia Cosmetics for over a month, we sought to understand the impact of social media appearances, driven by entrepreneurial strategies, on their purchasing decisions.

Our findings revealed that a significant majority of participants, specifically 9 out of 10 interviewees, reported making purchases based on their engagement with Caia Cosmetics' social media content. This decision was often influenced by a combination of factors, including the appeal of the brand's social media content and recommendations from friends who also followed the brand's account. Moreover, our findings distinguished between different types of purchasing behaviour stemming from social media engagement like purposeful purchases, impulsive and upselling.

Participants demonstrated a tendency to make purposeful purchases influenced by their engagement with Caia Cosmetics' social media content. P4 articulated this sentiment, stating, *“I think they're influencing you to buy those things, which made me buy that one as well eventually since I was already looking for the perfect lip-gloss.”* Moreover, P10 articulates that her purchase decision was influenced by content from Caia that effectively demonstrated and articulated the superior quality of the products. P10 states, *“I bought the lip pencils once. It was good because I really needed them, and I saw a lot of content about them and heard how good they were”*. P8 further illustrates this point by explaining that her initial purchase involved a long decision-making process. Ultimately, what convinced her to make the

purchase was the diverse posts around the benefits of the product, targeting her in multiple ways.

In addition to intentional purchases, our study revealed instances of impulsive buying among participants, often triggered by persuasive social media campaigns. For instance, one participant P8 openly shared,

I'm consistently drawn to their campaigns, which often push me to buy on impulse. Recently, I ended up purchasing a new palette out of the blue, even though I didn't really need one.

Similarly, P5 mentioned, *"After seeing a post that really resonated with me, I felt a sudden urge to try it out and ended up buying it without on-purpose looking for that product."* P8 highlighted the effectiveness of Caia Cosmetics' marketing efforts in provoking impulsive purchases, noting, *"Their content and campaigns are designed to trigger an impulse to buy, and they excel at it."* Furthermore, participants indicated a tendency to purchase additional items as a result of their engagement with Caia Cosmetics' social media presence. P2 elaborated on this, stating:

I think that what has influenced me in my decision making when buying their products, to buy more products in the end because I want to complete the whole routine they are promoting.

Furthermore, P1 elaborates on how videos consisting of makeup demonstrations can influence purchasing decisions by demonstrating how the products perform when applied. When seeking a new product, P1 is more easily affected by advertisements specifically tailored to her needs and describes how she has made purchases from Caia during these times. P1 exemplifies this, *"Maybe I need a new mascara and then I see a post from Caias and think, this must be good since Bianca talked positive about it."* P9 also elaborates on this, explaining that when she is looking for a specific product and it appears on her Instagram-feed she is more intrigued to buy it.

However, it is evident that some participants make purchases from Caia based on recommendations from friends and positive word-of-mouth discussions about the brand. P1 highlights the importance of recommendations by stating,

You really trust your friends and their recommendations. Then, I assume that the product is good because of the recommendation and the perception I have of the brand.

P8 further elaborates on this, explaining how her purchase mainly was influenced by content on social media, word of mouth and reviews on Caia's website.

4.3.3 Recommendations

In this section, the impact of Caia Cosmetics' entrepreneurial marketing strategies on participants' recommending the brand is examined. Through the interviews, it became apparent that participants' level of emotional engagement directly influenced their behaviours and inclination to recommend Caia to others. Those with stronger emotional connection to the brand were more inclined to recommend it, often requiring just a slight nudge from interactive content to prompt their advocacy.

During the interviews, we observed that participants provided different kinds of recommendations when asked about their likelihood to recommend Caia Cosmetics to others. Nine out of ten participants expressed a willingness to recommend the brand to friends and family. These recommendations include encouraging others to follow and interact with Caia's Instagram account, changing current beauty routines based on informative videos and to buy products from them.

The drive to recommend following Caia Cosmetics on Instagram primarily stemmed from the cognitive and emotional engagement, as well as enjoyable and interactive content they offer, including memes and trending videos. but also starts a conversation to talk about the brand
P3: *"I also want to know if my friends think the brand is very nice. Therefore, I opened up a conversation about Caia cosmetics."* Participant 4 expressed, *"I thought that they have been posting a meme and I also really liked memes. So, I sent that one to a friend."* Participant 5 elaborated, stating:

I send it to a lot of friends because I think that their Instagram is really pleasing and clean, showing a lot of nice products in an innovative way and all my friends are very interested as well in cosmetic companies.

Notably, the emphasis thus far has been on the engaging nature of the Instagram account, with participants yet to discuss the products themselves.

Moreover, taking it a step further, participants also recommend Caia Cosmetics to encourage others to consider changing their current beauty routines and finding new inspiration. After seeing creative content showcasing the benefits of products for different skin types, P2 stated:

I recommended the page to my mom, because they use different ages of models on the page because I saw it was worn well by a more mature woman so with wrinkles and textured, and well that inspired me to share it with her to change her routine.

Furthermore, P8 elaborates that she has received numerous compliments while wearing Caia's makeup, prompting her to recommend the brand to others. It is apparent that P8 also recommends Caia Cosmetic when asked for makeup brands worth trying since she really likes the products. Similarly, P10 has received compliments while wearing Caia products and frequently recommends the brand when someone is looking for a new product.

Eventually, it motivates people to recommend the products due to their presence on Instagram. P5:

Caia Cosmetics makes themselves unique online with sharing content of their products and therefore I sent it to my friends, we need to try it out and now we're very happy with it.

A few participants also mention that they do not recommend Caia Cosmetics because of their Instagram and their marketing but more because the quality of the products. However, their entrepreneurial marketing activities on Instagram attracted and inspired them. P1: *"Of course the Instagram profile got my interest it's first, but when talking to friends, I would rather talk about the product itself than the Instagram presence."*

5. Analysis and Discussion

In this chapter, the findings presented earlier will be interpreted and contextualised. Their significance in relation to the research question will be analysed by thoroughly examining their connections with the literature discussed in Chapter 2 and how it adds upon the already existing literature.

5.1 Cognitive engagement

The findings suggest that Caia's entrepreneurial marketing activities prompted varying extents of cognitive engagement, as evidenced by different levels of attention, interest and comprehension regarding Caia's products and messaging. Participants exhibited varying levels of active processing and engagement with the information presented by the brand, indicating their degree of cognitive involvement in the brands entrepreneurial marketing activities.

A majority of the participants expressed how Caia's longer campaign videos consistently captured their attention and influenced their perception. It becomes evident how these videos diverge from traditional marketing campaigns, showcasing Caia's innovative approach in presenting their brand. This innovative approach exemplifies Caia's embrace of new ideas and creative processes, aligning with the concept of innovativeness in entrepreneurial marketing as described by Morris et al. (2002). The campaign videos feature a unique aesthetic that diverge from the typical expectations associated with makeup brands. These videos portray an aspirational lifestyle that customers aspire to emulate, attracting them to the brand and fostering a perception of Caia as a symbol of success in achieving this desired lifestyle. This approach moves beyond traditional product-focused advertising by incorporating storytelling and imagery that resonate with broader aspirations and values. This aligns with the concept of innovativeness in entrepreneurial marketing, where firms explore novel approaches to stand out in dynamic markets (Majovski & Davitkovska, 2017).

Moreover, Caia's campaigns are involved in creating value for customers beyond product features. Instead of only showcasing the products, they cultivate lifestyle associations and emotional connections, enhancing the overall brand value. This value creation aligns with entrepreneurial marketing principles, where firms find new and unique ways to generate value in dynamic markets (Morris et al., 2002). Caia demonstrates a strong customer intensity, a key

dimension of entrepreneurial marketing, by emphasising a deep understanding of their customers' needs and aspirations (Majovski & Davitkovska, 2017). Caia's commitment to understanding its customer base serves as a foundational element in shaping and refining its entrepreneurial marketing strategies to effectively resonate with target audiences and fulfil their expectations.

Another significant finding is that participants perceive Caia not merely as a brand, but as a person, cultivating a personal connection and impression. This perception is cultivated through Caia's innovative approach to portraying themselves via diverse entrepreneurial marketing activities. By proactively and consistently integrating this persona into the brand's identity across all entrepreneurial marketing activities, including campaign videos, visuals, challenges, co-creation activities, Caia transforms to being more than just a brand. According to (Morris et al., 2002), SMEs acquire a marketing advantage from the close relationships established between entrepreneurs and customers. This requires excellent communication skills to understand customer needs and effectively persuade and influence them (Majovski & Davitkovska, 2017). This often entails innovating new relationship-building approaches, a capability that Caia Cosmetics demonstrates effectively. Caia's approach exemplifies their understanding of the importance of customer intensity, relationship-building, and the opportunities social media offers, which they accurately exploit. This aligns with the dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing and reflects their continuous pursuit of emerging opportunities.

Moreover, the findings highlight Caia's success in generating cognitive engagement through innovation and adaptability. The company demonstrates a proactive strategy by embracing new trends and technologies, establishing a strong presence across multiple platforms. This approach enables Caia to effectively reach and engage a diverse customer base. Their proactive stance as early adopters and inventors reflects a commitment to innovation not only in product development but also in marketing strategies. Furthermore, Caia's proactive approach aligns with the concept of proactiveness in entrepreneurial marketing (Morris et al., 2002). They actively shape their marketing strategies to influence customer behaviour and market dynamics. This proactive innovation contributes significantly to Caia's competitive advantage in the cosmetics market.

Another aspect highlighted by the findings emphasises the significance of human presence in entrepreneurial marketing activities for stimulating cognitive engagement among participants. The visual representation of individuals, particularly influencers and the founder Bianca Ingrosso, using the products not only captivated attention but also increased participant's tendency to learn about and engage with new product details. This human-centric approach to entrepreneurial marketing enhances cognitive involvement by fostering a sense of relatability and authenticity, resonating with Zontanos & Anderson (2004). According to their research, SMEs benefit from marketing advantages rooted in the close relationships entrepreneurs establish with customers.

5.2 Emotional engagement

Emotional engagement is crucial for nurturing lasting customer-brand relationships, as highlighted by (Magids et al., 2015). Rooted in feelings and connections, emotional engagement establishes deep bonds between customers and brands. Our examination of emotional engagement within Caia Cosmetics' context highlights its significant role in fostering brand loyalty, trust, and affinity. However, it becomes evident that cognitive engagement, in form of attention, interest and perception, plays a critical role in shaping emotional engagement. The findings suggests that when customers develop a positive perception and interest in Caia, they are more likely to cultivate positive attitudes and feelings towards them.

Building on Magids et al's (2015) dimensions of emotional engagement, our study reveals the varied dimensions of customer attachment and relationship with Caia Cosmetics. Participants consistently expressed a strong sense of belonging and connection with the brand, attributing it to Caia's inclusive entrepreneurial marketing strategies and personalised approaches. For example, Caia regularly encourage customers to share their own experiences and stories, as well as actively responding to customer comments and messages which creates a personalised interaction. These findings support prior research emphasising inclusivity and personalisation in strengthening emotional ties between customers and brands (de Oliveira Santini et al., 2020).

Moreover, the association with Bianca Ingrosso emerges as a significant factor in fostering emotional connections with customers. Bianca's authentic portrayal and active involvement

with the brand evoke feelings of trust and relatability among consumers, contributing to the emotional appeal of Caia Cosmetics. This resonates with the notion of building emotional connections through brand ambassadors, as highlighted by Magids et al.(2015), where customers develop emotional attachments to brands represented by individuals they admire. In accordance with Zontanos & Anderson (2004), the relationships that customers develop with co-founder Bianca are fundamentally based on trust. This trust comprises both a belief in her professional competence and personal trust in her integrity and reliability. Entrepreneurial marketing emphasises the importance of leveraging personal networks and the entrepreneur's own persona to build brand credibility and customer loyalty (Jones & Rowley, 2011). By leveraging Bianca's influence and authenticity, Caia Cosmetics effectively enhances its emotional appeal and resonance with its audience, thereby fostering deeper emotional engagement.

Furthermore, in line with the characteristics of entrepreneurial marketing, Caia's transparent and collaborative approach to co-creation enhances customers' sense of involvement and ownership. This aligns with previous research underscoring the significance of customer participation in brand-building activities (Chandna & Salimath, 2022). Engaging customers in co-creation not only fosters brand loyalty but also fosters a sense of community among them, aligning with the customer intensity dimension, highlighted by Majovski & Davitkovska (2017). As customers actively contribute to the brand's development, they perceive themselves as essential to its journey (Rialti & Zollo, 2023). Our findings further illuminate the value of co-creation, as participants expressed a strong attachment to the brand due to their involvement in the process. They feel that their opinions are valued, giving them a sense of ownership and deeper involvement with the brand.

By having high customer intensity and deeply understanding the preferences and aspirations of their target audience, Caia can create a brand persona that strongly resonates with them. This strategic approach involves careful communication and presentation tactics that align with the audience's aspirations and lifestyle preferences. According to Appel et al. (2020), social media platforms offer SMEs an opportunity to present their distinctive brand identity and values. With an entrepreneurial mindset and focus on opportunity, Caia leverages these qualities by sharing authentic stories, behind the scenes insights, and customer testimonials, which humanises their brand and establishes personal connections with customers. This

approach fosters a deeper level of emotional engagement and resonates with audiences seeking authentic brand experiences.

Additionally, through captivating innovative campaigns and aspirational content, Caia Cosmetics evokes joy, admiration, and inspiration among its audience, aligning with prior research on the emotional power of marketing communications and looking at the components of entrepreneurial marketing (Jones & Rowley, 2011).

However, it is important to recognise the diverse responses to Caia's marketing efforts. As earlier mentioned, Caia Cosmetics heavily relies on its co-founder, Bianca, who serves as the face of the brand. However, if Bianca's actions or public image negatively impact individuals, it can result in a diminished connection with the brand. Unlike traditional marketing approaches where the company builds relationships with customers, Caia's brand persona is closely tied to Bianca's public image (Martin, 2009). Therefore, individuals' perceptions of Bianca directly influence their attitude towards the brand.

Our findings suggest that while a strong connection with Bianca enhances brand affinity, those who do not resonate with her may perceive the brand as distant or exclusive, leading to negative attitudes towards it. This highlights the intricate relationship between brand persona and consumer perception, emphasising the importance of managing and nurturing the public image of key brand representatives as presented by Zontanos & Anderson (2004).

5.3 Behavioural Engagement

The findings in behavioural engagement emphasises the connection among various dimensions of engagement. In particular, positive emotional engagement expressed through positive attitudes, interactions and attachment, significantly enhances behavioural engagement. Therefore, customers who feel emotionally connected to a Caia are more likely to engage in behaviours such as making purchases, interact and recommending the brand to others. However, there are numerous entrepreneurial marketing activities that instigate behavioural engagement.

Caia demonstrates a proactive approach to identifying and exploiting opportunities through Instagram to connect and interact with their customers. This aligns with key dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing, including proactiveness, opportunity focus, innovation and recourse leveraging. Caia's focus on leveraging social media opportunities reflects an entrepreneurial mindset, seeking to engage customers meaningfully (Morris et al., 2002).

Entrepreneurial marketing emphasises a customer-centric approach, part of the customer intensity dimension, where businesses actively listen to and engage with their target audience (Majovski & Davitkovska, 2017). Caia's use of Instagram shows this by directly interacting with customers, showing a commitment to addressing customer needs and fostering meaningful relationships. Their interactive methods - such as asking questions, providing quick responses, and using a friendly tone – create a conversational atmosphere, building trust and enhancing behavioural engagement. This approach aligns with Hamilton et al. (2016)'s perspective on social media marketing for SMEs, which goes beyond broadcasting promotional messages to actively engage with customers through comments, messages, and interactive content.

Participants are motivated to share Caia's engaging content on Instagram with their friends, encouraging exploration and brand trials. The sharable nature of Caia's content underscores its ability to resonate with the audience and inspire organic word-of-mouth. According to (Li et al., 2021), social media platforms offer SMEs a cost-effective way to reach a wider audience, build brand awareness, and establish meaningful connections. Caia effectively leverages Instagram's capabilities optimising resource allocation to maximise reach and behavioural engagement. This approach aligns with Becherer et al. (2012)'s perspective on entrepreneurial marketing, which emphasises a creative approach to resource leveraging.

Caia's entrepreneurial marketing activities, particularly those involving co-creation, significantly drive behavioural engagement. By actively involving customers in brand and product development, Caia fosters a sense of community and deepening customer relationships. This approach is an important factor of entrepreneurial marketing, emphasising close customer relationships and personalised interactions (Majovski & Davitkovska, 2017). Co-creation at Caia allows customers to participate directly in the brand's journey, which contribute to customer feeling valued and heard, but also builds a strong emotional bond, as discussed by Rialti & Zollo (2023). Caia's deep understanding of customer needs and

aspirations allows Caia to craft compelling campaigns that inspire active follower engagement.

Moreover, the findings suggest that Caia's creative content on Instagram influences purchasing decisions, particularly when the customers are actively seeking a product. This aligns with entrepreneurial marketing's focus on understanding and effectively influencing customer needs (Martin, 2009). Their proactive embrace of new trends, leveraging customer insights, and fostering relationships reflects a commitment to innovations and customer-centric strategies (Majovski & Davitkovska, 2017). The findings further indicate that Caia's effective entrepreneurial marketing activities can lead to upselling, as consumers are inspired and motivated to invest in complementary products showcased on social media. These findings highlight how entrepreneurial marketing activities, such as two-way communication, interactions, and innovative content, can enhance behavioural engagement and lead to additional sales.

Caia's strategic and innovative approach to releasing new products also drives behavioural engagement among participants. By teasing new products and portraying nostalgic or aspirational lifestyles, they generate anticipation and excitement, leading to strong purchase desires. This excitement often results in purchases even when not immediately necessary. Caia consistently introduces new ideas and creative processes into product realises, embodying the essence of innovativeness in entrepreneurial marketing (Majovski & Davitkovska, 2017). The success of these releases is closely tied to the perceived value and how well they resonate with the target audience, driving higher behavioural engagement levels.

Recommendations and word-of-mouth significantly influence purchasing behaviour. While influencer recommendations can affect decisions, recommendations from friends typically have a stronger impact on behavioural engagement. For customers to recommend the brand, Caia's products must meet the expectations set by the company.

5.4 Hierarchy of Engagement

Based on the findings, a hierarchical framework of engagement is proposed. This framework suggests that engagement progresses through different levels, each building on the previous one.

First, cognitive engagement represents the foundational level of engagement. This involves customers being aware and understanding the brand and its messages. At this stage, customers show attention, interest, and perceptions of the brand's offerings. This level serves as the initial step in the engagement process and lays the groundwork for deeper connections.

Next, emotional engagement builds on cognitive awareness. It involves customers forming deeper emotional connections with the brand, including feelings of attachment, trust, and affection. This level drives brand loyalty and advocacy, as customers develop emotional bonds with the brand.

Finally, behavioural engagement encompasses the tangible actions customers take in response to their cognitive and emotional connections with the brand. This includes behaviours such as liking, commenting, purchasing, recommending and participating in co-creation activities. Behavioural engagement is the most concrete form of engagement, reflecting cognitive and emotional connections through meaningful actions.

This hierarchy of engagement shows how these levels interact and reinforce each other. Cognitive engagement forms the foundation, leading to emotional connections, which in turn drive behavioural outcomes. Understanding and measuring engagement across these levels provides a comprehensive framework for assessing the effectiveness of entrepreneurial marketing activities in building strong and lasting customer relationships.

Importantly, the hierarchy of engagement is not linear but circular. Each level of engagement – cognitive, emotional, and behavioural – influences and strengthens the others, creating a self-reinforcing loop that enhances overall customer engagement. For example, cognitive engagement, which involves awareness and understanding of the brand, lays the foundation for emotional engagement. When customers develop emotional connections with the brand,

such as trust and affection, these feelings can reinforce their cognitive perceptions, making the brand more memorable and significant to them.

Similarly, behavioural engagement, which includes actions like purchasing and recommending the brand, can reinforce both cognitive and emotional engagement. Positive actions and experiences with the brand can enhance a customer’s understanding and positive feelings, creating a cycle where each level of engagement feeds into and bolsters the others, as demonstrated in figure 2.

This circular, customer-centric approach ensures that the brand continuously evolves to meet customers’ needs and preferences more effectively. By fostering stronger connections at each level, brand can achieve greater customer satisfaction and loyalty. This ongoing feedback loop allows the brand to adapt and innovate based on direct customer interactions and feedback, ultimately leading to more meaningful and lasting relationships.

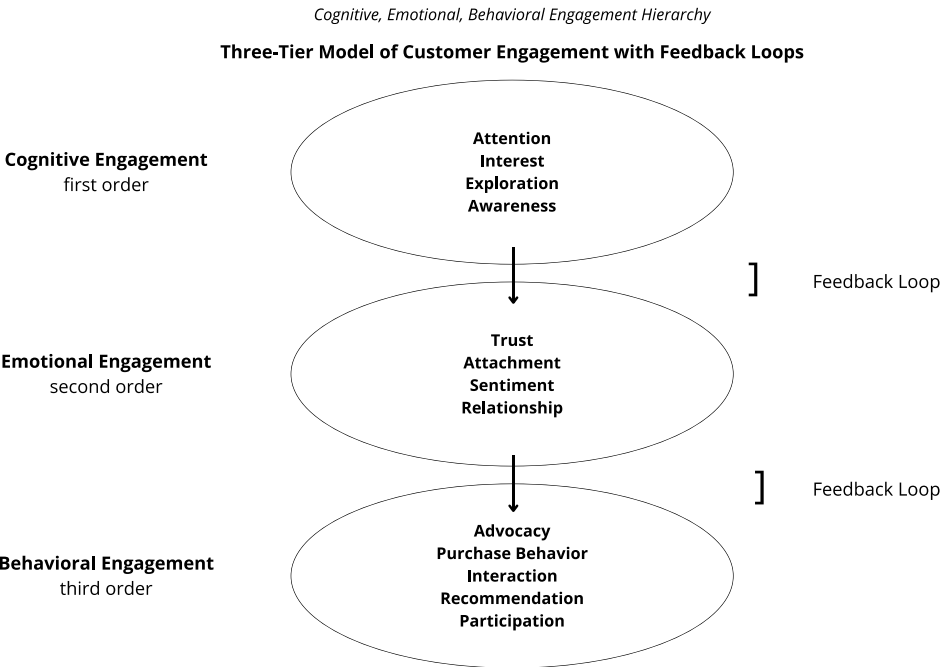


Figure 2: Three-Tier Model of Customer Engagement with Feedback Loops

6. Conclusion and Implications

In this final chapter, the key findings and insights from our study are summarised. Practical implications are explored, and avenues for future research in the field of entrepreneurial marketing and consumer engagement on social media are discussed.

6.1 Aim of the Research and Findings

The primary objective of this study was to explore how entrepreneurial marketing activities on social media instigate various forms of customer engagement. By investigating different dimensions of customer engagement, valuable insights were gained into how target audiences perceive, feel, and interact with entrepreneurial marketing activities on social media platforms. This understanding is crucial in identifying and evaluating the effectiveness of different strategies employed by SMEs to drive engagement. By examining how target audiences interact with different entrepreneurial marketing activities and strategies, this study identifies key factors that contribute to effective engagement in the digital landscape.

The study contributed insights into various dimensions of customer engagement instigated by diverse types of entrepreneurial marketing activities and strategies on Instagram. Moreover, it provided insights into how target audiences engage with entrepreneurial marketing activities on social media, encompassing cognitive and emotional engagement levels, as well as behavioural responses triggered by innovative content and strategic campaigns.

Interactive entrepreneurial marketing activities offering unique and innovative experiences were found to instigate cognitive engagement. Furthermore, the development of a compelling brand persona that resonates deeply with customers' values and aspirations serves as another important factors in driving cognitive engagement. Utilising the human presence of co-founder Bianca as well as influencers also emerged as an effective entrepreneurial strategy for stimulating attention, interest, and perception.

In essence, cognitive engagement forms the foundation for emotional engagement, which is further enhanced by various entrepreneurial marketing activities and strategies. These strategies include actions such as ensuring a strong presence of influential individuals, like entrepreneur Bianca Ingrosso, fostering co-creation initiatives, and actively involving customers in brand activities. Additionally, providing genuine content tailored to individual

customer preferences, which aligns with the dimension of customer intensity in entrepreneurial marketing, was found to be crucial.

Furthermore, emotional engagement tends to drive behavioural engagement. Customers who feel positively about a brand and have a strong sense of attachment are more inclined to engage in actions such as purchasing, interacting, or recommending. During this phase, entrepreneurial marketing activities such as co-creation, interactive posts and innovative content showcasing product benefits play essential roles in further instigating behavioural engagement.

Caia Cosmetics strategically leverages the opportunity provided by social media platforms to execute entrepreneurial marketing activities, thereby transforming traditional brand-customer relationships. Using Instagram's interactive features, Caia fosters two-way communication and personalised engagement, fostering an environment where customers perceive the brand more as a trusted friend or role model rather than a conventional corporate entity. A notable strength of Caia's approach lies in their profound understanding of their target audience. This understanding enables Caia to present their brand in an aspirational light that resonates with their customers' desires and aspirations, establishing strong emotional connections and genuine affection towards the brand. Such emotional connections acts as a catalyst for behavioural engagement, leading to brand loyalty and advocacy among customers.

However, despite the effectiveness of the close relationships the entrepreneur Bianca have established with the customers, fostering brand loyalty, the study highlights the inherent risks associated with dependency on individual influencers or brand ambassadors. The reliance on a single personality or entrepreneur, such as Bianca Ingrosso, can introduce vulnerabilities in brand perception and customer attachment. To address these risks, brands must find a balance between leveraging individual personalities for connection and diversifying their marketing efforts to build a broader brand identity. While individual personalities can indeed foster strong connections and relationships with customers, relying solely on them poses risks to brand resilience. Therefore, brands face a dilemma in maintaining the benefits of personal connections while also ensuring a sustainable and diversified marketing approach.

6.2 Broader Implications

The findings of the study extend the existing literature by providing nuanced insights into the impact of entrepreneurial marketing activities on different types of customer engagement within Instagram. Through the integration of theoretical frameworks with empirical evidence, this study offers practical implications for SMEs seeking to leverage Instagram effectively. Understanding how specific entrepreneurial marketing activities resonate with customers and drive engagement enables SMEs to tailor their strategies to better align with customer preferences.

The findings emphasise the importance of innovative, interactive and personalised entrepreneurial marketing strategies in fostering deeper customer relationships. Additionally, they highlight how SMEs can use social media to not only engage customers but also elevate entrepreneurial marketing efforts by creating more dynamic, participatory and emotionally resonant brand experiences.

The study reveals that cognitive engagement serves as a critical foundation for building emotional connections with customers which in turn lead to behavioural engagement. This progression underscores the broader implication that effective customer engagement strategies must be multi-faceted, addressing cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions. By understanding the key factors that contribute to these dimensions, SMEs can better tailor their strategies to align with customer preferences, ultimately driving greater loyalty, advocacy and overall success.

6.3 Implications for Future Research

Based on the research presented in the thesis manuscript, several implications for future research in the field of entrepreneurial marketing and consumer engagement on social media have emerged. These implications can guide future studies and contribute to the advancement of knowledge in this area.

Firstly, there is a need to explore the dynamics of various social media platforms beyond Instagram. Future research could investigate how entrepreneurial marketing activities impact consumer engagement on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and TikTok. Each

platform offers unique features and audience demographics, potentially affecting the effectiveness of marketing strategies.

Additionally, conducting comparative studies between various SMEs engaged in entrepreneurial marketing on social media holds significant promise. By comparing outcomes across multiple companies, researchers can identify best practices and areas for improvement. Such comparative analyses can illuminate the effectiveness of different strategies employed by SMEs.

Longitudinal studies represent another important avenue for exploration, offering insights into the evolving nature of consumer engagement over time. Tracking the impact of entrepreneurial marketing activities over an extended period can reveal trends and patterns in consumer behaviour. This understanding can inform the development of sustainable marketing strategies tailored to meet changing consumer preferences.

Furthermore, the development of standardised metrics and evaluation frameworks is crucial for consistently assessing the impact of entrepreneurial marketing activities on consumer engagement. Establishing clear measurement criteria enhances the thoroughness and reliability of research findings, facilitating meaningful comparisons across studies.

By addressing these future research implications, researchers can enhance their comprehension of how entrepreneurial marketing affects consumer engagement on social media and foster innovation in marketing strategies. Investigating these areas can significantly contribute to expanding knowledge and developing effective marketing practices within the digital environment.

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Appendices

Interview guide

Screening questions

1. **Age:** Can you confirm that you are between the ages of 18 and 29?
2. **Gender:** Can you confirm that you identify as a woman?
3. **Specific Brand Interaction:** Do you follow Caia Cosmetics on Instagram for longer than one month?

Interview Questions

1. What are your thoughts on Caia Cosmetics?
 - a. What emotions comes to mind?
2. What types of posts or content have you seen from Caia Cosmetics on Instagram?
3. Is there anything specific Caia Cosmetics posts that you really like? Why?
 - a. Show a few examples and ask what they think about them and what makes them stand out
4. How does seeing Caia Cosmetics on social media help you understand what they are all about?
 - a. Show a few posts and ask what they think Caia is trying to say or show about their brand.-> what make them stand out from the crowd?
5. Can you recall a time when a post from Caia made you feel particularly happy, excited or inspired?
 - a. What was it about that content that evoked such emotions?
6. When you see a new product from Caia Cosmetics on Instagram, how likely are you to read or listen to the details?
7. Have you ever looked at reviews or UGC about Caia Cosmetics to learn more?
8. Have you ever clicked on a link or explored further information provided by Caia Cosmetics in their social media posts?
 - a. If so, what motivated you?
9. Do you think Caia Cosmetics has any advantages or disadvantages in their social media marketing?
 - a. What do you think Caia does well and what could they do better on Instagram?
10. Have you ever found yourself particularly engaged or drawn to any of Caia Cosmetics content? What caught your attention?

- a. Show a few posts and ask how they make them feel.
11. Have you ever made a purchase from Caia Cosmetics?
 - a. What influenced your decision?
 12. Can you remember a time when something Caia Cosmetics posted made you want to buy something or share it with a friend?
 13. When was the last time you told or recommended Caia Cosmetics to a friend?
 - a. What made you recommend them?
 14. What keeps you coming back for more?
 - a. What sets them apart?
 15. Do you feel a sense of connection to Caia Cosmetics?
 - a. What parts of Caia resonate with you?
 - b. Do you trust or are you confident in Caia Cosmetics?
 16. In your opinion, what do you think makes Caia Cosmetics Instagram special for connecting with customers?
 17. Can you think of a way Caia Cosmetics keeps you interested on social media? What do they do differently?
 18. Have you ever felt a sense of loyalty or attachment to Caia Cosmetics due to their social media activity?
 - a. If yes, please describe that experience.

Slideshow presentation Caia Cosmetics





1 771 gilla-markeringar
caiacosmetics GIRE CRUSH @josefinevodt 🥰 The perfect no-makeup-makeup look made with 🥰

3 355 gilla-markeringar
caiacosmetics LIPS LIPS LIPS 🥰 Pink, golden or beige? Which gloss will be on your lips this new year?



Gillas av majaholmbergg och 11 937 andra caiacosmetics 💕 COMPETITION ENDED 💕

We're soon turning 5 years old (!!!!), and of course we want to celebrate this with YOU. Our wonderful community 🥰
You and a friend now have the chance to win a spot at our 5-year birthday party, a masterclass at NK in Stockholm. 🥰

- To enter the competition you have to:
1. Follow us on IG @caiacosmetics
 2. Write a comment and let us know why you should win a spot!
 3. Tag the person you want to bring with you. 🥰



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