Towards a fandom through social media engagement

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Abstract

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Social media is developing and changing constantly, and staying relevant and building a strong brand requires continuous efforts. This thesis aims to determine how the commissioning company can communicate with the target audience to create more brand engagement on social media and find out what content resonates with the community online. Through this research, the commissioning company can provide an experience that resonates with the audience by understanding the fanbase better. It also enables the company to create more targeted marketing messages and communicate with the fanbase to enable more engagement.

This thesis focuses on social media engagement, brand community, and fandom. The theoretical framework provides insights into central concepts around branding, brand communication, brand values, and brand personality. Adapting the theoretical framework for fan-page participation by Jahn & Kunz helps understand how the brand can further build and strengthen the community on social media.

The research approach is a qualitative case study focusing on content analysis. By analyzing social media content posted across different social media channels for a time period of one year and categorizing those posts, the results give an overview of what kind of content resonates with the community and target audience.

The results of this thesis help develop the online brand and understand what creates engagement within the fandom. Many of the most popular posts were tied to timely content created for special dates or relatable content. This study concludes that reactive posting, relatable content, and seasonality seem to resonate with the community.

Keywords
Social media engagement, fandom, brand community, brand communication, brand values

Table of contents

1. Introduction

The rise of social media has transformed marketing and shifted the focus to digital channels. Through that, a lot of the work around building a brand has also shifted to social media. The shift, in turn, enables brands to communicate directly with consumers. By building an audience of dedicated consumers, or fans, brands can create content that resonates with that audience and enables more effective communication and marketing. This thesis defines a brand, brand communication, brand positioning, brand personality and brand values and introduces ways to strengthen the Moomin brand through theoretical concepts. This thesis also introduces topics of social media engagement, brand community, fandom, and human-to-human marketing. Tying the findings together and presenting ideas on how to develop and strengthen the Moomin brand further and build an engaged fandom around it.

This chapter introduces the thesis topic and the commissioning company, All Things Commerce Helsinki Ltd, later on, referred to as ATC, and the Moomin group. It also focuses on the aim and objectives of the research, key terminology, and the scope of this thesis study. Solely creating content on social media does not guarantee reaching the target audience and create engagement. Staying engaged with fans is critical to create a community where fans interact and engage with the brand and, by doing so, strengthen the brand.

The author of this thesis has been part of building the Moomin community on social from thousands to hundreds of thousands for the past several years. Understanding what enables engagement on social media is essential. Gaining insights into what engages the Moomin audience is extremely valuable moving forward. This thesis project is part of a more extensive development process within the Moomin group. The Moomin group aims to open up new markets for the brand and, by doing so, reach new audiences around the world.

Finding a way to stay relevant while maintaining and building a brand also needs constant work and emphasis within the company. Moomin has systematically worked on building the brand and staying true to the values chosen to reflect the brand (more about the Moomin brand values in chapter 2.2).

Staying relevant on social media has become more crucial for brands and companies. One method for staying relevant to consumers and fans is to build a strong brand and distinguish it from competitors. Finding a tone of voice that resonates with the audience in question is important. The fans, in most instances, are the ones conversing on social media, not the brands. Many brands post on different platforms to sell and not engage, and those posts do not tend to go viral or perform as well as posts focusing on storytelling and engagement. To create more engaging

content, brands need to be present and be prepared to dive in and engage with their audience. Listening to customers and fans while engaging with them will ideally turn them into brand advocates. (Gil 2020, 17-20, 189-190.)

This thesis study focuses on the engagement around Moomin and how the fans react to the content posted on social media. Gaining an understanding of Moomin's presence on social media platforms and how it could be developed further. What kind of content do the Moomin fans interact with? Do the fans want to engage with the Moomin brand? Is there something that can be done to address possible negative sentiments? How can Moomin create an inclusive environment for fans to engage with the content posted? Ideally, finding out how a fandom around Moomin could be built and developed in a way that engages with existing fans and consumers while attracting new ones.

1.1 Moomin

Tove Jansson (1914-2001), the Finnish-Swedish writer and artist, created the Moomins more than 75 years ago. The first Moomin book, "The Moomins and the Great Flood" was published in 1945. The Moomins are central characters in a series of books and comic strips written between 1945 and 1980. A total of eight novels, four picture books, and hundreds of comic strips have been published. The Moomin books have been translated into more than 55 languages and are still in print worldwide today. (Moomin Characters Ltd 2020b.)
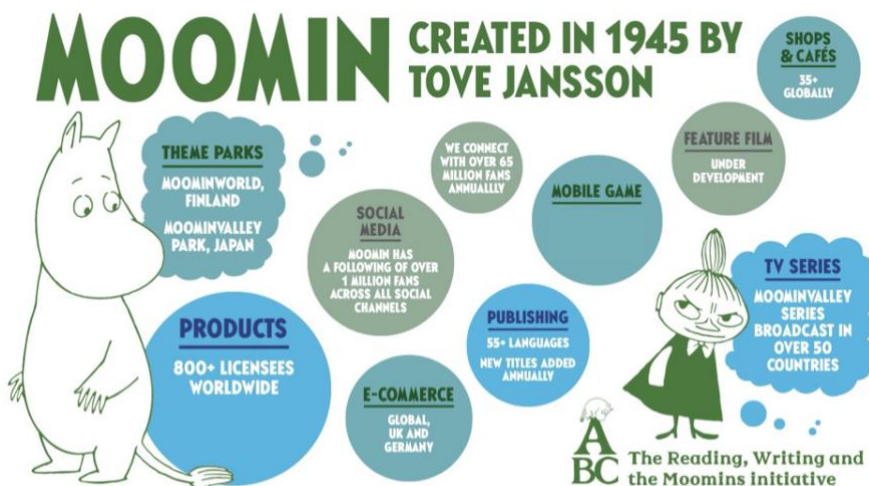

Image 1 Moomin Highlights (Moomin Characters Ltd. 2020a)

The Moomins have enjoyed international popularity since the 1950s, when the original Moomin comic strips were distributed globally to tens of millions of readers, followed by animation series, theme parks, and theatre plays worldwide. Moomin Characters Ltd. was founded in the 1950s by

Tove Jansson and her brother Lars Jansson, and family members still run it. Moomin Characters, MC, when moving forward, is the copyright holder of all the Moomin characters and is responsible for supervising and managing the Moomin brand, copyright, and licensing it. Today MC has over 800 licensees worldwide. (Moomin Characters Ltd 2020b).

The Moomin brand is often spoken of as a whole within the organization, revolving around the novels and art Tove Jansson created. The foundation of the Moomin brand is the Moomin values listed in chapter 2.2, and those values should guide all products, marketing, and communication around the Moomin brand.

1.2   Aim and objectives

Moomin has strong brand recognition globally and emphasizing the art and story-based creation has proven to be a valuable asset for creating awareness and building the brand globally.

This study aims to find out how ATC can communicate with the Moomin audience to create more brand engagement and find out what kind of content resonates with the community. Through this research, ATC can provide an even more "Moominous" experience by understanding the fanbase and authentically engaging with them. It can also enable ATC to target more specific customers in marketing and communication. Ideally, the insights can prove valuable when building and developing the brand, which direction to take, and which actions positively affect Moomin fans. Finding a way for ATC to engage with the fanbase authentically, be perceived as part of the Moomin community, and build an even more loyal fanbase. By identifying what works with Moomin fans, ATC and the Moomin group can provide a more personalized experience with marketing and communication activities.

The main objective of this study is to find out how to engage with the audience in a way that resonates and creates more brand engagement within the Moomin community.

Main RQ 1: How to develop brand engagement within the Moomin community?

Sub Q 1: What kind of content encourages and initiates engagement with Moomin fans?

Sub Q 2: How to understand social media engagement?

1.3   Key terminology

In the context of this study, the term *engagement*, which is a relatively new term within digital marketing, refers to likes, comments, messages, and other forms of interaction with the brand on social media. Engagement depends on the brand's ability to create and add value for the fans

(Zamith Brito & Zanette 2015, 53-54). Moomin aims to create a platform where everyone can engage and participate in the Moomin community and feel like a part of it—finding ways to create or add value for the Moomin fans.

Moomin fans are referred to as those who follow Moomin on different social media channels, assuming that they might be passionate about the brand, and have a relationship to it, whether that be through nostalgia from their childhood or being fans of the Moomin stories found in their adulthood. *Fandom*, in this context, is the platform where those fans can interact with each other in a setting that does not discriminate and encourages them to engage and steer up discussions (Kostelijk & Alsem 2020, 96-97, 187-188.). Ideally, creating a place where Moomin fans would feel safe meeting up virtually and talking about their brand experience.

1.4   Scope

This thesis is a case study focusing on content analysis on posts from Moomin's social media channels. The study focuses on analyzing content on social media and what kind of reactions and engagement it has created. The study analyzes social media posts with the most reach during the time period chosen. Is there a common nominator in these posts? Can they be developed further? This thesis project is the first step of development work for the Moomin fandom and how to build it globally. The first stage is to explore and focus on the content and the engagement around that posted content. Understanding what creates engagement makes it possible to find ways of building the Moomin fandom further.

This study focuses on content in English, as most of the communication on Moomin's social media channels focuses on said language. As the language of the study is English, the analysis focuses on the global accounts (@Moominofficial on Twitter and Instagram, as well as Moomin on Facebook). Official Moomin accounts in other countries, such as Japan, have a large audience; however, the study is limited to the main international accounts for clarity and access.

The study is limited to a time period of one year and analyzes the five most popular posts on each channel to better understand the content that creates the most engagement on each channel. The time period is limited to collecting enough data while focusing on content that is still relevant as it lives on through social media. Through the social media management tool Sprout social that ATC uses, it is easy to access and analyze content over a certain period. The posts are categorized depending on each post's content and focus.

2   Moomin company and the Moomin brand

The commissioning company for this thesis project is All Things Commerce Helsinki, ATC, when moving forward. ATC was founded in 2013 and has since been the party responsible for supervising and managing everything digital related to the Moomin brand. ATC is a subsidiary of Moomin Characters. ATC operates the website moomin.com and the global e-commerce store included on the site. ATC merged with Moomin Shop Oy in April 2021 and took over the brick-and-mortar stores in Finland. There are currently five stores, two at Helsinki Airport, two in the Helsinki city center, and one in Turku. ATC supports the local Moomin webshops in Germany and the United Kingdom, including the brick-and-mortar store in Camden Market, London.

The Moomin website consists of the content side, including the blog and general information about the brand, and the shop side, shop.moomin.com. The blog features more in-depth stories about the Moomin brand, products, and events. These stories are also highlighted across Moomin's social media channels to drive traffic and sales and create engagement.

Image 2 Moomin.com front page (4.3.2022)

The local sites use the same e-commerce platform to give the customers a similar shopping experience regardless of the outlet. The template for the shops is the same, with minor differences.

Image 3 below is the front page of the global Moomin webshop. The local sites have access to the same templates but can tweak it based on local content and visuals while the look and feel remain similar.

Image 3 Shop.moomin.com front page (4.3.2022)

The local sites aim to highlight timely content and products in their specific target market. Image 4 below is of the local front page of the webshop in the UK.

Image 4 Moomin.co.uk front page (16.4.2022)

2.1 Moomin group

Besides MC and All Things Commerce Helsinki, the Moomin group includes the publishing house, Förlaget and the content production company, All Things Content. The licensing agency, Rights & Brands, is the worldwide licensing agent for MC. In total, the Moomin group employs around 80 people. The core team working with Moomins at MC and All Things Commerce Helsinki is about 25 people, excluding the brick-and-mortar stores, which employ around 20 people. (Moomin Characters Ltd, 2020.)
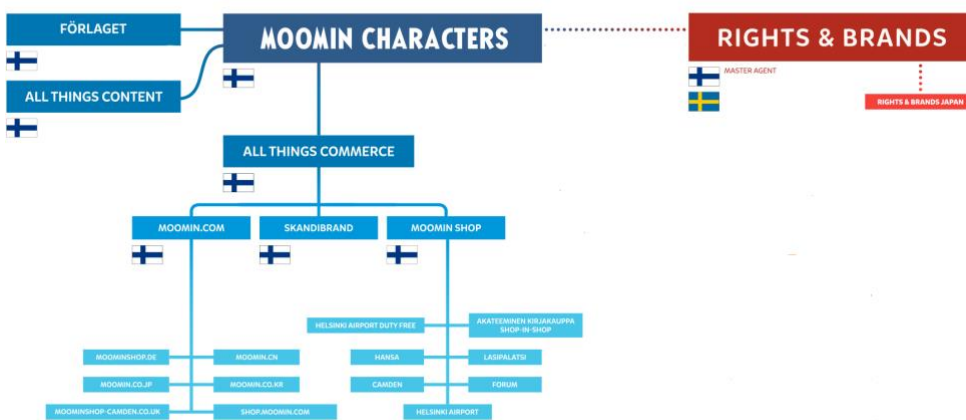

Image 5 Moomin Group – Organisation structure (Moomin Characters 2021)

2.2 Moomin brand values

The Moomin values are the foundation of the Moomin brand, they are what MC wants the Moomin brand to be, and they are also listed in the brand guidelines. The brand guidelines referred to here are made for Moomin partners and licensees, focusing mainly on visual elements, but listing the Moomin values as an essential part of the brand, besides the characters and other visual elements. The values listed are meant to be present in all Moomin-related campaigns, products, and communication efforts.

The values that should be the foundation of the Moomin brand are friendship, love, kindness, respect for nature, adventure, courage, tolerance, equality, freedom, and individuality. These values guide all the content and communication that the Moomin brand publishes and creates. These are regularly highlighted in different contexts, tying the values to the Moomin stories. They are not highlighted separately for consumers and fans on the website, but they are mentioned in many articles, posts, and images. These values also guide the tone of voice used when

communicating about the Moomin brand, and they are the brand's backbone (Moomin Characters 2021b). These values found in Tove Jansson's books represent the Moomin brand. The Moomin guide and steer the brand communication, marketing, and licensing. The values listed are also included in the brand guidelines for Moomin licensees and partners. These values should be present in all Moomin products and campaigns.

Image 6 Moomin brand values

The following chapter focuses on understanding how a brand works and how to strengthen it, how to build an engaged audience around a brand, and what that means.

3 Theoretical framework

This chapter introduces theoretical concepts that focus on brand literature, introducing a brand, brand equity, brand communication, brand positioning, brand personality, brand values, human-to-human marketing, and brand community and fandom.

To give an overview of a brand and how to develop it further, it is essential to define a brand and how brand communication and positioning impact it. This chapter also introduces social media engagement and how to build a brand community and fandom. As the study focuses on social media, the subject is introduced in this chapter, focusing on social media engagement, building a brand community and fandom, and the benefits of doing so. By understanding what a brand is and how it can be developed, the theoretical concepts aim to provide insights into the benefits of strengthening a brand by building a fandom.

3.1 Building a brand

The following chapters define a brand, brand equity, brand communication, brand positioning, brand values, brand personality, brand community and fandom.

3.1.1 Brand definition

A *brand* is essentially the consumers' or fans' complete experience of a product or company, which makes all interactions with the brand meaningful when building and developing it. Branding is the process of finding and giving meaning to the company, product, or service by creating and shaping a brand in the consumer's minds by influencing their choice with different actions. Originally a brand was defined as an object or a mark of identification, something to set a name, term, design, symbol, or other features apart from similar products. Brands are generally considered to be the sum of tangible and non-tangible elements. Tangible elements include physical characteristics, such as the logo, retail space, product, and packaging. Non-tangible elements include values, meanings, feelings, and associations that the consumer connects with the brand. (Huggard & Cope 2020, 2-3.).

The key to creating a brand is to choose the elements that identify as a product and distinguish it from others. The components that identify and differentiate a brand are called brand elements. Brands take on a special meaning to consumers because of past experiences with the brand in question. Consumers tend to choose the brand that satisfies their needs and adds value. A brand is essentially a promise of something. Consumers often create a bond with the brand in question, thus having an emotional relationship with it. (Keller, Apéria, Georgson 2012, 4-9.)

Ideally, a brand creates trust, affinity, and customer loyalty, while distinguishing the product from competitors. It also allows a brand to charge a higher price for its products. A brand is ultimately a customer's experience represented by a collection of images and ideas, often connected to a symbol, name, logo, slogan, and design. Brands signal quality and provide a sort of guarantee. Brands allow consumers to satisfy both functional and emotional needs. (Lalaounis 2021, 2-3, 12-13.)

3.1.2 Brand equity

Brand equity consists of marketing effects attributable to a specific brand. It is the added value a product or service acquires from branding activities. Brand equity aims to explain which marketing effects can be attributed to the brand and how those potentially build the brand equity. Brand equity provides a way of assessing the value of the brand. Fundamentally, brand equity reinforces the importance of the brand when considering marketing strategies. The strength of a brand lies in the brand associations that the consumers have. When the brand has positive consumer-based brand equity, the consumers are more likely to react more favorably to marketing efforts. Brand equity is created through brand awareness image and associations. (Keller 2013, 57, 69-73.)

By building brand equity, the brand can increase customer loyalty and margins and increase marketing communications effectiveness while gaining other benefits. Understanding the market is essential, and the brand should be positioned rightly within that market to maximize brand equity. The brand should provide a superior experience to the consumers and satisfy their needs. Communicating in a consistent way that fits the brand's tone of voice will also help build brand equity. (Keller 2013, 550, 554)

The brand image is often viewed as the complete set of associations that a consumer has with the brand in question. These associations are the added value to the brand, what images or memories the consumers connect with the brand. The brand image is influenced by each encounter and association made by the consumer. These associations can be both positive as well as negative. Both experiences build brand associations, and a strong brand is more resistant to negative associations. Positive associations add to the brand value, also known as brand equity, when the consumer is familiar with the brand, and it evokes positive associations. When these associations match the brand in question, it adds to the brand equity. (Kostelijk & Alsem 2020, 7-9.)

In order to develop strong customer-based brand equity, the organization needs to define the brand identity and build brand awareness, create brand meaning, generate brand responses, and build brand relationships. (Lalalounis 2021, 25-26.)

3.1.3 Brand communication

Brand communication is when companies inform, persuade, enlighten, teach, remind, and enrich the knowledge of the target audience and the stakeholders about the brand, the vision, values, services, and products. Brand communication was siloed in many ways before the growth of brands' online presence. The rise of social media and digital strategies has led to open, multi-way, and co-created dialogue between brands and their audiences. In turn, brands are adopting more integrated brand communication into their strategy through different outlets to avoid audience fragmentation and deliver a seamless, cohesive narrative. (Huggard & Cope 2020, 4-5.)

With the rise of social media, the power to communicate the desired message has shifted from marketers to include consumers of the brand. The brand message is no longer determined by marketers alone but is also impacted by the audience and consumers. Brand messages are co-created with consumers and other stakeholders. When creating and strengthening the consumers' relationship with the brand, it is essential to enable conversations where consumers may integrate their own brand-related experiences and thoughts into the story. By allowing the consumers to interpret and morph the brand's message into their own while evolving the brand narrative shared on social media. (Lalaounis 2021, 122-123.)

The possibility for brands to get involved and engage with their audience has become more evident with the rise of social media platforms. The rewards of engaging with the target audience when the values and beliefs align with the brand communication will, in many cases, lead to praise and brand advocacy. Social media gives brands a platform to engage and connect with their audience. (Kotler, Pfoertsch, Sponholz 2021, 117-118.)

Trust has become instrumental in all marketing and communication activities today, especially when looking at it from a brand management perspective. Trust positively impacts many different areas and builds loyalty and brand advocacy. Companies and brands are not solely responsible for their brands in society today, but consumers are essential to building them. A brand with human characteristics enables direct contact in today's digitalized world. The constant overflow of information results in distractions and leads to a decline in the effects of outbound marketing measures. As consumers' attention spans and the time for decisions decrease, while there are endless alternatives, consumers tend to turn to brands they trust. (Kotler et al. 2021, 111-112, 141.)

3.1.4 Brand positioning

Brand positioning is the desired position on the market and what kind of message and image the brand wants to convey to the preferred target group. The positioning concerns the strategic choice

of the distinctive position the brand wants to achieve. Operational marketing actions help reach the brand position. The brand position is often called a symbiosis between marketing and communications, supporting each other. In lack of this, it can result in both working in silos and not reaching the desired result, consumers forgetting what the brand stands for, and customer loyalty is harder to reach. (Kostelijk & Alsem 2020, 3.)

The importance of brand positioning is increasing as the competition in the market is increasing. Online growth has increased market transparency, more powerful customers, and low customer involvement. The more choices consumers have, the less they tend to be loyal to a specific brand, the paradox of choice. Also, the importance of subconscious decision-making is emphasized. (Kostelijk & Alsem 2020, 4-7.)

By consciously choosing a strategic position the company can add to the brand awareness and success of the brand. It is about creating visibility and associations. Due to the growth of online media, brands have less of a grip on the final consumer, and it requires even more branding actions to build a strong brand. A brand can be considered strong if the reputation is high, with relevant and distinctive associations. It should also be visible and recognizable. (Kostelijk & Alsem 2020, 13.)

Creating favorable brand associations convinces consumers that the brand possesses relevant attributes and benefits that fulfill their needs and wants. The essence of brand positioning is that it distinguishes itself from competitors and gives the consumers a compelling reason to choose the brand over competitors. Having unique associations is critical to a brand's success unless there is no competition, but in most cases, the brand in question will share some associations with other brands. (Keller 2013, 78.)

3.1.5 Brand values and personality

Brand values can be viewed as a promise, indicating what the brand stands for. Companies often profile their core values prominently. People often attribute human emotions and personality traits to brands, even if brands are not living organisms. Attributing human characteristics to brands will make them more relatable and bring them closer to the consumer. (Kostelijk & Alsem 2020, 82-83.)

Brand personality is influenced by the values the brand upholds, the brand values. Brand values can provide strategic direction for the organization. From a consumer perspective, brand values play an important part as it allows the consumers to let psychosocial differences influence their decision-making. Consumers look for brands whose values are matched with their own ones. (Lalalounis 2021, 50-51.)

Brand personality refers to the set of human characteristics associated with a specific brand. Aaker (1997) identified five dimensions of brand personality: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. Each of the dimensions includes characteristics describing that dimension. These dimensions are somewhat similar to human characteristics and are mainly distinguished in how they are created. Human characteristics are created through experiences, physical attributes, attitudes, religion, and demographics. Brand personality is, first and foremost, affected by direct and indirect contact with the consumers of the brand. The brand personality is formed around the consumers and their impressions and perception of the brand. (Aaker 1997, 3.)

3.1.6   Brand community and fandom

In the era of social media, it has become evident that all the different platforms allow companies and brands to listen to the conversations and experiences of their customers. Listening to the customers, even without responding, provides a better understanding of how the customers use products, and it can help make decisions in communications and marketing. Listening to customers might provide new insight and uncover new opportunities. Knowing the target customers can help plan engaging activities and create a buzz more efficiently. (Kerpen 2019, ch. 1.)

With the importance of social media increasing, many companies use different platforms to showcase their brands. *Brand communities* are created on different forums and platforms, for example, Facebook. In such communities, a group of users or fans share their commitment and passion for the brand in question. A brand community extends outside of social media in many cases. It is a group of brand enthusiasts who use the community as a platform to share their brand experience and love for the brand. In many cases, there is a sense of belonging in the community, and the community might share an important bond with other users. Social media is often used as a tool to build these brand communities, even though they are viewed as channels for the consumers themselves and not as much as platforms for promotion and marketing. A brand that manages such a platform must ensure that the platform becomes a place where fans of the brand feel at home, share information, and communicate with others. Setting up a platform does not automatically create a community around the brand. (Kostelijk & Alsem 2020, 96-97, 187-188.)

Important things to consider when creating a platform for a brand community on social media include things like; matching the overall target group, creating interesting and compelling content in line with the brand positioning, and a means to communicate directly with the consumers. The brand enables members to meet and interact further by organizing competitions or events. Creating an environment where members can interact with other members further builds the community around the brand. It is also important to consider what to do in negative situations and how to respond to negative publicity. (Kostelijk & Alsem 2020, 96-97, 187-188.)

The definition of a fan varies, but it has often been described as an interest that engages a consumer with a brand or product. These interests connect users and create a community, a *fandom*. The fundamental ingredient for true fandom is a meaningful and active human connection. This has resulted in a shift in companies and their communication, and it has become more forthright, helpful, and transparent in many ways. Ideally, a fandom can enable people to feel, think and act together. Building connections with like-minded people creates meaning for both the consumer and the brand. The relationships the brand builds with customers are more valuable and important than the products and services sold to them. (Meerman Scott & Scott 2020, 17, 21-22, 27.) In the context of this thesis, the audience is referred to as fans.

The benefits of building and managing a brand community have been split into four social practices that are present in these communities those are social networking, impression management, community engagement, and brand use. These different practices create value for brands and community members through increased use of branded services and products, increased community engagement, more consumption opportunities, and greater brand vitality. (Zamith Brito & Zanette 2015, 63.)

There are different frameworks to analyze fandom, and one of them is Jahn's and Kunz's framework for fan-page activation. It focuses on gratifications theory, customer engagement, and involvement theory concepts. The framework describes how fan-page behavior might influence consumer brand loyalty and what might influence fan-page behavior itself. The framework is divided into three zones: gratification, participation, and customer-brand relationship. The basic idea of the framework is to illustrate that if a brand fan page satisfies the user's particular needs, this satisfaction should lead to a higher approach to the brand fan page, which should lead to higher brand loyalty. (Jahn & Kunz 2012, 348-349.)
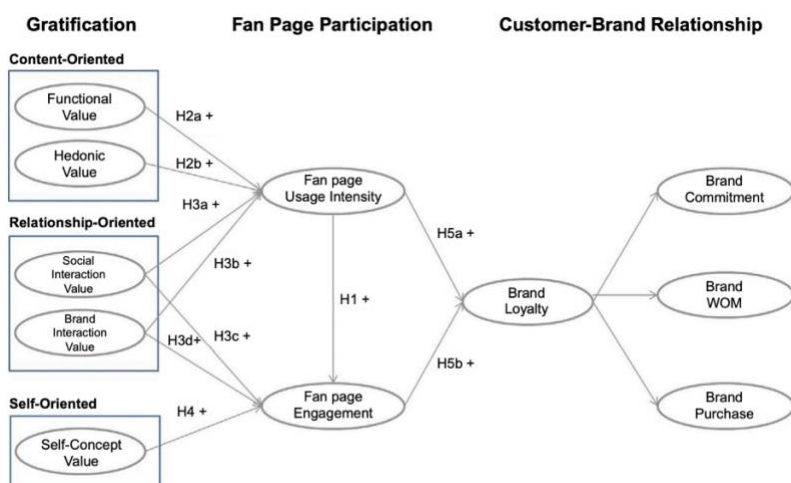

Image 7 Framework of fan-page participation (Jahn & Kunz 2012)

3.2 Human-to-human marketing

Traditional marketing focuses on the customer as a consumer, rather than viewing the customer as a human being and not only abstract elements. *Human-to-human* (H2H) marketing focuses on the understanding that the consumer makes decisions with all their rational and irrational behavior, needs, and wishes. This focus makes it essential to think from a human-centered frame. Customers are not only recipients of the marketing message but rather individuals with their own needs and feelings. (Kotler et al. 2021, 100.)

The H2H mindset involves considering all actions and thoughts the people involved might have and their sense of purpose, keeping in mind that a product or service suggests a value proposition but does not necessarily create it solely by existing. Being adaptable, reflective, and recognizing potential issues and changes while contributing and reacting quickly and pragmatically to them are important when having an H2H mindset. The H2H mindsets start from within the company, and corporate culture enables and facilitates this approach. (Kotler et al. 2021, 105-107.)

Individual values impact many of the choices that consumers make. They are deeply rooted in the personality of the consumer. Values can hardly be influenced by marketing or communication activities. Nevertheless, values are an important factor in brand positioning and marketing. They determine the motives of the consumer and why they make a specific choice. Consumers are guided by their values, impacting their unconscious and conscious decisions. The influence of values on consumers' behavior and brand experience are essential factors to consider in marketing and communications. Brands strive to meet the needs of consumers, and they do this by positioning the brand as well as possible in line with the target audience. The brand should match the benefits and values of the brand as closely as possible to their target customers and consider them as individuals. (Kostelijk & Alsem 2020, 51-67.)

3.3 Social media

Social media connects audiences worldwide through social networks like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok. In the early days of social media, these networks worked to keep in touch with friends and family, wherever they might be. Today the algorithms on these networks, like Facebook, do not necessarily show us the same kind of content as before, but rather the content with the highest-earning profit for the network in question. Resulting in many seeking more meaningful connections online instead of the overflow of information many content creators provide. (Meerman Scott & Scott 2020, 17.) In the context of this study focusing on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

Social media allows users to interact with other users through the chosen platform or application. The platform allows users to create their content and engage with content created by others. Content includes personal information, documents, videos, links, and photos. Depending on the platform, the restrictions for content might vary. Social media typically features user-generated content and personalized profiles based on the user in question and their preferences. Companies use social media to find and engage with customers, drive sales through promotions and advertising, gauge consumer trends, and offer customer service. (Dollarhide 2021.)

Facebook is a social media network connecting people through its online platform. The platform enables users to share text, images, videos, and links. Users can contribute to other users' content and join in conversations with others. Users are also able to react to others' content. Facebook allows users to connect with other users either by becoming friends and seeing each other's posts or following other users. Facebook is also a platform for events and pages, making it a popular platform for companies to share their content. (Chi 2021.)

Instagram is a social media platform that emphasizes sharing images and videos through the mobile app. Instagram focuses mainly on visual content, unlike Facebook and Twitter, where written content is also an essential part of the platforms. Editing images and adding filters are also part of Instagram, and those edits can be done directly within the app. There is also a section of short-lived content called Stories that only show up for 24 hours. Instagram allows users to follow other accounts and connect with like-minded users. (Forsey 2022.)

Twitter is a quick and easy way to microblog where the user is sharing short messages up to 140 characters. It is, foremost, a social messaging platform. Twitter asks, "What's happening?" and was initially intended to be a short and snappy platform to keep in touch on. While being a good platform for conversations, it has also become evident that Twitter works well as a listening tool. Twitter can be used for both public and private discussions. The conversations are only for the users to see when using direct messages, while @replies are visible to anyone searching. (Coles 2018, 84-85, 92.)

3.3.1 Social media engagement

Social media engagement is a broad term that covers a lot of different metrics. Understanding what engagement is on a broad level and breaking it down to examine it at the micro-level helps analyze the different metrics. The definition of engagement differs slightly depending on the social media platform. Facebook, for example, determines all possible ways of interacting with content as engagement, whether it is through messages, mentions, shares, likes, profile clicks, or any other sort of activation through the viewed content. Understanding the audience and the engagement for

that said audience to improve it is essential. Setting goals for the published content and defining the analyzed metrics make it easier to view the data objectively. Determining which metrics to focus on and what parts to focus on will help analyze engagement and set goals for the target audience in question. (Chenn 2020.)

There are dimensions to social interactions that impact engagement on social media platforms, personalization, social accessibility, perceived risk, and transparency. Social interactions often reflect the level of personalization of the communication and how the users perceive the content based on their interests. When users perceive the interactions as personalized to their specific interests and needs, positive attitudes tend to increase, leading to more personal relevance and greater satisfaction, resulting in higher user engagement. Social accessibility is defined as having access to social resources to interact with others. The perceived risk dimension is how the users are influenced by the perceived negative feelings of engagement and what ultimately can discourage engagement. Perceived risk is the perception of the potential harm the users can experience when interacting. The perception of higher risk discourages the users from interacting and causes the user to become more cautious and consider the potential negative consequences of participation in the discussion on social media. The final dimension is transparency and how trustworthy and safe the users perceive the community. The greater the perceived transparency within the social media community, the higher the level of engagement tends to be. (Di Gangi & Wasko 2016.)

The measure of successful social media has shifted from an audience as big as possible to an engaged audience. The focus is more on the quality and engagement of the gained audience rather than simply maximizing the number of people reached with a post. Social media activity and engagement are cornerstones in building a positive brand experience and developing meaningful relationships with new and potential future customers and users. Social media engagement helps grow the audience when users interact and engage with the account. Engagement is a ranking signal across platforms, and the algorithms tend to organically show content that has gained a lot of engagement to other users with similar interests. Thus, creating engaging content can help grow the community and reach more users. Social media engagement indicates how users respond to the content and help adjust the strategy and better match the audience's interests and expectations. (McLachlan 2020.)

Brand communities can also be linked to fan pages on social media, where fans engage. Engagement is a relatively new term in marketing, instead of focusing on how many likes or fans a brand obtains the focus should more focus on what the fans react to and how they react to those marketing or communication efforts. Engagement depends on the brand's and the company's

ability to add value for the consumer. Creating a space that enables engagement helps the brand create value online. It can often be seen as the first step to help create value through word-of-mouth behavior and building trust. (Zamith Brito & Zanette 2015, 53-54.)

3.4   Summary of brand theories

The theoretical concepts presented in the previous chapters form a foundation for understanding the importance of a brand, brand equity, brand communication, brand positioning, brand values and brand personality, and building the community, a fandom, around the brand. The audience should be considered more than an audience. The fans are potential consumers, brand ambassadors, human beings, and individuals with needs and desires that should be considered. The concepts presented in this chapter help understand what a brand is and how it can be built in a way that engages the audience and creates the foundation for a community on social media. By understanding what a brand essential stands for and how it can be developed and strengthened further.

Central aspects to consider when building a brand are that brands are often given human characteristics that are relatable to consumers and fans. A **brand's personality** is first and foremost affected by the direct and indirect contact with consumers and fans in this context of the brand—the brand personality forms around the consumers and their impressions and perception of the brand in question.

The theoretical framework presented provides a foundation for the study conducted to understand social media engagement, **fandom**, and how to move towards building that fandom. The chosen framework describes how fan-page behavior might influence brand loyalty and what can influence behavior on a fan page.

In the context of this study, considering a **human-to-human approach** can benefit Moomin when developing the brand and keeping in mind that an end consumer is a person with needs and desires. Planning accordingly and adjusting marketing activities with this mindset might prove valuable when building the Moomin fandom. ATC strives to use the Moomin values as a foundation for marketing and communications instead of a solely product-based marketing approach. Focusing on a value-based and H2H approach can prove important when building the Moomin community through marketing efforts. Building a recognizable and strong brand benefits the Moomin brand, as it enables effective marketing efforts and communication while at the same time building the Moomin community around the brand.

By understanding **social media engagement** and the metrics related to that, choosing the ones relevant to the brand or community in question helps analyze the success of the social media

content. Building a community that users perceive as trustworthy and safe enables an environment that encourages engagement on the platform in different forms. Engagement, in turn, helps the brand reach more potential consumers that have similar values and interests. The fans need to feel that the brand in question creates or adds value to create engagement online. Engagement is often the first step in creating value for the brand.

In the context of this study, it is crucial to understand what kind of content creates engagement and helps build and develop the brand. By understanding these factors, the Moomin brand can distinguish itself from competitors by providing strong, favorable, and unique brand associations through brand positioning and by building a stronger community around the brand.

4   Methodology and research design

The following chapter introduces the methodology and research strategy. This thesis research is executed as a qualitative study. The research strategy chosen is a case study focusing on social media and how to create engagement in the Moomin community. This chapter introduces the research strategy and process and content analysis as a primary analysis method.

Table 1. Research strategy and process

Research strategy	Data collection and analysis method
Case study	Content analysis

4.1   Research approach

A case study is an empirical research approach that investigates a specific phenomenon, the "case", in-depth within its real-world context—especially aiming at explaining the boundaries between phenomenon and context when they might not be clearly evident (Yin 2018, 15.). Due to providing in-depth insights into a particular phenomenon, in the context of this study, Moomin's social media, this is a suitable research approach. This research approach gives a holistic overview of the case in question and provides insights into it on a deeper level.

A case study focuses on explaining, describing, and explaining the phenomena by answering "*how*?" and "*why*?". (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006a.)

Typical for a case study is to focus on one case, situation, event, or a group of cases where the focus is often on the process. The method does not necessarily aim to describe the connection between these events, test hypotheses, making prognoses but describe the study subject and its' qualities and properties in a systematic, precise, and truthful way. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006a.)

The process for a case study involves different stages that include planning, design, preparation, collection and analysis of data, and finally, sharing and reporting the found results. The research questions should mainly focus on "how" and "why". The case study design should focus on the case(s) definition and how it is selected. There should also be a logical connection between the research questions and the data collected. The process is pictured using Yin's model for case studies. (Yin 2018, 1, 234.)
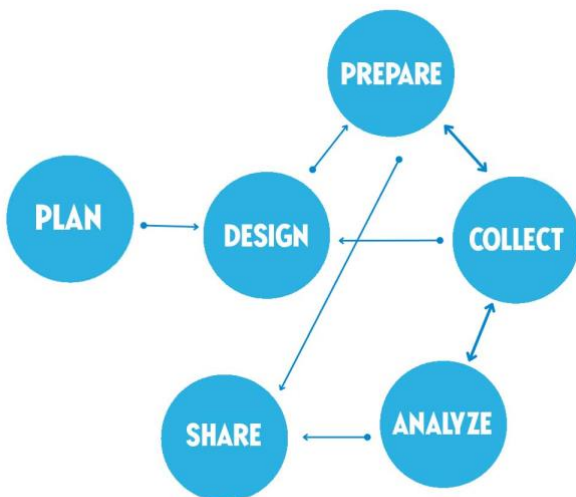
Image 8 Case study process (Yin 2018)

The case study must form a whole. Since a case study utilizes different data collection methods and analysis methods, it can not be considered a method for data collection solely. Doing a case study does not narrow down the research method. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are applicable. A case study is often used when focusing on a company or organization. It can also be used for projects, evaluation, and development. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006a.)

By focusing on a particular case, the aim is to increase the understanding without generalizing the findings. Choosing a case study for the research approach is often helpful when aiming at finding a deep understanding of the subject and its context, circumstances, and background. Even if case studies focus on one particular subject, it is essential to consider the findings as a whole. It results in a bigger picture of how this particular case study might teach a similar process in the future and how the knowledge acquired could be applied to other cases. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006a.)

4.2   Content analysis

Content analysis is an analytic method used in quantitative or qualitative research to interpret text or video data systematically. Data can be generated from different sources, including interviews, open survey responses, text and posts on social media, printed materials, research articles, newspapers or books, video simulations, or naturally occurring conversational events. Content analysis can be used in case study research, and it aims to describe data as an abstract interpretation. (Frey 2018.)

Content analysis is a traditional method often used for qualitative studies. Content analysis can be used as a single method and a theoretical framework. It can be used for many kinds of studies. To reach the desired results, it is crucial to narrow down the topic and research question in qualitative studies. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, ch 4.1.)

Content analysis can also analyze the emotional tone of social networking comments as sentiment analysis, taking advantage of social media metrics and data. Content analysis uses messages as its units of data collection and analysis. (Neuendorf 2017, 1-4, 36.)

The choice of data collection method affects the depth of the analysis. For example, interviews might provide more in-depth insights than open-ended surveys. Content analysis follows the following steps: planning, data collection, analyzing and creating a report, and presenting the result. In the planning stage, it is essential to determine the aim of the study. The sample and unit of analysis and the data collection and analysis method should be determined in the planning phase. It is also important to consider practical implications, such as approval for the study. In the next stage, data is collected based on the earlier decision on the method. The data analyzing phase includes identifying units, categorizing data and identifying common factors, and based on those drawing realistic conclusions. The researcher creates a report in the final content analysis stage to present the study results. (Bengtsson 2016, 8-14.)

In this study, content analysis is a suitable solution. The content analyzed is qualitative and can not be solely analyzed by quantitative metrics, allowing the researcher to systematically categorize the content and discover possible trends while still leaving room for conclusions and findings supported by the theoretical concepts and framework.

4.3 Moomin on social media

The digital side of the Moomin brand is primarily managed by ATC, which manages all the different social media channels for Moomin. The following across various social media channels combined is almost 750,000 (4 March 2022). The most prominent channels are Facebook (355K), Instagram (312K), and Twitter (78K). Alongside these, the Moomin Fanclub is one of the most important communication channels for ATC and the popular Moomin Official YouTube channel with around 130K subscribers. The Moomin Fanclub is the newsletter subscribers who have signed up to receive special offers, the latest news, and early-bird invitations to Moomin events worldwide. When combining all of these channels, the potential reach is close to 1 million Moomin fans.

The demographics across Moomin's channels are similar to a large extent. Facebook currently has the largest audience. The majority of the followers are women between 25-44 years old.
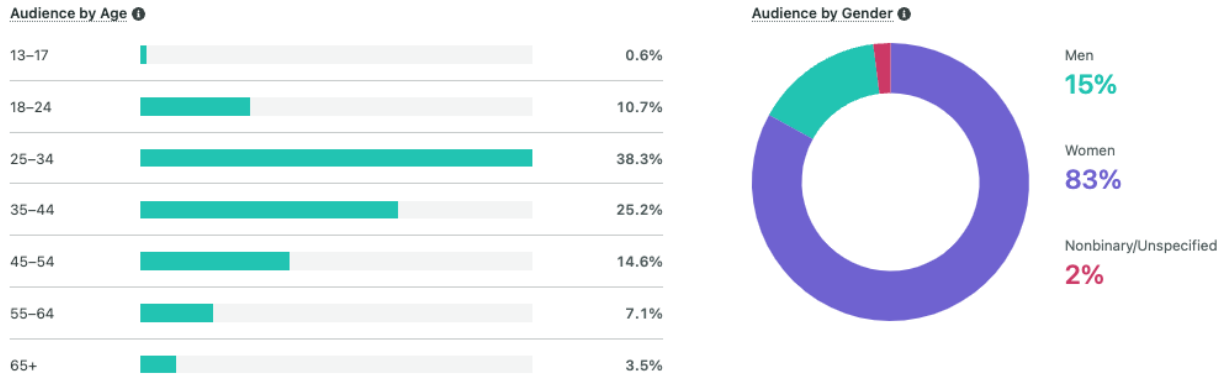

Image 9 Facebook demographics Moomin (Sprout Social, December 2021)

Instagram is Moomin's second-largest channel, with a similar demographic as Facebook. Besides reaching the majority of the audience, 25-44-year-olds, Instagram also reaches more younger users than Facebook.
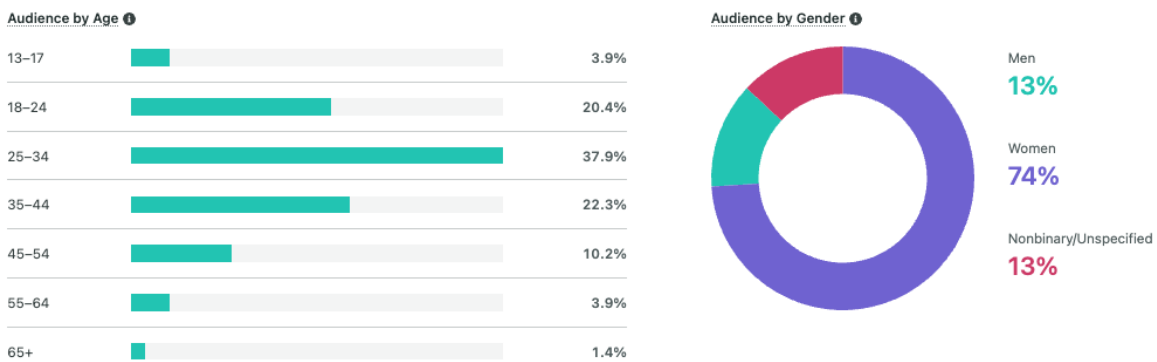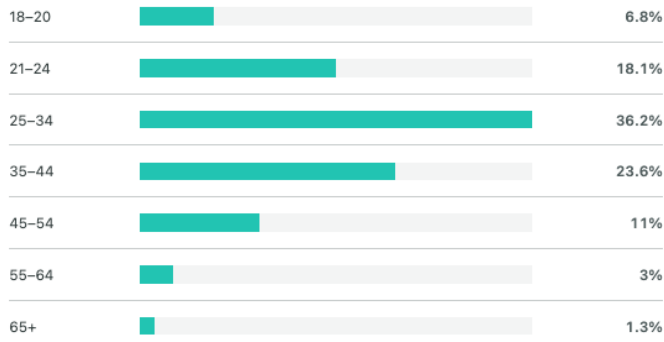

Image 10 Instagram demographics @moominofficial (Sprout Social, December 2021)

The Moomin audience on Twitter varies slightly from Instagram and Facebook by reaching more male followers than on the other two channels. The age demographic is similar to Instagram and Facebook.

Audience by Age ⓘ

18–20	6.8%
21–24	18.1%
25–34	36.2%
35–44	23.6%
45–54	11%
55–64	3%
65+	1.3%

Audience by Gender ⓘ
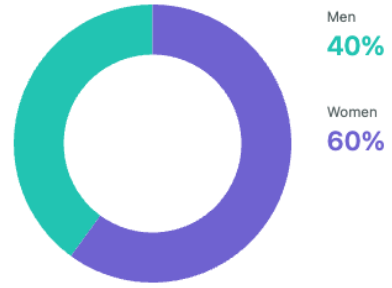
Men
40%

Women
60%

Image 11 Twitter demographics @moominofficial (Sprout Social, December 2021)

5 Research process

The research process moved along for several months, starting in August, and the process became clearer along the way.

Table 2 Research process and timeline

August	Building the theoretical background and framework Mapping out the potential research problem and starting with the theoretical concepts and framework.
November	First impression The initial idea was to utilize a social listening report provided by Sprout Social. This turned out to be challenging due to the platform not recognizing the brand's tone of voice. A need to shift the focus of the study became clear.
December	Re-assessing the research questions The data gained via the listening tool was not usable for this thesis, so the research questions needed to be re-evaluated. The final RQs came into focus.
January	Analyzing the collected data The first impression of the collected data started to form. Categorizing the data for a better overview.
February	First Findings The analysis was done based on the categorization, and the first findings became evident.
March	Results and development ideas Presenting findings, results, and development ideas. Finalizing the thesis in a cohesive document ready to be presented.
April	Presenting the results Creating a presentation for the commissioning company and presenting the findings, results, and development ideas.

The process followed the case study model presented in chapter 4.1. Based on the data collected via Sprout Social, it was necessary to reassess the research questions. As the focus shifted, the research approach changed from a narrative study to content analysis. The thesis process followed the initial timeline planned by the writer.

Collecting a comprehensive theoretical base for this thesis continued over the first three months. The analysis method and specifying the research question started to come into focus as the process moved forward. The initial idea was to do a narrative study and focus on spoken and written materials by utilizing a listening report put together by Sprout Social, but that turned out to not be a viable option, as the listening tool did not recognize the tone of voice of the Moomin brand.

A narrative study focuses on what stories are told about the study subject and how those stories exist in culture or society. Narrative means story, in a spoken or written form. The foundation for the analysis is interpreting the language and tone of voice as the primary method of providing meaning (Jyväskylän Yliopisto 2019.). A narrative approach is suitable for studies where the interest lies in analyzing the stories told freely by the subject, their words, or reactions (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006c.). As the data provided by the listening tool did not give desirable data to analyze, the focus of the study shifted to analyzing the posted content and how it performed on Moomin's social media channels.

5.1 Plan and design phase

The study was done as a case study following Yin's model presented in chapter 4.1. The planning and design phase included understanding the Moomin channels, finding a theoretical framework to support the findings, and mapping out the initial research questions.
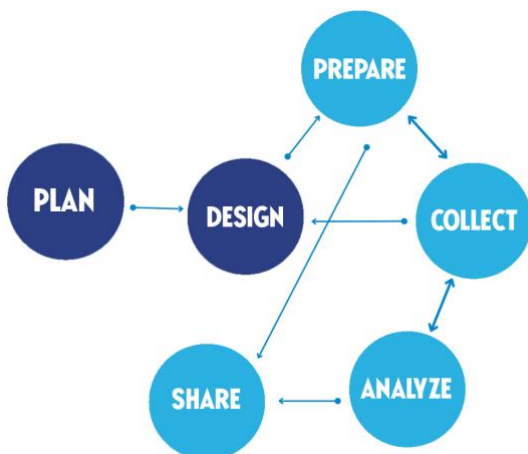

Image 12 Case study process - Plan and design phase (Yin 2018)

Deciding on using the theoretical framework by Jahn and Kunz to better understand the possible factors that impact the engagement on Moomin's social media channels.

5.2 Preparation, collection and analyzing phase

The preparation stage included finding literature that could support the research questions and address them. By reflecting on the understanding gained from the theoretical framework, it was possible to form an initial idea around the topic. The preparation stage included finding literature that could support the research questions and address them. The data was collected utilizing the social media management tool Sprout Social, which ATC has in place. The data for this study was limited to the time period of one year, 2021, to form a comprehensive overview of the content Moomin has created and posted across different social media channels. After preparing the study and collecting the data, the next stage was analyzing it and observing the initial findings.
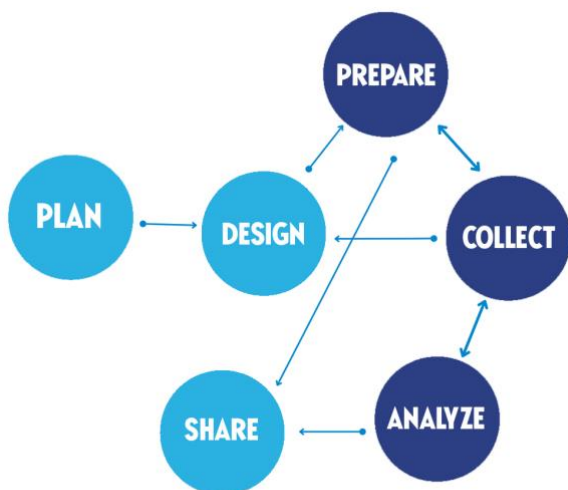

 Image 13 Case study process – Preparation, collection and analyzing (Yin 2018)

The data was abstracted from Sprout Social for 2021, starting 1 January and ending 31 December. The study focuses on analyzing the content with the most engagement, and this study limits the most popular posts to five posts for each channel.

First, each channel's five most engaging posts were analyzed and given the main category in most cases, also given a subcategory to highlight the type of post to get a better overview of what kind of content has created the most engagement. The categorization was done for fifteen posts across the three channels chosen, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. There are four categories listed; product-related, general brand content, brand history content, and licensee and partner content.

The subcategory of seasonal/date-specific was added to understand the timeliness of a specific post and if that might have impacted the engagement.

For example, a post about a licensee's products was categorized primarily as a partner post, and the subcategory is product-related. In this case, excluding posts about products in stock on the Moomin webshop, those posts were categorized primarily as product-related posts.

5.2.1   Analyzing and observing initial findings

The first work stage included getting more familiar with the content abstracted through Sprout Social, what kind of posts there were and what kind of engagement those posts had received. To get an overview of the posts, they were all added to a Jamboard and later given categories to be able to dive deeper into the content analysis. The categories follow Moomin's internal guidelines that help describe the published content.

The theoretical framework by Jahn and Kunz works as the foundation for understanding the engagement on Moomin's social media channels and highlights the importance of brand communication and building the community around the Moomin brand. The framework has been adapted to help describe this specific case study. The theoretical framework is split into three zones, and the first one, *gratification,* has been split into two: content-oriented and relationship-oriented. In the first one, *content-oriented*, there are two different categories: *Moomin news*, referring to general news about the brand, like fairs, events, and other types of informative content, and product-related content, which focuses on Moomin products. In the *relationship-oriented* category, there are also two different categories: brand-related content, focusing on the Moomin stories and content that communicates the Moomin values, and brand history content, communicating about the history of the Moomin brand, aiming at awakening feelings of nostalgia and providing information into the history of how the brand came to be. The brand personality theories is most visible in the relationship-oriented category and have the most humanlike characteristics.

These categories helped guide the categorization of the social media posts to help map what creates engagement on Moomin's social media channels. The categories and subcategories for the content analysis are summarized in table 3, on page 30.
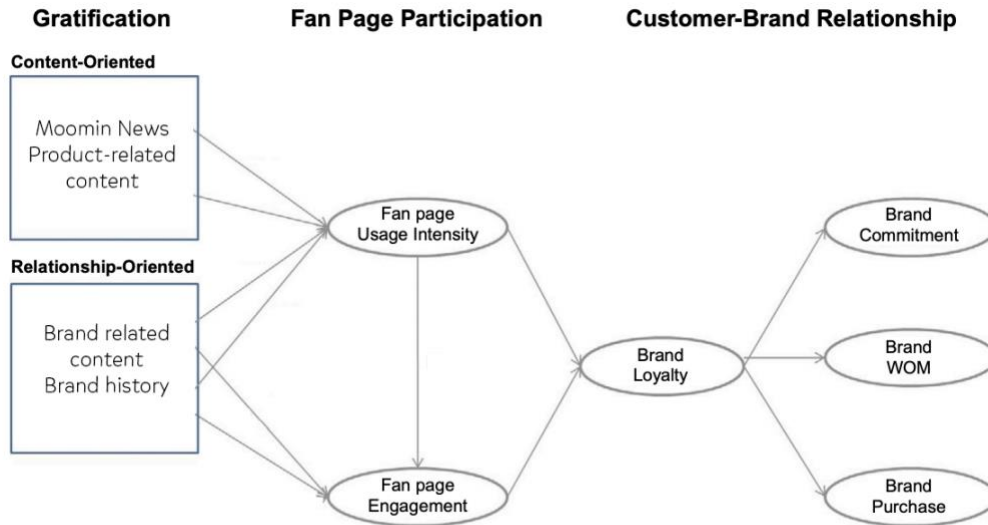
Image 14 Adapted framework for fan-page participation (Jahn & Kunz 2012)

Each channel's five most engaging posts were analyzed and given the main category. In most cases, also given a subcategory to highlight the type of post to get a better overview of what kind of content has created the most engagement. The categorization follows internal guidelines that help describe different kinds of content published on the Moomin channels. The categories described focus on content ownership, which helps ATC analyze which kind of content created by the ATC team creates engagement and what kind of collaborated content works well, that is created together with licensees. These include the four main categories listed: product-related, general brand content, brand history content, and licensee/partner content. The subcategory of seasonal/date-specific was added to understand the timeliness of a specific post and if that might have impacted the engagement. The categorization was done for a total of fifteen posts across the three channels chosen, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

For example, a post about a licensee's products was categorized primarily as a partner post, and the subcategory is product-related. In this case, excluding posts about products in stock on the Moomin webshop, those posts were categorized primarily as product-related posts.

Table 3. Content categories and subcategories

Category	Subcategory
Product-related	Product-related
General brand content	General brand content
Brand history	Brand history
Licensee/Partner content	Licensee/Partner content
	Seasonal/date-specific content

The brand personality theory is most visible in the brand categories, general brand content, and brand history. Those posts are often relationship-oriented and have the most humanlike characteristics, making the brand personality more visible in those categories. Posts that communicate directly to the audience aiming to resonate with the user through values, emotions, or helpful information, seem to create more engagement. Posts with a "hook" of some sort also enable more possibilities for engagement.

The post with the most engagement on Instagram from 2021 was the Moomin's Day post, and the same post performed well on Facebook and Twitter. This post was given the *general brand content* category*,* with the subcategory of *seasonal content*. This post focuses on a specific date, Tove Jansson's birthday, 9 August, and also falls under relationship-oriented. Many Moomin fans have an emotional connection to the creator, Tove Jansson, and content focused around her can be viewed as general brand content.
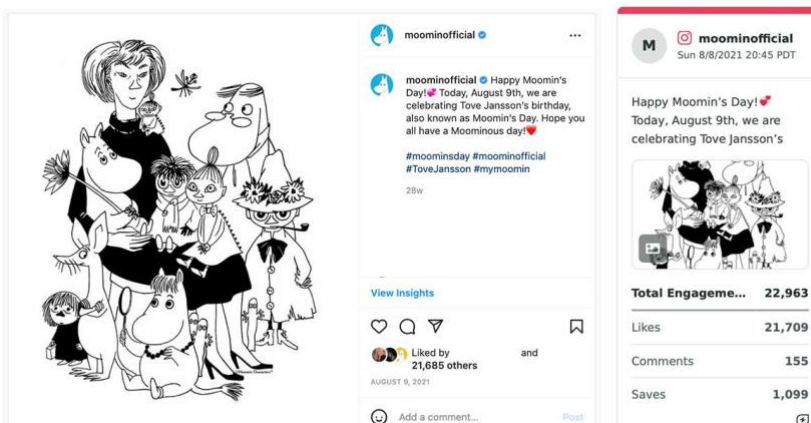

Image 15 Moomin's Day – Instagram post with the most engagement 2021 (Main category: General brand content, subcategory: seasonal content)

The most engaging post on Facebook was the same as on Instagram, the Moomin's Day post from 9 August, which had an identical copy and image. The posts on both Instagram and Facebook are typical examples of what kind of engagement the Moomin accounts receive. The post on Facebook received more comments and shares, but the total engagement was less than on Instagram.

Image 16 Moomin's Day – Facebook post with the most engagement 2021 (Main category: General brand content, subcategory: seasonal content)

As can be seen from image 15 below, the most popular post on Twitter is slightly different, highlighting queer themes in Tove Jansson's works. The categories are the same, general brand content with a seasonal aspect. The post also focuses on a specific time, Pride month. It also falls under the framework category of relationship-oriented content. By understanding what kind of content fulfills the gratification aspect of the model based on Janz's and Kurz's model, Moomin can provide even more targeted content to add value to the Moomin community and the fans.
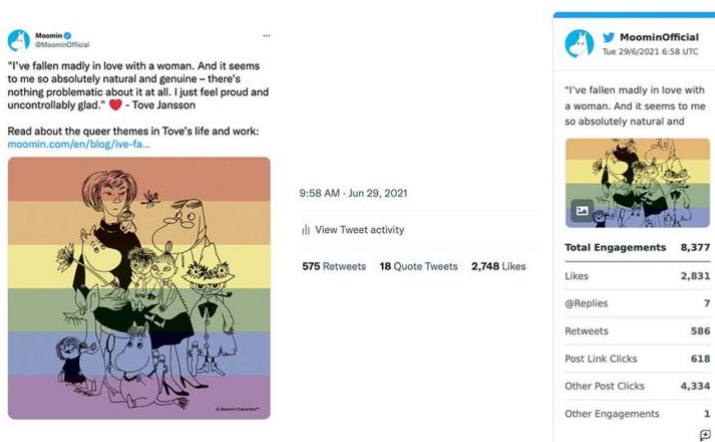

Image 17 Pride month – Twitter post with the most engagement 2021 (Main category: General brand content, subcategory: seasonal post)

5.3   Sharing phase

The last phase of the research process included sharing the findings and results with the team at ATC. The insights from this study can be used when assessing future resources for building the Moomin brand and community on social media.

There is an ongoing project to renew the visual elements on social media. The results provided by this study can also help improve the written content, in the form of captions and responses to comments, to enable more engagement and shares within the Moomin community. Sharing the results within the organization can help different parties working around the Moomin brand on social media create more engaging content that builds the Moomin community and fandom in the future. Also, sharing the results with external partners can prove valuable for licensees and local actors to understand the Moomin community and what creates engagement better. By utilizing the learnings from this study, the Moomin brand can create more brand awareness as a unanimous front by using similar elements across different social media accounts.
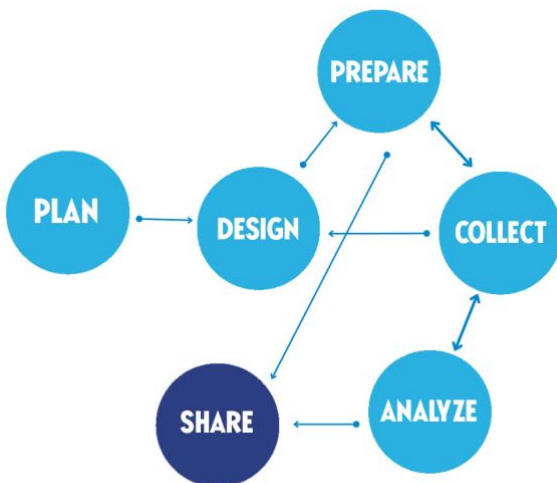

Image 18 Case study process - Sharing phase (Yin 2018)

6   Research findings

This chapter focuses on answering the research questions, the findings from the study, and what kind of content creates engagement within the Moomin community.

6.1   Answering the research questions

As introduced in earlier chapters, this thesis study aimed to answer the following research question and subquestions:

Main RQ 1: How to develop brand engagement within the Moomin community?

Sub Q 1: What kind of content encourages and initiates engagement with Moomin fans?

Sub Q 2: How to understand engagement on social media?

This thesis answers those questions by building an understanding of the Moomin community and the content created, supported by the data drawn from internal social media management tools.

6.1.1   Main RQ 1: How to develop brand engagement within the Moomin community?

Developing the Moomin brand and building a community by dialogue with fans requires resources. In this study, it has become evident that some aspects might prove valuable to the Moomin brand to consider in the future. There is a constant flow of content created, and it can also be important to emphasize the utilization of that said content in different ways. ATC has made strategic decisions to decrease the number of new posts and reuse and rephrase a lot of the content already created, especially blog content. Reusing content has proven an effective way to reach fans who have not yet come across the content. However, also for the company since it saves resources and time.

The initial idea was to utilize the **social listening** report provided by Sprout Social. However, the challenge proved that the listening tool does not understand the brand the same way as someone familiar with the brand. The tool labeled many posts as negative, despite the post or message in question being neutral when inspecting it closer. It is essential to consider the nuances of a specific brand when making decisions on social media management tools and other brand reports. A brand is layered, and understanding the whole might not be possible simply by utilizing AI, but there are many aspects to consider.

As explained in earlier chapters, values impact consumers' choices, and values are essential factors in brand positioning. **Brand values** work as a promise to the consumers, and they indicate

what the brand stands for. Companies, including Moomin, often highlight their core values (see ch. 2.2). Even if brands are not living organisms, even if they are often given human traits, attributing relatable characteristics to brands often makes them more relatable and brings them closer to the end consumer (Kostelijk & Alsem 2020, 82-83.). This was also evident in the most popular posts. Those that brought the Moomins closer to the everyday life of the fans tended to do rather well in terms of engagement.

Many of the most popular posts from 2021 seem to connect to the real world, whether through seasonality, special dates, or products of some kind, that resonate well with the audience. In many cases, the fans respond well to the **H2H communication**, where they are made to be a part of the Moomin community and communicated with directly. It also seems that in many cases, a question in the post itself creates more engagement in the form of comments, which is a factor that Moomin should consider in the future. Determining a clear goal for each post created could be considered even more. There should always be a measurable goal. In this case, it can be the number of comments, reach, and total engagement for a post.

As the algorithms on social media are constantly changing and showing different posts to different users, the importance of followers is decreasing. Many platforms are decreasing the visibility of organic posts and instead focusing on paid ads and sponsored posts, meaning the brand must pay for the visibility. Instead, the focus is shifting to consider engagement and shares to a more considerable extent. As the organic reach decreases, other users sharing the posts help reach more users. The fast-rising popularity of video content has put pressure on content creators to create engaging content that can be shared across channels and puts pressure on Moomin to create timely content. Utilizing existing channels while still finding new audiences on other channels can prove extremely valuable as the organic visibility on platforms decreases constantly. The rapid growth of video platforms, such as TikTok, might be worth entering to find a new generation of Moomin fans. There should be content in a suitable format that has the requirements to create engagement and reach Moomin fans on different platforms.

The results of this study could be used in internal projects that aim to provide insights to local actors who currently run the local operations in different countries. There are ongoing projects to create documents on communicating with the Moomin audience in the most Moominous way possible. The learnings of this study will be collected and added to a steering document that can then be shared with local partners to ensure they have access to the insights on what resonates with the Moomin audience and, through that, gives them the tools to create awareness around the brand on a local level.

Moomin strives to find a balance between commercial and cultural brand content, and by that, Moomin is also choosing a strategic position for the brand. By creating more visibility, and associations with the brand, Moomin is on an ongoing basis building the brand through different branding actions, such as trying to understand what kind of content the fans react to and engage with. As discussed in chapter 3.1.4, **brand positioning** is the desired position on the market and what kind of message and image the brand is hoping to convey to the preferred target group. Strategic positioning can build brand loyalty and associations, and these actions can also contribute to general brand awareness (Kostelijk & Alsem 2020.). The core of brand positioning is giving the desired target group an edge over competitors and compelling consumers to choose the brand over competitors. In this case, Moomin can provide strong and favorable brand associations by strategical brand positioning and communicating the values. These actions can, in turn, prove helpful when building the Moomin community.

As mentioned in chapter 2.2, ATC strives to use the Moomin values as a foundation for marketing and communications, thus focusing more on value-based marketing instead of solely focusing on commercial content. By looking at the posts with the most engagement, this can also be seen, and out of all the posts, only three directly connect to products. One of these three is a partner post on Twitter highlighting products found on the licensee's webshop. Two of the three are posts about a limited-edition mug, and the same post performed well on both Instagram and Facebook.

Creating and publishing content on social media is not enough. Creating a space for dialogue and building a community has a more substantial impact on building the brand and creating engagement. The published content needs to resonate with the community to have an impact. It is crucial that the brand values are accurate to the brand, and they are reflected and showcased in the content the brand creates. Building trust, engagement, and loyalty are essential parts of storytelling and what Moomin as a brand aims to do. Engaging directly with the fanbase creates a sense of dialogue and trust is easier to build, thus creating brand experiences. As discussed in chapter 3.2, the values influence the consumers' behavior and brand experience and are essential factors to consider when planning marketing and communication activities. A brand community often extends outside of social media platforms, and many use the platforms to share their brand experience with other enthusiasts (see ch. 3.1.6). The way the brand sees the platforms tends to be slightly different from how the fans perceive it.

In many cases, the platform is seen as a way to reach potential customers and promote commercial messages. At the same time, the fans tend to experience the community as a place where sharing information and communicating with other fans should be at the core. Setting up social media channels does not automatically create a community, even if that might be the aim.

As the community and following grow on social media, the work surrounding the channels also adds up in many cases. The community around the brand is built on consumers and fans involved with the Moomin brand. Involving them further enables the Moomin brand to interact with the fans and build a stronger community. The more engaged the audience is, the more the message spreads on social media. Current fans sharing the content with their audience helps Moomin reach new potential fans. It is important to remember that the definition of the Moomin brand is not solely what the Moomin brand communicates, but it also forms in the minds of the Moomin fans and community members; they have their own image of how they perceive Moomin. Aiming to communicate the Moomin brand values and match that to the Moomin fans' perception is the goal. The assumption is that brand content will create brand engagement on social media and build the Moomin community through that. By doing this, Moomin can move towards a fandom and build a stronger community around the brand.

6.1.2   Sub Q 1: What kind of content encourages and initiates engagement with Moomin fans?

In terms of content, **relatable content** with a touch of the real world proved to be the most engaging posts. Whether the connection can be viewed as seasonal or something that brings up nostalgia, content that resonates with the fans somehow creates more engagement. These insights can help guide the ATC team when planning content. One interesting thing to conclude from this study is that few general product posts made it to the most engaged posts listing, and to investigate this further, it would be of interest to see how many product-related posts were created and how those could be improved in the future to create more engagement in the Moomin community.

As many of the posts Moomin publishes can be found on multiple channels, in this case, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, some of the posts are among the most popular posts on all three channels. For example, the Moomin's Day post, categorized as general brand content as the main category, also had seasonality as the subcategory. It is tied to a specific date, 9 August, Tove Jansson's birthday. Ten of the fifteen posts across different channels have the general brand content category. Those ten posts had eight tied to seasonality or a specific date, which would suggest that fans tend to engage with posts that have some **seasonality** to them.

Social media has allowed brands to dialogue with their audience, and brand communication has adapted to create a more cohesive narrative for the fans (Huggard & Cope 2020, 4-5.). This, in turn, is also what Moomin strives to do, create a dialogue with the fans and, through that, encourage more engagement and reactions to the content created. Brand communication (see

more in ch. 3.1.3), has shifted from being a direct message from marketers to consumers to involving the consumers and other stakeholders' interpretation of the message and the dialogue between them. It has proven essential to enable and create a space for conversations where consumers and fans may share their own brand-related experiences (Lalaounis 2021, 122-123.).

There seems to be a red thread of posting content that can be related to on some level, whether through seasonality or something else that brings the Moomins closer to reality. As the creator of Moomins, Tove Jansson is at the center of the brand, and posts where she is mentioned are among the most popular ones on each channel. Moomin's Day, highlighted on Tove Jansson's birthday, created engagement on all three channels.

6.1.3   Sub Q 2: How to understand social media engagement?

In the context of this study, understanding which **metrics** to follow to understand engagement within the Moomin community has provided a base for setting goals for social media content in the future. The metrics to follow in this study have been total engagement; likes, comments, shares, link clicks, and saves. Because the organic reach is restricted on many platforms, changing metrics from solely focusing on the audience already built to considering the overall reach might be of interest. The number of likes and comments gives an idea of how well it works within the community, but looking at the total reach could be interesting, especially when offering visibility to partners and licensees. Creating content that the Moomin fans want to share helps reach new audiences that the Moomin accounts might otherwise not reach. Finding an angle that would make someone share a post with their audience is one thing to consider in all social media posts and how to develop this. Shares typically indicate how popular a post has been by increasing the reach of said post.

6.2   Evaluation of study

Validity refers to whether a study is accurate and, more specifically, how accurately the research method measures the intended. Furthermore, if the results and conclusions are the "right" ones, a study can provide faulty results if the researcher fails to recognize context and patterns or asks the wrong questions. When assessing validity in qualitative research, it is more defined as credibility and how others understand the researcher's constructions and conclusions. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006b.)

Reliability and *validity* measure the trustworthiness and the quality of a study. Research results must be trustworthy, which can not be obtained without planning and quality checks. Measuring the reliability of a qualitative study is considerably more challenging than a quantitative one, where

standardized methods can be utilized. Validity means measuring and researching the right things, while reliability is the permanence of the results. The research questions, problematization, and researching the right things determine the validity. While reliability mainly focuses on the execution of the study. (Kananen 2017, 173-175.)

Using well-founded categorization and coding methods can improve the credibility of a qualitative study. By documenting the different phases of data collection, credibility can also be measured and improved. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006b.)

The theoretical framework chosen for this study supports the credibility of the findings and the chosen analysis method, content analysis. Analyzing social media posts by looking at the right metrics, in this case, social media engagement metrics such as likes, comments, and shares, is essential. By analyzing the right metrics, the results can be considered trustworthy. The research questions and problematization for this thesis study determine the validity. The study provides insights into the problematization and the Moomin fandom by answering the research questions. The reliability focuses on the execution of the study. In this case, a case study and content analysis as the method. This study can be considered credible by using well-founded categorization based on the theoretical framework and internal guidelines. This research follows a logical order, and the theoretical concepts and framework form a solid basis for the topic and problematization that are in line with the findings and results. The research process can be considered valid, as the theoretical concepts are consistent with the research problematization and context of the study. The study can be executed again with a similar setup, making it transferable and credible.

7   Discussion and conclusion

This thesis project was constructed in collaboration with ATC and discussed on several occasions within the team what might be of value and how understanding the behavior of fans on social media could be analyzed and utilized better. This thesis study can provide valuable insights for those working around brands and building the brand and its community. This study also provides insights into general brand development and might provide insights to other companies that base their brand on storytelling and value-based marketing.

As the writer has worked with the Moomin brand and built the community from thousands to hundreds of thousands, the assumption of what content resonates with the audience has been apparent, but gaining insights confirmed by data is extremely valuable moving forward. As the company grows, it has become evident that more resources are required constantly. Writing this thesis was, in many ways, a critical way to analyze the work done and what can be improved in the future. The theoretical concepts are in line with the findings of this study, and it is fascinating and insightful to see how the Moomin community can be developed further using these insights. Drawing the conclusions based on the data and categorizing the results proved a more difficult task. Finding the red thread to support the findings and drawing conclusions based on theory rather than gut feeling was tricky. There have been immense efforts to better understand the brand within the company by backing it up with data, and this thesis might add to that understanding. There have been, and are currently ongoing, projects that aim to find more data-driven ways of working around the Moomin brand more systematically and strategically.

This thesis can hopefully be utilized within the company when enhancing brand guidelines for Moomin licensees and partners or when providing insights to local branches of the organization as it grows and enters new markets. Especially when communicating with partners who manage local social media channels and websites, it can prove valuable to understand what resonates with the Moomin audience and what tips and tricks can be used to build the community. By understanding the foundation of how the Moomin fandom works and what kind of content resonates with the global accounts and audience, the local actors can tweak and curate the content to fit their needs better. While still staying true to the Moomin brand and highlighting the Moomin values at the core.

This thesis study aimed to determine how ATC can communicate with the Moomin audience to create more engagement around the brand on social media and find out what content resonates with the community. Through the results and findings of this research, ATC can provide an even more "Moominous" experience by understanding the fanbase. In the future, it can be of interest to research what kind of impact a fandom has on engagement on social media compared to only publishing content without actively creating a space for dialogue with the fans. The key finding from

this study is that **relatable content**, whether it resonates through emotions, values, or seasonality and everyday-life resemblance, is an essential factor when building the Moomin fandom and creating engagement on social media platforms. By providing these insights and findings to the commissioning company, the goals of this thesis are met. The insights help form a foundation for future development work on building the Moomin brand and its community across different social media platforms.

As data was limited to a time period of one year, focusing on the five most popular posts on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, it does not necessarily give an overview of all the content published during the past years. However, it does give an idea of how the fans have reacted to recent content. As Moomin has allocated more resources to creating content and building the fan base, there has also been a shift in what kind of content has been published, which justifies only analyzing the content from the past year.

7.1   Development ideas

Social media is often seen as a bi-product to get the word out and done on the side of other things. Social media and **community management** can be full-time jobs for many. In Moomin's case, the channels and the community include hundreds of thousands of Moomin fans worldwide. It might prove beneficial to do a pilot of community management and see if that would increase engagement and the dialogue within the community, potentially growing it and reaching new heights. Reaching new markets and new Moomin fans are part of the strategic goals of ATC, so implementing new ways to work around the social media community might make those said goals easier to reach. At the moment, other social media channels, such as TikTok, Pinterest, and others, are not being utilized to the full extent due to different reasons, whether it be the lack of content in the proper format or simply the lack of resources. The competition on social media is fierce, and by not leveraging the current community to its full extent, Moomin might be missing out on creating an even more loyal fanbase. Building a dedicated fanbase that shares a sense of belonging is often more valuable than reaching individuals with individual posts without creating engagement. The audience, and the fans who are a part of it, are more than an audience; they are the foundation of the Moomin community, and adding value to those users can prove more valuable than reaching individuals. All Moomin fans should be considered potential consumers and brand ambassadors. Focusing on strengthening the brand through the community by providing a human-centered approach while highlighting the Moomin values can prove valuable in the future.

By working around the Moomin brand and managing large parts of the social media channels, the writer has become aware of the current resources allocated to social media. A dedicated

community manager could grow the fanbase and leverage the existing channels more effectively. There is much to be done around this, and many different theories and practices could be tested if more resources were available. Now, social media is mainly managed on the side of other tasks, but it could be a full-time position at some point. Building the brand visually, engaging with the community, and creating an even more strategic approach by making the channels more cohesive. There are many aspects to the different channels that could be interesting to test —testing different messages on different channels to avoid overlapping fans who are followers on several platforms by creating individualized messages based on the channel. Investigating which hashtags have a large following within the Moomin community and how to leverage more views and engagement for the Moomin brand can prove valuable. Another clear area to develop is video content. It might make sense to have a dedicated person to grow the audience and engage with the fans on social media.

The H2H mindset, see chapter 3.2, introduces that it is always a person involved, with their feeling, purposes, and needs at the center (Kotler et al. 2021, 105-107). By adapting the content and communication to fit this approach more in the future, Moomin could benefit when developing the brand and building the Moomin fandom. Considering the end-user, and fans, in all communication and marketing, the content created might attract more engagement from the fanbase. Building a community of Moomin fans also becomes a more valuable asset for the brand. The relationships between consumers and the brand can become more valuable and important in the long run than the actual products or services sold to them short term. (Meerman Scott & Scott 2020, 17, 21-22, 27.). This has proven true when building the Moomin Fanclub of newsletter subscribers, and Fanclub members tend to be more engaged with marketing efforts than non-subscribers.

One thing that has also come up in this thesis and internal discussions is **reactive posting**. As the Moomin characters do not exist in the real world, they can not be tied to politics, religion, or other ongoing events. However, the seasonal aspect could be utilized even more using the content available. Holidays, seasons, and other timely events can be planned well ahead, such as Valentine's Day, but other aspects could be worth looking into. If possible, these holidays could then be tied to the Moomin values and communicated and hopefully resonate with the Moomin community.

The knowledge provided by this thesis can be helpful in internal presentations and when sharing tips and tricks with local Moomin actors, who might not have a broad understanding of the brand or how to communicate the brand values on social media in general. The results were discussed on several occasions within the Moomin team during the spring. Hopefully, these results can also be utilized in other contexts. There are ongoing internal projects that could benefit from the

information gathered in this study and how to address the Moomin audience. It could be of interest in the future to do a similar analysis for each of the local social media channels to see if similar content resonates across the board or if it is restricted to geographic locations and language. It might also be interesting to do a netnographic study about the Moomin community and dive into how the Moomin fans interact with each other and how they perceive the brand. It would require finding groups and communities across different social media platforms and deep-diving into them.

Another thing that became obvious is that, in general, relying solely on an automated listening or engagement report does not provide deep insights into the brand. Understanding the brand on a deeper level requires brand-specific work, which requires more than AI. A listening report does not necessarily provide a realistic image of the brand's health and position. Using data to confirm hypotheses about the health of the brand is helpful.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Links to Moomin's social media

Links to the Facebook posts in order of amount of engagement:

https://www.facebook.com/Moomin/photos/happy-moomins-day-today-august-9th-we-are-celebrating-tove-janssons-birthday-als/4428344397216106/

https://www.facebook.com/Moomin/photos/a.18617270143318/4902011483182726

https://www.facebook.com/185958374788084/posts/4232440043473210/

https://www.facebook.com/Moomin/photos/a.18617270143318/3978722972178253

https://www.facebook.com/Moomin/photos/a.18617270143318/4774312765952599/

Links to the tweets on Twitter in order of amount of engagement:

https://twitter.com/MoominOfficial/status/1409768097783988224

https://twitter.com/MoominOfficial/status/1458383990965088259

https://twitter.com/MoominOfficial/status/1424586694280499205

https://twitter.com/MoominOfficial/status/1437348930950504452

https://twitter.com/MoominOfficial/status/1368779361055309827

Links to the Instagram posts in order of amount of engagement:

https://www.instagram.com/p/CSVsrnLJSrF/

https://www.instagram.com/p/CQsd8ibtM_n/
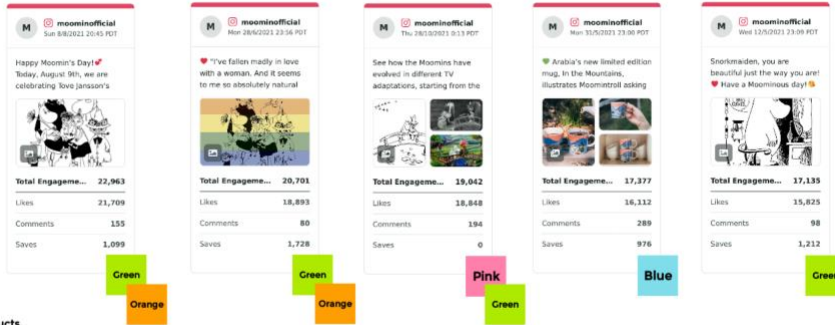
https://www.instagram.com/p/CVkELNqgEe9/

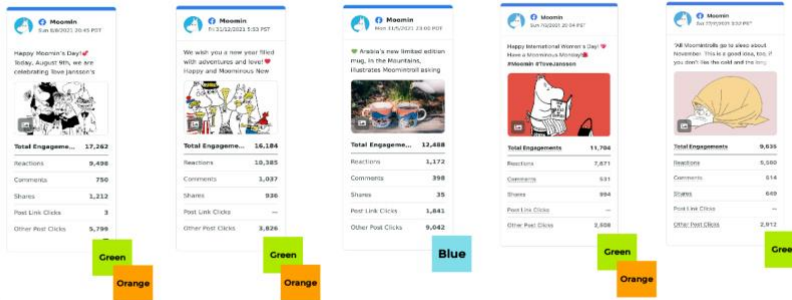https://www.instagram.com/p/CPkRS32nNZr/
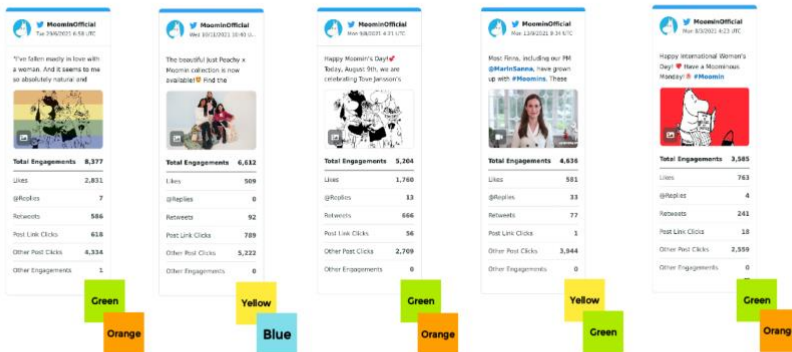
https://www.instagram.com/p/COzXNLgNv_p/

Appendix 2. Categorization of Moomin's social media posts

blue = products,
green = general
brand content, pink
= brand history
content,
yellow=partner
content, orange =
seasonal

blue = products,
green = general
brand content, pink
= brand history
content,
yellow=partner
content, orange =
seasonal

blue = products,
green = general
brand content, pink
= brand history
content,
yellow=partner
content, orange =
seasonal