

BSc Thesis in Marketing, Spring 2018

Stockholm School of Economics

Creating the automatic customer:

How do companies transform regular buyers into subscribers?

Abstract

This paper examines how companies transform their frequent buyers into subscribing to the product they are frequently buying, assuming this is a priority for companies, since it is assumed to lead to higher revenue in the long run. The paper uses different sources for mapping company communicational behavior, interviews and test-runs are the primary sources of information. According to the data and existing marketing theory, companies transform customers primarily by communicating customized relevant benefits of subscribing with precise timing related to the customers previously mapped purchasing behavior.

Keywords

Consumer marketing, subscriptions, online marketing, automated marketing

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Definitions

SBM: Subscription based business model

PSS: Product Service Systems

Relational communication: marketing communication aimed and customized to a relational customer

B2G: business to government

B2B: business to business

Frequent customer: a customer who buys a similar amount of a products at repetitive times

1. Introduction

Many years ago, before the age of the grocery store, we used to subscribe to many of our daily goods, eggs and milk were delivered on our porch every morning and amounts were adjusted by placing a note on the porch the night before. Later, that way of buying groceries replaced by brick and mortar grocery stores and we limited our subscriptions to newspaper and the occasional magazine or maybe records from Mr. Music. However, with the development of e-commerce, we see more and more companies adding subscription services in addition to their ordinary exchange-based business model.

Subscription based business models (SBMs) are ways of doing business where a customer receives a certain quantity of a certain good in certain intervals for a prepaid fee. This is in contrast to the traditional way of doing business, where customers order and pay for every point of delivery. Researchers suggest that this is the future of doing business, since it offers benefits for customers and companies not possible via traditional ways of doing business (Longanecker, 2015). The popularity of these types emerged in North America but are now also taking on Europe (van Letht, 2016).

1.1 Background

SBM's have been used in traditional media companies as newspapers, magazines and cable-TV channels, more recent examples are "all you can eat" streaming services, such as Netflix and Spotify. The example of newspapers is interesting since they moved from a subscription-based business model to an advertising based model online, which quit being profitable since more and more consumers started using ad-blocker. Where they are now, they have gone back to using a subscription-based model, where customers pay a fee for getting access to their online content.

In Sweden, our most established example of subscription of consumable products are most likely pre-packed grocery bags, with recipes and food for a certain number of dinners. Another example, which will not be processed in this paper, is mystery boxes where consumers sign up to receive a package with unknown content within a certain field (eg.

cosmetics, snacks, gadgets). However, we see that these ways of buying goods are expanding into more and more field, driven by easy access and administration through online channels. However, little knowledge is gathered on how to transform customers from regular buyers of your product to being highly valuable subscribers, it's time we find out.

1.2 Problem area and research gaps

The concept of automated, agreed and formalized loyalty has been used in the B2B and B2G-environment for a long time, especially within framework agreements and public tendering. Where especially framework agreements aim to remove some of the bureaucracy connected to public buying by agreeing on the terms and allocation in elder hand (Fredrik Andersson, 2006).

Extensive research on consumer loyalty can be found within many areas of research, however most of it is based on a cognitive attitude, for example Dick & Basu (1994) developed a conceptual framework for loyalty, where customer loyalty is viewed as *the strength of the relationship between an individual's relative attitude and repeat patronage*. They find that loyalty is built in three different phases: cognitive, affective, conation. These phases are all based on some sort of cognitive process or attitude. Oliver (1999), adds a fourth phase, action loyalty, which is one step closer to being formalized, agreed and automated but is still, in a sense, based on an intention and an attitude.

Susan Fournier (1998), found that there might be a paradigm shift in consumer purchasing coming up, where we move from the transactional way of buying consumer goods and start utilizing more of a relationship-based purchasing pattern. John Deighton et al. (1996) tried to forecast how the development on internet would affect our way of interacting with companies and even frames it as a shift of paradigm, where we move from a mass marketplace with one way communication to the interactive market where relationships matters and "product, price, the selling message and the store are wrapped up into one big value proposition". This research paper is of course old and mainly focuses on how companies communicate with their customers, however it concludes that companies will have a more intimate relationship with their customers, but still stays on the cognitive affecting action level.

Continuing on the cognitive track and why customers choose to continue buying from the same company, of course the company's offer could be better than the competition. However, Grönroos and Ravald (1996) found that the relationship in itself has a value to the customer. Closing in on somewhat agreed but not automatic loyalty is loyalty programs of for example airlines and grocery stores. Most of the research on loyalty programs assumes that customer retention is more profitable than customer acquisition and hence examines whether loyalty programs is useful for retaining customer. Dowling, Grahame & Uncles, Mark. (1997) finds that the effectiveness of loyalty programs is highly depending on the brand it's connected to. It adds some knowledge on how loyalty programs should be designed depending on the attributes of the brand.

The relationship between loyalty programs, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty has been researched quite recently by Ibbrahim Zakaria et al. (2014). They examined how different activities that intuitively would increase customer loyalty, in reality are increasing customer loyalty. However, they find that customer loyalty is correlated with customer satisfaction and hence, activities that influence satisfaction will influence loyalty, still staying on the cognitive attitude level.

As we can see in the existing research, loyalty is of course something expressed through actions but the desire and decision that leads to the action are based on something cognitive, which influences the customers decision. Subscription based ways of buying good is the definition of formalized, agreed and automated loyalty, where customers agree to formalize their loyalty. And hence limits some of their freedom of choice for a certain period of time in exchange for some other benefit. The concept of agreed and formalized loyalty has been existing within the B2B and B2G sector mainly as a way of avoiding bureaucracy and to lower total costs to some extent. However, since the concept of bureaucracy is non-existing in the B2C field, the need for agreeing and formalizing loyalty has never been needed and hence not researched. This paper is needed to examine how companies make the customer want to agree and formalize their loyalty.

1.3 Purpose and research question

The purpose of this thesis is to get a deeper insight in what features of the services SBMs focuses on, how these are marketed and later used to acquire subscribers.

The main research question is:

How do SBM-companies transform regular buyers to subscribers?

Where the subordinated research question is aiming to examine whether we are facing a new paradigm of loyalty, if subscriptions are outside of the existing concept of loyalty:

Can SBMs be seen as a new form of loyalty?

1.4 Delimitation

This paper will only regard companies with a SBM in addition to their traditional business models based on ad hoc exchange between the customer and the company. Hence, the question is how the companies work in order to transform their buyers from buying ad hoc into subscribing for regular deliveries of the selected goods. Due to the nature of these services, this paper has chosen to focus on products that has a regular rate of consumption. All in all, these business models can be categorized as the *consumables model* (Warrillow, 2015).

As previously stated the paper focuses on the transformation of frequent buyers to subscribers. Hence, the process of new customer acquisition is excluded from this paper. This paper focuses only on the marketing of subscriptions to consumers and hence excludes b2b-marketing.

1.5 Methodology

The existing literature on marketing of SBMs is limited to one master thesis aiming to define typologies of SBMs, which means that the literature and theoretical framework has been used to has been taken from related topics and fundamentals within marketing theory.

Most of the literature review has been aimed at theory regarding how customer loyalty is created and defined, to question the validity of the existing conceptual framework for loyalty.

The data collection has been done through interviews with companies using SBMs, screening of companies using SBMs marketing communication and via testing and acting as a frequent purchaser from SBMs using companies. In addition, literature, blog posts and non-research-based articles have been used for collecting data regarding how companies transform frequent buyers into subscribers.

2. Literature review

In the following section, a review of the existing literature on loyalty and sticky customers is laid out. Which further down in the paper will be problematized and its relevance in modern day business will further down be questioned.

2.1. The concept of loyalty

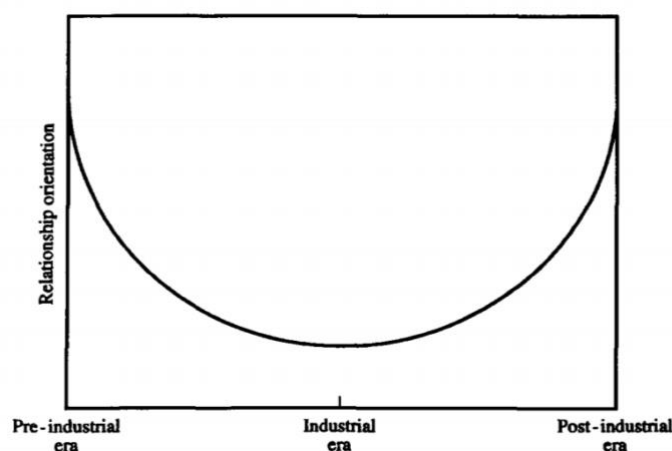
Dick & Basu (1994), developed a conceptual framework and a definition for loyalty. This article is complex and hard to apply on this field, fortunately, Tim van Leth (2016) simplified and made this framework applicable on this field. They view loyalty as “the strength of the relationship between an individual’s relative attitude and repeat patronage”. This in turn consists of two dimensions, attitudinal strength: how much the product or service differentiate from its competitors and attitude strength: how much the customer prefers the brand in question. An important thing to keep in mind is that these two dimensions are not excluding, they work together to form the strength of the loyalty. Different levels of loyalty can be defined as: no loyalty, spurious loyalty, latent loyalty and loyalty, where the latter is the strongest one. Dick & Basu argues that customer loyalty is built up via different phases, as we can see in the list below.

- Cognitive: mostly based on brand loyalty only. The way customers think of repeating purchases in terms of accessibility: how easy is it to recognize the benefits to buy a product, confidence: what were the earlier experiences with the product, centrality: is the brand preferred by a customer and clarity: how easy is it to find alternatives for the designated product.
- Affective: the affective outcome is different from the cognitive decision process. This phase develops the customer's loyalty. It is based on emotions: the feeling a customer have when buying a product, which can be realized by the shop personnel for example. Or on moods: the mood someone has for a brand created by advertising. And primary affect: the customer is stimulated when buying or checking out products in a store environment that uses fragrant aromas. Or satisfaction: this antecedent comes in when the customer is using the bought product, does it match the expectations?

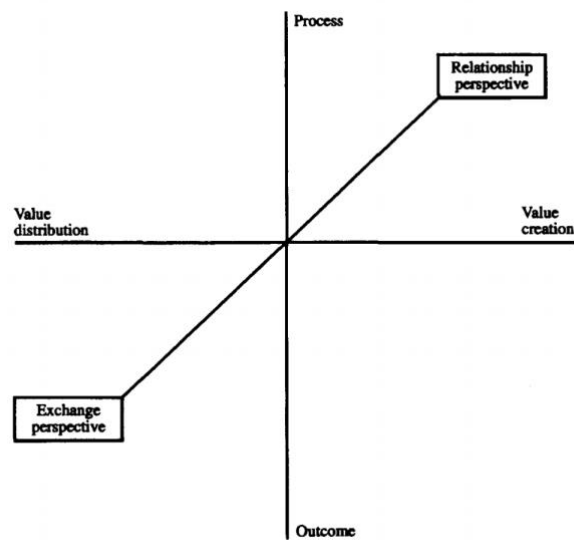
- Conation: has the intention to re-purchase a product based on for instance switching costs: how easy is it to switch from one supplier's product to another. Or on sunk costs: raising or lowering prices can have an effect on loyalty. And on expectations: customers' future expectations can influence if they repurchase a product or not.
- Oliver (1999) adds a fifth phase: Action loyalty. This is the phase where the customer commits to a product by buying the product repeatedly.

Dick & Basu (1994) argues that loyalty, seen as defined attitude toward entities are affected by both social factors and situational factors.

The evolution of relationship-based marketing has been researched by Sheth and Parvatiyar (1995), they conclude that the extent to which marketing has been prevailing has been going through different stages during the last couple of centuries, where it had a low state during the industrial revolution and had been increasing in the most recent years.



Their findings suggest that there is a paradigm shift prevailing within marketing where the market shifts from value distribution in an exchange-based perspective into conjunctural value creation within a relationship-based perspective.



Susan Fournier (1998) focuses her research on loyalty on the customers relationship towards a brand and takes on where Hinde (1979) left. Hinde means that “For a relationship to truly exist, interdependence between partners must be evident: that is, the partners must collectively affect, define, and redefine the relationship.” Fournier concludes that a relationship is something that continuously changes and is constantly being redefined based on the actions of the brand and the consumer. However, Fournier adds to Hinde’s research that the relative attitude and hence the relationship is also affected by other factors such as the type of good and usage pattern.

3. Theoretical framework

The purpose of this thesis is to get a deeper insight in what features of the services SBMs focuses on, how these are marketed and later used to acquire subscribers.

In order to be critical towards findings and to be able to understand and concretizes the same, a theoretical framework on online marketing, customer acquisition in comparable business models and on e-businesses in general.

3.1.1 Marketing automation

Marketing automation was first mentioned by John DC Little in 2001 and defined it as computer supported ways of deciding “What do we tell retailer X to do when customer Y arrives on Monday morning?”. Which is essentially the definition still used, although there still isn’t a commonly accepted definition used. Marketing Automation is the process of automating “customization” and “personalization” of marketing mix activities. This is an extension of the personalized offers and marketing that has been used within the B2B-sector where sales representatives have been able to address customers individually. Marketing automation enables B2C-companies to incorporate key qualities from the B2B-marketing (e.g. customized discounts and couponing). This is assumed to lead to increased interest and involvement in the communication from the company due to the enhanced relevance. As a consequence, companies using Marketing Automation may enhance their conversion rate, cross- and upselling, and retention rate.

3.1.2 What is a SBM?

Baden-Fuller & Baden (2010) examines why the concept of business-models are useful and how to use them. Baden-Fuller & Baden defines the role of a business model as “to provide a set of generic level descriptors of how a firm organizes itself to create and distribute value in a profitable manner”. Since the bottom level methodology of converting customers is to somehow convince them that subscribing will give them more value, it is important for a company to assess how their business models is adding value and hence access what value proposition to communicate. Tim van Leth (2016) examined and classified typologies of SBM in his master thesis, essentially in what ways can SBMs add value. He defined an SBM as both a way of administrating orders and distributing goods.

3.1.3 How are SBMs creating customer value?

In order to understand how e-business in general and SBMs in particular add value, we need to understand the basic concept of value. There has been extensive research done on the concept of value, especially within the literature on pricing. Monroe (1991) defines customer-perceived value as the ration between perceived benefits and perceived sacrifice:

$$\text{Customer – perceived value} = \frac{\text{Percieved benefits}}{\text{Percieved sacrifice}}$$

This way of looking at value captures the whole spectrum, where perceived sacrifice includes all the costs the buyer faces during the lifetime of the product/service when making a purchase. Using this simple and illustrative formula makes it clear that there are two basic ways of increasing customer perceived value, either lowering perceived sacrifice or increasing perceived benefits. An important addition to this is that both parameters of this subjective and therefore individual and can differ between customers. Several researchers have argued that the offering should be considering only one episode, including all benefits and sacrifices for that episode (Grönroos, 1990; Kotler, 1994; Levitt, 1983). Grönroos and Raval (1996) however, argues that the relationship itself might have a major effect on the total perceived value of the offering, where customers shift the focus from evaluating separate offerings to evaluating the relationship as a whole. They therefore, in relationship marketing, argues that the total perceived value of the episode should be modelled like this:

$$\text{Total episode value} = \frac{\text{Episode benefits} + \text{relationship benefits}}{\text{Episode sacrifice} + \text{relationship sacrifice}}$$

Mapping perceived customer value like this gives us the opportunity to look at the value of the offering, including the benefits that comes from the relationship as an individual phenomenon. Benefits from the relationship that contributes to the overall value are: safety, credibility, security and continuity.

In order to understand how SBM creates value and finds its legitimate place in the market, we first need to understand how e-business in general creates value. R. Amit and C. Zott (2001)

examined how e-business creates value in the early 21st century, although this research might seem old at first sight. The fact that this paper was written in the early days of e-business allows it to capture the essentials of value creation in e-business. Their conclusion is that value within e-business is driven by four factors:

1. Efficiency
 - a. Lower transaction costs, both in marketing and in exchange phase
 - b. Access to larger numbers of information, products and services
 - c. Scalability of transaction volume
2. Complementarities
 - a. Cross-selling
 - b. Combination of on-line and off-line transactions
3. Lock-in
 - a. Transaction reliability
 - b. Affiliate programs
 - c. Transaction safety mechanism
 - d. Learning investments made by participants
4. Novelty
 - a. First to introduce business model
 - b. Business model structure relies on trade secrets and copy rights
 - c. New participants

(The list shows a selection of examples from the article, for added relevancy.)

Since these factors apply for e-business in general, we need to look into how to work with driving these factors in practice and how these factors apply to SBM. Fortunately, there has been extensive research made on these factors.

3.1.3.1 Efficiency

The main efficiency win for e-business is lower transaction costs, where transaction costs are broadly defined and incorporate all sacrifices from both parties in conjunction with the transaction (Williamson, 1975, 1983, 1989). Which suggest that transaction efficiency increases when the costs decrease. The way e-business decreases transaction costs are in addition to the obvious with smoother payment-solutions and systems for ordering lowering

information asymmetry between companies and consumers. Easier access to information will decrease customers search and bargaining costs (Lucking-Reiley and Spulber, 2001), further decreasing transaction costs. Garciano and Kaplan (2000) quantified the decreased transaction costs and found that online selling of cars decreased transaction cost by 50%. The increased connectivity of e-business increases efficiency in distribution, inventory management, marketing- and sales costs, transaction-processing costs, communication costs and decreasing the risk of mistaking purchases. These factors are applicable for SBMs in particular since the amounts of transactions are lowered or at least made automatic.

3.1.3.2 Complementaries

Complementaries are the concept of when a bundle of goods holds higher perceived value than the sum of the individuals. According to strategy researchers Branden-burger and Nalebuff (1996) “A player is your complementor if customers value your product more when they have the other player’s product than when they have your product alone” (Brandenburger and Nalebuff, 1996: 18). The research done by R. Amit and C. Zott (2001) results in that e-business can add complementary value by offering a complementing bundle of goods and service, not possible to offer using traditional offline business. They also find how offline and online retail complement each other, they exemplify an online retailer that can offer the convenience of online retail with the convenience of after sales services from a brick and mortar store. As we can see SBMs offer complementaries in a way such that the automatic transaction and the convenience of having guaranteed access to the consumable in question will add bundling effects.

3.1.3.3 Lock-in

See the literature review for lock-in defined as loyalty.

3.1.3.4 Novelty

Value creation by innovation was conceptualized by Schumpeter (1934). The traditional way of adding value thru innovation has been to innovate products or service in the way they were produced, distributed or marketed. However, e-businesses mainly innovate in the way

transactions are made, for example e-bay introduced efficient online auctions between consumers, priceline.com introduced reversed markets, Autobytel.com revolutionized how consumers bought cars. Their common denominator was that they connected previously unconnected parties, reducing inefficiencies in the transaction process thru innovative technology and capturing latent consumer trends. E-business also has the unique opportunity to incorporate reverse information flows and create new ways of bundling their offer, which connects to complementaries. It's important to note that these innovative advantages might seem as just effecting efficiency, however, the novelty on its own creates a first mover advantage, which can be empirical seen in examples as razorblades.com and ebay where the network-effect created a major lock-in, R. Amit and C. Zott (2001).

The benefits for the selling companies from operating via SBMs are:

- Financially: customers pay beforehand for their products or services, hence the need for borrowing for investments becomes less necessary.
- Loyalty: a subscription model will automatically lead to renewal purchases. The customers do not need to perform an action for every point of purchase.
- Differentiation: subscriptions can be part of the differentiation of a product or service. Curated services, for instance, where the company selects products for a customer, the subscription model itself offers the differentiation
- Efficiency: increased accuracy in forecasting the sales for each period will lead to efficiency-wins in managing inventory, logistics and planning deliveries.

The benefits for the buying consumer:

- Convenience: SBMs come in services for daily things, like sending you coffee every month before you run out, or things you do not want to think about like recipes and ingredients for your meal everyday
- Money-saving: when the customer many movies but don't want to pay per view Netflix is a money-saving service. But also the fact that you take a subscription for a year could be enough for a company to give you a discount for your loyalty (van Leth, 2016).

3.2 Comparable concepts

SBMs could be linked to the growing phenomena of PSS, previously mainly used in B2B-environments for wearing parts and equipment within especially manufacturing. It is now moving into the business of investment goods for consumers (eg. Care by Volvo). The concept of PSS is essentially different ways of transforming business from selling the product itself to selling access to the products or in more advanced ways selling the effects that is performed by the products. Different ways of classifying PSS have been researched by M Cook (2004) and Van Ostaeyen, Joris (2013). PSS can of course be defined as different ways of selling and delivering products, but another definition is that it is a product with services linked to it, which enhances the perceived value to the customer.

3.3 How should SBMs be marketed?

3.3.1 Logistics as competitive advantage within e-commerce

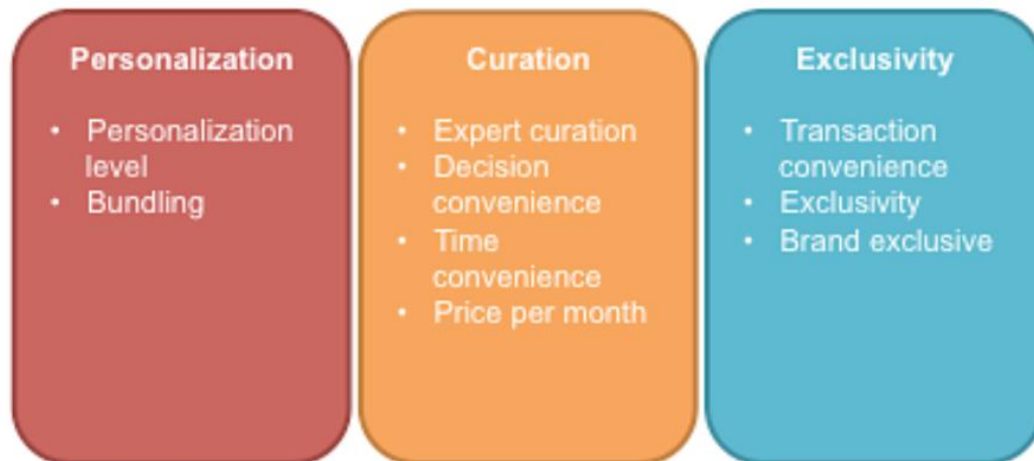
Research has shown that logistic capabilities within e-commerce is positively correlated with firm performance (Jay Joong-Kun Cho, John Ozment & Harry Sink 2008), and industry reports suggests that this will have growing importance (Global e-commerce Logistics 2018). Logistics within SBMs are of large importance for especially goods that need special treatment (groceries etc.), which is part of the success of Amazon's subscribe and save.

3.3.2 What Value propositions are used by SBMs

In his master thesis from 2016, Tim van Leth (2016) used quantative methods for defining typologies for SBMs. He tabulated 14 factors from existing research and opinions on SBMs against 84 real life examples of SBMs in order to classify them and find what factors that define their typology.

Van Leth finds that, in contrary to Longo's article and Warrillow's book, that SBMs can be divided into three typologies, personalization, curation and exclusivity.

SBM typologies + variables



Personalization/mass customization

Van Leth defines, and researches based on the level of personalization defined by Vesanen (2007): First, Segmented marketing; Second, Adaptive personalization; Third, Cosmetic personalization; Fourth, Transparent personalization; Fifth, Collaborative personalization. SBMs can offer one subscription for all customers or can go into a lot of detail to personalize the subscription for the customer.

Curation

Curation is defined in the study as Longo defines it in his article. It's the way in which a SBM selects products for its customers. The customer don't know what products it will receive, only in what category the products will be in. The research finds that these types of SBMs are able to charge a higher price for the same goods as other services.

Exclusivity

A typology of company that is exclusive in the distribution of a certain product, this way the brand of the service and the product are closely aligned. These types of services can arise from two different sources, either as a way of distributing a newly developed product, or as a way of adding additional value to a preexisting product. Examples of the exclusivity typology is Netflix and Dollar shave club.

3.3.3 Lock-in in SBMs

In the master thesis on SBM-typologies by Tim van Leth (2016) the findings imply that none of the 84 SBMs examined use any tools or methods to actively lock in customers. Van Leth discusses that this might be since lower barriers to exit the subscription lowers the mental berries to subscribe in the first place, and he links it to the suggested concept of subscription fatigue.

3.4 Key take-aways

In order to be able to understand and grasp the data and further on the findings, the concepts and theories presented in the previous section needs to be kept in mind. Many of the theories and concepts presented might at first glance seem to be far away from the concrete level of customer transformation. However since the purpose is to identify how companies are doing, we need to be able to think about to implications of the information communicated by the company, which is provided by this theoretical framework.

4. Methodology

The original plan with this paper was to conduct several interviews with marketing professionals representing several companies doing business in the way this paper is supposed to examine. However, this showed to be easier said than done, companies wasn't willing to reveal information about how they are doing to transform companies. Only one interview was being held before it was decided to redirect the focus of data-gathering.

Instead the communication used by companies doing business the way the paper is about was reviewed and mapped, and the fundamental value propositions was identified in order to be able to find common topics. Fortunately, most companies were explicit in the benefits the sought to communicate.

In addition, the companies to which the writer has been a customer for a long enough time to experience the whole cycle of communication was reviewed in a deeper way. This was also mapped (even though it only accounted to two observations).

In addition, non-scientific papers, articles and books was used as data, since this can be seen as an indication of where to start looking, and the latter being able to either falsify or confirm.

When the data was gathered, a common theme for the communication and the method of transforming customers was identified with a base in the theories earlier viewed.

5. Data

5.1. Interviews

5.1.1. Martin Benckert, CEO of InkClub.com

Martin is CEO of InkClub-group, one of Sweden's largest e-tailers with several sites for e-tailing. The characteristics in target groups and goods of the websites differ; however, they have one common denominator, they sell consumable goods. Since this paper is about SBMs, the material in this summary will focus on those sites and product groups that are currently sold as subscriptions or are potential subscription goods.

InkClub currently sells two of their product categories as subscriptions, vitamins from dinvitamin.com, vacuumcleaner bags from ductclub.com and inkclub.com. They are also in the process of starting a new site, dinespresso.com, where they will sell their inhouse developed biologically decomposable coffee capsules, which will most likely also be sold as subscriptions.

Martin identifies one mainly administrative obstacles for creating a successful SBM, one purely commercial and two somewhere in between. These are of importance to this paper, since the touch upon marketing.

1. The administrative obstacle is linked to difficulty in administration of the subscriptions, how they are supposed to be labeled in the ERP-system. Difficulties also arise when customers want to change something in their subscriptions or when they order something in addition to their subscriptions.
2. Martin talks about the subscription fatigue, how customers always need something in return for subscribing, we'll come back to how InkClub works with this.
3. The main issue regarding all e-tail today, according to Martin, is how to deal with the last mile of shipping, how to get the order from the company to the customer. It's both about how fast it is done and how much effort the customer has to perform to get the order home. Martin expresses some concern about SBMs as subscriptions might be less convenient when ordinary transaction-based e-tail will be able to deliver on the same day as the order.
4. The main challenge for SBMs, especially within consumable goods, is how to estimate the rate at which the consumer consumes the product. For some products this is easily

done, and the rate stays constant, but for some it's almost impossible which might discriminate these products as subscription goods

Martin is open with the fact that the first obstacle is positively correlated with complexity of offer and the rest of the business.

Martin talks about the life-cycle of a subscriber where subscribers can be divided into two categories:

- Subscribers that keep subscribing for a few periods, typically the number of periods that will receive the initial discount.
- Subscribers that stay for longer than the initial discounted period and then continues to subscribe until something affect their willingness to subscribe. Typically for many years.

Din vitamin

Dinvitamin.com is a site they recently launched which sells vitamins exclusively through a subscription-based channel. The customer fills in a form with question on their medical status and overall lifestyle which will then result in a recommendation for what vitamins they might need to eat. The customer will then receive a 30 days' supply of vitamins, packed in daily doses.

Dinvitamin.com has solved the last mile problem with packing their orders in boxes that are small enough to fit in a regular mail-box, which eliminates the effort the consumer has to make in order to receive their package. In order to limit the number of orders lost due to subscription fatigue dinvitamin.com offers a 75% discount the first two months of subscription.

Dinvitamin.com is marketed in most online channels and has made a collaboration with former professional biathlon-skier Magdalena Forsberg. Due to the flexibility and adaptability of their offer, they are not targeting a specific group, rather than health conscious-people. Martin claims that their fundamental competitive advantage is based on the added value in form of the form-based advice and the dose-packaged form, and that the smooth last mile and price (which is equivalent to buying every vitamin separately) are just hygiene factors.

Dustclub.com

Dustclub offers dustbags for vacuum cleaners both as exchange-based purchases and as subscription. They focus on primarily one thing within their marketing, the annoyance of being out of stock of dustbags.

Their transformation marketing to existing buyers is based on a sales funnel where they use the information of their frequency of buying in order to get the correct timing of when to communicate their subscription offer.

General thoughts on transformation of customers

Martin strongly believes that in almost every case, the customer need some sort of direct tangible benefit from subscribing, to avoid the subscription fatigue. He talks about a formalized agreement between the company and the customer where they (in a conceptual way) split the lowered costs and effort for the company (marketing and communication primarily) to affecting the customer to make repetitive purchases.

5.2. Real life observation

5.2.1 Market screening and communication review

As seen in the appendix 1, the review of the marketing communication on respective SBM-website shows that the most frequent products that are offered through subscription share two common characteristics:

1. Constant rate of consumption
2. “Must haves” for consumers

Both of these characteristics are fulfilled by 16 out of 28 of the reviewed companies’ products, and they are also by far of a larger average size. Which is some sort of indicator of that these are successful products to distribute via subscriptions. The products that are considered to have these characteristics are:

- Coffee
- Snus
- Food for pets
- Pre-packed food bags
- Lenses

Other notable characteristics that cannot immediately be categorized into the previous but that are marketed as solving the same problems, are products that have a limited period of freshness and hence would need to be replaced at a consistent rate, for example underwear, socks, toothbrushes and razorblades to some extent.

The most common value propositions communicated are:

- “subscribe and forget” 14/28
- Value for money 12/28
- Flexibility 10/28
- Expert help in selection 9/28
- Logistics 4/28
- Simplicity 3/28

5.2.2 Testruns

By testbuying from Snusbolaget, a pattern can be recognized, where they automatically track their customers purchasing pattern and adapt their mail-communication based on their customers' purchasing pattern. They remind of their customers latest purchase and re-create their latest basket with an automatic link. They also remind of the ability to subscribe to their products and focus on the benefit of not risking forgetting to order the next time, the communication also highlights the fact that subscriptions receive a free delivery in contrast to the exchange-based service. Appendix 2.

5.2.3 Non-subscription loyalty

An observation of automated relational communication which seem to aim to remind customers to buy from the same place, this follow a similar pattern as the communication from snusbolaget. In this case this about parfym.se (beauty products), they seem to recognize and track their customers buying patterns in order to remind them to make a new purchase just in time when they are likely to run out of stock of their previous order. In this case the e-mail was send out 43 days after the order was picked up, about the average time a can of hair-wax will last. However, parfym.se doesn't offer the possibility to subscribe to their products.

5.3 Nonacademic literature

5.3.1 Different types of SBMs

John Warrillow (2015) in his book "The Automatic Customer: Creating a Subscription Business in Any Industry" develops a framework for categorizing SBMs, which shows the large possibilities of applying a subscription-based business model into many different fields:

1. Membership website model. With this model, you provide website access to insider information for a regular subscription payment. It works best in a tightly defined niche market, like antique car owners, or rare-coin junkies, or woodworking enthusiasts, where experts hare hard to find, and members can gain from interacting with each other.
2. All-you-can-eat content model. By providing access to a large variety of titles, like Netflix with streaming movies, or Hulu for TV shows, with new content added

regularly, there is always a reason to keep up your subscription. If you already have many followers for some limited free offerings, this also becomes a natural freemium upgrade

3. Private club model. On the other end of the spectrum, if your service or experience is in limited supply, make it a status offering for the strivers out there who want to act and feel like affluent consumers. Here the key is to convince customers that you have something really rare, and maybe even entice them into a long-term but affordable relationship.
4. Front-of-the-line model. If you can help with a relatively complex product or service, this one is especially appealing to customers who are not overly price sensitive, or ones for whom waiting in line can have catastrophic consequences. It works for the need to resolve IT issues in a small business, to avoiding long lines at popular clubs and hotels.
5. Consumables model. You should consider this subscription model if you sell things that naturally run out, like Diapers.com or Birchbox for cosmetics. People are willing to pay for convenience, but don't underestimate the logistical challenges involved in fulfilling orders and providing services to thousands of subscribers in out-of-the-way places.
6. Surprise box model. This model involves shipping a curated package of goodies to your subscribers each period. It may have started with wine club memberships but has now been extended to include BarkBox for family dog treats, Standard Cocoa for those who love chocolates, and SpicySubscriptions for lovemaking paraphernalia.
7. Simplifier model. Everyone these days wants to simplify their life, so this subscription model works well for personal service businesses, like pet grooming, tutoring, window cleaning, and even bookkeeping. The key is making sure the customer doesn't have to remember the scheduling, deal with immediate variable payments, or worry about quality.
8. Network model. This model works best where your product or service utility improves as increasing numbers of people join in. It was popularized with dating sites and LinkedIn, but now is popping up with many services, like Zipcar for car-sharing, BeatsMusic for music sharing, and WhatsApp for international messaging for a low predictable fee.
9. Peace-of-mind model. This one is an extension of the insurance model into new domains. For example, Amber Alert GPS will make sure your kids don't wander

outside of safe zones, Site24x7 will let you know if your web site is down, and Radian6 monitors social networks so you know what people are saying about your brand.

5.3.2 in SBMs

A recent blog-article in Harvard Business Review exposed how SBMs connect their customers to two critical value propositions, convenience and curation (Randall, Lewis & Davis, 2016). They also offer a much simpler model of identifying how SBMs are valuable to companies, starting a SBM is basically a way of deepening their customer relationships, which can have different positive effects for different companies. Their research shows that successful SBMs has managed to capture on or two out of the two value propositions.

- Convenience: For time-strapped consumers, there is indeed value to a service that eliminates the need to travel to a store or to remember to buy a product for which they have a continuing need — particularly for a replacement or recurring purchase (e.g., razor blades, laundry detergent, etc.).
- Curation: Consumers may be overwhelmed by the choices in certain categories, or they may need to be educated—or they may simply enjoy the sense of surprise and discovery when items are “hand-selected” based on their interests or preferences. Replenishment is not an issue in this category — rather consumers want to be regularly introduced to new products such as fashionable clothes, personal-care products, children’s toys, books, and so on.

According to John Warrilow’s book “the automatic customer” (2015) business that base their offer in convenience needs to find some sort of edge in their offer, otherwise large fast-moving competitors will beat them on price. As in the case with Amazon’s acquiring of diapers.com, where the owners of diapers reasoned that they would lose the fight on convenience and price combined.

5.3.3 How are SBMs marketed and sold

The way SBMs are sold and marketed depends on the relative complexity of the offers, Warrilow claim that there are three main ways of selling and marketing subscriptions.

- Field salespeople, are used when the complexity of the good/service is high and when sales cycles are long. Eg. Workdays
- Telesales, are used when complexity and sales cycles are medium. Eg. Hubspot
- Self-service, the marketing system and sales funnel are automated. Eg. Ancestry

5.3.4 Obstacles for transforming and how to conquer them

Warrilow claims that the most occurring threat for SBMs are the “subscription fatigue” where customers will realize that it is profitable for companies to have them subscribe. The fact that they will most likely forget to unsubscribe is hindering them from subscribing in the first place. Warrilow has discovered 7 ways to work around this and, USPs.

1. Superior value for money: having a Netflix account is only slightly more expensive per month than renting one movie from itunes.
2. Appeal to their rational side: Raz*War (razor blades) will always have their blades compatible with their old handles or a flower bouquet service will be able to delivery fresher flowers, since customers are ordering upfront.
3. Give customers an ultimatum: this only applies when companies also sell on a one-shot basis, for example you can't buy a single movie from Netflix
4. The freemium model: customers can access a less competent version for free but need to pay in order to get the full potential of the product/service.
5. The trial model: customers are able to try your full service for free, but only for a limited amount of time.
6. Offer your subscription as a gift: companies can market their subscription as a gift for a limited amount of time, in addition to create a second market, it can also act as a Trojan horse for the receiver of the gift to experience the convenience of the subscription.
7. Set fire to the platform: companies can offer potential customers a deal for a limited amount of time, which will lower the barriers of decision.

6. Discussion

6.1. Is it really possible to determine a common theme for the transformation of consumers?

Due to the limited data it might be hard to determine and distinguish a certain pattern for how companies transform frequent buyers into subscribers, however, by combining communication reviews, interviews and literature it is at least possible to identify two important factors of success:

- Relevance of the service's benefits to the problems experienced by the customer
- Timing of relational communication

The message and values proposed in the transformation of the customer into a subscriber are in every of the reviewed companies and results from the interviews, based on solving an issue, experienced by the customer, or highlighted by the marketing of the subscription service. The solutions to the experienced problems are in every case based either on the direct benefits from subscription, or on the indirect benefits made possible by the accurate forecasting of demand and streamlined logistics (as with fresh goods in the case with eko-lådan or freshly ground coffee). According to existing marketing literature and also seen in the data, the benefits communicated are not necessarily all the benefits received from a subscription or not even the major and most obvious benefit. Instead, which is in line with marketing theory, the benefit that is of the highest importance and relevance to the customer is mostly highlighted.

To frame the benefits sought by customers as a “problems” might seem excluding to benefits sought that not really a problem. The companies that can be categorized into the curation typology benefits are solely based on some variant of expert help in selection of the goods subscribed to. However, as seen in the marketing communication by especially companies selling subscriptions of coffee (by also companies running other curation businesses), the subscriptions of different kinds of coffee at every delivery is both a way of helping customers to try different variants, but also to capture customers that want to subscribe to coffee (based on the other benefits received when subscribing) but don't want to miss out on the opportunity to try different variation that they would be able to do when buying from the local

store. Which makes it important to the company to consider when targeting customers with marketing, since they in the case discusses in the paper most likely have some previous data on the respective customer's purchasing pattern, they are able to identify in what way every specific customer should be targeted.

Based on the relational communication received from the companies when acting as a customer, companies seem to send their relational communication when their customer has the statistically highest chance of starting to run out of stock. Worth mentioning in the cases used as data is that the e-mail seems to primarily aim to make the customer place a new order, but that the communication also highlights the fact that the customer can subscribe to not risking forgetting to place an order the next time. This, to some extent indicates that the companies do not necessarily always aim to transform their customers. Which would make sense since as long as the customer is continuing to make repetitive purchases, the companies are indifferent between in what way the repetitive purchases are made.

6.2. A new paradigm of loyalty?

As the findings suggests in the thesis quoted in this paper, none of the companies examined in that paper utilize any form of tools to hinder the customers from unsubscribing. Of course, based on the limited amount of data regarded in both the quoted thesis and in this paper. It is hard to know whether companies would for example offer a leaving customer a better deal, sort of as a non-binding soft form of holdback. However, there is an important difference between lock-in and holdback. In this case lock-in would mean for example extended times of notice, formalized and legally binding ways of hindering customers from unsubscribing.

As the research on loyalty reviewed in the literature review concludes, the current paradigm states that loyalty is not necessarily the actions of repetitive purchases, but the relative attitude towards the company and the intention to perform repetitive purchases. In the existing view on loyalty, nothing is formalized and agreed upon in advance. Since, nothing is agreed upon, there will be a certain matter of uncertainty from both parties, the company will not know how much the specific customer will buy and can hence not promise any determined level of benefits. Which leads to the uncertainty of the customer, since they don't know what benefits they will receive from being a loyal customer, however research shows that even for the

customer the relationship on its own is adding to the customer's perceived value. We can however find a few examples of non-subscription businesses where they utilize progressive systems of benefits for loyal customers, the more frequent the customers buy, the larger percentage discount they will receive (for example COOP). However, the benefits received by the customer for being loyal are retro-active, and hence nothing is agreed upon in advance except for the benefits the customer will receive if acting loyally. And this type is in no way automated.

The question is hence whether the concept of SBMs can be considered as a new form of loyalty since it differs so much from the concept of loyalty as formulated in the current research. The findings in this paper and other research on similar topics rather suggests that SBMs is an extension of the current loyalty-framework. Since companies distributing their goods through subscriptions focus on benefits provided directly by the ordering and distribution form that subscription really is and don't use any other form of lock-in mechanisms rather the benefits from the service. The decision made by the customer to continue to subscribe is entirely made up of the benefits from the service (similar to the part discussed loyalty-discounts) and other cognitive attitudes towards the company. In which the existing view on loyalty is a part.

6.3. The loyalty paradox?

As discussed in the previous section and earlier in the paper, subscriptions at first glance might seem to be a new form of formalized loyalty, however, the case might actually be the other way around. As previously concluded, loyalty viewed as relative attitude, is something that affects that customers buying intentions in addition to the relative convenience and value of the product or service. In addition, research on relational marketing, shows that the relationship on its own is adding value for the customer. Since marketing and characteristics of the subscription services included in this paper all have additional value adding features to the core product, with the single additional sacrifice for the consumer being to have automated renewal of the order (for one period, since no times of notice seem to occur). It might actually be so that the loyalty in the traditional sense is a smaller part of the factors contributing to the customers purchasing actions, or in this case the action of not quitting the subscription. Indicating that partly due to the formalized form of benefits for action loyalty is decreasing the importance of loyalty as an attitude. However, this is based on the assumption that the intention to purchase or subscribe are equally strong, hence the “sum” is constant, it could of course also be so that the total intention is stronger/larger, and that loyalty plays an even larger part, in absolute terms.

7. Conclusion

Given that the delimitations in this paper gives companies access to customer data based on previous purchases, companies transform frequent purchases into subscribers using fairly simple and intuitive methods. The key for successfully transforming customer lies in timing of communication and relevance of benefits included in the subscription. The general rule for timing is to target the customer when her or she is about to make the next purchase of the desired product, in order to avoid the situation where the customer simply has no need to make a purchase. In addition, the benefits chosen to be communicated for subscribing are those most likely to solve the customers problem and are also easily understood by the general customer (closely linked to the subscription). As the benefits are easily understood and intuitively linked to the subscription, they derive either directly from subscription as a way of purchasing (repeated orders, never running out of stock) or indirectly from subscriptions as a way of distributing (increased freshness of goods). The third important possible factor is the tangible benefit from subscribing (often monetary) as a way for the companies to “push” the customers over the mental barrier resulting in subscription fatigue. In addition to the previous measure, companies avoid using lock-in tools and highlight the fact that these are non-occurring, in order to lower the mental barrier causing subscription fatigue.

8. Summary of key findings

How do SBM-companies transform regular buyers to subscribers?

The simple answer to this question, based on the findings in this paper is that they work with well-timed communication highlighting the specific benefits from subscribing that are seemingly important to the individual customer.

9. Relevance and further research

9.1. The contribution to understanding of automated marketing

This paper contributes to deeper understanding of the application of automated marketing, the existing literature is helpful in understanding how it can be applied and what capabilities it has, with added business value taken for granted. In contrast, this paper adds understanding in how companies apply these technologies in the real world and succeeding with it. The paper contributes to understanding of not just how automatization is used to customize the message directed towards the customers, but also on how it is used to track purchasing patterns and adapting the timing of the communication accordingly.

9.2. Further research

This paper focuses on how companies transform customers which is based on observing how companies do it, assuming that companies behaving in the observed way are successful in this. However, what would deepen the understanding and contribute to understanding how they should do it would be research on how customers react to certain forms of communication aiming to transform the customers. This research would need to examine different forms of communication in order to compare and contrast the results in changing of subscription intention.

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11. Appendix

Company	Products	Subscription service	Value proposed
Mat.se	Groceries	Pre packed grocery bags	Simplicity, quality in selection, flexibility
Björn borg	Men's Underwear	BI monthly deliveries of underwear	Peace of mind, being fresh
Vet zoo	Pet's products	Dog food, cat food and kitty litter	Logistics, peace of mind
Synoptik	Optics	Lenses	Flexibility, peace of mind, cheaper
Specsavers	Optics	Lenses	Flexibility, peace of mind, cheaper
Synsam	Optics	Lenses	Flexibility, peace of mind, cheaper
Smarteyes	Optics	Lenses	Flexibility, peace of mind, cheaper
Linsboxen	Optics	Lenses	Flexibility, peace of mind, cheaper
Lensia	Optics	Lenses	Flexibility, peace of mind, cheaper
Rakexperten	Razors	Razor blades	Cheaper -> Better results
Citygross	Groceries	Pre packed grocery bags	Simplicity, quality in selection, flexibility
Xwine	wine	Surprise wine-boxes	Selection, matched recepies, hard to get goods
Kafferoosterietkoppa	Coffee	Decided or surprise selection of coffee	Freshness and peace of mind
Baristashopen	Coffee	Surprise selection of coffee	Surprise and peace of mind
Tefrossa	Te and coffee	Surprise selection of coffee	Surprise, peace of mind and cheaper
Kränsku	Te and coffee	Surprise selection of coffee	Surprise,
Snusbolaget	Snus	Snus	Peace of mind, freshness
Ekolådan	Ecological food	Ecological fruits and vegetables	Increase consumption, freshness
Swedish Match	Snus	Snus	Simplicity
Amazon	Everything	Customized subscriptions for consumal	Cheaper, peace of mind, time saver
Coolsocks	Socks	Socks of different colors	Flexibility, selection
Organicsocks	Socks	Socks of different colors	Flexibility, selection
Kalsongkungen.se	Men's Underwear	Underwear	Flexibility, pay in advance
Bachelorbox	Men's consumable	Consumables with consitent lifetime	Peace of mind, freshness, personalization
Sniph	Parfume	Selection of parfumes	Expert help in selection
Sf anytime	Streamed movies	Unlimited access	Value for money
Viaplay	Streamed movies	Unlimited access	Value for money, flexibility
Cmore	Streamed sports a	Unlimited access	Value for money, flexibility

Figure 1

Beställ direkt via produktbilderna eller kontakta oss och beställ.

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SMIDIGHET



PRIS



Om du vill beställa produkterna är det bara att klicka på det du vill ha. Du kan också skicka ett mejl eller ringa vår kundservice om du vill ha beställningshjälp eller om något annat är oklart.

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**Hur mycket & hur ofta
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direkt till brevlådan**

Du får detta utskick för att du prenumererar på Snusbolagets nyhetsbrev. Vi reserverar oss för eventuella felaktigheter, förändringar och slutförsäljning. Alla priser i utskicket är inklusive moms.

Du kan [uppdatera din profil genom att klicka här](#), om du inte vill ha fler utskick från Snusbolaget, [klicka här för att avregistrera dig](#)

Snusbolaget Norden AB Norrlandsgatan 18 Stockholm 111 43 Sweden
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Figure 2

VI SAKNAR DIG

Du kanske saknar någon av dina favoriter?

Eller bara behöver fylla på?

HÅRVÅRD

Matrix

**Matrix Style Link
Over Achiever 49g**



fr. **89 kr**

Rek 165 kr

Spara 46%

Figure 3