Investigating the Impact of System Trust on Communication Behaviors

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Abstract: The study asks whether state regulation functions as a source of system trust on some service markets, and explores whether this indirectly affects communication behaviors by lessening the dependence on interpersonal trust to maintain business-to-business relationships. The findings confirm the prevalence of system trust in highly regulated industries. It also supports differences in communication behaviors, with companies in less regulated industries making use of richer media and informal activities while putting less priority into internal cost efficiency and time efficiency. The study indicates that these differences in communication behaviors may be driven by a stronger motivation for less regulated industries to establish interpersonal trust in the face of low levels of system trust, but it does not find conclusive evidence for this being the case.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

No company today can ignore the importance of personal communication when it comes to maintaining successful relationships with business customers. Every day, information is exchanged via emails, phone calls, face-to-face-meetings, letters, video conferencing and texts (SMS) - presumably without much effort being put into the choice and usage of the media in every given interaction. Much of this communication takes place within business relationships where mutual trust is a key factor of success (Zaheer et al., 1998; Nooteboom et al., 1997) and hence this should influence behavior.

If the building of trust is regarded as a key objective in communication with customers, then there may be significant benefits to harvest from analyzing and reflecting about the way personal communication is carried out in the business-to-business context – not the least in identifying the underlying drivers of trust in one's specific industry. With trust being a multifaceted concept (Luhmann, 1979), the importance of interpersonal trust may vary between industries, making the choice of communication behaviors and media a more complex decision than a mere comparison between the cost or time efficiency of alternatives alone.

As became evident through the course of interviewing company representatives for this study (the results of which are presented in Section 4), there is still no broad consensus on how and when to use different media when communicating with customers, and what overall strategy these individual interactions should amount to. This especially seems to be true in regard to relatively new means of communication (such as e-mail and video conferencing). Part of the contribution from this study, then, is to map the motivations underlying inter-employee communication behaviors in the business-to-business context and to provide insight into how these relate to two basic conceptualizations of trust.

1.2 Purpose of Study

In this thesis we aim to bridge the research on interpersonal business-to-business communication with trust research. In particular, we want to investigate whether customer trust in a larger system (as conceptualized by Luhmann, 1979) may reduce the need for employees to maintain interpersonal trust with customers. The study asks whether state regulation functions as a source of system trust on some service markets by guaranteeing a certain expected level of quality, and explores whether this effect leads to different communication behaviors between highly regulated and less regulated industries in practice.

To test this effect, this thesis will investigate four different service industries, divided into two categories based on degree of regulation. On the one hand it will study banks and auditing firms, which are characterized by being highly regulated industries, and on the other hand management/IT consulting firms and recruitment firms, which are considerably less regulated. In addition to this, the study will delimit itself to inter-employee communication with long-term business customers rather than focus on overall marketing communications strategies.

The study proposes that i) state regulation may generate system trust, which ii) lessens the dependence on creating interpersonal trust among customers for companies in highly regulated industries. It also proposes that iii) this should lead to tangible differences in communication behaviors between industries, as companies in less regulated industries will direct more communications efforts toward building interpersonal trust.

2. Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

The objective of this section is to provide the reader with existing theories building up to an understanding of the background for our study. Firstly, we will discuss the difference between relationship and transaction marketing and highlight the importance of long-term business relationships. Secondly, we will explain and develop the concept of trust and its implications on relational quality and loyalty. Subsequently, we will cover research into the use of different means of communication (used interchangeably with the word *media*) and media richness theory. Closing the theoretical framework, we will account for the regulations in the different industries chosen for the study. In the final section, we will present our hypotheses.

2.1 Relationship and Transaction Marketing

The starting point of this thesis is to acknowledge that relationships in the realm of business relations consist of a continuum from transactional to relational orientations (Dwyer et al. 1987; Jackson 1985).

Transaction marketing is characterized by a pursuit of several parallel distributors in order to create and leverage competition between two parties. Products are standardized low-complexity products and the distributor is selected based on the lowest price. The criteria result in a relatively short time frame since switching costs are low and distributors will be replaced immediately if a rivalling firm can deliver cheaper (Jackson 1985). The nature of these transactions implicates low involvement in communication (Axelsson & Agndal, 2012).

Relationship marketing, on the other hand, is characterized by a very limited amount of distributors, usually no more than two. Instead of standardized products, relationship marketing aims to provide solutions for complex situations. Switching costs are higher and exposure is subsequently perceived as high by buyers (Jackson 1985). Hence, price is not the only important aspect in the choice of the distributor; instead the selection is based on which firm can contribute with the best competence in solving the issue, i.e. which selection provides the best long term solution. The nature of these transactions implicates high involvement in communication (Axelsson & Agndal, 2012). In knowledge intense service industries, where complex solutions are common, this gives rise to long term commitments and, consequently, high communication involvement (Axelsson & Agndal 2012).

Crosby et al. (1990) outlines three relational selling behaviors that have a positive effect on service customers' perceptions of relational quality. These are conceptualized as contact intensity (that is, the frequency of customer interactions), cooperative behavior and mutual disclosure of information. These behaviors are associated with a sense of commitment (Williamson, 1983), increased trust in negotiation contexts (Pruitt, 1981) and reduction of relational distrust (Darlega et al. 1987) respectively.

2.2 Trust Conceptualizations and Implications of Trust on Loyalty

Several studies have concluded that building trust has a great importance in achieving success in business relations (Zaheer et al., 1998; Nooteboom et al., 1997). Trust, as defined by Sztompka (1999), is a "*bet on the future contingent actions of others*". Some people are more inclined to make these bets, whereas some people can be more hesitant and less willing to make risky bets. Trust indicates the assessment by the trustor that risk is reduced or even eliminated (Näslund, 2012). It is thus closely related to predictions of the future concerning matters of which we have no control and that include the involvement of some sort of agency (Sztompka, 1999; Näslund, 2012).

Trust can be divided into two sources, interpersonal trust and system trust (Luhmann, 1979). Interpersonal trust is mainly identified by the trustworthiness of a specific person, derived mainly from the trustor's own experiences of the trustee's actions and judgment. This approach calls for a long period of relation-building with gradual increases in reliance, constantly testing the other actor's reliability and trustworthiness. System trust is separated from specific individuals. Instead, the primary target of the trustor's trust is a system. A trustor may for example trust the bank system with his or her money even though he or she has no opinion of the particular people dealing with the money. Hence, the trustor trusts that the system works irrespectively of his or her opinion of certain people (Näslund, 2012).

How firms choose to approach trust-building activities can have implications for customer loyalty, as attitudinal loyalty has been shown to be positively related with trust in the supplier in a study carried out in the delivery service context (Rauyruen and Miller, 2007). This study did not support a similar relation between trust in the supplier's employees and behavioral or attitudinal loyalty. In contrast, a study focusing on consulting and professional service firms found positive relationships to attitudinal and behavioral loyalty both in variables measuring trust and commercial friendships (Harste and Richter, 2009).

Drawing upon the studies of Luhmann (1988) it is important to make a distinction between trust and confidence. Confidence is created automatically and implies a situation where a certain expectation is safely assumed not be disappointed, which is a prerequisite for our everyday life. For example, you can be confident that your train will not derail. Trust on the other hand requires a certain involvement of risk.

You may or may not choose to bestow trust upon someone and initiate an action with the risk of eventually being disappointed. For example you can choose to buy or not to buy a house from someone with the risk of being disappointed by the result. One always has a choice whether to trust or not in a specific situation, and trust is only needed in situations where the possible negative outcome is greater than the sought outcome. Trust, along with control, is also argued to be a prerequisite to build confidence in strategic alliances (Das & Teng, 1998).

2.3 Means of Communication and Media Richness

When comparing means of communication, media richness can be used as a conceptualization of their capacity to convey information. In an explorative study, Lengel & Daft (1984) found face-to-face meetings to be the richest information medium, allowing communication of a broad set of cues such as body language, facial expression and tone of voice, which allows instant feedback and check of understanding. Telephone is described slightly less rich, given that it lacks visual cues. It is trailed by addressed and unaddressed written communication, which both limit visual cues to what is written and has slow feedback. Other studies have arrived at similar conclusions, with Trevino et al. (1990) outlining a richness continuum where face-to-face is considered most rich, followed by telephone, e-mail, letters, notes, memos, special reports and flyers/bulletins in falling order.

In the organizational context, rich media is preferable in equivocal issues, which feature conflicting interpretations about the situation. Conversely, leaner (or less rich) media suits situations with high uncertainty, which is defined as absence of information rather than ambiguity (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Along similar lines, rich media has been shown to have a positive influence on decision quality when the task-relevant knowledge in a group is high. This is due to mitigated deception within the decision-making group and an increased perceived ability of being able to evaluate the expertise of others. At the same time, leaner media is suited for situations where there is less task-relevant knowledge, as it limits unnecessary communication and gives the opportunity to reflect before communicating (Kahai & Cooper, 2003).

Rich media carry less deceptive potential, and can hence be used to engender more trust in the party communicated with (Carlson et al., 2004). However, channel expansion theory holds that lean communication channels might actually be perceived to become richer as individuals develop knowledge in communicating efficiently through them over time (Carlson & Zmud, 1999). In addition, critics of media richness theory hold that the communication medium alone does not determine communication richness or leanness, which instead emerges from the interactions between participants (Ngwenyama & Lee, 1997).

Despite new technology enabling communication from a distance, face-to-face contact remains an important means of communication, as indicated by modern growth in business travel as well as the clustering of firms in urban areas (Stolper & Venables, 2004). In various studies, the face-to-face medium has been reported to increase understanding between communication partners and lead to more positive evaluations of each other than when using computer-mediated communication (Bordia, 1997). In the context of negotiations, the online setting has been shown to lead to less trust both before and after the interaction as well as less desire for future interaction relative to face-to-face settings (Naquin & Paulson, 2003). Similarly, telephone conferencing tend to lead participants to feel less at ease than in a face-to-face meeting (Halbe, 2012).

In the media richness framework, video conferencing intuitively appears similar to face-to-face communication, but research has found that video conferencing participants tend to rely heavily on peripheral cues and heuristics such as partner likability in evaluating message content (Ferran & Watts, 2008). Comparing video and telephone conferencing, video provides increased non-verbal feedback, ability to identify and discriminate between speakers, less perception of remoteness, increased interactivity in the conversation and the possibility of having parallel conversations when being able to selectively gaze at specific participants (Sellen, 1995). Hence video conferencing is commonly placed between face-to-face and telephone communication in the media richness continuum (Carlson et al., 2004).

Baron (1998) describes how email and telephone communication have created new modalities of the two early human modes of communication (writing at a distance or speaking face-to-face), thus enabling written messages with zero delay and spoken conversations at a distance. The study finds email communication to be informal, it develops a level conversational playing field, it encourages personal disclosure and it frequently becomes emotional (due to a high potential for misunderstandings). Zineldin (2000) argues that information technology and business relationship concepts are more or less inseparable, and that technology should be at the core of both business-to-consumer and business-to-business marketing efforts.

2.4 Regulation in Swedish Service Industries

2.4.1 Regulation in the Auditing Industry

Swedish law states that all Swedish limited companies (*Aktiebolag*) should have at least one auditor, if the company fulfills two or more of the following conditions:

- For the duration of each of the last two financial years, the average number of employees in the company has exceeded three.
- For the duration of each of the last two financial years, the company's balance sheet total has exceeded 1.5 million SEK.
- For the duration of each of the last two financial years, the company's net revenue has exceeded 3 million SEK.

The main purpose of auditing is to make sure that companies' annual reports can be trusted (Johansson et al. 2010). The auditor therefore scrutinizes the financial reports to make sure that they are established according to Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (*god redovisningssed*). These principles are developed and controlled by the Swedish Accounting Standards Board (*Bokföringsnämnden*) which states the norms for accounting principles and publish them as general councils (*allmänna råd*) in "BFNAR" based on The Book-keeping Act *(Bokföringslag (1999:1078))* and The Annual Accounts Act (*Årsredovisningslag (1995:1554)* (Swedish Accounting Standards Board, 2014).

To direct auditors in their work there are specific laws, such as The Law of Auditing (*Revisionslagen 1999:1079*) and The Law of Auditors (*Revisorslagen 2001:883*). The Law of Auditing is mainly aimed at companies that require auditing and contains rules concerning the tasks of the auditor such as the design of the audit report and what is to be done with it, rules that explain the selection process of an auditor and who is allowed to take the position. An auditor cannot for example have any personal interests in the company; this regulation is designed to reduce bias. There are also rules that state the auditor's liabilities in case of damages on the firm. The Law of Auditors is aimed directly at the auditors and contains rules on who may be recognized approved and authorized auditors, registration of auditor bureaus, rules on foreign auditors, the duties and behavior limitations of auditors and, last but not least, liabilities.

2.4.2 Regulation in the Banking Industry

The banking industry is subject to extensive regulations. The main reason for this is that trust in the system in general, and banks in particular, is a prerequisite for a fully functional financial system. What makes the banking market unique is that the market's collective trust capital is larger than a certain bank has incentive to take into account. There is an overhanging risk that problems in one bank could spread to other banks since people have incomplete information about the values and composition of banks' assets and therefore tend to treat all banks similarly. This can cause collective and simultaneous mass-withdrawal, or make it more difficult for banks to renew their loans on the internal bank market (SOU 1998:160).

In Sweden, the Law on Banking and Financing (*Lag (2004:297) om bank- och finansieringsrörelse*) covers most of the regulations for banking activity. It extends the restrictions stated in the Swedish Companies Act (*Aktiebolagslagen*) for companies in the banking industry. In addition to this, there are several complementary laws. Banks in Sweden also stand under the surveillance of the Financial Supervisory Authority (*Finansinspektionen*) which supervises companies on the financial market. There are also several international authorities that oversee the activities of banks in Sweden, the most influential being the European Banking Authority (EBA) and The Basel Committee on Banking Supervision (Financial Supervisory Authority, 2014).

In short, the law covers three key topics that restrict the activities of banks, all of which are put forward in the Swedish Government Official Reports for regulations and supervision of banks (SOU 1998:160): buffer capital (regulations regarding for example capital coverage and minimum start capital), risk limiting (measures to limit banks' possibilities and motives to take risks threatening their solidity) and transparency (facilitating the possibilities to observe the banks' assets).

2.4.3 Regulation in the Consulting Industry

Consulting firms in Sweden have no other laws and regulations to adhere to other than the general laws affecting all limited companies in Sweden. Several attempts to set up general standards for consulting firms have failed since standardization generally is associated with inefficiency, inertia and old-fashioned bureaucracy (Alexius, 2013), with the only exception being rules for public procurement (PPA). These, however, regulate the clients and their use, selection process and purchasing of consulting services rather than regulating the consultants (Alexius, 2013; Schiele & McCue, 2006). Instead, order in the industry is based mainly on an “informal field order” such as shared norms and values, mutual adjustment, trust etc. (Alexius, 2013).

There are also professional associations of which the most prominent is the Swedish Association of Management Consulting (SAMC). SAMC, according to its bylaws, works in the interest of the industry with the purpose of continuous development, strengthened competence within the field of management consulting, and ensures that a nationally recognized and high ethical standard is maintained (Swedish Association of Management Consulting, 2012). Although this and other similar organizations exist, very few companies are members. For example, less than ten percent of management consulting firms in Sweden are members of a professional association (Alexius, 2013).

2.4.4 Regulation in the Recruitment Industry

As in the consulting industry, recruitment firms have no specific regulations or laws to adhere to when it comes to restrictions of activities. There is one unique law for recruitment firms in Sweden, The Law of Letting (*Lag (2012:854) om uthyrning av arbetstagare*). This law however, pertains to the rights for employees in the industry rather than restrictions of activities for recruitment firms. There are industry organizations in the recruitment industry that have rigorous demands on member firms, the most prominent being the Swedish Staffing Agencies (*Bemanningsföretagen*), whose primary task is to ensure a continuously functioning and expanding recruitment industry in Sweden (Swedish Staffing Agencies, 2013). However, submission to these regulations is voluntary.

2.5 Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical framework provided by previous research in the fields of relational marketing, trust and media richness, we have outlined a set of hypotheses to be investigated in our quantitative and qualitative studies. Using state regulation as the main proxy for system trust, we initially want to establish whether regulation is perceived to promote homogeneity of quality in an industry and whether higher levels of system trust are associated with less dependence on interpersonal trust:

- H_{1a}: Industries with a high degree of state regulation perceive a lower degree of differentiation and a higher degree of system trust in the eyes of customers than industries with a low degree of state regulation.

- H_{1b}: Industries with a high degree of state regulation rate interpersonal trust as less important than industries with a low degree of state regulation.

Once the basic relationships between state regulation, industry quality and interpersonal trust have been mapped, we will focus our attention on differences in communication behaviors between industries with high and low degrees of state regulation. More specifically, we expect to see that companies in less regulated industries put higher priority in conforming to customers' communicational preferences, make use of richer means of communication, devote more effort to quick and correct responses to inquiries, and spend more time on informal communication with customers. That is, we hypothesize that companies in highly regulated industries should benefit from system trust, and hence should have less incentive to engage in customer communication outside of that which is perceived to be functional and internally efficient.

- H_2: Compared to industries with a high degree of state regulation, industries with a low degree of state regulation puts higher priority in conforming to communicational preferences of customers.

- H_3: Compared to industries with a high degree of state regulation, industries with a low degree of state regulation make more use of richer media when communicating with costumers.

- H_4: Compared to industries with a high degree of state regulation, industries with a low degree of state regulation devote more effort to prompt and correct response to inquiries and make more use of minutes, reminders and confirmations.

- H_5: Compared to industries with a high degree of state regulation, industries with a low degree of state regulation devote more effort to informal communication and activities with customers.

3. Method

This section serves to account for the approaches and methods used in order to gather information and produce this thesis. We will first discuss the general approach to the studies. We will then move on to account for the design of the pre-study as well as the two main studies. Afterwards, we will present how our variables are measured and a discussion about validity and reliability in the studies.

3.1 Chosen Approach

Since our thesis involve both mapping differences in communication behavior between industries and determining the underlying motivations behind these differences, both a quantitative and a qualitative study have been necessary. We therefore implement a *method triangulation* , i.e. combined approach, in order to take advantage of the benefits of the individual research methods (Hair et al., 2007). Moreover, our approach involves elements of both inductive and deductive reasoning.

The strengths of a quantitative research method are that it provides information about how spread a phenomenon is, and whether the prevalence differs between populations (Tufte, 2011). Hence, the quantitative study will provide us with information about how prevalent certain phenomena are and to what extent this prevalence differs between industries. It will, however, not say anything about the underlying reasons for these differences.

That is why it is necessary to carry out a qualitative study. The strengths of a qualitative study is that it seeks to interpret or make sense of phenomena and their underlying meanings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Rather than asking ‘how much’, qualitative research asks ‘what’, ‘why’ and ‘how’ (Ritchie et al. 2014). This will allow us to investigate the underlying reasons to the results of the quantitative study.

Deductive reasoning origins in a conceptual framework which is applied on empirism. The results can thereafter be used to test hypotheses. Inductive reasoning, however, origins in empirism, and the data collected serves to build theory. Based on this information hypotheses may be developed (Hair et al., 2007). A combined approach allows us to, based on our theoretical framework, develop hypotheses that we test in the quantitative part, and, building on these findings, use the information in the qualitative part to develop hypotheses for the visible differences in communication behaviors.

3.2 Research Design

The study consisted of three different elements: A pre-study, a qualitative study and a quantitative study.

3.2.1 Selection of Researched Industries

Since we aspired to examine communication behavior based on two different types of trust, it was crucial to determine a just sample to mirror this. In order to ensure that the answers were not industry-specific, we had to pick at least two companies in each regulation category, i.e. four industries in total. Furthermore, we had to look at two companies within each industry in order to ensure that the industry results were not idiosyncratic for one specific company. This led us to aim at examining eight different companies from four different industries in two trust categories in total.

Corresponding to the assumption of highly regulated industries as acting as a basis for system trust and conversely, of largely unregulated industries to depend more heavily on interpersonal trust, our selection aimed to pinpoint industries from the extreme ends of the regulation continuum to investigate. We arrived at on the one hand banks and auditing firms (representing highly regulated service industries) as representatives for system-trust based industries, and on the other hand management/IT consultants and recruitment consultants (representing largely unregulated service industries) as representatives for industries based on interpersonal trust.

3.2.2 Pre-study

In preparation for the primary interview sessions, we had developed an interview structure and a draft for the survey that we felt necessary to put to the test and assess before commencing the principal study.

Therefore, two pre-study interviews were conducted with company representatives with extensive experience of B2B relations. The principal objective of the pre-study was to prepare ourselves for the main interviews by ensuring that our questions were understood correctly and that answers were informative. Another purpose of the pre-studies was for us to become more comfortable in the interview situation. We therefore assessed that we did not need to choose subjects within the service industry. Hence, we chose the interview subjects out of easy access and convenience, so as not to affect our sample of relevant subjects for the main study, and, most importantly, to carry out the pre-study as soon as possible in order to have sufficient time for the main study. The two pre-study interview subjects were:

- Öystein Aksnes, Segment Director, General Packaging Consumer Board, Stora Enso (14.03.04)
- Staffan Ceder, Head of Corporate Communications & Marketing at Permobil (14.03.07)

Both of us were present at both occasions. One of the interviews was recorded and one was not in order to examine the possibilities of using different means of documenting the interviews.

The outcomes of the pre-studies was principally establishing our respective roles in the interview context, with one of us focusing on documenting, and one focusing on keeping up a smooth and rewarding discussion in terms of investigating the aspects interesting for our study. We also decided to both record the interview and document it on site in order not to lose any information, maintain credibility, and at the same time be efficient in our work.

Another finding from the pre-study was the need to specify more clearly what information we were looking for, since to begin with our subjects tended to start talking about marketing communication rather than personal communication. Furthermore, we narrowed down the investigated business relationships to ones involving Swedish customers in order to avoid accounting for differences in intercultural communication. We also became more aware of the differences in communication behaviors toward customers of high importance and companies of lower importance which made us clearly specify what customer companies were relevant for our study. Another measure we took as a consequence of the pre-study was to exclude the fax as an investigated means of communication since the it was perceived to be entirely obsolete.

The impact of the pre-study on the quantitative study was marginal. The greatest alteration made as a consequence of the pre-study was removing the fax completely from the survey. We instead chose to add “letters” as a means of communication to be investigated. As in the qualitative study, we added clear instructions concerning the type of business relationship we were interested in, as well as which types of business customers were relevant for our study, in order to ensure that respondents gave relevant answers to our study and never felt confused at the aim of a question.

3.2.3 Qualitative Study

Since we were mainly interested in everyday communication in long-term relations between service companies and large company customers, it was crucial to arrange interviews with subjects on relevant positions. Hence we aimed to delimit ourselves to Account Managers or positions with equivalent relationships vis-à-vis business customers, although this was not always feasible in practice. Our aim was to conduct eight interviews (two interviews for each of the four branches), but in the cases where we managed to attract more than two companies, we chose to carry out more, in order to further stabilise the foundation of our research. We ended up with three banks, three auditing firms, two recruitment firms and one consulting firm. The subjects interviewed for the main study were (in chronological order):

- Britta Rosenqvist, Head of Third Party Distribution at Avanza Bank (14.03.10)
- Annelie Barklind Wranne, Sales Executive at CapGemini (14.03.10)
- Jonas Dahlborn, Account Manager at SEB (14.03.13)
- Lars-Erik Mohsen, Account Manager at Academic Work (14.03.13)
- Daniel Johansson, Sales Executive at Adecco (14.03.17)
- Anders Fornstedt, Office Manager at Mazars (14.03.25)
- Didrik Roos, Partner at Deloitte (14.03.25)
- Peter Strandh, Partner at EY (14.03.28)
- Christer Örtegren, Office Manager at Handelsbanken (14.03.31)

Both of us were present at all interviews, and all interviews were recorded, but in order to render the process of summarizing the nine interviews more efficient, we also took extensive notes during the interview sessions. The interviews lasted for between 45 and 60 minutes and all main study interviews were conducted at the subjects' working premises for their convenience.

Since the main goal of the interviews was to extract information that could not be obtained through a survey, we mainly focused on motivations behind communicational behavior, reflections on observed communication patterns and specific situations when communication behaviors have played an important part in the development of customer relationships.

3.2.4. Quantitative Study

The quantitative study was a survey carried out and distributed using the online tool Qualtrics. To find respondents, a snowball sample was implemented. The reason was that it may be useful to facilitate the location of rare populations (Hair et. al. 2007) such as our sought profile. The invitation to participate in the quantitative study was extended simultaneously with the invitation to the qualitative study. Thereby, each company agreed to identify at least 15 respondents (except for one company, for which the relevant population was too small). The point of gathering at least 15 respondents from each company was to reach 30 respondents within every industry, so as to be able to assume normal distribution in every industry and consequently be able to perform desired statistical comparisons (Hair et al. 2007). In the cases when possible, we sent the link directly to the chosen respondents via email, while otherwise we sent the link to a contact in the company who distributed the link. You can find the survey enclosed in Appendix 7.3. Prior to distribution, the final version of the survey, which consisted of 26 questions, was presented to a small sample who could give us insightful feedback. The survey was distributed in the end of March, 2014.

3.3 Investigated Variables

In order to map the differences in communication behavior between industries, and to test the explanatory power of system trust and interpersonal trust, the questions in our quantitative study focused on a set of general themes outlined below:

Communication frequency and means of communication: In order to find out the relative usage frequency of different means of communication, we included questions regarding the perceived frequency and the relative time allocated to six of them (email, phone calls, face-to-face meetings, letters, texting, video-based conferencing). The overall time spent on communicating with individual business customers was also broken down into categories of customer importance.

Content and perceived importance of communication factors: In order to find out whether there were differences in the communication behaviors of different industries, we designed two questions mapping the importance of various properties of communication with customers (quick response, correct information, correct language, right degree of formality) as well as how frequently some elements are included in such communication (e.g. confirmations of received inquiries, reminders of upcoming interactions, minutes/summaries from previous interactions).

Informal communication and activities: To assess the extent of non-business related communication and activities between firms and business customers, two questions were asked regarding this.

Perceptions of trust-building: In order to find out if the choice of communication media is perceived to affect the levels of trust in the business relationship, we included one question on the subject to be explored further in the qualitative study.

Perceptions of internal efficiency: The perceived relative time and cost efficiency of six different means of communication was investigated in two questions. The intention was to find out whether there are discrepancies in the perceived efficiency and the de facto choice of communication media, which could then possibly be attributed to concerns regarding credibility and trust-building in the eyes of the customer.

Choice motivations: In order to be able to pinpoint if concerns about trust-building influences the choice of communication media, one question investigated which factors are considered important in this choice. The alternatives (being time efficient, being unintrustive, building trust, reducing ambiguity/confusion, using the customer' preferred means of communication, being cost efficient) built on pre-study findings to be explored further in the qualitative study.

Degree of state regulation: In order to validate our conceptualization of industries as either loosely or tightly regulated two questions investigated the perceived degree of regulation in the various industries. This complements the theoretical foundation provided in Section 2.4 in forming the foundation for our distinction between industries as highly regulated or less regulated.

Differentiation and trust-implications of regulation: In order to assess whether regulation in some respect guarantees a certain level of quality in service industries, we designed three questions. One investigated the perceived effect of regulation on customer trust in the respondent's firm, while another mapped how differentiated the industry is perceived to be by customers and a third to which extent customers perceive there to be unserious actors in the industry.

Interpersonal trust and alternative explanatory variables: In order to measure how important interpersonal trust is perceived to be in relation to other explanatory variables, one question explored the importance of the customer trusting various aspects of the company ([the respondent] personally, [the respondent's] colleagues, the company brand, the company methods, the company track record, the company values). Interpersonal trust was also covered in a proxy variable by asking about the likelihood of business customers following a resigning employee to a competitor. These questions were investigated further in the qualitative study.

Descriptive information: Concluding the survey, we asked for the gender, industry and seniority (both in terms of how long the respondent has worked for the company in question and in terms of how long he/she has worked in roles with business-to-business contacts). We also included a question regarding how many companies the respondent is in regular contact with.

3.4 Credibility

In order to evaluate the quality of the study it is crucial to consider the reliability and validity thereof. First off, the choice to conduct a *method triangulation*, i.e. executing almost the same study using both a qualitative and a quantitative approach (Hair et al. 2007), provides strengthened reliability and validity. This will therefore be assessed for both approaches below.

3.4.1 Reliability of Study

Reliability is defined by Hair et al. (2007) as "when a scale or a question consistently measures a concept".

As for the qualitative study, reliability is measured in the consistency of wording and phrasing in the execution of the interviews (Hair et al. 2007). Since the development of the first interview layout, questions have remained the same. The fact that interviews were both recorded and summarized on the spot creates a reliable foundation that the results presented in this thesis are as close to the original verdict as possible. Some interpretations and underlying assumptions in the minds of the researchers are difficult to account for and may influence the results (Silverman 2010) which would call for inclusion of tape recordings or detailed transcriptions to allow the reader to develop his own interpretation of the interviews. Due to the chosen treatment of anonymity, we have opted for not doing so, and this consequently remains an issue of reliability.

The reliability for the survey conducted must also be scrutinized. Reliability in this context indicates that measurement errors are reduced (Osborne 2008), as well as that results are consistent in repeated studies (Hair et al. 2007). To ensure reliability of results, we used method triangulation to confirm results both in the quantitative and the qualitative setting. However, since our study is explorative in its nature, the variables we measure aim as much to identify areas that indicate significant differences between industries as to measure them. As this requires a broad setup of many different variables, some of which may or may not generate notable differences, prioritizing internal consistency reliability over versatility has in some cases been judged to be counter-productive to our task.

3.4.2 Validity of Study

According to Hair et al. (2007) validity is when "a construct measures what it is supposed to measure". The optimal way to measure validity would hence be to compare the obtained results with the "real" results, but since no such results exist, we need to take other measures to assess validity.

Because of the nature of qualitative studies, validity cannot be calculated (Hair et al. 2007). It is still crucial to keep it in mind since there is a distinct risk of so called *anecdotalism* in qualitative studies, i.e. that the study rather is based on a few examples that have been chosen since they fit the researchers aim, than the entire data set. The study would therefore not rest on a foundation of critical investigation (Silverman 2010). One should of course always try to maintain an as objective stance as possible towards the study, but this may not guarantee complete validity. The principal approach to validity in this study is the method triangulation that effectively prevents researchers from drawing conclusions solely from the qualitative study. In addition to this, to the farthest extent possible more than one representative from each industry have been interviewed which reduces the risk of taking answers from one individual as representative for the entire industry (see discussion in Section 3.2.1).

As for the quantitative study, there is a need to look at both the internal and the external validity of the study. Internal validity is assessed by looking at the independent and the dependent variable and their connection. That is to say; *do changes in the independent variable cause changes in the dependent variable or could there be other factors affecting the outcome?* (Flick, 2011) To ensure internal validity, we have delimited ourselves to studying people in similar positions and with similar responsibilities as far as possible, and we have carried out our study entirely within the service industry to account for possible systematic differences in communication behaviors. Delimiting ourselves to long-term relationships between Swedish companies prevents us from possible influence deriving from cultural differences and possible differences in relationship stages. We have also investigated several alternative explanatory variables that could possibly account for differences in outcomes of the quantitative and qualitative study, including seniority, time spent on communicating with customers, the relative time devoted to different customer segments, number of customers, alternative concepts for trust, alternative choice motivations and the number of touch points between companies. Often, the causal relationship between these and other measures have been explored through the qualitative study.

External validity is linked to the possibilities to extend the results of the study to other conditions, such as other subjects or other points in time (Flick 2011). Referring to the discussion on researched industries in Section 3.2.1, considerations have been taken to ensure generalizability of results for the industries and the trust categories. The sample size is, however, small; when the survey was closed 79 surveys were completed, with 135 surveys started in total. As Bachmann (2010) points out, it is crucial to regard the specific cultural and institutional contexts when developing methodological approaches for studies concerning trust - the reason being that trust is closely intertwined with cultural traditions and institutions. This will limit the generalizability of the study to the Swedish market.

The study used a snowball sample, which implies some dependence on the judgment and interpretation contact person at the company in choosing respondents. Clear guidelines on the profile should have mitigated this issue.

3.4.3 Treatment of Anonymity

While respondents in the quantitative survey have been guaranteed full anonymity through the course of the study, all of the people we interviewed accepted to have their name and company included under the condition that their answers were only used in an aggregated context. Hence, no quotes in the study are linked to individual interviews.

The inclusion of names, positions and companies of participants instead aims to provide transparency into the possible effect on validity by the selection of brands and professional roles. It is possible that strong brands could distort the results by being sources of system trust on their own, and hence we want to open the comparability of their strength to discussion. Likewise, different professional roles may be accompanied by different perspectives on communication with customers, which makes the transparency of this selection as important.

4. Results

In this section we will present the results of both the qualitative study as well as the quantitative study. Firstly, results of the in-depth interviews will be put forward. Then, the findings from the survey will be presented. In the presentation of the qualitative results triggering events identified in the interviews will also be summarized.

Table 1: Planned and actual number of participants in the qualitative and quantitative study

	Number of participants	Plan
Qualitative study		
	# of companies	*# of companies*
Auditing	3	2
Bank/finance	3	2
Management/IT consulting	1	2
Recruitment	2	2
Total	**9**	**8**
Quantitative study		
	# of respondents	*# of respondents*
Auditing	17	30
Bank/finance	31	30
Management/IT consulting	15	30
Recruitment	16	30
Total	**79**	**120**
	# of respondents	
Incomplete answers (missing industry)	56	
Surveys started in total	**135**	

4.1 Qualitative Study: Interview Findings

Throughout our interviews, we discovered some behaviors and motivations that were generally held by interview subjects in all or most of the industries, as well as some that were brought up predominantly in either one of the industries or one of the two regulation categories. In this section we aim to highlight the similarities and differences we found in key areas of investigation.

On an overall note, interview subjects mentioned a variety of aims with their communication toward long-term business customers. Companies in all industries cited the maintenance of important customers rather than simply functional purposes, and many related their reasoning to the notion of investment in long-term business relationships being less costly than finding new customers. Among the banks and auditing firms, achieving mutual understanding for the customer needs and the products offered were a commonly cited aim. Representatives of auditing firms in particular tended to be relatively functional in their approach to the question, focusing more on the content of the communication.

There was general consensus regarding the means of communication used across industries, although the relative frequency of usage varied between companies. Telephone, emails and face-to-face meetings were the main means of communication across all companies, trailed by some mentions of text messaging (SMS) and video conferences.

Telephone was used frequently across all industries, although different interview subjects mentioned different purposes and different benefits and risks in using it. Among banks and auditing firms, telephone communication was a preferred channel when discussing complex or sensitive information with customers. In addition, information associated with strong emotions or a possible negative reaction from a customer was always communicated via phone. In contrast, firms in consulting and recruitment tended to use communication via telephone to follow up and coordinate on issues via personal dialogue. Across all industries, motivations for telephone communication gravitated around what was perceived to be a lesser risk of misunderstanding than written communication.

Regarding the usage of email communication, there was a general consensus across the interview subjects in both industry categories. Email was perceived to work best for simple information and such information that had a low risk of being misunderstood. It is quickly noticed and responded to by the customer, with most interview subjects expecting answers to their emails during the course of the day it was sent. Additionally, the automatic documentation email communication provides was mostly viewed favorably. In a more negative context, email was generally perceived to have a high risk of misunderstanding both in terms of information and tonality.

Face-to-face meetings were highly prioritized across all industries, but the aims of them varied slightly. Similarly to the usage of telephone communication, banks and auditing firms frequently cited face-to-face meetings as fitted for complex, sensitive and possibly negatively loaded issues. Representatives from the recruitment and management/IT consulting industries were relatively more prone to highlight relation-building aspects of face-to-face meetings and the personal touch it is perceived to bring. In recruitment firms, the number of face-to-face meetings with customers was stated to be used as a performance measure in itself. In both industries, most companies said that meetings are held at the customers' premises.

Of the less frequently used means of communication, texting (SMS) was primarily used for short notifications regarding meetings, delays, confirmations and reminders. In both trust categories, it was also perceived to be the least intrusive way of communicating in evenings and on weekends. Some held texting to be unsuitable for business conversation, with particularly interview subjects from auditing firms viewing it as improper for their professional role. Video conferencing was sometimes used by firms in various industries, but due to poor technological compatibility it was rarely used to communicate with customers. Letters were only mentioned occasionally for functional purposes such as sending contracts, while fax was not used by any interviewee and personal communication via social media was only mentioned once (LinkedIn messaging).

When asked about more informal interaction (that is, without a stated business purpose) with business customers, most companies shared similar setups which involved sending Christmas and summer greetings via letter, as well as meeting customers for lunches, seminars, lectures and mingles. Although the settings were held to be less formal, the interactions were normally business-related and the purpose was to establish a personal touch, build personal relationships and learn what customers are interested in. There was some distinction between the venues chosen for these interactions, with some of the bank/auditing representatives claiming that museums and exhibitions were more suitable venues in regard to their professional role than e.g. sports events.

There was widespread agreement across industries regarding the desirable content and properties of communication with business customers. All interview subjects stated that quickness of response is crucial when communicating with customers and many had seen additional indications of this in customer satisfaction surveys. In the domain of email, a confirmation that an inquiry has been noticed and will be tended to was usually perceived to suffice. The recruitment industry stood out in their quick-response policies, which require employees to respond within a few hours. In most other industries, 24 hours was an accepted response time.

Although short response times were important, all interview subjects considered correct information to be essential. Many cited the importance of not promising something that cannot be delivered. Correctness of information was especially prioritized by representatives from the auditing industry, where auditors are likely to be held accountable for misinformation.

Correctness of language was generally held as important, but representatives from banks and auditing firms particularly considered it essential. Many of them cited the expectations customers have of the professional roles in their industries. Finding the right degree of formality was viewed as equally important, which also became more prominent in auditing firms and banks. Some mention the expectations from customers that their industries should be “gray and dull”, and auditing representatives also highlighted that their professional role requires them to remain independent in regard to the customer. Although some companies claim to position themselves as exceptions to their “gray” competitors, they acknowledge that such expectations do exist among customers. Both correctness of language and formality were generally held to be of most importance in early stages of a business relationship.

When asked about the degree to which communication behaviors were perceived to be idiosyncratic for their industries, auditing firm representatives tended to once again emphasize the formality expected in their line of business along with the relatively large extent to which regulation sets standards for how to communicate certain pieces of information. Bank representatives tended to highlight a collaborative approach toward solving customers’ problems rather than trying to convince customers of buying certain services. The recruitment and management/IT consulting firms did not provide a unified picture of how their industries differ from others, and to a large extent played down the uniqueness of the features they mentioned.

In all four industries, there was disagreement on the relative importance of customers’ trust in the interview subject personally as opposed to trust in the firm brand. All interview subjects highlighted the importance of both interpersonal trust and trust in the company brand as well as the interconnections between the two, and in both industry categories the conclusions were roughly evenly split. Many interview subjects noted that the brand establishes a basic trust for the processes used by the company and that interpersonal trust becomes more important in individual projects. There was a slight difference in how interchangeable employees were perceived to be, with a couple of interviewees in the bank/auditing category noting how the brand can remain strong even if an employee is perceived as slightly lazy. In the consulting/recruitment category, the importance of switching people involved in a customer contact when there is disagreement was instead noted. All four industries reported that business customers occasionally follow when an employee in charge of customer contacts (e.g. an account manager) leaves for a competitor.

There was variation in the number of employees reported to be in continuous contact with each customer company. Banks generally reported relatively few employees being in contact with the customer, with one person being mainly responsible for communicating with one to three people on the customer side when dealing with large organizations (although with many experts working in the sidelines). Auditing firms had a span of six-seven up to 20-30 employees communicating with a large business customer, with everything from three to 20-30 employees being active on the client side. The recruitment and management/IT consulting firms reported many people to be involved on each side, with one assessment being around 20 employees communicating with as many of the customers' staff.

Among representatives from both auditing firms and banks, there was consensus on that the respective industries are tightly regulated. Most interview subjects also agreed that the customers' knowledge of this creates a certain amount of trust for the firms in their industry from the get-go, and that few doubt the competence of firms in it. There was also a common opinion of the bank sector as being overregulated, with one interviewee noting that customers' trust in banks predates present levels of regulation. There was nonetheless a broad support for the role of regulation in protecting customers against bank competition driving cut-downs on internal quality standards.

In recruitment and management/IT consulting firms, representatives agreed that their industries were relatively loosely regulated. In addition, this was perceived to lead to a larger amount of unserious competitors on the market, although rarely ones lasting over time. To differentiate the own brand from less legitimate actors the interviewed firms tended to pursue various external quality certifications, along with relying on their strong brands to raise them above the competition.

4.2 Qualitative Study: Triggering Events

In order to map the perceived benefits and risks of various means of communication, the interview subjects were asked to list specific events in which their way of communicating with a business customer was perceived to have led the business relationship to improve or deteriorate significantly. Pooling answers from all the industries, this part of the qualitative study aimed to complement media richness theory in distinguishing the motivations for using various means of communication. By establishing a common framework for the relational benefits and risks of using various means of communication - much in the vein of media richness continuums outlining objective differences in information richness of various mediums (e.g. Lengel & Daft, 1984; Trevino et al.,1990) - differences in actual usage should reflect sought communication benefits instead of conflicting expectations about the effects of different usages. This view was not rejected by our interview findings, as general motivations behind usage was shared but sought effects and intended customer reaction differed (as outlined in Section 4.1).

The discovered triggering events are presented in Appendix 7.1 (events perceived to have led to negative effects on the business relationship) and Appendix 7.2 (events perceived to have led to positive effects on the business relationship). More generally, three themes were prominent:

- Although the interview subjects were asked for specific events (permitted to be presented in an unspecific matter as to protect sensitive information), most answered in terms of more generally occurring events. Some of the answers involved scenarios that were perceived to be highly likely, although without indicating whether they had actually occurred or not.

- The general motivations and perceived risks and benefits in using various means of communication were often held across several of the industries, although views on the benefits sought and the risks that were perceived to be most essential to avoid differed in many cases.

- Triggering events that had a negative impact on the business relationship were devoted much attention, while positive ones were scarcely mentioned. Most of the positive impact from communication was positioned as a response to a negative event having occurred.

4.3 Quantitative Study: Survey Findings

The survey generated complete responses by a total of 79 respondents , of which 48 belonged to the highly regulated category (banks and auditing firms) and 31 belonged the less regulated category (management/IT consulting and recruitment firms). For questions where responses from both industry categories have been analyzed as one pool, otherwise valid responses lacking information on industry belonging have been allowed, allowing the number to exceed 79. Questions which do not measure actual quantitative information (such as numbers of customers, hours spent communicating and so forth) have used an interval scale (1-7) except where noted. The highly regulated industry category has been denoted *h* and less regulated industry category has been denoted *l*. The full survey can be found in Appendix 7.3.

Efforts were made to ensure that respondents held equivalent roles in their respective companies, the result of which was further validated in that there were no significant differences between industry categories in the number of hours spent communicating with business customers. There was however differences in seniority between industry categories: 54.2% of respondents in the highly regulated industries had been at their companies for ten years or more, while the equivalent percentage for the less regulated industries was 16.1%. Similarly, 55.3% in the highly regulated category reported to have worked in roles with business-to-business contact for ten years or more, with the less regulated industries coming in at 32.3%. Furthermore, there was a significant difference in the number of business customers the respondents kept regular contact with, with highly regulated industries averaging 75.6 customers and less regulated industries averaging 45.9 (T-test, $p < 0.05$, $\mu h - \mu l = 29.7$).

Perceived degree of regulation, differentiation and interpersonal trust

The survey results validated our conceptualization of the bank and auditing industries as highly regulated and the management/IT consulting and recruitment industries as less regulated. The results support that there is a significant difference in how tightly regulated banks/auditing firms perceive their own industries to be in comparison to how consulting/recruitment firms perceive theirs (Mann-Whitney, $p < 0.01$; $\mu h - \mu l = 1.54$)[1]. When each respondent was asked about the extent of regulation in all of the four industries, results were along similar lines (Table 2).

Table 2: Perceived degree of state regulation by industry (pooled sample)

	Bank/finance	Management/IT consulting	Recruitment	Auditing/accounting
N	77	77	76	76
μ	6.42	4.04	3.96	6.11

There was a significant difference between industry categories in the extent to which they believed customers perceived there to be unserious actors in their industries (T-test, $p < 0.05$; $\mu h - \mu l = -0.96$). In addition, at the 0.1 significance level, highly regulated companies believed customers perceived lower levels of within-industry differentiation than less regulated companies did (T-test, $p < 0.10$; $\mu h - \mu l = -0.53$). There was also a significant difference in the perceived effects of regulation on trust in the company, with highly regulated companies indicating that regulation in their industry has a more positive effect on customers' trust (T-test, $p < 0.01$; $\mu h - \mu l = 0.90$).

None of the variables intended to measure interpersonal trust found any significant differences between industry categories. Highly regulated industries had only slightly lower means than less regulated industries in perceived importance of customer trust in the respondent personally ($\mu h - \mu l = -0.15$), his/her colleagues ($\mu h - \mu l = -0.11$), and the likeliness of customers following an employee to a

[1] Ordinal scale (1-5)

competitor (μh - μl = - 0.07). Neither was there any significant difference between industry categories regarding the importance of customer trust in other areas of the company.

Hence, *support is found for H_{1a}*, with lower degrees of differentiation and more positive impact on trust from regulation being perceived by highly regulated industries than less regulated industries. However, *H_{1b} is rejected*, as we found no significant difference in perceived importance of interpersonal trust between highly regulated industries and less regulated industries.

Media usage and choice motivations

For the majority of the means of communications included in the survey, there were significant differences between industry categories in their usage frequency when communicating with business customers. The less regulated industries scored significantly higher on usage of face-to-face communication (T-test, $p < 0.01$; μl - μh = 1.29), texting (T-test, $p < 0.05$; μl - μh = 0.93) and video conferencing (Mann-Whitney, $p < 0.01$; μl - μh = 1.15), while scoring lower than the highly regulated industries on usage of letters (Mann-Whitney, $p < 0.01$; μl - μh = - 0.97). There was no significant difference in usage frequency of email (μl - μh = - 0.27) and telephone (μl - μh = 0.2) when communicating with customers.

The relative usage of different means of communication is further validated by the percentage of time communicating assigned to each by respondents (Table 3).

Table 3: Relative time spent on using different media when communicating with business customers

		Email	Phone	Face-to-face	Letters	Texting (SMS)	Video-conferencing
High regulation	N	48	48	48	48	48	48
	μ (%)	43,6%	26,0%	25,1%	3,2%	1,4%	0,7%
Low regulation	N	31	31	31	31	31	31
	μ (%)	32,9%	26,4%	34,0%	0,1%	2,3%	4,4%

When choosing means of communication, there were no significant differences between industry categories in the perceived importance of building trust (μl - μh = 0.32), being unintrusive (μl - μh = - 0.36), using the customers' preferred means of communication (μl - μh = 0.05) or reducing ambiguity/confusion (μl - μh = - 0.07). There were however significant differences between industry categories in the priority assigned to cost efficiency (T-test, $p < 0.01$; μl - μh = - 1.42) and, on the 10%

significance level, time efficiency (T-test, $p < 0.10$; $\mu l - \mu h = -0.56$), with highly regulated industries ranking them higher.

To explore the collective perceptions of time efficiency, cost efficiency and effects on trust in different means of communications, we pooled the samples and ranked the means for the respective variables from highest to lowest. Tables 4, 5 and 6 present the ranks along with the results of paired T-test comparisons between the ranked means.

In regard to the hypotheses, *H_2 is rejected*, as there is neither statistical support for differences in perceived importance of conforming to customers' communicational preferences, nor support for a second variable that prioritizes customer efficiency rather than internal efficiency (being unintrusive). It should be noted that some evidence point to less prioritization of internal efficiency in less regulated industries, with time efficiency and cost efficiency being viewed as significantly less important than in highly regulated ones.

At the same time, *support is found for H_3*, with usage frequency of face-to-face communication and video conferencing being significantly higher in the less regulated industries than in the highly regulated ones. At the same time less expected differences arose in terms of significantly higher usage frequency of texting and significantly lower usage frequency of letters in less regulated industries.

Table 4: Perceived time efficiency of different means of communication

Time efficiency				
Means of communication	**N**	**μ**	**Significance**	**Significance**
Phone	82	5.78		
			N.s.	
Email	83	5.48		p < 0.01 (phone, face-to-face)
			N.s.	
Face-to-face	82	5.1		
			p < 0.01	
Video conference	81	4.35		
			N.s.	
Texting (SMS)	80	4.03		
			p < 0.01	
Letters	79	2.09		

Table 5: Perceived cost efficiency of different means of communication

Cost efficiency				
Means of communication	**N**	**μ**	**Significance**	**Significance**
Phone	82	5,9		
			N.s.	
Email	83	5,81		
			p < 0.01	
Video conference	81	4,75		
			N.s.	
Texting (SMS)	81	4,68		p < 0.10 (video conference, face-to-face)
			N.s.	
Face-to-face	82	4,29		
			p < 0.01	
Letters	81	2,95		

Table 6: Perceived effect on trust in using different means of communication

Effect on trust			
Means of communication	**N**	**μ**	**Significance**
Face-to-face	87	6.74	
			p < 0.01
Phone	87	5.89	
			p < 0.01
Email	86	5.12	
			p < 0.05
Video conference	85	4.78	
			p < 0.01
Letters	85	4.11	
			N.s
Texting (SMS)	86	4.1	

Quickness and correctness of response and elements included in email communication

There were no significant differences in the perceived importance of quick response (μh - μl = 0.13), correct information (μh - μl = - 0.06), correct language (μh - μl = 0.27) and right degree of formality (μh - μl = 0.00) in communication with business customers between the industry categories. In email communication, there were not any significant differences in the inclusion of minutes/summaries from previous interactions (μh - μl = - 0.31) and reminders of upcoming meetings or events (μh - μl = - 0.07) between industry categories. The same applied to use of confirmations of having received an inquiry even when it does not require an answer (μh - μl = - 0.14), confirmations of having received an inquiry and that it will be tended to later (μh - μl = - 0.23) and confirmations of having received an inquiry along with an estimation of when it will be tended to (μh - μl = - 0.16).

Hence, H_4 is rejected. We found no significant differences between industry categories in the effort devoted to either prompt and correct responses to inquires or to the establishment of shared expectations through the use of minutes, reminders and confirmations.

Informal activities and communication

In regard to contacting business customers for informal or non-work related purposes, there was no significant difference between industries (μl - μh = 0.03)[2]. However, the less regulated industries reported a significantly higher tendency to invite business customers to informal activities such as lunches, after-works or day activities (Mann-Whitney, $p < 0.05$, μl - μh = 0.64)[3].

Therefore, *some support is found for H_5*. While there were no differences in use of informal communication with business customers, less regulated industries show a stronger tendency of inviting customers to informal activities.

[2] Ordinal scale (1-7)
[3] Ordinal scale (1-7)

5. Discussion and Implications

This section is dedicated to a discussion about the findings in our qualitative and quantitative study, followed by an account for the possible shortcomings of our study. To conclude, we briefly comment the academic and managerial implications of our study.

5.1 Supported Conclusions

5.1.1 Support for State Regulation as a Generator of System Trust

The study found support for the hypothesis that a higher degree of state regulation can generate system trust in an industry, at least as perceived by people within the industries themselves (which, we would argue, is a more relevant factor in guiding communication behavior than the de facto perceptions of customers). In the quantitative study, there was significant support for the notion that highly regulated industries perceive a positive effect on trust, which can be attributed to the fact that companies believe customers perceive there to be fewer unserious actors and less differentiation in their industries. This was also confirmed in the qualitative study, where interview subjects noted differences in the prevalence of unserious actors as well as less customer doubt toward the competence of companies in highly regulated industries. This lends support to our conceptualization of state regulation as a generator of the system trust described by Luhmann (1979).

5.1.2 Differences in Communication Behaviors and Motivations

The study found mixed support for differences in communication behaviors between the highly regulated and less regulated industry categories. The quantitative study found no significant differences in the importance ascribed to correctness of information or formality or language, nor any significant differences in the use of minutes/summaries, reminders or confirmations in email communication. The qualitative study gave some indication of stricter policies for quick response to customer inquiries in the less regulated industries, but the quantitative study did not support differing views of its importance.

There was however significant support for differences in the usage of different communication media. Most importantly, the less regulated industries had a significantly higher usage frequency of face-to-face communication and video conferencing, which can be argued to be the two richest media available for personal communication. This argumentation is supported by the media richness continuum outlined by Lengel & Daft (1984) and added onto by Trevino et al. (1990) and Carlson et al. (2004). This finding is interesting as richer media have the potential to engender more trust (Carlson et al., 2004), which would suggest that less regulated industries may be willing to account for lower levels of system trust by prioritizing those media. This would explain why less regulated industries report higher usage of face-to-face communication, which implies a prioritization of trust over cost efficiency or time efficiency. This is further supported by the less regulated industries emphasizing the relation-building qualities of face-to-face communication in the interview setting, whereas highly regulated industries tended to use face-to-face meetings for complex or sensitive issues. Granted, the quantitative study does not support the view of video conferencing having a trust-building potential equivalent to its position in the media richness continuum among our population, but this may also be due to its perceived poor technological reliability in practice.

It is also interesting to note that the quantitative study indicated that there was a stronger tendency to invite customers for informal activities in less regulated industries. Since this was motivated with personal relationship building in both industries, it hence further indicates a stronger tendency toward building interpersonal trust in less regulated industries. It should however be noted that none of the industry categories was more likely to contact customers for non-work related purposes, which suggests once again that trust building motivations does not change the actual content of the communication.

In regard to the motivations behind the choice of media, the triggering events collected in the qualitative study suggest motivations are mainly negatively reinforced. Despite asking each interview subject both about events that had positive and negative impact on relational quality, answers were overwhelmingly framed in negative terms, as indicated by our tables (which do not reflect the fact that a few generic negative events were mentioned more than once). This suggests that in general, the choice of means of communication is not primarily guided by positive effects on trust, but by reducing the risks of ruining the established trust in the business relationship. In that sense, mutual trust seems to be perceived as the "normal" state in the business-to-business relationship, with less rich media (such as email) posing a risk of misunderstanding that could impact trust negatively.

5.1.3 Mixed Support for Interpersonal Trust as a Mediating Variable

The quantitative study found no significant differences in the importance of interpersonal trust between highly regulated and less regulated industry categories. However, it did not generate any significant differences in alternative mediating variables between system trust and communication behavior either. Although there is certainly a possibility of there being other variables affected by system trust in the form of state regulation that may in turn affect communication behaviors, many of the outcomes of our study (such as the higher propensity of less regulated industries to use the richest two communication mediums, to use face-to-face interaction for relationship building and to invite customers to informal activities) indirectly suggest differing degrees of priority to building interpersonal trust between industries. This is further hinted by the tendency of employees in the less regulated industries to spend more time communicating per customer and to put less priority to time efficiency and cost efficiency in customer communication, although this can certainly also be impacted by other factors.

We are inclined to believe that there are two reasons why no differences in perceived importance of interpersonal trust appeared in the study. Firstly, many interview subjects seem to resort to a normative view on interpersonal trust rather than an assessment of the de facto importance in their respective industry, which could be distorted by interview subjects being in positions and industries where the importance of interpersonal trust border toward being a truism. Granted, if this was the case our proxy variable (customers following employees to competitors) should nevertheless have captured a difference. Secondly, even if system trust is prevalent, within-industry competition is still real, and the establishment of interpersonal trust may still prevent customers from leaving for a competitor - especially since regulation guarantees less differentiation. Because of this, interpersonal trust should indeed be considered a crucial factor by companies the highly regulated industries as well, even if it seems to have less impact on actual communication behavior in practice.

Also, there was a tendency of less regulated industries to build other kinds of system trust to make up for the lack of quality assurance offered by regulation. Interview subjects spoke of voluntary and impartial certifications of quality that their companies had undertaken, as well as of trying to establish similar quality indicators by building their brands. This suggests that there are more ways to confront the lack of industry-wide system trust than by working to establish interpersonal trust only, although our evidence suggests a combined approach.

5.1.4 Potential Impact from Industries with Strong Professional Roles

Throughout the study, we have made another finding that is worth mentioning, as it may impact communication behavior and hence encourage alternative interpretations of our results. Our qualitative study indicated that there may be some impact on communication behaviors from the professional roles associated with some industries. This was most noteworthy in interviews with representatives from the auditing industry, where for example texting (SMS) was not regarded as “fitting” with the perception of the auditing industry and hence was not used. In many ways, this seemed not to be guided by company guidelines, but by strong individual senses of what was acceptable in the specific professional role.

5.5 In Summary

This thesis supports the existence of system trust in highly regulated service industries (i), driven by perceptions of there being less differentiation and less unserious actors in such industries. It also supports differences in communication behaviors between companies in highly regulated versus less regulated industries (iii), with companies in less regulated industries making use of richer media and informal activities while putting less priority into internal cost efficiency and time efficiency. The study indicates that these differences in communication behaviors may be driven by stronger motivations and incentives for less regulated industries to establish interpersonal trust in the face of low levels of system trust, but it does not find conclusive evidence for that being the case (ii).

5.2 Limitations and Shortcomings with the Study

In order to establish what communication behaviors are actually preferred by the business customers it would have been desirable to perform the study on both the supply side and the customer side in the relationships. It may have provided more nuanced answers regarding the actual effect of communication behaviors, as well as insights into what drives perceptions of customer preferences. The limitations in time and resources have however made it impossible for us to include such a study.

Since all the participating companies are of considerable size and consolidated on their respective markets, there may be a risk that there is more system trust prevalent than reflected by the regulation only - the reason being that expectations and trust could be generated by the strong brands of companies, which could lessen the dependence on interpersonal trust even in relatively unregulated industries. This may skew the results of our study. We have seen some indications of this, where less regulated firms refer to the brand as a trust marker similarly to how highly regulated companies referred to regulation. Despite this, we have chosen to target these companies instead of smaller and less established companies, since we needed firms of approximately equal size and structure to make just comparisons. We also required firms with big enough samples of relevant respondents. This possible shortcoming has therefore been reluctantly accepted in order to achieve good comparisons in other aspects.

The number and choice of interviews is also a potential shortcoming. We were unfortunately never able to receive a second interview in the consulting industry despite much effort. There are therefore only three interviews building the qualitative foundation for the less regulated industries. For the highly regulated industries, we were more successful and managed to achieve three interviews in each industry totaling six interviews for highly regulated industries. This fact results in a situation where we much reliably can assess and draw conclusion from the highly regulated side, which may cause a bias. It may also give the answers of the three interviewees on the less regulated side disproportional influence. Fortunately, our method triangulation provided us with quantitative data that balances us from giving too much significance to any single interviewee.

The choice of interviewees has never been entirely in our hands. We have therefore been forced to trust the judgments of our contacts at the respective companies to find suitable subjects. With hindsight, this has however not been a major issue since clear descriptions by us of the desired profile has led to what we perceive as being relevant interviewees. A similar problem is that of selection of respondents of the survey, where we can but trust that our contacts at the firms have understood our account for relevant respondents correctly. There is also a risk that, out of the selected group, a skewed sample has chosen to answer the survey. These are factors that may have affected the results, but measures such as being explicit in descriptions and sending reminders to all respondents about completing the survey should have mitigated the problems.

Another factor that may have influenced the results is possible shortcomings with the formulation and wording of questions, in the interview context as well as in the survey. The pre-studies provided us with insight into situations where risks for misunderstanding were present, which may have mitigated this effect.

5.3 Academic and Managerial Implications

5.7.1 Further Research

Initially, it is important to emphasize that this is an explorative study, which means that we have opted for a broad and sweeping approach with limited possibilities to investigate specific findings deeper. The study rather serves to map the field and identify interesting discrepancies. It would therefore be interesting to see further research into the niches where we have made our main findings.

It would also be of use to redo this study in a larger scale in order to increase external validity and obtain more statistically significant results. With more resources and time, it would be possible to conduct a study including more industries, companies, interviews and survey respondents. It could also include research on the client side and map their views on relationships and communication behaviors.

This study was conducted on rather large firms with strong brands. Since strong brands could be carriers of system trust, it would be of interest to perform a similar study on smaller companies with less established brands in order to remove the possible brand-intrinsic system trust. It would also be interesting to look at early stages of business relationships instead of, as this study does, look at already established relationships. Throughout the course of this study, we have received indications that the degree of system trust may be even more important in the beginning of a relationship.

There may be even more variables that could explain discrepancies in highly regulated and less regulated industries than the ones examined in this study, and there may be more powerful sources of system trust than regulation to make the industry division. Communication behaviors may also be influenced by other factors such as professional roles that seem to work as invisible guidebooks for how to communicate.

5.7.2 Practical implications

Although many companies in our study had beliefs and convictions concerning how personal communication should be carried out, only a few of them actually examined what provides satisfaction to the customers. Foundations for trust building measures could therefore be flawed, which may in some cases even result in overinvestment - if highly regulated industries are indeed subject to system trust, then less building of possibly costly interpersonal trust should be able to take place. An implication of this study is to establish that more reflection by the firm on how personal communication is carried out and how trust is established could result in considerable advantages.

In addition to this, richer means of communication were often not used until a problem in a customer relationship became apparent. However, the qualitative study indicated positive outcomes by being more proactive in choosing media. In the qualitative study, it was strongly indicated that sending emails carries more relational risks than using for example the telephone, as the leanness of the media promotes ambiguity and misunderstanding. Email in particular was identified as a common trigger of negative consequences, while being perceived as no more time or cost efficient than the telephone. The choice of media often seemed to focus on short term efficiency, even though misunderstandings and ambiguity often lead to the necessity of putting in significantly more time and resources later on to sort things out with customers.

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7. Appendix

7.1 Negative Triggering Events

Triggering event	Initial consequence	Response	Result
When a problem occurs, customers are sometimes notified via email prior to it being solved.	Even when an issue has been solved, the content of the email can be re-read by the customer, iterating a negative view of the company.	In the long term, surveys and interviews are used to map and learn from mistakes.	N/A
Answers via email commonly make the message from the sender vague or unclear, especially when telephone or face-to-face communication is rare.	Misunderstandings between company and customer.	Mostly face-to-face meetings to clear out misunderstandings in person.	Both firms end up on the same page.
After agreeing on a contract, a business customer sent a revised edition to be signed without properly noting all the changes that had been made.	Dispute about the contents of the contract and mistrust of the customer in question.	The interview subject called a person higher up in the customer company hierarchy to sort out the situation. That customer representative later flew in by plane for a face-to-face meeting in order to recover the damaged relationship.	The friendship between the firms was quickly recovered, but the customer has not been trusted to make changes to contract drafts without a careful second review since.
Large amounts of information is being emailed back and forth between company and customer.	Information ends up in the wrong places and it is difficult to have a bird's eye view over everything that is sent.	A portal has been built in which workspaces can be set up for collaborating with customers.	The communication with customers has gone from messy to structured and customers are pleased in general.
Communication frequency from account managers from time to time becomes very low.	The customer is left to wonder where the relationship is at and why there is no word from the company.	The company usually "relaunches" the account by assigning clear responsibility for the customer contact (although there are no explicit policies on communication frequency).	The cooperation with customers tends to function better after a relaunch.

Team members in charge of certain customer accounts have frequently been replaced.	Occasionally, poor handover processes mean expectations are communicated badly. Also, the communication style of a new account manager is not always appreciated by the customer, which comes to the attention of the firm sooner or later.	Being chiefly responsible for the team, the interview subject usually calls to initiate an open dialogue and find out the expectations of the customer.	Customers rarely hold grudges and are pleased as long as communicated flaws are fixed.
A customer asked to work with an employee who they had previously been pleased with on a project. After checking within the firm, the employee's availability was confirmed to the customer. Later, it turned out that the employee would remain busy on another project.	The customer had previously felt that their problem had been handled, but now felt that this solution had been taken from them. This led to dissatisfaction.	N/A	The trust could not be recovered.
The level of formality appropriate for a customer is sometimes misjudged, e.g. by sending a poorly formulated email.	If the customer does not share the same view of the formality level in the business relationship, trust can be affected.	N/A	Negative effect on trust in the business relationship.
Face-to-face meetings are occasionally carried out poorly, mainly due to lack of preparation or the wrong attitude from an employee.	The business relationship is sometimes damaged. This was perceived to be a bigger risk in face-to-face meetings than in phone or email communication.	Surveys are sent out and workshops are carried out in cooperation with the customer to find out what to improve.	The cooperation with customers tends to function better.

7.2 Positive Triggering Events

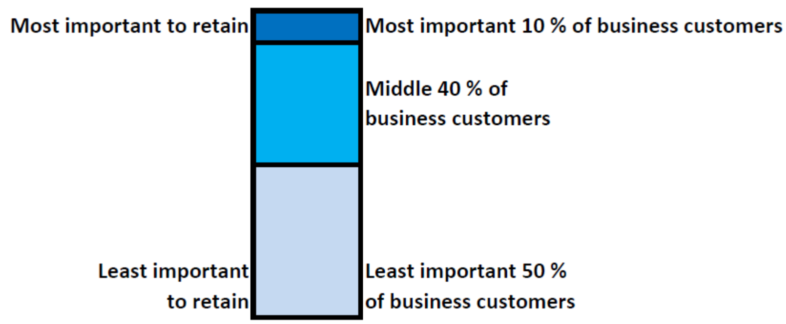
Triggering event	Result
Meetings face-to-face with the customer, where a relationship can be built and not only business is discussed.	Positive effect on business cooperation, although it was stressed that it should not be overstated.
Quick responses to inquiries from the customer via email and telephone, even if it is just an acknowledgement that the message has been received.	Appreciation by the customer, which is commonly indicated in surveys carried out.
Responding to customer dissatisfaction by meeting face-to-face.	A chance to affect the negative view of the company in a positive direction.

7.3 Survey

Welcome to this survey carried out as a part of a bachelor thesis at the Stockholm School of Economics (Handelshögskolan i Stockholm).

The survey consists of 23 questions and is estimated to take 5-10 minutes to complete. All answers will be anonymous. When filling in the survey, we want you to have your everyday communication with Swedish business customers in mind (e-mails, phone calls, face-to-face meetings, letters, texting, video conference).

As a rough guideline, the distinction we use between categories of business customers is clarified in the following figure:



In the first question we want you to consider all three categories. Thereafter, we will focus on the 10% of business customers you consider most important to retain.

Thank you for taking the time to help us!

Andreas Bränström & Hugo Hehn

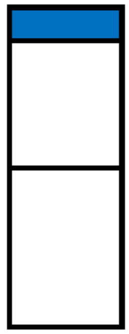
Questions can be sent to branstrom.andreas@gmail.com or hugo.hehn@gmail.com

Q1

On average, how much time do you spend communicating with a single customer in one month (drag the sliders to the correct number of hours)?

______ Most important 10% of business customers (1)
______ Middle 40% of business customers (2)
______ Least important 50% of business customers (3)

From now on, questions regard the most important 10% of business customers to retain.



Q2

How frequently do you use the following means of communication when communicating with business customers?

	Not at all frequently (1) (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	Very frequently (7) (7)
Email (1)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Phone calls (2)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Face-to-face meetings (3)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Letters (4)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Texting (SMS) (5)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Video conference, Skype or similar (6)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

Q3

How do you think that the following means of communication affect trust in a business relationship?

	Very negatively (-3) (1)	-2 (2)	-1 (3)	No effect (0) (4)	+1 (5)	+2 (6)	Very positively (+3) (7)
Email (1)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Phone calls (2)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Face-to-face meetings (3)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Letters (4)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Texting (SMS) (5)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Video conference, Skype or similar (6)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

Q4

On average, how often do you contact a single business customer for informal (non-work related) purposes?

❍ Never (1)
❍ Less than once a month (2)
❍ Once a month (3)
❍ 2-3 times a month (4)
❍ Once a week (5)
❍ 2-3 times a week (6)
❍ Daily (7)

Q5

On average, how often do you invite a single business customer to informal activities (e.g. lunch, afterwork, day activity)?

❍ Never (1)
❍ Less than once a month (2)
❍ Once a month (3)
❍ 2-3 times a month (4)
❍ Once a week (5)
❍ 2-3 times a week (6)
❍ Daily (7)

Q6

How time efficient do you perceive the following means of communication to be?

	Not at all time efficient (1) (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	Very time efficient (7) (7)
Email (1)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Phone calls (2)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Face-to-face meetings (3)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Letters (4)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Texting (SMS) (5)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Video conference, Skype or similar (6)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

Q7

How cost efficient (in monetary terms) do you perceive the following means of communication to be?

	Not at all cost efficient (1) (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	Very cost efficient (7) (7)
Email (1)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Phone calls (2)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Face-to-face meetings (3)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Letters (4)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Texting (SMS) (5)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Video conference, Skype or similar (6)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

Q8

Of the time spent communicating with business customers, approximately how much of the time do you spend on each of the following means of communication? Answer in percentages, total must add up to 100.

______ Email (1)
______ Phone calls (2)
______ Face-to-face meetings (3)
______ Letters (4)
______ Texting (SMS) (5)
______ Video conference, Skype or similar (6)

Q9

How important do you think the following properties are when choosing means of communication?

	Not at all important (1) (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	Very important (7) (7)
Being time efficient (1)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Being cost efficient (6)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Being unintrusive (2)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Building trust (3)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Reducing ambiguity/confusion (4)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Using the customer's preferred means of communication (5)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

Q10

How important are the following properties in communicaton with business customers?

	Not at all important (1) (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	Very important (7) (7)
Quick response (1)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Correct information (2)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Correct language (e.g. grammar, spelling) (3)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Right degree of formality (e.g. tonality, formal greeting/ending) (4)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

Q11

When emailing with your customer, how frequently do you include the following elements?

	Not at all frequently (1) (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	Very frequently (7) (7)
Confirmation of having received an email, even though it does not require an answer (1)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Confirmation of having received a customer's question, and that you will tend to it later (4)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Confirmation of having received a customer's question, and an estimation of when you will tend to it (5)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Reminders of upcoming meetings or events (2)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Minutes/summaries from previous interactions to ensure agreement on what has been said (3)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

Q12

How tightly regulated do you perceive that your industry is compared to an average service industry?

❍ Not very regulated (1)
❍ Relatively unregulated (2)
❍ Neither unregulated nor regulated (3)
❍ Relatively regulated (4)
❍ Very regulated (5)

Q13

To what extent do you perceive the following industries to be regulated?

	Not at all regulated (1) (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	Very regulated (7) (7)
Bank/finance (1)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Management/IT consulting firms (2)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Recruitment firms (sv. Bemanning/rekrytering) (3)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Auditing/accounting firms (4)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

Q14

Given your answers in the previous two questions, how do you think that the degree of regulation in your industry affects customers' trust in your company?

❍ Very negatively (-3) (1)
❍ - 2 (2)
❍ - 1 (3)
❍ No effect (0) (4)
❍ + 1 (5)
❍ + 2 (6)
❍ Very positively (+3) (7)

Q15

To what extent do you think customers view companies in your industry as differentiated?

❍ Not at all (1) (1)
❍ 2 (2)
❍ 3 (3)
❍ 4 (4)
❍ 5 (5)
❍ 6 (6)
❍ To a large extent (7) (7)

Q16

To what extent do you think customers perceive that there are unserious actors in your industry?

- ❍ Not at all (1) (1)
- ❍ 2 (2)
- ❍ 3 (3)
- ❍ 4 (4)
- ❍ 5 (5)
- ❍ 6 (6)
- ❍ To a large extent (7) (7)

Q17

How important is it that your business customers trust...

	Not at all important (1) (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	Very important (7) (7)
You personally? (1)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Your colleagues? (2)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
The brand of your company? (3)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
The methods your company uses? (4)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
The track record of your company (e.g. previous cases)? (5)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
The values of your company? (6)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

Q18

Consider a situation where one of your employees working extensively with business customers decides to join one of your competitors.How likely is it that some of her/his business customers follow her/him to the new employer?

- Not at all likely (1) (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- 6 (6)
- Very likely (7) (7)

Q19

Which of the following best describes the industry you work in?

- Bank/finance (1)
- Management/IT consulting (2)
- Recruitment firms (sv. Bemanning/rekrytering) (3)
- Auditing/accounting (4)

Q20

How long have you been working at your present company?

- Less than 1 year (1)
- 1-3 years (2)
- 3-5 years (3)
- 5-10 years (4)
- More than 10 years (5)

Q21

Throughout your career, for how long have you been working in roles with business-to-business contacts?

- Less than 1 year (1)
- 1-3 years (2)
- 3-5 years (3)
- 5-10 years (4)
- More than 10 years (5)

Q22

Approximately, how many business customers do you keep regular contact with? (Across all categories)

Q23

What is your gender?

- Female (1)
- Male (2)

Do you have any comments/clarifications regarding the survey that you wish to communicate?