National College of Ireland

The impact of nudging on social media and email content to influence the buying decision process: An exploratory study of B2B.

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, it has been proven that B2B or B2C consumer behaviour is influenced by social and psychological factors that change their perception of brand communication. However, some studies have demonstrated that the B2B buying decision process can be a bit challenging because it involves several stakeholders with different backgrounds, criteria and department goals that can affect the result of a purchase.

Lately, big B2B companies have studied how to create impactful strategies for their communication, and the results show that they should be creative in using engaging formats to catch customers' attention. It is believed that the application of nudging in brand communication can influence decision-making processes in B2B. This is because a marketing stimulus can influence a consumer's perception of a product or service to make a favourable decision for that brand.

This paper aims to validate if nudging in brand communication through emails and social media can influence B2B decision-making. The buying decision process of Kotler will be used to evaluate the stages of awareness and consideration by applying two different nudges in every stage. Eight people were interviewed using in-depth semi-structured interviews that helped to understand B2B buying perceptions towards nudges. The findings demonstrated a correlation between B2C customers and business people. Social cues nudges and salience nudges can influence both customers. Additionally, a study of what type of posts format and social channels are more influential for them when searching for information about a brand was considered to tackle present B2B marketer challenges.

The findings of this research contribute to B2B marketing practitioners by offering guidance on how to create brand communications that can influence B2B consumers' decisions and what type of posts are more engaging to consumers when receiving communication through social media and email marketing.

DECLARATION

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

National College of Ireland

Research Students Declaration Form

(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

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Degree for which thesis is submitted**: MSc in Marketing**

Date: 17th August 2022

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Be surrounded by inspiring people.

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Business-to-Business (B2B)

Business-to-Customers (B2C)

Return on Investment (ROI)

Customer Relation Management (CRM)

Call To Action (CTA)

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

Consumer behaviour is among the most commonly investigated types of studies. For example, brands know how to advertise and send impactful communication to the final consumers to influence their buying decisions. However, not much is known about B2B consumer behaviour, and research by academics and practitioners is still in process. It is thought that business people think and behave differently than regular consumers. Still, they are regular consumers, and a large portion of the business-to-business (B2B) sector has forgotten this (Harrison, M. 2021).

It has been proven that B2B or B2C consumer behaviour is influenced by social and psychological factors (Kotler et al. 2019; Pandey and Mookerjee, 2017). However, consumers evaluate products and services by applying different criteria based on the product attributes (Choi & Kim, 2016). An organizational buyer is motivated by a mix of personal and corporate objectives that highly depend on moving the organization's needs (Pandey and Mookerjee, 2017). Therefore, the B2B buying decision process is slightly different from a B2C, as it involves several stakeholders with different criteria and department goals, as well as backgrounds that can affect the result of a purchase.

With the increasing demand for information from B2B marketers, big companies such as LinkedIn, HubSpot and others have studied how to create impactful strategies for B2B. In addition, advertising platforms such as WARC have documented significant Business-to-Business brand activities. It has been mentioned that it is much the same as Business-to-Consumer, 'practitioners should aim for a broad reach, balance long-term brand-building and generate brand fame'. Additionally, it mentions that since the B2B audience is Millennials in the vast majority, they are opening opportunities for marketers to use video and social media channels.

Complementary to this, B2B practitioners have found difficulties creating brand posts that stimulate brand engagement (Content Marketing Institute, 2021), and influence decision-making. In fact, it is not yet known or documented in academia how to influence B2B decision-making through brand communication on social media. This

has opened the door to study how the impact of nudging can be applied to B2B communication in social media and email marketing to influence decision-makers.

1.2 Gaps in the literature review

The literature review of this research is based on the most popular or influential channels for B2B decision-makers: social media and email marketing. There is a considerable amount of literature on these subjects. However, even though nudging is gaining much attention in the business world due to its effectiveness in influencing people's decisions, it has not been widely studied in B2B.

Until now, academic researchers have studied the application of nudging to the final customer to influence their decision-making. Also, big companies such as Amazon, Booking.com and other brands are applying these techniques to their communication and websites (Singh, 2019), but little is known about the application of nudging in Business-to-Business communication.

Since nudging is attracting more practitioners' attention, it is believed that applying social cues nudges and salience nudges in brand communication could create interest in the decision-maker. This is because a marketing stimulus that influences the consumer's perception will be sent by the brand, influencing the consumer to make a favourable decision towards that brand.

Additionally, previous work has focused on the type of posts and channels that impact customers to catch their attention. Still, it has been limited to practitioners and not widely documented in academia. Based on these two gaps in the literature review, this research has raised questions that need further investigation.

1.3 Research, Justification and Rationale

This study has emerged due to the existing challenges B2B marketers have faced and the gap in the literature. For example, B2B marketing practitioners have mentioned that catching customers' attention and engaging with them has been a big challenge. However, on the other hand, according to B2B Content Marketing Institute, the most

effective distribution channels for B2B content are Email: 60%, and social media: 60%, while the most effective types of content for moving through the funnel are videos with 31% and social media with 22%. Based on the data, it has been the researcher's interest to explore those channels and study the impact of video and image marketing on brand communications to gain customers' attention while applying nudging to influence their decisions.

It is believed that the application of nudging in brand communication can influence decision-making processes in B2B as it has been widely studied in B2C. Many attempts have been made in the study of nudging, such as Leea et al. (2019), 'How to "Nudge" your consumers toward sustainable fashion consumption: An fMRI investigation', has focused on B2C fashion retail, and another recent study from Moritz Ingendahl et al. (2020) 'Who can be nudged? Examining nudging effectiveness in the context of the need for cognition and need for uniqueness' search personality traits. And finally, Maas et al. (2018) 'Nudging Along the Customer Journey' explores the behaviour in health services. Based on the findings, the technique of nudging in B2B has rarely been studied in academia. The researcher has developed this study to prove a theory, which will be tested through qualitative data.

Communications for B2B companies are a significant barrier between consumer perception and behaviour. This study's rationale is that B2B marketers can apply nudges to brand communications so customers will express favourable attitudes toward the product, thereby promoting the consumption of the brand's product or service. An exploration of video and images applying to nudge can measure the effectiveness and answer the question.

Additionally, Business-to-Business people are considered regular consumers. Therefore, the Kotler et al. (2019) consumer behaviour framework will be reviewed. From the marketing stimuli, going through consumer psychology ends in the buying decision process.

Model of Consumer Behavior
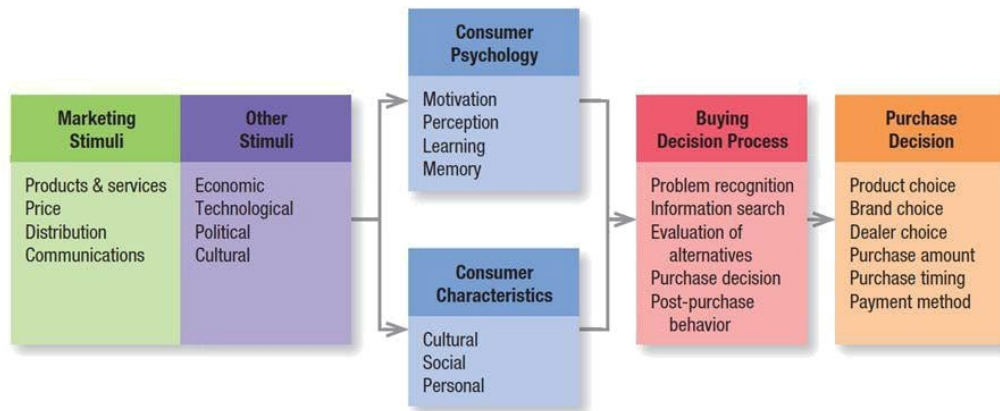
Figure 1. Model of Consumer Behaviour (Kotler, 2019)

1.4 Aim of the Study

This paper aims to validate if nudging in brand communication through emails and social media can influence B2B decision-making. Furthermore, it is known that nudges can influence consumers and big companies are currently applying the strategy. Based on Kotler's model, this research will explore how nudges influence consumer preferences towards a brand product or service.

This research will investigate the perception and preferred channels in B2B consumers, social media or email marketing, the application of nudging in brand communications, and what type of format is more impactful and influential when making a decision. Finally, in what stage of the buying decision process nudges influence more. Additionally, it will suggest new approaches to future developments in brand communication in the B2B sector.

1.5 Research Question

The main research question of this study is:

To validate if the impact of nudging on social media and email content can influence the buying decision process in B2B.

The main question led to the following sub-questions:

1. **What type of format influences more in the buying decision process?**
2. **What channel is more trustworthy for decision-makers to buy?**
3. **Do nudges influence B2B decision-makers?**
4. **In what stage of the buying decision process does nudge influence more?**

1.6 Research Methods

According to Saunders et al. (2016), research is the process taken methodologically to find information to broaden knowledge. Therefore, among other methodologies considered, the onion of Saunders was selected due to the methodological components that accurately cover this study's process.

Interpretivism was the best philosophy because it mentions that different people with different backgrounds and circumstances have different points of view to interpret things since their social realities might vary from others (Saunders et al. 2016). This philosophical framework aims that all knowledge acquired is a matter of interpretation from a subjective perspective (Quinlan, 2011).

Additionally, pragmatism is another philosophy for this study since it considers theories, concepts, ideas, and hypotheses as instruments of thought and action (Saunders et al. 2016). This philosophy starts with a problem and offers solutions that can be relevant to further study and practice.

Since the main objective of this study is to gather in-depth data, previous frameworks have helped to determine that a qualitative approach will be taken by interviews (Quinlan, 2011). Qualitative data is rich and descriptive; this represents feelings,

thoughts, and ideas (Quinlan, 2011) that can analyse to develop a framework and theoretical contribution (Saunders et al. 2016).

Only a qualitative approach was chosen because it is one of the most feasible ways to obtain the required information. This means that a mono method is the best option for this research since it is an exploratory study that aims to determine if nudging can influence B2B decision-makers. Moreover, a mixed method would not be the best option because it is essential to fully understand the decision-makers main objectives and perceptions. Additionally, the study will take place in a particular geographic location, Mexico, where the participants will have similar perspectives. This will bring a simple conclusion using an in-depth analysis (Quinlan, 2011)

The rationale is that the B2B buying decision process involves several decision-makers using rational choices. Therefore, in order to understand if nudging can influence decision-makers in B2B, semi-structured one-to-one interviews are considered the best option because logical questions were asked as if the interviewees were making an actual decision. However, new or unpredicted questions could arise (Saunders et al. 2016) because the question "why" followed the main question. This is because in-depth information is required to fully understand B2B decision-maker's behaviour since they might not use heuristics to make a decision (Singh, 2019).

Since the study is focused on B2B decision-makers to explore and understand if nudging in the marketing communication of a product or service influences their choices, the sample was carefully selected. People interviewed were executives that have reached the mid-senior or senior level. Additionally, they would have been involved in the decision-making, regardless of whether they have been specifically working in the shopping department.

Purposive sampling will be used with a homogeneous sampling strategy since this study aims to collect in-depth insights to answer the research question and meet objectives. This is because all the participants need to be similar with minor differences to be more apparent (Saunders et al. 2016) and will cover a specific criterion mentioned previously in this section.

1.7 Structure and Overview

This research is organised and divided into six chapters that explain every step of the research process. The first chapter is the introduction of the investigation. It gives a brief overview of what the study is about and highlights the background of the research, the study's rationale, the main question and sub-questions that have emerged after reviewing the gap in the literature review.

The second section contains the literature review. It examines the definition of nudging and how it has been applied to marketing strategies. Additionally, this chapter provides knowledge and explanations of how marketing strategies in B2B have been researched by academics and used by practitioners. Also, it brings information on the challenges that B2B marketers have faced in the industry.

In the third chapter, the research methodology is explained in-depth and its process. It describes the methods used to collect the primary data and gives insight into the sample selected for doing the research. The following section describes the finding that the interviews came up with. In addition, new insights not considered came up from the research result.

The fifth chapter discusses and analyses the collected data and compares it with the literature review. Finally, the conclusion is presented in chapter six. It aims to assess if the main question and objectives of the research were covered. It also brings recommendations for further investigation in the area.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to bring information related to the research, and it will examine how the content on social media and email marketing is used in B2B and what the current challenges marketers have faced to create an impact on the customers. As several academics argue that B2B companies have started using social media as part of their communication strategy (Cortez and Dastidar, 2022; Devereux, et al. 2019; Michaelidou et al. 2011) but it has not been used in its full potential (ascend2, 2019; Wang et al. 2017) and it is facing problems to integrate social networks to marketing efforts since there are many different platforms with different uses to different targets, as it will be reviewed.

Additionally, this chapter will review the concept of Nudging created by Richard H. Thaler and its applications to marketing, as well as a discussion of how it can be applied to B2B communications on Social media networks and email marketing to influence decision-makers. Finally, this section addresses the importance of nudging on Business-to-Business content, considering the stages of the buyer's behaviour of Kotler (2019).

2.2 Business-to-Business companies

In the business world, there are two types of companies that offer services or products (1) those that are customer-oriented are known as B2C, and (2) those that offer different services to other companies are known as B2B. In order to have a better comprehension of this research, it is crucial to define what a B2B is.

According to the American Marketing Association (2020), Business to Business services, unlike Business to Customer services, distribute their services to other companies rather than sell their services to the final customer. Additionally, B2B organizations have a better effect on firms since they constantly seek to improve and generate service innovations to enhance firm value. For instance, a B2B company

offers software-as-a-service (Saas), equipment for the workforce, and different kinds of solutions any organization might need.

2.3 Social Media, Email Mkt & Content marketing for B2B

2.3.1 Social media for B2B

As organizations seek to increase return on investment (ROI) on their advertising efforts through various forms of digital marketing, social media platforms have been a perfect tool to reduce costs due to rapidly replacing traditional advertising methods. Content Marketing Institute (2021) argues that 'social media has beaten email', brand websites, and blogs, and it has become the best channel for distributing marketing content. However, eMarketer (2022) has a contrasting review, mentioning that social media has indeed increased popularity among B2B marketers. It is used for customer acquisition, passed only by email marketing.

The social network for B2B is ideal for communicating and engaging with potential customers. Through vast advantages, the platforms have by reaching a large audience and sending diverse types of content such as text, videos, and images (Juntunena et al. 2019) while being cost-efficient (Lashgari et al. 2018) if published organically to build relationships and trust. In business management, consumer engagement is a vital factor in measuring the impact of marketing efforts (Devereux, et al. 2019; Lashgari et al. 2018). Ranked 64% by ascend2 in its survey made in 2019, the second factor to consider as objectives for social media strategy increases brand awareness with 54%, followed by a lead generation with 41%. Additionally, the American Marketing Association (2022) reports highlight that engaging and connecting to the right audience is vital to understanding the target market. This refers to posting times that vary depending on the business's industry and audience.

For instance, Facebook has been among the most popular and engaging social platforms for business, alongside Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, Twitter, LinkedIn, and lately, TikTok. However, there is the belief that some social networks, such as Facebook, would not work for B2B but for B2C (Lashgari et al. 2018); this is supported by Miller, et al. (2020) and their interview made with professional B2B marketers. The

results have shown that B2B companies such as Salesforce and Content Marketing Institute claim LinkedIn and Twitter are the most effective social media channels for B2B with 64% and 55%, while Facebook is in fourth-place effectiveness after YouTube.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is the world's largest online professional networking website, according to the American Marketing Association (2022), which is why this social platform was selected. LinkedIn has been, over other apps, the ideal social network for B2B leaders in lead generation (LinkedIn Audience 360 study, 2022). By letting vendors interact with prospects, companies can communicate with their target audience and build relationships with them since the platform offers a great variety of engagement options through the data to help B2B marketers to target a better audience with real-time information. This is provided by LinkedIn Sales navigation (LinkedIn, 2022).

One of the most crucial marketing goals on LinkedIn is to increase the number of followers of the company by creating awareness and building brand credibility. This is done through the app's different features to help B2B companies' growth (LinkedIn, 2022). More recent evidence (LinkedIn, 2020) suggests that followers are 95% more likely to respond to a contact from one of the firm employees than a non-follower. Without followers and interactions with companies' posts, decision-makers and buyers wouldn't be unable to find a company that might interest them.

2.3.2 Email marketing for B2B

Email marketing is used as a company's effort to send communication to a prospect or lead to building a relationship with that company to convert it into a customer.

Over the years, companies needed to manage their customer database in CRM (Customer Relationship Management) software. This marketing system emerged to improve communication through the email-sending system to customers. These evolved marketing automation software tools include HubSpot, Salesforce, Monday.com Pipedrive, and so on.

A successful CRM application may result in increased sales productivity, improved marketing and sales processes, superior service levels, engagement, and loyalty by targeting a more accurate market (Miller et al. 2020; Salesforce, 2022) through email campaigns. In addition, email marketing is one of the most critical digital sources of revenue for companies since there is a high return on investment (ROI) (eMarketer, 2022) for well-segmented campaigns since email marketing works in a more personal way to build a relationship with customers.

Additionally, regarding ROI, most recently, evidence from Direct Marketing Association suggests that email marketing 'delivers a $40 return for every $1 spent in 2019'. In contrast, the report of HubSpot mentions that in 2020 the 'ROI is $36 for every $1'. Despite the return decreasing, no other digital channels match those figures. In fact, the Satate of B2B Email Marketing SuperOffice shows in its survey that 26% of B2B marketers cite 'email marketing as the channel that makes the most significant impact on revenue'. There is no need to underline that email is a valuable instrument of marketing strategy and lead generation. A considerable number of practitioners and researchers have sown the value of email. HubSpot (2022) has highlighted that success is 'highly based on how well a campaign is designed', and Milles et al. (2020) reported that email is effective for lead generation, with 46% of marketers agreeing.

On the other hand, some of the benefits of using B2B email marketing, according to HubSpot and B2B Content Marketing Institute, 31% of B2B marketers say newsletters are the best way to nurture leads. In addition, according to eMarketer (2022), 64 per cent of B2B subscribers open emails based on the sender, versus interestingly, only 47% of people open emails solely on the subject line. All this data suggests that email marketing is a good channel for B2B marketers to create impact and have a great ROI.

From a strategic perspective, there are two ways to communicate with customers using email, inbound strategy and outbound. Customers are attracted to inbound email marketing because it creates meaningful information and personalised experiences (Paramoa-Lorente et al. 2019), and marketers meet customers at whatever stage of the journey they are in. This strategy created by HubSpot acknowledges that there are different stages where a lead can be before it is ready to buy from a company.

On the other hand, Outbound email marketing entails contacting leads who have not opted in to receive messages from you. Since emails are unsolicited, prospects might consider it disruptive to reach them out. Hence, asking explicit permission and having a healthy two-way interaction with customers (Paramoa-Lorente et al. 2019).

2.3.3 Content Marketing in B2B

Content creation in B2B has become highly important to communicate business value to executives by generating leads and helping buyers self-educate, taking them through the funnel of purchase. Practitioners such as B2B Content Marketing Institute outline that the most effective distribution channels for B2B content are Website: 63%, Email: 60%, and social media: 60%, as was reported above. While 'the most effective types of content for moving prospects through the funnel' are articles or blogs post, representing 45%, testimonials with 45%, whitepapers with 32%, videos with 31%, and social media with 22%, among others. This information has excellent acceptance, as practitioners and academics would agree. Paramoa-Lorente et al. (2019), for example, argue that testimonials and whitepapers are considered educational and trustworthy. Other researchers such as Qi et al. (2021) also maintain the same arguments by supporting video marketing, expressing that videos represent vividness which stimulates interaction; therefore, viewers are engaged with the content.

However, it has not been easy for companies to integrate marketing efforts, and despite knowing the most effective types of content, the question remains how to do it. In the same survey applied by Content Marketing Institute, B2B professional marketers mentioned that the challenge of producing content is engagement with 65% agreed, quality with 50% agreed, and mapping the content to stages of the buyer's journey 44%. Furthermore, 51% of respondents agreed that it had become challenging to catch customers' attention in recent years. Recently, there have been several authors that search for adjustments to the tone in marketing communications to reach customers' attention better. For example, they have argued that 'sentence length, text ease in reading and posting length influence customer responses' (Qi et al. 2021). However, eMarketer (2022) mentions in its survey that more than 60% of B2B

consumers opt for receiving image-based emails. Still, only 18% of email marketing campaigns are image-based out of 72% of B2B campaigns.

It would be worth researching if video marketing and sharing valuable information to B2B consumers would be engaging since this format has a high level of engagement on social media posts, as mentioned previously.

On the other hand, Cortez et al. (2020) mention that when creating content strategies, emotional and rational appeals should be considered for the development of involvement and motivation of the buyer-makers. This is because, in B2B, different personalities are involved in the buying decision process, and various groups will respond differently to each message. In fact, other authors claim that emotional appeals help to improve brand perceptions (Qi et al. 2021) and credibility. Furthermore, the higher a brand's reliability, the more likely advertising will stimulate positive cognitive and emotional responses in the audience (Cortez et al. 2020).

From the researcher's perspective, email content differs from social media content. The length and type of information can vary depending on the buyer persona a company is talking to; since email marketing can be targeted more precisely than social media, sharing even more valuable and detailed information than social media posts.

As was mentioned before, one of the biggest challenges for B2B marketers is mapping the content to match the consumer's journey. That is why in this research, some stages within the funnel have been considered to generate accurate content depending on the buyer's journey to provide the information the buyer is seeking.

2.4 What is nudging

Nudging is a concept that originated from behavioural economics and was created by Richard H. Thaler, Professor of Behavioural Science and Economics, awarded in Economic Sciences 2017 for its contributions to this field. Behavioural economics is a relatively new area focusing on human behaviour and decision-making (Singh, 2019). The nudging concept claims that using psychological insights into human behaviour

can influence decision-making. This is because decisions are not made rationally. Hence, they can be nudged into better choices by changing the way options are presented (Earl, 2018), shaping people's general behaviour- customers and citizens.

Thaler and authors (2010) have exposed that the human brain involves cognitive shortcuts involuntarily; these are called heuristics. Heuristics help to make a decision depending on how the information is presented. In other words, if subtle nudges are shown in the information given, let's say brand communication, this will change people's choices on a subconsciously level. One of the first rules to create nudges is to make the action simple to inspire people to make decisions, according to Thaler. Those actions can be motivated by three different types of nudges: default settings, salience settings and social cues.

Default settings are used when customers need to make a choice, and the desired option is pre-selected in the communication given by a brand. However, with the GDPR, this nudge is not easy to use. The second nudge most used is salience settings, which is a promotion of the desired choice given by a brand but might not be necessarily visually seen at first glance. The third nudge is social cues. This is a social influence provided by a brand describing what other people similar to a customer's social group do to motivate the customer to do what others do.

Much of the research on nudging is based on influencing people to have better habits, such as eating healthier, having regular health check-ups and so on. Still, just a little research was found on applying nudging in business-to-customer only, excluding B2B.

2.4.1 Nudging applications in marketing

The application of nudging has been acclaimed in Behaviour Economics and is widely applied by marketers in health companies, and e-commerce is applying this technique to their websites. The UK Government first used the concept of nudging, helped by Richard Thaler, in 2010 to improve wellbeing. Earl (2018) mentioned that the goal of the UK was to allow citizens to behave ´freely´ but nudging them to help them to make better decisions that they might not have done without a nudge. The use of nudging is also applied to the business world. Jung Anna-Katherina et al. (2022) mention in their

research that there are different forms of using nudges, from a design, information given and elements in digital environments.

Authors such as Dennis et al. (2020) have stated different psychology research and mentioned that irrational environmental elements influence human behaviour through unconscious cognition. These elements are three, as mentioned previously, social cues, salience settings and default settings.

In the digital world, information and communication are abundantly sent by different brands that want to stand out from the rest. Therefore, it is important to help customers with their cognitive dilemmas to make a quick decision; maybe a subtle nudge that reduces decision biases could help influence people's behaviour towards better choices.

E-commerce has widely used nudging to influence consumer behaviour. Studies such as 'The effects of Information nudges on consumer usage of digital services', by Xiao et al. (2022) argue that consumers might fail to provide attention to brand communications due to the enormous amount of content. Therefore, brands need to create a stimulus that alters customer behaviour unconsciously, and this is done using nudging. Consequently, people can be influenced towards a brand without forbidding any other option of brands a customer has. In other words, two brands can send their communication to the same customer, one using social cue nudge and the other one not. People will likely choose the brand with a social influence due to the perception of being accepted by peers. In marketing, researchers such as Maas et al. (2018) express that social cue nudge is used in the marketing field to find a specific target audience based on the similarity of the social groups.

Social cue nudge is often seen in communications when a customer wants to buy a product and the brand 'tells' you that a specific number of people like you have seen or purchased that specific product (Singh, 2019). This nudge is the easiest to use in B2B communication since the fact that other people in the same area or department have used a specific service is telling that have been approved and somehow recommended. Moreover, this nudge helps customers resolve their cognitive

dilemmas since buying behaviour is usually motivated by peer influence and social norms. Behavioural economists have widely used this (Singh, 2019).

The last type of nudging is salience settings. This can be seen when a customer wants to buy online and goes to a particular brand's website. Marketers guide the shopping experience so customers can add products to the cart. It is well known that there is a high rate of abandoned carts since customer re-think their purchase and hesitate when checkout. This might be because they have a dilemma and are searching for more options. These people need motivation or a nudge to finish their purchases. This nudge could be applied by sending offers through a clickable button or using banners that are not invasive (Singh, 2019) this way, and the customer will always have the option to make the purchase or not.

The default setting has been an option used by governments to help citizens to make more accessible choices in the past. For example, different countries in the EU ran an organ donation campaign, and those that used the default setting nudge on the choice form had a higher donation rate. This is because citizens needed to choose from the donor's list not to donate. Further, countries that did not have the default setting had a lower donation rate. This is because citizens need to make an effort to opt-in, and the first rule of nudging is to make the decision easy. This is because people prefer following standards, norms and behaviour (Singh, 2019). This has been widely used by some marketers when marketing communication subscriptions. For instance, sometimes, customers need to opt-out if they do not want to receive communication from a brand or do not want to buy promotions. However, as mentioned previously, this has been restricted by the GDPR law launched by the EU.

As it was perceived, most of the examples given have been applied to B2C companies, where decisions are not always rational. However, B2B companies must work more to convince a prospect to buy a product or service. Hence, this is why it is thought that social cues nudge could be applied to B2B communication since B2B customers require far more information (HubSpot, 2021). And people's behaviour is influenced by others (Singh, 2019) and using a social cue and salience nudges could be a good strategy. However, for this study, only social cues and salience settings will be explored.

2.5   Targeting - segmentation

In the data era, understanding the customer and using the data correctly to create segmentations have become indispensable to accurately sending messages to an audience on the right channel at the right time. By knowing the audience, a business wants to reach, persuasive, valuable and nurturing communication can be sent.

According to Miller et al. (2020), their survey shows that nowadays, buyer-decision-makers senior positions in the U.S. are occupied by Millennials. The study applied to B2B marketers confirms that Millennials prefer content that shows what the product does rather than the buyer's needs. This information is highly valuable when targeting and hyper-personalization content is sent. Because by knowing what the target audience needs or wants, brands would send more relevant content and information to every user. According to the same authors, the most effective and challenging tasks when hyper-personalization is improving customer experience with 60% and 34% challenging, applying data insights to decisions with 51% and 53% challenging and understanding customers better with 41% effectiveness and 35% challenging. Once again, the results of this survey have shown that understanding the customer and using data accurately will improve targeting and business results.

Additionally, regarding new lead generation, the most significant challenges are targeting prospects and finding leads, with 57% and 55%, respectively. These figures represent a high number that needs to be reviewed for marketers to understand the importance of data to segment, thereby finding quality prospects and generating quality leads.

2.5.1   Social Media segmentation

As mentioned, targeting correctly by combining criteria is essential to building the ideal persona. LinkedIn target audiences are based on professional positions. On LinkedIn, 4 out of 5 members drive business decisions (LinkedIn Audience 360 study, 2022).

The benefits of accurate target criteria can be seen in the results some companies, such as Microsoft, Autodesk and Bombora, have gotten by using sponsored content

addressed to specific audiences. For example, LinkedIn has proven that targeting the right audience and targeting close can lower costs by 15 % Autodesk or even 41% Bombora (Marketing LinkedIn solutions, 2022).

Having said that, LinkedIn is by far the best option due to its nature. On this platform, targets can be segmented by job titles more than demographics and psychographics, reaching more accurate niches, and having a more significant impact, hence ROI for businesses.

2.5.2   Email marketing segmentation

As mentioned, brands use data to create unique emails for each person by using personalisation (HubSpot, 2022). Email marketing campaigns must be defined and segmented cleverly to attract customers' attention. This can be done by defining the right audience, starting with a buyer persona; then, a tailored message is sent. Segmenting email campaigns might sound similar to segmenting posts on social media. However, a report made by Litmus (2022) mentions that 80% of customers are more likely to purchase messages that send personalised experiences. The same report argues that personalised emails have a better open rate, and 83% of customers are more willing to share data with brands that provide more personalised experiences.

On the other hand, regarding scheduling, it is vital to understand the persona's habits to send emails when they can open them. Additionally, SuperOffice (2020) has revealed that the number one reason people unsubscribe is the frequency; prospects could feel overwhelmed if too many emails are sent.

While social media is an excellent platform to create leads in B2B and drive traffic to the website, it could be argued that since email marketing is more personalised, it can increase conversion rates. This can be supported by HubSpot (2022), which has mentioned that email segmentation and personalisation can increase revenue by up to 760%.

2.6 Consumer behaviour in B2B

Academics have mainly studied the model of consumer behaviour, and it has been applied by several practitioners to map the customer activity cycle. It is claimed that consumer behaviour is influenced by three factors: cultural, social and personal, and four psychological processes: motivation, perception, learning and memory (Kotler et al. 2019). B2B consumers buying behaviour process is not different, where environmental, organizational, social and individual perceptions influence behaviour (Pandey, and Mookerjee, 2017). However, regarding consumer buying decisions, several personal characteristics play an essential role in influencing the decision-making process. This is slightly different from the B2B process since many other people with diverse backgrounds and different information-processing perspectives are involved. This will be reviewed at a more in-depth level in the following sections.

2.6.1 Decision making in B2B

In economics and statistics, traditional decision theories in B2B focus primarily on profits and are driven by rational choice processes. In contrast, Pandey and Mookerjee, (2017) argue that an organizational buyer is motivated by a mix of personal and corporate objectives that highly depend on moving the organization's needs. It mentions that organizational buying behaviour considers four variables – environmental, administrative, social and individual influences- this argument is quite similar to what Kotler and Keller (2019) mention about buying decisions. However, this can be compared and argued that the organizational process is a bit more complex and slightly different, as it involves several stakeholders with different criteria and department goals, as well as backgrounds that can affect the result of a purchase.

On the other hand, as in a single-person buying decision process, psychological factors play an important role for B2B members; this can be applied to every member of the decision-making process. For instance, the motivation at an organizational level is related to the income this service will provide to a particular need a member of a team has.

The perception of a B2B brand is related to the associations and corporate reputation a product or service has. It is argued that the organizational decision-making process is rationally based and refers to gathering relevant information to make a choice (Pandey and Mookerjee, 2017). Also, judgement and experiences are involved in the stakeholders' perceptions of the brand. To this extent, people involved in the process adopt different shortcuts called heuristics, as was explained in section 2.4. For example, it is more likely that a B2B brand will be perceived as trustworthy depending on the brand's clients in its pipeline. This is reinforced in the previous survey mentioned above in section 2.3.3, where case studies are more weighted as trust content. This reduces cognitive strain and risk perceptions (Brown et al. 2011).

2.6.2 Buying decision model in B2B

According to the buying decision model by Kotler et al. (2019), the process starts before a purchase is made and continues the following process after the purchase. The process consists of five stages, and marketers must understand every behaviour depending on every stage. The stages are problem recognition or need awareness, information search, evaluating alternatives, purchasing, and finally, post-purchase. As can be seen in the image below. The same model will be used in this research to study B2B buyers.

Figure 2. The Five-stage model of the consumer buying process (Kotler, 2019)

Problem recognition: The buying process begins with recognising a problem or needs created by internal or external stimuli (Kotler, 2019). An internal factor in B2B, however, might be the need for a service from another company to be able to perform a particular activity. Further, an external factor might be using a particular service that other organisations already use. In this case, the need for that specific service or product will create brand awareness.

Information research: in B2B, consumers often search more than a B2C customer might do. This is because different personalities and backgrounds are working together, the level of involvement is higher, and each person tries to cover their own department's needs. When this happens, a person becomes more receptive to the communication of a product or service and starts looking for the material. As mentioned above, according to B2B Content Marketing Institute, the information sources more used for B2B consumers are websites, email and social media.

Evaluation of alternatives: At this level, since the process is performed by B2B consumers, after evaluating the advantages of one alternative over another, judgements are made on a conscious and rational basis. According to Kotler (2019), the process is as follows: first, the consumer is trying to satisfy a need, then they will look for specific criteria from the product or service, and finally, the consumer will review attributes that will meet the need. It is in the process when B2B buying decision process plays a different role since several people are involved in the process, and each of them will have different attitudes and beliefs about the product attributes. For instance, Milles et al. (2020) show in their survey that Millennials prefer content that shows what the product does rather than what the buyer needs.

For instance, in a Saas product, decision-makers could be interested in some attributes, for example, where the software was developed since people might have good beliefs and attitudes towards developers of certain countries. Hence, it could be predicted that people will be inclined to buy SaaS from some countries over others.

Purchase decision: In this stage, consumers have already created a set of brand preferences and may also have an intention to buy the best option (Kotler, 2019). Kotler and the authors of the book *Marketing Management* explain that in this stage,

consumers are involuntarily exposed to cognitive shortcuts to avoid the effort of choosing a product; these are called heuristics.

According to the book *Marketing Management* (2019), there are four heuristics or shortcuts used in decision-making. First, Satisficing heuristic is when decision-makers select the good enough product that meets the selected criteria instead of the optimal option. The second heuristic used is the lexicographic heuristic, also mentioned by Kotler (2019). This refers to when decision-makers focus on one main attribute perceived as the most important, and the rest are ranked accordingly. Then, in elimination-by-aspects heuristics, the consumer compares brands based on specific attributes and eliminates the ones does not meet the criteria, then will review the alternatives based on the second criteria, and so on.

Post-purchase behaviour: This is the last stage and one of the most important. It is essential to cultivate a relationship with the customer after the sale is completed, so this can lead to a higher customer lifetime and incentivize word-of-mouth (HubSpot, 2019).

On the other hand, it is worth noting that B2B is more difficult to take a customer throughout the five stages. This is because customers constantly spend more time in the middle of the funnel than in B2C (HubSpot, 2019); for this reason, making an extra effort and sending accurate communication in the correct stages by using nudge can help speed up the process.

2.7 How nudging can be applied to communications

The sections above explained the use and benefit of using social media for B2B, the ideal content, and how to target the ideal audience. This section will be described the best channels for each stage of the buying process to communicate to the customer according to HubSpot (2021) since the buying decision process is influenced by the information source (Kotler, 2019).

To create content for every stage of the buying decision process to take the customer through a path of purchase, it is important to know the ideal message that will be sent

to the customers that will resonate according to their needs. The content in the information research stage aims to create interest. After, the aim of the content in the evaluation of alternatives stage is to create desire, and then the goal of the purchase decision stage is to make the customer act by purchasing. Finally, the aim of the content in the post-purchase stage is to retain customers.

Having said that, the final table suggests using the buying decision process model applying nudging in every stage of the buying decision process would look as follows:

Buying decision process	Nudging cue
Problem recognition	Social cue
Information search	Social cue - Salience
Evaluation of alternatives	Social cue - salience
Purchase decision	Salience - Social cue

Table 1. Buying decision process includes nudges

The following sections will explain what channels and content the best for every stage of the buying decision process is.

2.7.1 How nudging can be applied to social media content to influence buying decisions

Since the starting point of the buying decision process is 'Problem recognition, the number one channel to create awareness about a customer's pain point is through social media. According to HubSpot (2019), '75% of B2B buyers and 84% of C-level buyers use social media when making a purchase. As mentioned above, the best social media app for B2B is LinkedIn.

In the problem recognition stage, B2B brands must create awareness about the company's problem. Catching customers' attention can be done by creating videos on LinkedIn since, according to HubSpot, 49% of marketers use LinkedIn to share video posts. Milles et al. (2020), mention that content marketing campaigns on social media are 53% effective but 28% challenging. Hence, sending a subtle social cue nudge could be applied to the video. People who find the content helpful and interesting might go through the next process stage.

Information search: In this stage, people seek valuable information, and businesses want to know more about other companies (HubSpot, 2019). For instance, posting white papers or industry reports with a format available for social media and asking their email to send more communication, using social cues and salience nudges could help by applying mental short-cuts to decide faster.

Evaluation of alternatives: In this stage, marketers need to understand and identify the attributes B2B consumers set to expose this criterion in the communication. In this stage and the last one that social media can use, it is important to show the customer why the brand, service or product offered is the best option. In this stage, a social cue could be applied by showing the case studies of other companies or award winning and salience settings by using a tool that provides valuable information to the prospect, while nudging the person to go further in action.

2.7.2 How nudging can be applied to email marketing content to influence buying decisions

However, the stage where email marketing starts compared to social media is in the information search stage. This is because the customer first needs to be aware of the solutions the brand can give them, and their email is required to send communication to them. According to Milles et al. (2020), email marketing campaigns are 39% effective and 21% challenging. This is why knowing if addressing the right message and adding nudging to the right content at the right stage will improve the decision-making faster. Email marketing is a powerful channel for creating content. HubSpot (2019) mentions that '83% of B2B companies use email newsletters as part of their content marketing

plan and 80% of business decision-makers prefer having information from an article than an ad. Since email marketing is a means to segment more strategically, communications focus on things that resonate more with the target audience. In this stage, a subtle nudge of social cue and salience can be applied in the communication, this can be done in the subject lines to get higher open rates, and salience could be used in the email content.

The evaluation stage of alternatives is critical for B2B marketers since several follow-ups need to be done (Olufunke et al. 2017), strategically content and nudges can be applied at this level. It is when different people with different backgrounds and attitudes towards a brand will show up; using social cue nudge will help make a decision. Additionally, it is the most important stage for engaging with the potential customer and building lasting relationships by providing solutions aligned with the customer's pain point and goals (HubSpot, 2019). For that reason, in this stage, a free tool that provides value to the customer will be shown in the communication.

The purchase decision is a crucial stage where the potential customer is about to make the decision. It is the stage of action, and sometimes, at this stage of the process, a final nudge and a CTA (HubSpot, 2019) will be needed to help them make the decision. In this stage, two types of nudges could be applied, social cues, and salience settings; this could go in the body of the mail. At this stage, the content plays a dramatic role.

Finally, the last stage is post-purchase. To retain customers, it is vital to provide a delightful customer experience that adds exceptional value and encourages customers to become loyal (HubSpot, 2019). Email marketing is a crucial channel to keep customers buying for the business since retargeting is used and nurturing information related to the industry is sent. Additionally, subtle social cue nudges can be applied to content at this stage.

CHAPTER 3 – Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Research Methodology

Research methodology is the journey of gathering information by using different research methods. In other words, different authors describe Research Methodology as the philosophy, science and theory behind how research should be undertaken (Saunders et al. 2016) to help us prove or validate knowledge.

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the methodology and method used in the research to gather the information that will help to provide knowledge and prove if one can apply the knowledge taken from the literature review. Also, it will explain the rationale for using the research methods.

Additionally, a detailed description of how the data is gathered using semi-structured interviews and the population used for the interview. Finally, the research question is How nudging applied to social media and marketing communication can influence the buying decision process in B2B.

3.2 Research Aims and objectives

This research aims to explore and understand if nudging applied to social media and email communication can influence the buying decision process of decision-makers in B2B. The decision-making process involves more people, making buying harder since multiple perceptions and backgrounds are concerned. Hence, the main research question of this study can be split down as follows:

- **What type of format influences more in the buying decision process?**
- **What channel is more trustworthy for decision-makers to buy?**
- **Do nudges influence B2B decision-makers?**
- **In what stage of the buying decision process does nudge influence more?**

Different posts and videos will be used for the research. The buying decision process stages and nudging cues will be used as shown in the table below. The stages of the

buying decision process have been shortened because this research will study only the impact of nudging on those stages. Therefore, two stages will be reviewed, 'problem recognition' as stage 1, and stages 2 and 3 will be merged into one, which will be reviewed as 'evaluation of alternatives'.

Buying decision process	Nudging cue
Problem recognition	Social cue – Salience
Evaluation of alternatives	Social cue - salience
Purchase decision	Salience - Social cue

Table 2. Buying decision process including nudges proposal

Important to mention is the table above is a brief description of the buying process, therefore is open to debate. There could be other use for nudging for the different stages of the buying process.

As previously shown in the literature review, video is one of the more engaging formats used on B2B social media; this will be one of the formats used in the research. However, it is in the researcher's interest to know if the same format has the same level of engagement in email marketing. Content Marketing Institute (2020) mentions that B2B professional marketers have the challenge of producing engaging content (65% agreed) and mapping the content to stages of the buyer's journey 44%. This is why the table above will be used as a reference to create content and measure its effectiveness. Finally, images post will be used in social media and email marketing;

as eMarketer (2022) mentions in its survey, more than 60% of B2B consumers opt to receive image-based emails. Still, only 18% of email marketing campaigns are image-based out of 72% of B2B campaigns. Furthermore, social cue nudge will be applied in the subject lines of these emails.

3.3 Proposed Research methodology

According to Saunders et al. (2016), research is the process taken methodologically to find information to broaden knowledge. Additionally, Quilan (2011) mentions that the research process involves several steps that will support the philosophical assumptions. This definition helps to underpin the methodology chosen for the operation of this research, which has been the research onion of Saunders et al. (2016). As will explain, the process has different steps to help drive this study's research and provide the rationale for the selected methods. Among other methodologies considered, the onion of Saunders was chosen due to the methodological components that accurately cover this study's process.
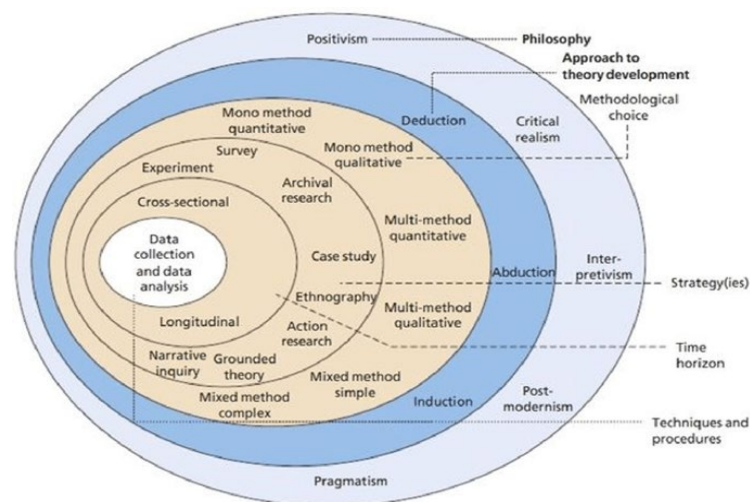

Figure 3. The Research onion (Saunders et al. 2016)

3.4 Research philosophy

Saunders et al. (2016) mention that research philosophy is the process that involves assumptions and beliefs regarding the evolution of learning. They are epistemological assumptions that refer to people's understanding. Ontological assumptions are about the truth faced in the research. And axiological assumption involves personal values applied to the investigation. These assumptions influence how a person interprets the study and the method used, and they will shape the final result (Quinlan, 2011).

This research will apply epistemological assumption because much of the information encountered in the interviews will be related to B2B decision-makers' legitim knowledge. And ontological assumptions that will bring reality to the discussions. At the same time, Interpretivism and pragmatism philosophies will approach this research.

This philosophical framework aims that all knowledge acquired is a matter of interpretation from a subjective perspective (Quinlan, 2011). Interpretivism philosophy mentions that different people with different backgrounds and circumstances have different points of view to interpret things since their social realities might vary from others (Saunders et al. 2016). For example, as mentioned in the literature review, in B2B business, decision-makers usually have different backgrounds and interests depending on the job position they are performing. This is the rationale for choosing this philosophy for this research. Interpretivism considers all different backgrounds, points of view and experiences of the participants.

Additionally, pragmatism is another philosophy that will be considered for this study since it considers theories, concepts, ideas, and hypotheses as instruments of thought and action (Saunders et al., 2016). This philosophy starts with a problem and offers solutions that can be relevant to further study and practice. The rationale for choosing this framework is the study of nudging applied in B2B. As mentioned, the nudging application has been used widely in B2C, but not much has been found in academia regarding applying this technique in B2B.

3.5 Research approach

According to Saunders et al. (2016), there are three research approaches. Deduction, Induction and Abduction. The logic of induction is that untested conclusions are generated using well-known facts, the study goes from the specific to the general, and the finality is to build a theory. In contrast, abduction is used to create testable theories, and the study is specific and general. Finally, the deduction approach relates that the outcome must also be true when assumptions are valid.

For this study extends, a deductive analysis will be considered and reviewed. This approach lies on a scientific basis. Saunders et al. (2016) 'Research methods book outline that the development of a theory is tested through different and rigorous means, and it is mainly used in natural sciences. One of the main characteristics of the deduction is that it explains relationships between variables. In other words, it reviews academic literature and relates to believed concepts to develop a hypothesis. Another essential characteristic is that ideas must be measurable through data collection and proven.

3.6 Research Strategy

This layer of the onion explains the methods used to gather data. There are three types of techniques as Mono, Multi and Mixed. Mixed methods incorporate the use of both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods and analytical procedures. The Mono method uses a single data collection technique (Saunders et al. 2016). Finally, the multi-method approach is the use of several research strategies, either quantitative or qualitative.

Since the main objective of this study is to gather in-depth, meaningful data, previous strategies mentioned above have helped to determine that a mono, a qualitative approach will be taken by semi-structured interviews (Quinlan, 2011). The value of the interviews is that pre-established questions of the researcher's interest will be asked and discussed with the interviewees.

The rationale is that the B2B buying decision process involves several decision-makers using rational choices. Therefore, semi-structured one-to-one interviews are considered the best option since logical questions will be asked as if the interviewees

were making a real decision. However, new or unpredicted questions could arise (Saunders et al. 2016). This is because in-depth information is required to fully understand B2B decision-maker's behaviour since they might not use heuristics to make a decision (Singh, 2019). Then every participant might have different perspectives and points of view according to their background. Therefore, more insights on thinking will be required.

Furthermore, the research strategy will be a case study. This is because the study will explore and understand the dynamics of the participants within the context (Saunders et al. 2016), which is nudging, and it is hoped that the contribution from participants will guide the research. Additionally, the study will take place in a particular geographic location, Mexico, where the participants will have similar perspectives. This will bring a simple conclusion using an in-depth analysis (Quinlan, 2011). Equally important is to mention that a cross-sectional study will take place, highlighting that the research is taking place in a particular time and geographic area (Saunders et al. 2016).

Regarding the questions, and as mentioned before, the semi-structured question will be asked. This will include questions that will bring the outcome to answer the objectives of the research shown as follows:

- **What type of format influences more in the buying decision process?**
- **What channel is more trustworthy for decision-makers to buy?**
- **What type of nudge influences more?**
- **In what stage of the buying decision process does nudge influence more?**

Interview technique and structure

Since the video has been mentioned as one of the more impactful formats for B2B decision-makers, and 60% of B2B consumers opt for receiving image-based emails (eMarketer, 2022), static images will be shown in the semi-structured interview.

The same content will be shown in both formats to know which design is more influential for the participants. The question will focus on which format they prefer to see, which is more compelling or impacts them. Then, the next question will be 'why'

after an answer is given. The reason is that since they are B2B decision-makers, they need to provide a rationale for every decision made. This will offer in-depth insight into the research, and future marketing uses.

The second objective address asking what channels, either LinkedIn or Email, are more influential when making a decision and 'why'. Then for the third objective, two posts will be shown, one with nudging and another without. The question will remain in 'what post was more influential in making a decision or was more impactful' this will answer if nudging impacts B2B decision-makers. This information will be beneficial for marketers since the result of the interviews will bring a pivotal element to use in marketing communication.

Finally, the last objective aims to understand what type of nudge influences more depending on the buying decision stage. The interview will be divided into two parts to gather insights for the study. The first part will emulate the 'problem recognition' state of the buyer's journey using social cue nudge, and the second part will emulate the 'evaluation of alternatives' and 'purchase decision', showing social cue nudge and salience settings nudge together. It is vital to mention that previous studies discussed above have concluded that the more nudging is applied to the communication, the more influential a decision will be. However, the researcher intends to know if this can be used in B2B communication to have the same level of influence.

Additionally, it is essential to mention that the content shown in the communication will be focused on SaaS. This means that participants will be asked to imagine they are looking for software to buy for the company they are working in and make a decision based on the content and channels provided.

3.7 Qualitative

The quantitative method focuses on providing data in the form of numbers or data that can be counted numerically (Quinlan, 2011). This approach reviews relationships between variables that can be measurable and analysed using statistics and graphics. On the other hand, qualitative data is rich and descriptive; this represents feelings, thoughts, and ideas (Quinlan, 2011) that can analyse to develop a framework and

theoretical contribution (Saunders et al. 2016). Since the philosophical frameworks for this study are interpretivism and pragmatism, qualitative data is the optimal choice.

Previous B2C studies of nudging made in academia have used a quantitative approach since they have resulted from a significant number of participants that provides robust results. However, as was mentioned in the literature review, the final customer tent to behave differently. In contrast, B2B customers need to consider more options and review these options with several people with different backgrounds before making a decision. Since qualitative research provides in-depth data from thoughts and feelings, this has been selected as the best option to collect data. This will better understand how B2B customers think and behave before making a decision.

3.8 population Sample

Selecting an appropriate population for the research project is a fundamental element of the exploratory study. This section explains how the population sample has been chosen and its rationale. Any qualitative research aims to have a population sample representing a complete set of cases or elements that the study requires to gather enough information to be considered when collecting data (Quinlan, 2011; Saunders et al. 2016).

As explained earlier, the strategy used in this study is semi-structured interviews. For such research, the sample selection that will be based on a specific criterion that covers the needs of this research is a case study (Saunders et al. 2016). Since the study is focused on B2B decision-makers to explore and understand if nudging in the marketing communication of a product or service influences their choices, people interviewed will be executives that have reached the mid-senior or senior level. Additionally, they will have been involved in the decision-making, regardless of whether they have been specifically working in the shopping department. Still, they were decision-makers, influencers or users of the product/service.

In research, there are different techniques when sampling. One of the most used case study strategies is a non-probability sample. This is because the sample needs to meet a criterion impossible in probability sampling. Non-probability sampling, on the other

hand, provides different alternative techniques to select samples (Saunders et al. 2016). Quota sampling is the first alternative to non-probability sampling; this represents the population's total. The second option, which is the opposite of Quota sampling, is Haphazard. This technique often lacks credibility since the sample taken is convenient and easy for the researcher. Third, the volunteer technique, as its name mentions, participants are volunteers to be part of the research. Finally, Purposive sampling, known as Judgemental sampling, is a technique where the researcher uses their judgment to pick cases.

Since this study aims to collect in-depth insights to answer the research question and meet objectives, Purposive sampling will be used with a homogeneous sampling strategy. This is because all the participants need to be similar with minor differences to be more apparent (Saunders et al. 2016) and will cover a specific criterion mentioned previously in this section. Therefore, for this research, the representative sample size will be 9.

In the following section, the analytics of the participants will be broken down. This information will help to understand the results of the research.

3.9 Analysing Qualitative Data

Data analysis provides meaningful insights into the collected data related to the objectives identified in the research (Saunders et al. 2016). All the interviews were recorded in zoom and transcribed for each participant. An interpretive approach is suggested to process the data abductively, recognising themes and trends in the data point. After having the data collected, then can be referenced with similar research done on the same subject to bring new hypotheses.

All participants were recorded, and the data collected was placed into an excel spreadsheet. Then, the data could be compared to find out trends and themes.

3.10 Ethical Issues

Ethics in any research is vital to consider. It can be defined as the reasoning for doing the right thing while considering that potential harm might occur (Quinlan, 2011).

Saunders et al. (2016) define it as the standards of the researcher's behaviour towards the participants involved in the researcher's work. Every practitioner must become reflective and ethical when researching, either when formulating research questions or when asking those questions to the participants.

Having mentioned that, it is worldwide known that a code of conduct generally contains a list of principles. Throughout this research process, different regulations and ethical considerations have been taken when interviewing participants and throughout the research process. Consequently, some of the ethics participants consider may include anonymity and confidentiality. On the other hand, some considered ethics during the research process are plagiarism, validity from the researcher advisor, and transparency while doing the research.

3.11 Limitations to the research

As in other research, some limiting factors were presented in this study. The first and most significant limitation was the limited research time to explore the subject in more detail and its application to B2B. And the limitation of the topic in academia.

Another significant limitation is the sample size. Despite being within an approved range of the minimum number of participants, a bigger sample size could have provided more data to ensure that the application of nudging to B2B communications works. Also, one limitation that might have influenced the interviewees' decision is that the equipment used to see the communications might not have been the best since some of the participants used their mobile phones to see the posts instead of a laptop or desktop that offers a bigger screen.

Finally, the last limitation is that despite the participants meeting the criterion for the research, they are not working in the talent acquisition department, which is the topic of the communication shown to them. This might somehow affect the results of the integrity of the final results. However, as explained above, the interviewees meet the criterion of being or have been participants in the decision process in B2B.

CHAPTER 4 – Research Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted in July 2022. In total, nine people were asked to participate in the interviews. However, one of the interviewees was disregarded due to unsuitable answers given. Hence, only eight interviews were considered for the data collection. The study's main objective is to explore if nudging applied to communications on social media and email marketing can influence the buying process for B2B decision-makers.

The data analysis follows the structure of the methodology pointed out previously, highlighting different themes according to the research objective. These themes helped in the composition of the finding chapter and mentioned crucial quotes that provide essential insights into the findings; all the information given in this chapter aims to be descriptive. The themes that emerged are:

- **Nudging: with nudging – without**
- **Type of format: Video - Image**
- **Trustworthy channel: social media - Email**
- **Buying decision stage: Awareness - Consideration**

The following table shows a brief description of the participants. This is necessary information since the differences in their job position level and generation can affect points of view. 5 of the participants are from the Millennial generation, and the rest are over 45 years old.

Participant	Job Position
1	Commercial assessor in IT and digital economy
2	Manager of product and design in North America
3	Quality Senior manager
4	Industrial Director
5	Manager parcel logistics of operations

6	Logistics and Project Manager
7	Senior Specialist
8	Contracting Manager

Table 3. Participants description

4.2 Findings from the semi-structured in-depth interviews

4.2.1 Nudging: with nudging – without nudging

Participants were shown two types of posts, one with social cue nudging and another without, in two different formats, video and image. This was through the two phases of the interview that aimed to simulate two stages of the buyer's journey: 'Problem recognition' and 'Consideration'. Therefore, eight posts were shown. Four out of those eight posts had nudging, and four did not. This research aimed to answer what type of nudging has more influence in the decision-making process.

Initially, four posts that belonged to the 'Problem recognition of the buying decision process were shown to the Interviewees. The communication shown is based on what the software is about and what benefits it brings for companies. Two out of those four posts had social cue nudging. All the content in the posts was exactly the same except for the ones that had nudging; for those, 1 or 2 slides were added showing the social cue nudge, which are reviews and logos of companies that had used the software. After showing the posts from the problem recognition stage, interviewees were asked to mention what type of post was more 'impactful' or could 'influence' their buying decisions. Roughly all the selected posts with social cue nudge were selected. Singh (2019) states that social cue nudges influence people's decisions. However, although more than half of the participants proved this theory, some results do not fully support the statement; in fact, for three participants, social cue nudges shown on the posts had not influenced them. Interestingly only P6 and P2 selected one post each with no social cue arguing that the posts with no social cue were shorter and provided only the information needed. The arguments are given outline search done by Qi et al. (2021),

where it is argued that sentence and post length in communication can influence customer engagement.

Also, almost all participants argued that the information on posts using social cue nudge using companies' logos provided a sense of trust so they could consider buying the software. Additionally, the reviews provided in the posts' content gave a sense of 'certainty' because other people have tried it already, and it is software approved by the market (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P8).

Something interesting came up when two participants, P3 and P1, mentioned that the colour blue of one of the posts made it hard to see the post. The researcher did not consider this; however, it is essential insight when designing a post to keep the prospect's attention.

In the second part of the interview, which simulated the 'consideration' stage of the buying decision process, four posts in total were shown, and 2 of them had nudging. The posts shown had a bit more information about what the software is, and the communication offered social cues and salience nudges together. Social nudge is the communication saying that the software has won a price as the most innovative app. Additionally, salience nudge is a free tool to obtain more information on how the software offered works for their company. In this case, the same participants, P2 and P6, plus one more, P4, selected one post with no nudging. The argument in this case for participant 2 was that they felt the communication was a bit pushy, trying to sell the software instead of feeling it natural. In the case of participants 6 and 4, they mentioned that the post had more information than the other one.

For the rest of the participants that chose the posts with nudge, the argument was that the free tool provides valuable information for their company so they could search more and know more about the software. This argument is aligned with HubSpot (2019), mentioning that consideration state is important to build relationships by providing solutions aligned with the customer's pain point and goals.

Additionally, interviewees mentioned that since the software has won an award, this reinforced its credibility (P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, P8). The outcome of these questions

goes hand in hand with statements that HubSpot (2019) has highlighted as part of its studies, referring that 'Businesses people want to know more about other businesses.

In this phase of the interview, it was seen that some interviewees did not realize that the content was the same, and, in some cases, participants chose posts with nudges unconsciously. They might not have given a specific reason, but 'it has more information P3, P4.

It is worth noting that participants 2 and 6 were constant with their decisions when choosing posts without nudging in both phases of the interview. For example, in phase 1, participant 2 chose a video with a social cue nudge and an image without nudging, the same choice for the second phase. While participant 6 chose a video with no nudging but an image with nudging in both phases.

It was thought that despite the minority of the participants choosing only one post without nudging, the rest of the interviewees were influenced by social cue nudges. This means that although nudging has not been widely studied in B2B in academia, the techniques used currently in B2C can be applied to B2B but slightly differently. Finally, it can be answered that both types of nudges influence pretty similarly, as Ingendahl et al. (2020) suggested in their research on 'Who can be nudged? Examining nudging effectiveness in the context of the need for cognition and need for uniqueness'.

4.2.2 Type of format: Video - Image

The research of the content has been of significant interest to the researcher. According to the literature reviewed, video marketing and image-based email are the most impactful but hardly applied by marketers, according to Content Marketing Institute, eMarketer and HubSpot. For this reason, the format shown in the interview was video and images that could be used on social media and email marketing. The videos were 40 seconds long, and the image-based posts were 2 or 3 slides maximum, depending on whether they had nudging, which could increase to one slide.

Throughout the interview, four videos and four image posts were shown. This research aimed to answer the question of what type of format influence the buying decision process and through what stage. This was done in order to provide a solution to the challenge of mapping content in the stages of the buyer's journey that marketers have presented to the Content Marketing Institute and previously mentioned in the literature review. The interview started with the videos, followed by the image posts.

Roughly half of the participants answered that the video is short enough to keep their attention and dynamic (P1, P2, P3, P6). Participant 2 mentioned that it is short enough to see it fast since he is usually too busy and has little time to spend on social media. Participant 8 noted that they could manipulate to watch what is needed. This format was selected over an image because it gives more information, despite both posts, the video and the image having exactly the same information.

On the other hand, almost half of the participants mentioned that the image post is better to see because they could take their own time to read the post and the caption, rather than going to a fast speed as the video could go (P3, P5, P6, P7).

Both formats, video and image-based posts, were selected 16 times each. Initially, the video was thought to be more impactful than the image due to the literature review's previous information from Content Marketing Institute. Therefore, some people selected videos in both interview phases, and others only image-based posts. However, participant 2 mentioned that when is the 'problem recognition stage', prefers video because it is quicker, but when is the 'consideration' stage, refers to posts because it can take more time to read the caption since there is a higher interest in buying the product. It has been shown that people who prefer image-based posts stick with this decision at every stage, and people who like the video do the same.

4.2.3 Channels: social media – Email

This section covers one of the main objectives of the research, to know what channel between social media and email marketing is more influential for B2B decision-makers to buy. According to Content Marketing Institute, the most effective distribution channels for B2B content are Website: 63%, Email: 60%, and social media: 60%.

Furthermore, HubSpot outlined that email marketing Increases 80% engagement, and LinkedIn reports that 4 of 5 LinkedIn members drive business decisions.

In this part of the interview, participants were exposed to the same content on both channels and were asked where they would rather see the post on LinkedIn or by email. Most of them prefer emails, but it also depends on the stage of the buying journey. Most millennials agreed that if the post is seen for the first time, they would prefer to see it on LinkedIn because "it gives a sense of formality and social proof since trustworthy companies advertise on this platform". Also, if they are interested in knowing more about the software, they "would search more and see the reviews" (P2, P3, P4, P5, P6).

Participants 3 and 6 highlighted that they prefer having all the communication on LinkedIn for cyber-security reasons. "I would never click any link that comes in an email that does not belong to the company". Also, unless they connect directly with any vendor, they could not open an external email, and the vendor email would likely go straight to the SPAM folder. The answer given by these participants is correlated to what HubSpot (2019) mentions, '83% of B2B companies use email newsletters as part of their content marketing plan and 80% of business decision-makers prefer having information from an article than an ad.

On the other hand, regarding email, participant number 2 mentioned that they "would not open an email if the subject line were not appealing." Still, also likely, that it would not open an email not only based on the subject line but "because every day I receive so many emails that if I see someone is trying to sell me something, I will just skip it, and keep going with my work emails". However, at the same time, participants 1, 2, 4, 8 and 7 mentioned that they would trust an email sent to them because "it is addressed to me because of my job position, and it has more detailed information than a post on LinkedIn".

Additionally, participant 7 mentioned that since the email is always open, it is expected to see an email quickly rather than a post on LinkedIn.

The research has been fruitful in gathering information about buying decision-makers in B2B. It is worthwhile to note the generational gap between millennials and retired

people. Most millennials would trust LinkedIn for the initial stage of the journey, while the rest of the participants remain with an email from the beginning.

4.2.4 Buying decision stage: Awareness – Consideration

As mentioned above, the buying decision stage affects how, regarding format, and where people want to see the communication. For instance, to create awareness, people would rather see post on LinkedIn, either on image or video, as reported by HubSpot (2019) in its blog, rather than receives emails. For consideration or buying a product, most participants agreed that email is a better option to have a conversation with the vendor. It is essential to mention that most of the interviewees were millennials.

On the other hand, for email, the interview result shows that either image-based or video are welcome, having a similar impact on them, except for participants 3 and 6, that prefer having all the communication on LinkedIn and mainly on the image. When asked what the reason was for choosing LinkedIn over email, participants answered that it is easier to see posts on LinkedIn and have their own time to read them.

Additionally, in the consideration stage, participants answered that they would rather see videos on LinkedIn and post in emails. The reason for this is that they are more engaged with the product and want to have more information about it. It seems that there is a sense of having in-depth information when receiving emails with static posts or images rather than videos in this stage of the buying decision process. And for LinkedIn, videos could be more engaging.

Also, participant 2 made a distinction between stages. In this case, it was evident that the participant instead sees videos on LinkedIn in the awareness stage because it could have 15 seconds of its time to watch the full video. However, interestingly for the consideration stage, the participant mentioned that they prefer receiving emails with images posted. The reason is that after knowing about the product and the interest rose, the interviewee would like to have detailed information through email and could have more time to read all the messages sent by the vendor. The answer given by this participant has a close relationship with the information provided by practitioners like HubSpot (2019), LinkedIn (2022), and Content Marketing Institute (2021) in the

literature review. They have suggested that nurturing the client through emails, whitepapers and newsletters is a good strategy to keep customers engaged.

On the contrary, people 45+ preferred receiving emails in both stages of the buying journey—awareness and consideration. As mentioned, this is because they felt that emails are written specifically for them, considering their job position and because it is easier to understand and get more information if they wish. This is an important insight that shows the behaviour of two different generations.

CHAPTER 5 – Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to discuss the findings and relate them to the information presented in the literature review in Chapter 2. Also, this chapter will connect the themes from the literature to the research questions and objectives.

This research aims to explore and understand if nudging applied to social media and email communication can influence the buying decision process of decision-makers in B2B. Since a gap in the literature review was found regarding the application of nudging in B2B, this study will close it with the findings and open new opportunities for further investigation.

For the discussion, the findings will follow the same structure and themes mentioned in Chapter 4:

- **Nudging: with nudging – without**
- **Type of format: Video - Image**
- **Trustworthy channel: social media - Email**
- **Buying decision stage: Awareness - Consideration**

5.2 Nudging: with nudging – without

The correlation between B2C decision-making and B2B is worth noting because nudging can influence decisions either in B2C or B2B. This concurs well with Peter (2018), who mentions that the first rule to create nudges is to motivate people to do something by making the action easy and shaping their behaviour.

In a recent literature review, Richard Milles et al. study (2020) mentioned that creating content marketing on social media is 53% effective but 28% challenging. It is widely known the digital world has plenty of information and different brands' advertising. For that reason, it was decided that testing communication with and without nudging could

provide insights for marketing to remove the challenge of keeping the audience's attention and help customers with their cognitive dilemmas to make a quick decision.

Remarkable results to emerge from the data are that more than half of interviewees chose communications with social nudging for the first interview stage. They argue that 'it provides a sense of trust so they could consider buying the product shown because other companies have used the software before. This confirms previous findings in the literature by Singh (2019) that when a customer wants to buy a product and a brand 'tells' you that a specific number of people like you have seen or bought that specific product, it reinforces that has been approved and somehow recommended. This proves that social nudge helps the customer resolve their cognitive dilemmas since buying behaviour is usually motivated by peer influence and social norms, even B2B decision-makers. However, although results widely prove what the literature states, there were unexpected results by the minority of the participants that did not choose posts with social cue nudges.

In addition, as indicated by Thaler (2010), this study's results are similar to his work. The finding shows that the human brain involves cognitive shortcuts involuntarily, heuristics, that help to make subconscious decisions depending on how the information is presented. This is confirmed by the answer given by participant 4. They could not provide a reason for choosing the post with a social nudge but said 'it has more information.

In the second part of the interview, a Salience nudge was used through offers that were not invasive nor evident to the participants. In this research, the test showed posts that offered participants a free tool that provides value to them and their company. Singh's (2019) review of Nudging Behaviour in Marketing Dynamics: Behaviour Economics and Marketing - An Interlinking shows that B2C customers need to be nudged through salience nudge to motivate them to finish their purchases because they might have a dilemma and probably are searching for more options. Hubspot (2019) also supports this, which stated that businesspeople want to know more about other businesses, and Pandey et al. (2017) mention that an organizational buyer is motivated by a mix of personal and corporate objectives that highly depend on moving the organization's needs. The results confirm Hubspot, Pandey and Singh's

statements, and the evidence can be seen in the interviewees' answers when asked if the post with salience nudging in the second part of the interview could influence their decision. All the participants chose salience nudges at least once, arguing that the tool provides additional valuable information for their companies.

On the other hand, limitations in this research might be that the communication would not have been accurately executed since the researcher is not a professional in the field. However, the overall results have further strengthened the researcher's thought. The findings demonstrate that using social cues and salience nudges could influence people's decisions in B2B by helping them to make a choice favourably towards the brand because customers from B2C or B2B will use mental shortcuts to decide faster.

5.3 Type of format: Video – Image

In recent years, there has been a vast amount of academic and practitioner information about the difficulty for marketers to catch customers' attention. Many researchers have argued that video marketing could be one of the solutions to invert this. Since then, the impact of video marketing has been widely investigated, and it has gained popularity, as mentioned previously. That is why earlier in the literature review, the researcher suggested that the study of video in an email could increase B2B people's attention to brand communication since this format has a high level of engagement on social media posts. On the other hand, regarding images post, eMarketer (2022) mentions in its survey that more than 60% of B2B consumers opt to receive image-based emails. Previous work has been limited to studying the impact of video in social media and image posts on email marketing but not vice versa.

The test in this research corroborates previous investigations, such as the Content Marketing Institute, which mentions that video is the most effective type of content for moving prospects through the funnel, with 31% of B2B marketers answering. HubSpot notes that 49% of marketers use LinkedIn to share video posts. As expected, the data shows that videos significantly impacted participants. However, contrary to what Qi et al. (2021) suggests, video is no more impactful than image posts. Participants chose the same time images and videos. The findings indicate that both video and images

are the same way influential for decision-makers. This would suggest that the format is not essentially important but the content. There was a strong rationale from the interviewees that video has more content than image posts. However, half of the participants who chose images said they could take their time to read the caption and understand the post.

Additionally, the results of the interviews suggest that people are mainly influenced by one format rather than mixing formats. In other words, participants that chose image posts in the first stage of the interview also chose image posts in the second stage. The same for video content. However, this is not a rule, and it can be seen that only 2 participants chose mixed posts in the second part of the interview. Unfortunately, this finding cannot be taken for granted since limitations should be considered. One might be that participants did not use a large screen to see the posts, but their mobile phones limited their sight.

Although these findings are interesting, there is not a deep study that suggests people are influenced by one format of posts rather than other. However, this will open the door to keep researching if what was found in this study can be proved.

On the other hand, regarding content, Qi et al. (2021) study 'Speak to head and heart: The effects of linguistic features on B2B brand engagement on social media', suggests that sentence length, text ease to read, and post length influence customer engagement. The results of the interview confirm this theory. This was proved when participants mentioned that 40 seconds length for a video is enough to keep them interested.

5.4 Trustworthy channel: social media – Email

Academic Wang et al. (2017) argue that B2B business has not used social media to its full potential. However, there is a lack of correlation with what was found in the data collected by the researcher. The finding gathered in this research mentions that most millennials agreed that if a post of a brand is seen for the first time, they would prefer to see it on LinkedIn. Because it gives a sense of formality and trustworthiness, they would search more and see the reviews if they are interested in knowing more about

a product. This confirms previous findings in the literature review with practitioners such as Content Marketing Institute (2021), which argues that social media has beaten email, brand websites, and blogs and become the best channel for distributing marketing content.

The most surprising data collected from this part of the interview was the answer of participant 2, mentioning that they would skip any subject line that is not attractive because they know that a brand is trying to sell something. This is information that was not related to the literature review, demonstrating one of its limitations.

One of the participants mentioned that they prefer LinkedIn in the awareness stage and then email to buy the product and communicate to the provider. This is an interesting correlation between what was stated previously in the literature review by Kotler (2019) that argues buying decision process is influenced by the information source.

On the other hand, while social media is an excellent platform to create awareness in B2B, it could be argued that since email marketing is more personalized, it can increase conversion rates, as discussed initially. This is confirmed by answers given by participants since, nine times; email was selected over social media. This is supported by HubSpot (2022), which has mentioned that email segmentation and personalization can increase revenue by up to 760%. Additionally, previous research done by the Direct Marketing Association found that email marketing delivers a $40 return for every $1 spent in 2019, and the report of HubSpot mentions that in 2020 the ROI is $36 for every $1. There are several possible explanations for this outcome, and the result of this study shows that email interviewees prefer email to have more detailed information about the product they want to buy. In addition, they think the content of the email is addressed to them because of their job position. Also, further studies carried out with eMarketer (2022) confirm the researcher's findings and thoughts.

Contrary to what was expected, participants 3 and 6 highlighted that they would not use email for any external contact due to cyber security reasons. They mentioned that unless they connect directly with any vendor, they could not open an external email

which is highly likely that the vendor email would go straight to the SPAM folder. In contrast, other participants opted for using only email because the email is always open. There is a reasonable probability that generational differences change people's perspectives.

The findings suggest that email content differs from social media content since the length and type of information can vary depending on the buyer persona a company is talking to. In addition, since email marketing can be targeted more precisely than social media, sharing even more valuable and detailed information than social media posts.

5.5 Buying decision stage: Awareness - Consideration

Content Marketing Institute mentions that B2B professional marketers have the challenge of producing engaging content (65% agreed) and mapping the content to stages of the buyer's journey 44%. This is why the interview was done in two stages, simulating 'problem recognition in the first part of the interview and 'information search' and 'evaluation of alternatives in the second part of the interview.

Pandey and Mookerjee, (2017) noted that B2B consumers buying behaviour process is not different to B2C, and environmental, organizational, social and individual perceptions influence behaviour. The results of this research seem to confirm their observation. In fact, to create awareness, participants would rather see post on LinkedIn, either on image or video, rather than receives emails. This also agreed with Kotler (2019) that an internal or external factor might influence the awareness of a brand and the channel where the post influences decisions. Therefore, it can be argued that using LinkedIn as a channel to create awareness is the best option because people can see what other companies are doing. The external factor, social influence, impacts decision-makers' choices because the social influence and individual perceptions affect decision-makers' behaviour.

On the other hand, for the evaluation of alternatives stage (consideration), most participants agreed that email is a better option to have a conversation with the vendor rather than using LinkedIn. Additionally, in the consideration stage, participants

answered that they would rather see videos on LinkedIn and post in emails. The reason for this is that they are more engaged with the product and want to have more information about it. Brown et al. (2011) mentioned that case studies, newsletters and white papers are trusted in their research. That paper also argues that this content reduces cognitive strain and risk perceptions. Therefore, people are willing to receive this information through email but only in the consideration stage when customers are more engaged with the brand.

Additionally, since decision-makers are evaluating other options in this stage, brands must follow up with the customers, as Olufunke et al. (2017) have mentioned in their study. Also, most interviewees agreed that they would be willing to have a conversation with the vendor only after they had caught their attention and emailed them back for more information. Hence, it can be argued that this stage of the buying decision process is critical for engaging with the potential customer and building lasting relationships by providing solutions aligned with the customer's pain point and goals (HubSpot, 2019).

It is essential to mention that this is an intriguing area in content marketing to research in-depth. Current studies have been focused on what type of format is more impactful to customers but not when mapping the buyer's journey. Although there is not an exact formula for creating content and buying, it would be worthwhile to know what posts impact more depending on the stage of the buying process.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

This paper has studied the application of nudging in B2B brand communication. The interview data brought interesting outcomes beneficial for further applications in email and social media brand communication applying nudging.

While there were no consistent results about what channel or format is more impactful or could influence the decision-making, there is a satisfactory result. A strong point lies in the proof that nudging can affect B2B decision-makers in social media or email marketing. This is a significant achievement and meaningful insight to consider when communicating with the target audience. Additionally, unexpected but meaningful findings emerged from the interviews. An example of this is the colours of the post. 2 participants mentioned that the colour blue as a background would make it difficult to read or see the content in the post. This is interesting when creating posts. Maybe a lighter background colour would be more friendly for some people. But it is essential also to have all the considerations and understand that every person is different. Therefore, different background posts can be created with the same information.

Correspondingly, regarding the question of what format impact more, video or image. Both affect and impact similarly. All depend on the person; hence, creating the same communication in both formats is important. In this way, an entire audience is covered and engaged. Additionally, what type of format is more impactful for B2B decision-makers is worthy of studying in-depth. The literature review discusses that video is more impactful and is increasingly taking part in marketing efforts. However, interviews showed that some people prefer having their 'own' time to see a post.

In contrast, one participant preferred to see the information in a video because it could go faster and more engaging. This observation needs further observation. The preferences between video or images might lie on a personality and perception basis, and a psychological study or neuromarketing could help to understand the decisions of B2B decision-makers. However, it is essential to underline that the researcher is not fully aware of the root or sciences that could take over this research.

6.2 Recommendations

The findings of this study suggest that nudging influences decision makers in B2B. Therefore, nudges could be applied to B2B communication since B2B customers require far more information (HubSpot, 2021), and adding subtle nudges to brand communication could help influence the consumer's action towards a positive interaction with the brand. Furthermore, the nudges applied could encourage downloading a whitepaper or case study, for example, by making the action simple to the customer.

Additionally, this study also identified that it is vital to understand how to apply nudges and what type of nudges depending on the stage of the buying decision process and formats to send the communication. For instance, a social cue nudge could be the best option to add in the awareness stage, while salience settings could help to add value to the information provided and make the customer take action.

Channels considered in the buying decision process

Turning now to the buying decision process, it can be acknowledged that there is a generational gap between Millennials and participants 45+. Perceptions and ways to use the channels differ from generation to generation. It can be concluded that for Millennials, LinkedIn is the best option for the first stage of the buying process. HubSpot and other practitioners state that social media is the best option to create awareness as it was reviewed in the literature. All interviewees agreed that LinkedIn is a trustworthy platform and would consider buying from a brand promoted on this social app.

On the other hand, participants would communicate to the vendor through email for the second stage of the process, which is 'consideration'. They agreed this is the best option for building a relationship with the stakeholder. Although participants 3 and 6 chose LinkedIn in both stages, they would select email when talking deeper about having a conversation with the vendor. However, they were clear that if they did not subscribe to any brand communication, they would not start a conversation through email.

In this case, it would be recommended for B2B to get prospects to their pipeline through outbound marketing to try to reach them through LinkedIn in the first instance. The application has a spare platform where it is easy to find prospects based on their job position or company name. This platform is 'Sales Navigator'. In this way, people who think similarly to participants 3 and 6 would be more likely to start a conversation with stakeholders.

Email uses

Regarding email, interviewees commented that they could not open an email that was not required, in other words, an email for a brand they have not subscribed to. This means that outbound email marketing has little chance of success. Because it is not only the fact that it is unwanted emails but also that due to cyber security norms, the spending budget on outbound email marketing could be affected and probably not have a good ROI. On the other hand, despite the literature review mentioning that email marketing has an incredible ROI, this applies only to inbound marketing and, what is more, to business to consumers. However, a further study from the researcher needs to be done on this topic to state it fully.

On the other hand, it can be concluded that participants want to see a post in the email, as stated earlier in the literature review. However, although B2B marketers are already sending image-based emails, practitioners have no data saying that videos are included in the email. Therefore, further application of video in emails needs to be done. A suggestion is that an image (as though it is a video) in the email is linked to a video within the website or landing page so prospects/customers can have even more information that cannot be sent in an email.

6.3 Recommendations for future research

This study clearly has some limitations. The most important lies in the buying decision process and the stages used to make the study. The present research shows how B2B decision-makers could consider brand communication over others in only two stages; Awareness and consideration. However, further research needs to be done to understand the entire buying process in B2B.

Another limitation is that, given the small sample size, the findings might not be generalized. Bigger sample size could provide more insight into email marketing.

Lastly, another nudge that has merged recently and studied for the first time in Maas et al. (2018) 'Nudging Along the Customer Journey' explores the behaviour in health services research is the colour of the CTA buttons. This approach was not researched in this study. Posts did not have a CTA button; however, it would be worth studying the effect of the colours in B2B communication.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Interview Questions

The interview started by explaining a situation to the participants, imaging that they are part of the department of talent acquisition and are looking to buy software that helps them to hire people through employee referrals. The first step involved the process of showing 2 posts, one video and one image without nudging and then the same video and image with a social nudge.

Then, the second part of the interview started after they decided on a post and a channel. The second part involves the same question. The difference is the communication shown on the posts. The communication has detailed information about how the software works and also, has social and salience settings nudge as shown in appendix 3.

First question, What post is more impactful for you or could influence your buying decision?

Second question, Why?

Third question, Where would you like to see the post you have selected, LinkedIn or email?

Fourth question, Why?

Fifth question, What channel between LinkedIn and email could influence your buying decision to consider buying the software?

Sixth question, Why?

Appendix 2 - Communication – Video & Images Posts

Each video has its own link right above it.
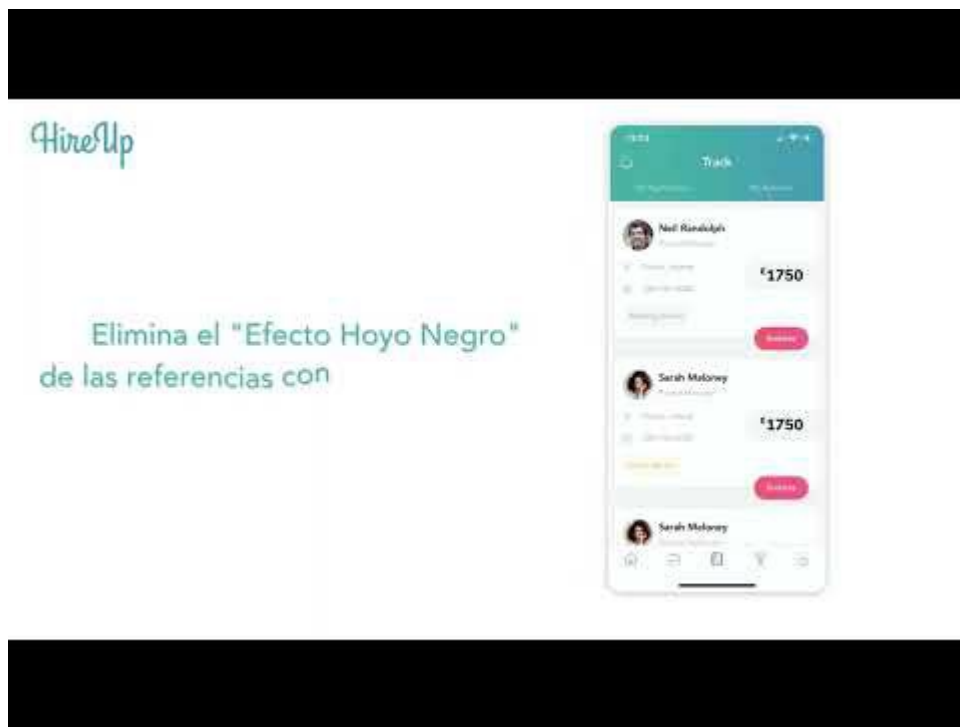
No nudge - First stage, awareness

Video NO Social Cue General communication - YouTube

Social cue nudge - First stage, awareness

Video Social Cue General communication - YouTube

No nudge - Second stage, consideration

[Video NO social cue Salience - YouTube](#)

Social cue and Salience settings Nudges - Second stage, consideration

[Video social cue - Salience - YouTube](#)

IMAGES POSTS

No nudge - First stage, awareness
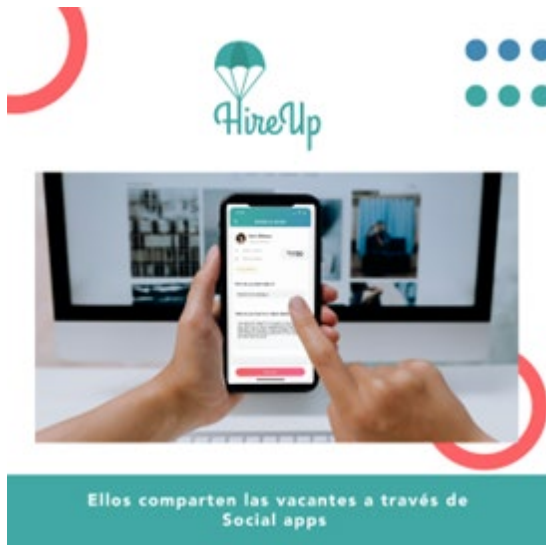

Social nudge - First stage, awareness

No nudge - Second stage, consideration

El personal recibe las vacantes a través de email

Envía las vacantes únicamente a personal seleccionado
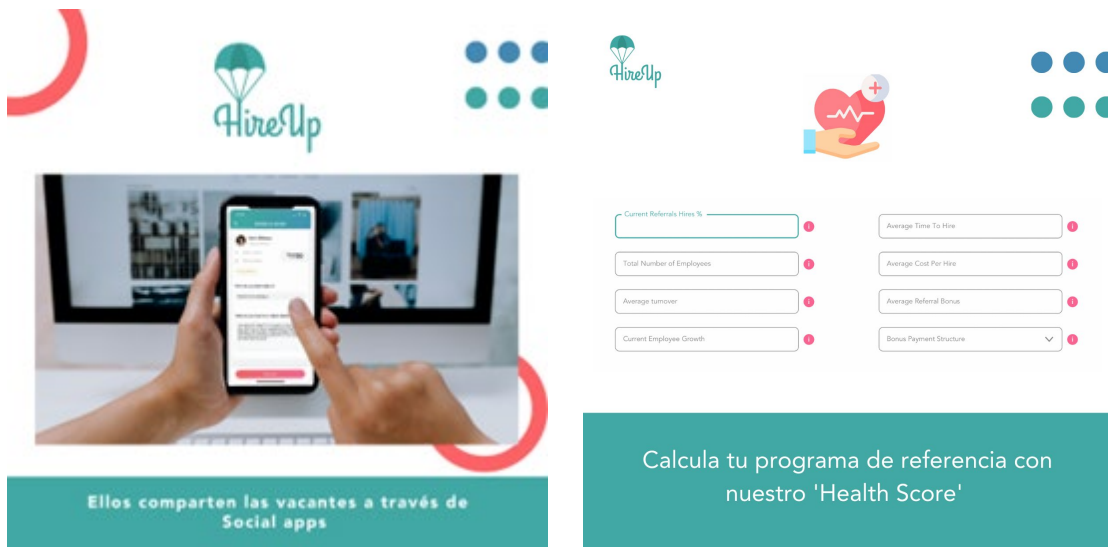
Ellos comparten las vacantes a través de Social apps

Social cue & Salience nudges - Second stage, consideration

El personal recibe las vacantes a través de email

Envía las vacantes únicamente a personal seleccionado

Appendix 3

Results

Participant	Position level	Social Nudge	Type of Post	Social - Salience Nudges	Type of Post	Channel	Format
1	Commercial assessor in It and digital economy in The US (33-36)	Video Social cue / Post - social cue	LinkedIn video / email - video	video social cue - salience / Post social cue - Salience	Linkedin video / Email video	Email / Email	video / video
2	Manager of product and design in North America (33-36)	Video social cue / Post no social cue	LinkedIn Video / Email Post	Video Social cue - Salience / Post No social - Salience	Linkedin video / Email Post	Linkedin / Email	video / post
3	Quality Senior manager (33-36)	Video social cue / Post social cue	LinkedIn Post / Email post	Video Social cue / Post Social cue - Salience	LinkedIn post	LinkedIn / LinkedIn	post / post
4	Industrial Director (45+)	Video social cue / Post social cue	LinkedIn Video / Email video	Video No social cue/ Post social cue - salience	Linkedin video / Email post	Email / LinkedIn	video / video
5	Manager parcel logistics of operations (33-36)	Video social cue / Post Social cue	LinkedIn Post / Email video	video social cue - salience / Post social cue - Salience	Linkedin video / Email Post	Linkedin / Email	post / post
6	Logistics and Project Manager (33-36)	Video no social cue / Post social cue	LinkedIn Post / Email post	Video no social cue - salience / Post social cue - salience	Linkedin video / Email Post	LinkedIn / LinkedIn	post / post
7	Senior specialist (45+)	Video social cue / Post social cue	LinkedIn Post / Email post	Video social cue / Post social cue - salience	LinkedIn post / Email post	Email / Email	post / post
8	Contracting Manager (45+)	Video social cue / Post social cue	LinkedIn video / email video	video social cue - salience / Post social cue - Salience	Linkedin video / Email video	Email / Email	video / video