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Social media in business-to-business branding

How B2B companies can thrive in the new era of digital communication

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Executive summary

The objective of this study is to explore the implications of social media for business-to-business brand management. Thought leaders of social media and branding in the online environment are currently doing their work out in the field, whilst the academics are lagging behind. In order to shed some light on issues regarding how B2B companies should manage opportunities and challenges in the social media space, this master thesis seeks to address the topic by conducting an exploratory study on how B2B companies can utilise social media to enhance the brand.

The study is conducted using a qualitative approach. The purpose is to give an aerial view of how B2B companies should approach social media, what opportunities and threats exists, and how they should focus their online strategy to enhance the B2B brand. The theoretical part of this study builds upon business-to-business brand management due to the growth of B2C brands in social media. The empirical data of this study is interviews with four experts on the topic, which is further illustrated by three case studies.

By synthesising the interviews, and comparing them with the illustrative case studies and the theory, the results develop. Social media does not change how businesses do business, but it adds another layer to brand management which needs to be treated different compared to traditional marketing efforts. In order to influence through social media companies have to provide value and build relationships, rather than hard-selling. The brand needs to be monitored in a much wider environment as conversations about the brand or conversations relevant to the brand are likely to be happening online, but at the same time they are feasible to monitor.

Branding in social media presents the company with opportunities to demonstrate the brand personality, a new dimension for branding, as well as highlight the competitive advantage, increase awareness and gather people in niche markets on a global basis. But the challenge is there is no delete button. Once something is out in the online space and starts build momentum, it is not possible to control it. Slip-ups spread through social media can hurt the brand significantly. As employees are increasingly using social media in their day-to-day work they are also representing the brand, whether it is consciously or not. Guidelines are proposed as a tool to manage employees' engagements in social media.

Before approaching the social media space companies need to monitor what is being said about the brand and the industry online, as well as map out how people internally are using social media in their day-to-day work. This will provide ideas to what business objectives it is possible to pursue solving through social media. When the company has established an objective, they could start choosing the strategy. When the strategy is chosen, they can start planning which tools, tactics and technologies they want to use. Where the company goes from there depends on the objective, the strategy and the unique properties of each company.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

For two decades the Internet has made a significant impact on everyday life. Information technology has changed everything and is increasingly making businesses more effective. It has also changed the rules of the game in terms of globalization, increased competition, how people work, and how information is shared.

More importantly, the Internet has changed the way people communicate. Where information previously was shared and distributed on paper, fax, telephone or face-to-face communication the digitalized new world makes it easier to communicate and share information. The early days of the Internet brought us e-mail, but as the Internet is maturing the growth of the new social media has exploded. Social media connects millions of people whom build relationships online, and is growing at an astonishing pace. Marketing and PR people are embracing these new communication channels, using them to improve the market performance of their businesses. Research in the field of social media is however limited, mostly because the experts and thought leaders on the topic are professionals doing their work out in the field. By continuously testing and failing these pioneers slowly ploughs through the new fields to create new ventures or leverage the opportunities.

B2B is all about relationships. One tends to think about companies dealing with other companies, but in reality it is business people dealing with other business people. Social media in a B2B environment needs to be explored to reveal the opportunities for these B2B companies and their brands. Research on the subject is important to understand how companies should proceed with social media, and where social media fits within the business strategy – or even how companies needs to change in order to cope with social media.

The aim of this master thesis is to provide insights to how business-to-business companies can leverage opportunities in the social media sphere to build their B2B brand, by looking at how the frontrunners and thought leaders of social media utilize the new technology.

1.1 The social media revolution

1.1.1 The history of social media

The term "social media" was adapted sometime during 2006-07, but a common definition is yet to be declared. The Internet encyclopaedia Wikipedia, one of the prime examples of social media, describes social media as follows;

> *"Social media is media designed to be disseminated through social interaction, created using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques. Social media uses Internet and web-based technologies to transform broadcast media monologues (one to many) into social media dialogues (many to many). It supports the democratization of knowledge and information, transforming people from content consumers into content producers. (...)"*

> *"Social media can take many different forms, including Internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, wikis, podcasts, pictures, video, rating and social bookmarking. Technologies include: blogs, picture-sharing, vlogs, wall-postings, email, instant messaging, music-sharing, crowdsourcing, and voice over IP, to name a few."*
> (Wikipedia, 2010c)

Social media is not a new phenomenon, even though the term was born when social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace gained popularity (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Social media has been around for a long time – "newsgroups" was social media in its early adaption albeit only tech-savvy users adopted the technology. The masses started using social media when recent advancements in the web technology, broadly named as "Web 2.0", made it possible to create "collaborative Web experiences when information is shared multilaterally" (McConnell and Huba, 2007, p. 57). Enhanced by user-friendly interfaces the threshold for all kinds of people to use the new online applications was lowered.

Socialisation of the Internet is a result of the maturing Internet technology which started with the commercialisation of the web back in 1988. Throughout the 90s the Internet changed the everyday lives of people all over the world; e-mails made it easier to communicate, search engines made it easier to find information, information systems made it easier for companies to manage their customers and so on.

Coming towards the end of the 90s the Internet hype met the wall; a lot of new companies were founded by venture capitalists, built on immature technology and unhealthy business models, looking to claim a market position. It all came to an end when the "dot com bubble" burst because it became obvious that a lot of these new IT ventures did not perform in the marketplace for different reasons. Some ran out of funding, others could not complete their product whilst others faced low demand from the market (Buttell, 2010).

Looking back to the early days of the "Railway Mania" in the 1850s on the arrival of the steam locomotive technology, the similarities are striking. Hundreds of companies were founded, fuelled by over-optimistic speculation about its profitability. The hype came to an end and only the most solid companies survived. This led to the development of the steam locomotive – a technology which had a major impact on the society and businesses all over the world (Robinson, 2009a). History repeated itself in the IT industry; the solid companies survived the boom, realistic expectations were in place, and the Internet business continued its growth with an increasing impact on the society. Information technology is maybe about to make an even larger impact as people are becoming more and more accustomed with using the web, whilst the technology continues to evolve and create new opportunities.

1.1.2 Disruption from social media

The ongoing socialisation of the Internet is one of the most defining changes in present time. Traditional media outlets like newspapers, magazines and TV are dominated by advancements in online publishing tools, where everyone can become their own publisher, fast, easy and free of charge (Husa and Kvale, 2009). The shift has gone from information and news being distributed by a few large players, to information and news being distributed by millions of people to niche markets.

The driver in the social media revolution is not the technology, it is about how people use online tools to connect and communicate. Li and Bernoff (2008) has named the trend "the groundswell";

> *"A social trend in which people use technologies to get the things they need from each other, rather than from traditional institutions like corporations."*
> Source: Li and Bernoff (2008, p. 9)

The most important aspect of the social media is thus not the technology, but the people; how we depend on relationships, draw strength from each other and our desire to rebel against institutionalised power. Our desire to connect, new technology as the enabler and online economics where traffic equals money, explains why this trend is happening now, according to Li and Bernoff (2008, pp. 10-1). The technology will continue to evolve and more people will be joining in – at an astonishing pace.

- Facebook has now more than 400 million active users. If Facebook was a country it would be the world's 3rd largest country – larger than USA. Facebook launched in February 2004. By December it had 1 million active users, in October 2007 it had 50 million active users, August 2008 100 million active users, and as of February 2010 Facebook had 400 million active users averaging 55 minutes on the site every day (Facebook.com, 2010, DigitalBuzzBlog.com, 2010).

- Twitter has 105 million users, with 300,000 new users signing up every day per 14th April 2010 (Huffingtonpost.com, 2010).
- LinkedIn has 60 million users (per February 2010), adding 5 million users the two previous months (Rao, 2010).
- YouTube users are adding 24 hours of new video every 60 seconds (per 17th March 2010), or put in other words two million minutes of video is uploaded to YouTube every day. That is a 17 % increase since 20th May 2009, and an 200 % increase since April/May 2008 (Mashable.com, 2010).

The sheer size of the amount of people moving into the social media space is bound to make an impact. Social media disrupts traditional business models, because with low entry cost anybody can create a website connecting people and leveraging the powers of social media to conduct commerce, share news, reviews, start a movement or whatever objective the site has. First-mover advantage is essential in the fast moving environment of the Internet where network economics comes into play; no social site can allow for socializing unless there are people its users can socialize with.

The success of Wikipedia forced Encyclopædia Britannica to revise its business mode. Not because the technology of Wikipedia was superior, but because people wanted to engage with Britannica in the same way people engages Wikipedia. The online version now allows for additional user-created content. Britannica is however, still lagging behind Wikipedia; only 1.5 million daily visitors compared to Wikipedia's approximate 6 million visitors each day. The encyclopaedia previously reliant on selling hardcopies now has an revenue where roughly 60% stems from their online operations (Sweeney, 2009, Charlton, 2009).

Basically, social media can marginalise the strength of existing companies, where as existing companies have to revise their business strategy in order to cope with the new threats – and opportunities (Li and Bernoff, 2008, p. 13).

The era of social media imposes a lot of threats to brand managers as the social media sphere is uncontrollable and stories picked up in the social media sphere can seriously hurt their brand. But there are ways to mitigate these threats and embrace new opportunities. A company with a presence in the sphere can build relationships and discuss both their products and services, as well as respond to rumours or criticism.

1.1.3 Social media, brands and B2B

A study on C-level executives in the US showed that the Internet is the top information resource (Millar, 2009). 39 % of the executives under 40 in the same study made more than 20 work-related search queries every day, whilst 17 % for the 40-49 year olds and only 6 % of 50 plus. 56 % of the executives under 40 and 34 % of the executives between 40-39 used micro-blogging tools such as Twitter at least several times each week. As the under 40s, coined "the Netscape generation", takes over executives positions, the importance of the Internet will grow – and as social

media is the driver of the current development of the Internet, the importance of presence both online and in the social media space increases.

B2B businesses has adopted the use of social media; 91 % of purchasers in over 1200 technology companies in North-America and Europe use social media in relation with business (Bernoff, 2009). Another survey showed done by Herder (2009) showed that 82 % of managers in America use social media for branding. In the same study 81 % felt social media could assist in building the brand, i.e. perceived value. Even being in a very early phase of social media, it has already made an impact on modern marketing and branding.

Alan Mitchell (2001) argues that the emerging era of interactive marketing is about to alter the very basics of marketing; the new many-to-many communication gives the customers the upper hand. Social media facilitates many-to-many dialogues, and on these mediums people talk about different brands and their experience with them, about both the positives and the negatives. Christodoulides' (2008) point of view is in the same line of thoughts; marketers are no longer in complete control of their brand, as social networks and communities heavily influences how those brands are perceived, which in turn influences not only consumer choices but also company decisions. Value is being created in a dialectical process, and companies can either sit on the sidelines or enter the social space in order to participate in an open conversation, and influence how their brand is being spoken about.

The amount of information on the Internet is immense, and the scarce resource is people's time. Marketers need to provide return on attention to the customers in order to get keep their attention once they have it; rather than pushing marketing messages on the public, marketers need to focus on creating relationships, connecting with customers in order to understand their behaviour and needs, in order to increase the demand for their products or services. This new era will provide opportunities to build brands with customers rather than trying to instil readymade brand imagery into peoples' minds (Mitchell, 2001).

Webster Jr. and Keller (2004) have pointed to the fact that buying and marketing for business-to-business companies the last decade is moving towards relationship management. Rather than having a transactional perspective, a long term-view looking to co-operate provides more opportunities in the long run. Values such as trustworthiness, reliability and credibility are going to have a significant impact on branding in markets where long-term relationships are of importance. Social media can be a valuable tool in order to build these relationships and enhance brand; understanding and communicating with customers is just as important as delivering upon the value proposition to develop relationships (Lynch and Chernatony, 2004).

At first sight social media looks harder for business-to-business companies. Li and Bernoff (2008, p. 70) explains this could be due to the lack of few role models, as the large successful social media initiatives are target at consumers. But businesses does not interact, people do; *"business people are people, too"*.

1.2 Problem definition

Social media is not a fad and it is not going to away; it is a fundamental change in how companies relate to their customers (McKee, 2010, p. 176, Li and Bernoff, 2008, p. 75, Christodoulides, 2008, Mitchell, 2001, Qualman, 2009b, pp. 239-41, Qualman, 2009a). Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006, pp. 140-4) argued that branding online needed to be treated different compared to traditional branding approaches. Two other authors (Christodoulides, 2008, Mitchell, 2001) took the argument even further and claimed that the challenges of the online environment will force a paradigm shift. Social media is currently having a massive impact on these traditional marketing approaches, but the main attention has been on social media in B2C. For B2B companies to enter social media the threshold is significantly higher compared to B2C companies.

How B2B brands can thrive in social media is under-researched. Thought leaders of social media and branding in the online environment are currently doing their work out in the field, whilst the academics are lagging behind. In order to shed some light on issues regarding how B2B companies should manage opportunities and challenges in the social media space, this master thesis seeks to address the topic by providing an exploratory study on how business-to-business companies can utilise social media to enhance the brand, what opportunities and threats there is, and how to connect and build relationship with their clients, prospects, partners, other stakeholders and wider network. The objective of this thesis is to explore the implications of social media for B2B companies managing and building their brand.

1.2.1 Research questions

The main research question proposed is;

- **What implications do social media have on business-to-business brand management?**

Sub-questions related to the main research question;

- **What opportunities and threats does a business-to-business brand face in the social media space?**
- **How should a B2B company enter the social media space in order to build the brand?**

1.2.2 Review content

This study will seek to address the implications of social media on B2B branding through an exploratory research process.

Chapter two will present a conceptual background to frame the discussion, including literature available on B2B brand management, B2B branding online and basic theory on social media for B2B companies. The research process is described and justified through chapter three. By taking an exploratory approach four interviews have been conducted, where as they are further triangulated by three case studies. The chapter also explains why and how the selected interviewees and cases was selected, as well as address reliability and validity issues.

Chapter four presents the empirical findings. The four interviewees are presented, before the interviews are synthesised based upon the main research question; the general implications for B2B brand management, the opportunities and threats and strategy for approaching social media. The interviews are followed up by the findings from illustrative case studies based mainly on secondary sources.

Chapter five discuss the findings. First a cross-case analysis is conducted, before the interviews are revisited and the highlights from the interview findings are presented and discussed. The cases are further analysed and put up against the findings from the interviews in order to triangulate the points made in the interviews. The final part of chapter five present implications for managers, theory, further research, as well as limitations and an evaluation of the study, before the conclusions are drawn in the final chapter.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Background

Chapter one argued for the relevance of the study, and defined research questions for further investigation. This part will frame the research question by covering theory from business-to-business branding both online and offline, and relevant aspects of social media in order to have a foundation for the further research.

2.1 B2B brand management

Business-to-business branding consists of a wide variety of topics, but this chapter will focus on how the B2B brand is defined and how it differs to B2C and the overall management strategies for managing the corporate brand both internally and externally.

2.1.1 The B2B brand

A brand serves the same purpose in B2B markets as it does in B2C; the myth that industrial purchasers are thoroughly influenced by rationale assessments and not emotions, and that the important issues were hard-facts as functionality, price and quality rather than soft-facts like reputation or a renowned brand, is false (Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2006, p. 2). A good reputation is of utmost importance for a company (McKee, 2010, p. 9). Kotler and Pfoertsch provide the following definition;

> *"They facilitate the identification of products, services and business as well as differentiate them from competition. They are an effective and compelling means to communicate the benefits and value a product or service can provide. They are a guarantee of quality, origin, and performance, thereby increasing the perceived value to the customer and reducing the risk and complexity involved in the buying decision."*
> *Source: Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006, p. 3)*

A brand is more than a logo and product packaging; tangible communication is used to support the brand, but it is not the brand. The brand is a intangible short-cut of attributes existing in the minds of customers, derived from the totality of their perception of the brand (Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2006, p. 5). Between B2B and B2C branding there are several fundamental differences as industrial and consumer markets differ significantly. Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006, pp. 20-6) highlights these differences;

- **The complexity of industrial products;** Purchasing often requires qualified experts in stark contrast to B2C.
- **Derived demand;** Industrial demand is far more inelastic than consumer demand, but also more volatile than consumer demand.
- **Internationality;** The ongoing globalisation enables B2B companies to sell to the whole world. B2B products in general requires less adaption to local markets, but national differences in culture and value can have implications for how products or services are perceived.
- **Organisational buying;** Fewer customers than B2C, larger volumes per customer and closer, long-lasting relationships with the clients, combined with a complex purchasing process.
- **Buying situation;** Different buying situations, whether it is a straight re-buy, modified re-buy or new task, and has implications for the complexity of the decision to be made.

- **Buying centre;** buying centres are often composed by different people with different roles. These people have different backgrounds, different interests in the purchase, different roles in terms of the purchase, different authority and power, different influence and different access to information.

The difference compared to B2C with most impact for B2B marketers is the complexity of the buying centre. How this buying centre is composed, whether it is formally sanctioned or ad hoc, how many people, and their roles differ significantly. Seven types of roles are proposed; initiators, users, influencers, deciders, approvers, buyers and gatekeepers. One person can occupy several roles, and for marketers it thus becomes a challenge to target the people with influence within the buying centre of their prospects (Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2006, pp. 26-8).

2.1.2 A holistic perspective towards branding

There is a recurring view regarding a holistic perspective towards how companies should build their B2B brand; a branding strategy should be strongly aligned towards the business strategy. The brand is seen as a differentiator which can increase the competitive advantage, but the brand needs to deliver upon the brand promise in order to increase the company's market performance (Webster Jr. and Keller, 2004, Boatwright et al., 2009, Rooney, 1995, Rosenbroijer, 2001, Rozin and Magnusson, 2003).

The holistic view of Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006, p. 108) proposes that the branding and business strategy needs to be closely related. The authors advocate a holistic perspective due to the complex nature of B2B transactions. Implementing the brand strategy only in the external marketing dimension is not enough; a branding effort should be consistent throughout every customer touch point.

> *"Consistency is one of the most important aspects of a brand strategy. (...) The brand identity that the company wants to communicate has to transverse all marketing materials and communications in order to build brand equity in the intended way."*
> *Source: Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006, p. 110)*

In order to strive for consistency throughout the branding touch points Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006, p. 16) visualises the need for a holistic branding perspective by using the branding triangle (see Figure 1). In order to leverage the full power of branding a company needs to consider the brand and be consistent about it in every part; relationship marketing, integrated marketing, internal marketing and social responsibility. The activities need to be aligned to create synergies between the marketing efforts.

The branding triangle visualising the holistic concept consists of three marketing dimensions; the external dimension, the internal dimension and the interactive dimension.

- **External marketing** concerns traditional marketing communications, where the company communicates its offerings to their (potential) customers.
- **Internal marketing** is vital in order to align the goals of the company with the goals of the brand. It is important for the employees to understand and appreciate the branding message in order to deliver upon the brand promise.
- **Interactive marketing** concerns employees having a dialogue with customers, suppliers and retailers. In a B2B environment where relationships are important, the employees are the ones to have to deliver upon the brand value, in regards to customer satisfaction, problem solving, and the likes.
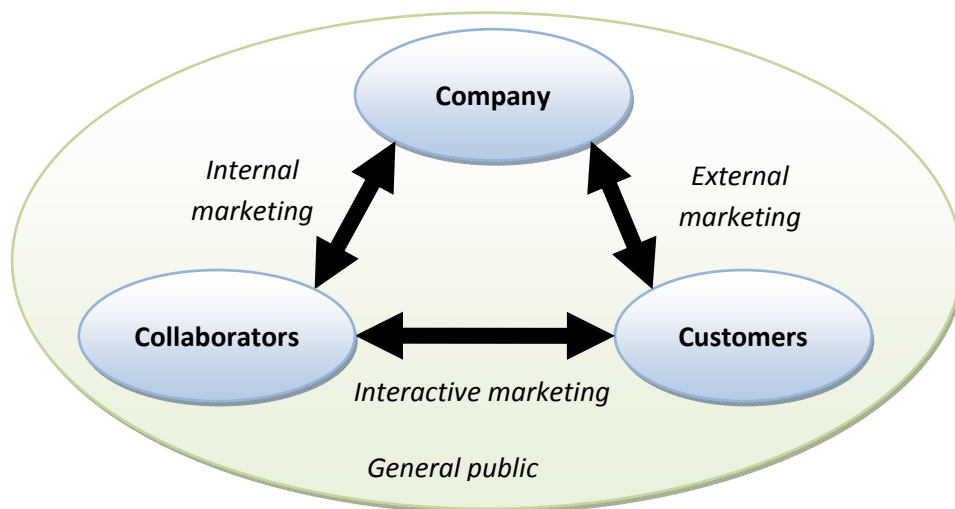
Figure 1: The branding triangle
Source: Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006, p. 55)

Frameworks for a holistic branding strategy

The "Acceleration Through Branding" framework presented by Kotler and Pfoertsch emphasises the importance of building a brand over time with ongoing change and continuous improvements. The brand building framework consists of five phases (Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2006, pp. 160-8);

- During the **planning phase** the organisation is prepared to undergo the branding processes, involving all parts of the organisation in order to establish brand values amongst the employees, establishing processes for information flow, implementation processes etc.
- The **analysis phase** examine the company itself, competitors, customers, in order to establish brand values aligned with the corporate mission – as well as the personality of the brand.
- A brand **strategy** is then built from the brand fundamentals established in the analysis phase; the guiding idea behind the brand, positioning, value proposition, brand architecture and brand promise. The brand is a powerful communication tool both internally and externally, something many companies fails to appreciated.

- The brand **building phase** uses the brand strategy as the building blocks to over time instil associations in the mind of the customer, where the actual branding initiative is carried out throughout the organisation; the marketing program, direct experience with the products or service, word-of-mouth, and the brands identification with a company, events, distributors – holistic.
- During the **audit phase** the strengths and weaknesses of the brand is assessed by a thorough investigation, whereby one goes back to the planning phase to iterate the process.

Webster Jr. and Keller (2004) presented in their article *"A roadmap for branding in industrial markets"* ten guidelines which are significantly aligned to the presented "Acceleration through Branding" framework. The article emphasises the importance of alignment between branding and corporate strategy, avoid internal confusion and educate employees about brand values, and involving the entire organisation.

In addition they recommend focusing on building the corporate brand, and not product brands, using a basic value proposition relevant for all players within the buying centre as well as understanding the role of the brand in the buying process. In line with the branding triangle this branding approach strives for consistency throughout all dimensions.

2.1.3 Internal branding

The goal of internal branding is to communicate the brand to make the minds of the employees aligned and conscious on the brand and business strategy, in order to deliver upon the brand value in every phase of their everyday work (Lynch and Chernatony, 2004, Webster Jr. and Keller, 2004). Aspara and Tikkanen (2008) argues for internal branding as an important management philosophy where branding is seen as an efficient management tool to create aspirational brand values aiming to secure a consistent perception of the company. Internal branding is important to align the employees, the brand and the business strategy.

One of the most important properties of a brand is the capability to connection with the emotions of buyers; a strong brand can remove uncertainty and build trust, thus the internal branding should also emphasis not only on tangible values but also intangible values surrounding the brand. As industrial products often have multiple customer touch points which influences the brand perception, it is important that the entire organisation is aware and conscious upon what the customers are expecting and what image the company is trying to build, in order to deliver upon the brand values on every customer touch point (Webster Jr. and Keller, 2004, Boatwright et al., 2009).

It is important for a company to educate its employees involved in the purchasing process to promote the affective benefits of the products, including how different benefits affects different actors in the buying centre. Lynch and Chernatony (2004) argues for three internal branding channels which should be aligned in order to build the brand internally; the organizational culture, internal communication media, and

training. Connecting with the customers emotions are especially important for salespeople as purchasing decisions are often influence by the emotions connected to the corporate brand; the relationship towards the customer is though based upon both rational and emotional brand values (Lynch and Chernatony, 2004).

2.2 B2B branding online

Internet as a new channel for brand building activities presents new opportunities and challenges for any kind of business, even though B2B branding online has received rather limited attention (Virtsonis and March-Harridge, 2009). The online environment is different compared to traditional branding approaches; Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006, pp. 140-4) encourage companies to use the Internet to innovate, attract and inform prospects, and develop and maintain relationships with the customers.

Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006, p. 142) argues for two specific advantages when it comes to branding online; information and simplicity. The nature of the Internet makes it possible to distribute information to the entire world in an instant, enabling business transactions to take place anywhere at any time. A company can customize the message delivered to different types of users in order to deliver the brand message depending upon the different types of users and buyers (Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2006, p. 142).

2.2.1 The B2B website

In the literature a recurring approach to B2B branding online is to focus on how the company website can be used to communicate the brand (Rozin and Magnusson, 2003, Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2006, p. 140, Wood, 2004, Virtsonis and March-Harridge, 2009). The company's website could be a prospects first contact with the brand and the first impression is vital. Because of the complexity of the B2B environment it is difficult for industrial purchasers to compare prices online, the B2B marketer have the opportunity to incorporate the brand extensively and consistent throughout the website to position the company in the competitive landscape (Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2006, Virtsonis and March-Harridge, 2009).

It is important to look at online branding different from traditional branding, and not just use the Internet to display a catalogue but rather to focus on the value proposition and how the company differs from its competitors (Virtsonis and March-Harridge, 2009, Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2006). Providing a good brand experience from the websites can influence the brand perceptions in the minds of the visitors positively, obviously by staying true to the company's branding strategy. A common theme on B2B websites is to demonstrate credibility in order to instil trust and reliability in the brand. The soft values of the corporate brand, such as trust and professionalism, are highly regarded by B2B industrial buyers. Those values could be further enhanced by usability and the quality of the content in order to create a brand experience which can influence the perception of the brand (Virtsonis and March-Harridge, 2009, Rozin and Magnusson, 2003).

2.2.2 Extending online interaction beyond the website

The maturation of the Internet as an arena for communication arms B2B marketers and brand managers with new tools to target their customers. The online medium presents opportunities to foster two-way communication with its audience, which subsequently foster trust (Webster Jr. and Keller, 2004). When companies enter the online environment seeking dialogue, the need to be comfortable with two-way relations is highlighted.

Brands tend to have a life of their own and develop through time. If a company create an aspirational brand promise but fails to deliver upon it, people will talk about it. Word-of-mouth marketing can have tremendous impact but people are more likely to talk about a brand when they are unhappy about it. The formula for developing word-of-mouth is however to meet the expectations and deliver upon the brand promise. Social media is an extension of word-of-mouth with a growing importance, and the new online mediums are perceived to have a significant impact (Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2006, p. 148). Qualman suggested social media is word-of-mouth on steroids (Qualman, 2010).

Novell's CMO John Dragoon, Sun Microsystems CEO Jonatan Schwartz, Adobe's Chief Software Architect Kevin Lynch, Boeing's CMO Randy Lerner, and the basketball team Dallas Maverics' owner Mark Cuban are among the lot of large corporations thriving in the social media space through corporate blogs. These are authoritative blogs in their niche, and can dictate important topics, create interest, spark debates and gather professionals through their brand. It is possible to communicate the brand on a personal level, rather than traditional broadcast messages (Christodoulides, 2008).

The tools and platforms available in the online environment lower the barriers for by facilitating engagement and dialogue in an informal manner between the company and its audience, whether it is fellow professionals or customers on a low commitment level. Webster Jr. and Keller (2004) argues that brand communications should be used in multiple channels to reinforce the brand strategy, and no other viable tool can facilitate many-to-many conversation with the same ease as social media which is a complement to traditional channels. People favouring a certain supplier or solution can use these tools to gain access to more information to influence the decision makers within the buying centre.

2.2.3 Missing aspects of the online environment

The online environment poses a significant challenge for brands in general; while it is possible to monitor mentions of the brand online, it is impossible to control the conversations. Research on brands, brand management and corporate branding is increasing, but the context of the online environment for these topics have been under-researched by business and marketing academics, even more so for the business-to-business setting (iamot.org, 2009).

2.3 Social media for B2B

Chapter one outlined how social media developed from obscure newsgroups to social networks connecting hundred millions of people and how it disrupts the marketplace and the competitive landscape. This chapter will outline the basics of social media, herein the classification and evolvement of social media tools and the user behaviour of B2B buyers. A recommended approach to creating social media strategies will be presented, as well as the difference between B2B and B2C social media.

2.3.1 Social media is not a traditional communication channel

Social media is a low threshold communication channel to the customers, but there are cases where marketers engage with social media as they do with traditional media. Social media experts discourage marketers to push direct sales messages, but rather providing the brand with a personality and engaging in discussions and conversations with the target audience. The audience in the social space does not accept direct selling, and it puts down – and expose if necessarily – companies who does not oblige to those rules; key values appreciated by the audience on social media is honesty, respect, open and transparent (Herder, 2009). Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006) argued also that social media should be approached with a different perspective compared to traditional marketing.

> *"I look at the internet as being a road. Social media has transformed that road into a four lane highway."*
> *Stuart Foster*
> *Source: Borders (2009)*

Almost all of these new online mediums share the characteristics about participation, openness, conversation, community and connectedness. In social media everyone is usually welcome and encouraged to contribute and give feedback, and the line between the sender and the audience is blurred. These services encourage voting, commenting and sharing of information, as well as people being open about who they are and who they represent. Anonymity and password-protected content is often frowned upon. Rather than the broadcast marketing traditional media is, social media is by nature a two-way dialogue. Communities are built on different (often niche) topics looking to gather people with common interests where they can communicate effectively. And it's all connected; social media thrive on connectedness, connecting other sites, resources and people(Mayfield, 2008). The value of a network increase as the number of users increase (Stabell and Fjeldstad, 1998).

2.3.2 Classification and evolvement of social media tools

The development of the different social media platforms, tools and networks has increased rapidly the last few years. There are now so many different tools it is impossible to even know about them all. The technology will always change and evolve so it is important to understand the forces at work, rather than how the different types of tools work. Li and Bernoff (2008) has classified six main types of social media technologies in six categories.

Table 1: Classification of social media

Activity	What	Purpose
People creating	Blogs, user-generated content, podcasts E.g.: Wordpress, Blogger, YouTube	People acts as publishers, creating and sharing information, knowledge, opinions or other. Content creators comment and connect with other content creators, as well as content consumers, through discussion areas.
People connecting	Social networks and virtual worlds E.g.: Facebook, Second Life	Facilitates relationship by enabling users to add other people to their networks and giving access to each other's profiles with personal info.
People collaborating	Wikis, open source E.g.: Wikipedia, Firefox, Linux	Communities evolving around collaboration to create a core product e.g. online encyclopaedias and software.
People reacting to each other	Forums, rating, reviews E.g.: Commenting and rating products on Amazon, IMDB.com, TripAdvisor, Blackberryforums.com	People helping each other by e.g. recommending or discouraging various items, or getting/giving help from/to other people by engaging on forums.
People organizing	Tagging content E.g.: Digg, Del.icio.us, StumbleUpon	Classify and organise the online world; content is tagged in video and photo sharing services, blog posts, bookmarking tools. Tagging tools allow for sharing, which in turn can be a part of people's personal brand.
Accelerating consumption	RSS and widgets E.g.: An RSS feed might be the posts from a blog, a widget can be a news ticker running on your desktop	Tools that brings content to the user rather than the user having to find. Increase efficiency by allowing people to monitor more social activity.

Source: Li and Bernoff (2008)

McKee (2010, pp. 182-94) presented a more brand centric model labelled "The Social Trinity Model" (see Figure 2), where the different social platforms are presented on three dimensions depending on their purpose; networking, conversation, and community. Rather than looking at how the different types of applications work, they are divided in terms of how they could be utilised for especially business-to-business companies.

Three platforms emerging as most relevant and popular for B2B companies; Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. Each of these tools represents one dimension; conversation,

community and networking. When these tools are used in parallel they replicate the activity or process a company would use to communicate offline in order to secure business. McKee argues social media should be applied to augment traditional business activities, rather than replacing it.

Figure 2: The Social Trinity Model
Source: McKee (2010, p. 183)

Conversation: Share new, views, opinions and ideas and engage in conversations new, alternative, interesting, different, and like-minded people. Online conversations can create interest for the brand, and amplify its voice. To participate and succeed the brand need to contribute something of value rather than 'selling', which in turn encourages loyalty. Conversations have *always* been an integral part of business. Conversation creates opportunities which creates revenue (McKee, 2010, p. 183).

Community: One-to-one conversations are powerful, but conversations open for anyone in a community can reach an even wider audience. Communities offer participative communication in a deregulated, casual, informal environment. This provides customers with valuable engagement opportunities (McKee, 2010, p. 187).

Networking: Networking platforms such as LinkedIn is easy to understand the value of, easier than e.g. Facebook or Twitter. Employees can connect with other professionals they would like to keep in touch with, and provides other companies and other employees with a searchable database to find other companies and people. Networks provide context to the brand; active participating in groups relevant to the industry, market or topics relevant to the brand can exert influence and provides a channel for business people to find, evaluate, and form the perception of brands (McKee, 2010, p. 191).

Social media evolving

The classification presented on social media tools is by no means constant; the technologies of social media are continuing to evolve and increasingly converge. A group of Forrester researchers have predicted how the future of the social web will develop (Owyang, 2009); from the era of social relationships where people use the web to sign up with online profiles and connected with their friends, into the era of social functionality where social networking are social interactive applications – small operating systems in their own right albeit existing in silos. By establishing shared IDs the era of colonization starts to allow users to connect and integrate their social experiences, blurring the lines between the different platforms and traditional sites, e.g. using your Facebook account to comment on news articles. Information connected to each user's usage and interests will make it possible to deliver customized online experiences, using the social platforms as the fundament.

Today this can be seen where e.g. the "Like!" buttons from Facebook is introduced everywhere. The social aspect of the web predicted by Forrester researchers will later develop into the era of social commerce where sites, service, networks and people are highly interconnected, i.e. the platforms will converge (Owyang, 2009). If the use of shared identifications is embraced by websites and platforms, users will be accustomed to logging in on various sites with e.g. their Facebook or Google account. In practice, this means that the barriers for people to reveal their identity to the websites they are using is lowered as it is only one click away which means companies can more easily identify and follow up the active users of their communities and websites.

Owyang and his team predicts that brands will face a significant challenge; customers joining forces in online groups as an opposite pole to brands which it will be a necessity to cooperate with (see Figure 3).

	Era of social relationships	Era of social functionality	Era of social colonization	Era of social context	Era of social commerce
Start; maturity	1995; 2003 to 2007	2007; 2010 to 2012	2009; 2011	2010; 2012	2011; 2013
Descriptions	Individuals assemble and connect with each other in online groups.	Social networks become operating systems.	Every Web site is now social, even if it doesn't choose to be.	Web sites deliver personalized content to visitors.	Online groups supplant brands.
Consumers	Use simple profile and discussion features to share with each other	Embed Web applications and widgets on their profiles to make experience more fun and useful	Lean on their peers' opinions to make decisions about products	Opt in to share their identity in return for a more relevant Web experience	Work with peers to define the next generation of products; also purchase in groups
Brands	Join online groups using conversational marketing or sponsorship, or create their own community	Advertise, then sponsor, then create applications to provide utility to consumers	Focus on influencers and including social recommendations	Provide specialized content for visitors; get rid of registration pages	Lean on groups to define products
Social networks	Struggle with monetization	Share as developers to monetize applications	Aggregate all implicit and explicit data, creating a new type of social inbox	Become the identity system of the Web	Offer features to help with product design and vendor management
Other media	The world is more connected.	Office apps become social; even solitaire games have social leaderboards.	Mobile devices trigger in-store displays to show custom content.	TV offers personalized interactive channels for viewers.	A new PR agency emerges that represents online groups — not brands.

46970   Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

Figure 3: The evolution of the social web affects consumers, brands and social networks
Source: Forrester Research via DestinationCRM.com (2010a)

2.3.3 Social media strategy

Literature on social media advices companies to start engaging in the social media space as the trend is something which cannot be ignored, and the examples of successful B2C social media campaigns are many and increasing (Li and Bernoff, 2008, p. 75, McConnell and Huba, 2007, p. x, McKee, 2010, p. 176, Qualman, 2009b, p. xix).

A lot of companies are entering the social media space in order to utilise the opportunities, albeit there is an issue of how and where to start. Too often companies engage in social media without a plan. The initial costs to take part in social media are practically zero, but establishing and maintaining the presence does require resources. In the same way the branding strategy needs to be aligned to support the business strategy, the social media strategy needs to be closely aligned to business objectives by focusing on strengthening and reinforcing each other which ultimately increases the competitiveness of the company.

> *"Social media is not a campaign. It is a commitment. Your plan*
> *should cover both the immediate and short-term with an eye to the*
> *long term understanding that the technology changes daily. You*
> *may find that some of the tools you initially choose are gone by the*
> *time you get around to accessing them. Be flexible."*
> *Jeffrey Hayzlett, former Kodak CMO*
> *Source: deHaaff (2010)*

The book "Groundswell" by Li and Bernoff (2008), perceived to be one of the most appreciated books on the social media strategy, presents a four-step planning labelled "The POST-method". This process they consider to be best-practice for how companies should build their social media strategy.

The POST-method: A four step planning process for social media
POST is an acronym for people, objectives, strategy and technology, which is the four steps the company have to visit in order to build a viable strategy; there is no correct way of doing it because all companies are unique (Li and Bernoff, 2008, pp. 67-71).

> *"Each company must adopt the tactics that are rights for its*
> *customers and its way of doing business and adapt as the*
> *technologies change. Copying others doesn't work because your*
> *company, your customers, and your goals are not the same as*
> *anybody else's."*
> *Source: Li and Bernoff (2009, p. 75)*

The first step, people, is to assess how the audience the company want to reach currently are engaging online. If the audience the company is targeting are more likely to comment on blogs than joining social networks, the strategy need to be build on that basis. Companies then need to be clear on their *objective* to their social media engagement; seeking customer insights, extend marketing initiatives to a more interactive channel, motivate brand ambassadors, decreasing support costs or integrating the customers into the business by e.g. helping them design products. See Table 2 for the five objectives suggested in the model. A company should have one primary object even though they may accomplish more than they sat out to; it is the progress towards this primary objective companies should measure their success (Li and Bernoff, 2008, p. 67).

The people and objectives are the basis for the *strategy*; how could their relationship with their customers be different and better in three years? The company should also think trough the consequences of the strategy and address key issues that may follow from social media engagements and how it will change the company. Only when people, objectives, and strategy are thought through the company decide on which *technologies* and platforms, i.e. choosing the tools and tactics, viable to reach the desired objective, based upon how their target audience use social media, what the objective of the company's engagement is and how they would like the relationship to change (Li and Bernoff, 2008, pp. 68,71-3).

Table 2: Existing business functions and their groundswell alternatives

Existing business function	Groundswell objective	How things are different in the groundswell
Research	Listening	Ongoing monitoring of your customers' conversations with each other, instead of occasional surveys and focus groups
Marketing	Talking	Participating in and stimulating two-way conversations your customers have with each other, not just outbound communications to your customer
Sales	Energizing	Making it possible for your enthusiastic customers (brand ambassadors) to help sell each other
Support	Supporting	Enabling your customers to support each other
Development	Embracing	Helping your customers work with each other to come up with ideas to improve your products and services

Source: Li and Bernoff (2008, p. 69)

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Chapter 3: Method

Chapter one identified several research questions; this chapter describes the methodology used to provide data to investigate them. The novelty of social media makes the approach a qualitative and exploratory by nature, but there are several ways such a study can be done. This chapter outlines how the research topic was selected, the research questions formed, how data was collected through interviews and case studies, and processed in order address the research question. It also justifies the chosen approach, and argues for the reliability and validity.

3.1 Research strategy

A qualitative exploratory research strategy was chosen in order to get a deeper understanding of how social media was used by actors in a given context. Due to the novelty of the field there is little academic literature available on the topic, and the inductive approach sets sight at generating theory which then can be hypothesised and tested through e.g. qualitative methods. The epistemological orientation is interpretivism because the study sets out to understand how practitioners utilise social media in the B2B context, whilst the ontological orientation is constructionism because the social properties are outcomes of a series of interleaved interactions.

3.1.1 Defining the research questions

Using social media to build the business-to-business brand caught the attention of the author due to the increasing importance, impact on traditional marketing and attention of social media, as well as the novelty of it. The amount of academic research conducted on the topic was perceived to be very sparse, and during the autumn 2009 a pre-study was conducted by doing a literature review on the topic of B2B brand management where B2B branding online was in focus. The findings revealed that some scholars predicted that the changes in the online environment would present a paradigm shift for the entire genre of marketing and branding (Christodoulides, 2008, Mitchell, 2001). Those findings led to the problem definition of this study in order to find out how social media can work in relation to B2B branding and brand management.

3.1.2 Research process and design

Because of the novelty of the topic "Social Media in B2B Branding" a qualitative and exploratory approach was chosen; the objective is to discover new insights to how B2B companies can utilise the social media space. Exploratory research is used for topics that have seen little research, in order to formulate a problems interesting for more accurate investigation, developing hypothesises for quantitative studies, and establishing priorities. Exploratory research asks "what are the variables involved", rather than the explanatory research which asks "what are the precise relationships between the variables" (Perry, 1998). The flexibility and limited structure gives the researcher the opportunity to have a little contamination of the world as possible, to risk imposing an inappropriate frame of reference (Bryman, 2008, p. 389).

The approach was open but based on a holistic B2B brand management theory foundation, and the conceptual background was built on the findings from a literature review, as well as additional literature focusing on social media; basics, strategy and the business-to-business sides of it. Due to the lack of academic research on social media a few appreciated books were chosen, "Groundswell" by Li and Bernoff (2008) the most significant one as it was written by a team of analytics at the renowned research company Forrester. In addition blogs, articles, and quasi-scientific surveys and white-papers conducted by practitioners and thought leaders, were carefully selected to have a foundation for the data gathering process. These resources were used due to the rapid development of the area and the need for up-

to-date content, not hampered by going through the tedious academic publishing processes. Blogs can tend to be based upon subjective opinions, and it could prove to be a problem of validity. They are however one of few resources available for research on the topic and provides fresh insights from thought leaders. The blogs were carefully selected based upon the reputation of the site as well as resonance in terms of comments.

The unit of analysis selected was *the branding strategy and approach of B2B companies in the social media space*, i.e. how companies could or should form their strategies for this new medium. By this approach it was possible to discover how B2B social media affect B2B brand management, a topic which have seen very little academic research. Yin (1994, p. 6) proposes that case studies is an appropriate research design when the research question is how and why, with no requirement of control of events as well as focus on contemporary events. How and why businesses have conducted their B2B social media is an important issue to address the research question. Perry (1998) also argues for case study research or action research being the best methodology for these types of studies.

There are however a limited number of publicly available B2B social media success stories, and it was hard to identify possible cases. The lack of B2B role models is also mentioned by Li and Bernoff (2008, p. 70). Quite a few B2B companies are engaging in space, but it is difficult to pin-point which of the B2B social media initiatives that have been highly successful as practitioners in B2B are still struggling to find their way in the new world of social media. Interviews are recommended when one looks to gain deeper insights into what the interviewee sees as relevant, and they can depart from the schedule to speak about what they think is important which is valuable when exploring new a field of study (Bryman, 2008, p. 437). On that basis interviews with thought leaders on B2B social media were selected as the main data source, where as three appropriate case studies were selected to illustrate the findings from the interviews as the limited number of cases available would not alone be sufficient to justify the generation of new theory and insights.

Four interviews with B2B social media experts in the UK and the US was the main data source. The interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analysed systematically. These expert interviews were further triangulated by three illustrative case studies on B2B social media in order to further enhance the validity of the findings. Interviews and case studies were selected to achieve an understanding of how people in real-world organisations, at the coalface of the new challenges, perceive and utilises B2B social media. In order to extract the new knowledge of the study the discussion part compares the interviews and the illustrative cases, triangulated with theory, concepts, evidence and opinions from other data sources.

The research design is thus a grounded theory approach, where the conceptual background frames the research question upon which the interview guide was developed; interviews and case studies were conducted, data was coded, reduced and compared to the literature which forms conceptual background. It is a common

misconception that a researcher using grounded theory approach must start with a blank mind, with no prior knowledge of the literature or experience. Substantive theory is the strategic link in the formulation and generation of grounded formal theory, and provides the initial directing in developing relevant categories. Constant comparison was done to maintain a close connection between the data and conceptualisation in order to see categories emerge. Additional literature relevant for the findings was also used to triangulate and verify these findings, and the study was evaluated in terms of its limitations, reliability and validity (Bryman, 2008, pp. 415,38-50, Suddaby, 2006).

Formation of research question
Based on literature framing the research question to a relevant context

Data collection
Four in-depth expert interviews, three case studies

Data reduction
Categorising the data from the interviews and cases, and identifying themes

Data display
Implications for social media on B2B branding and marketing
Opportunities and threats for B2B companies in the social media space
B2B companies developing a social media strategy
Case study findings

Discussion
Finding similarities and differences between the cases and the interviews
Connecting findings from theory to empirical findings

Conclusions drawing
Theoretical conclusions, managerial implications

Verification
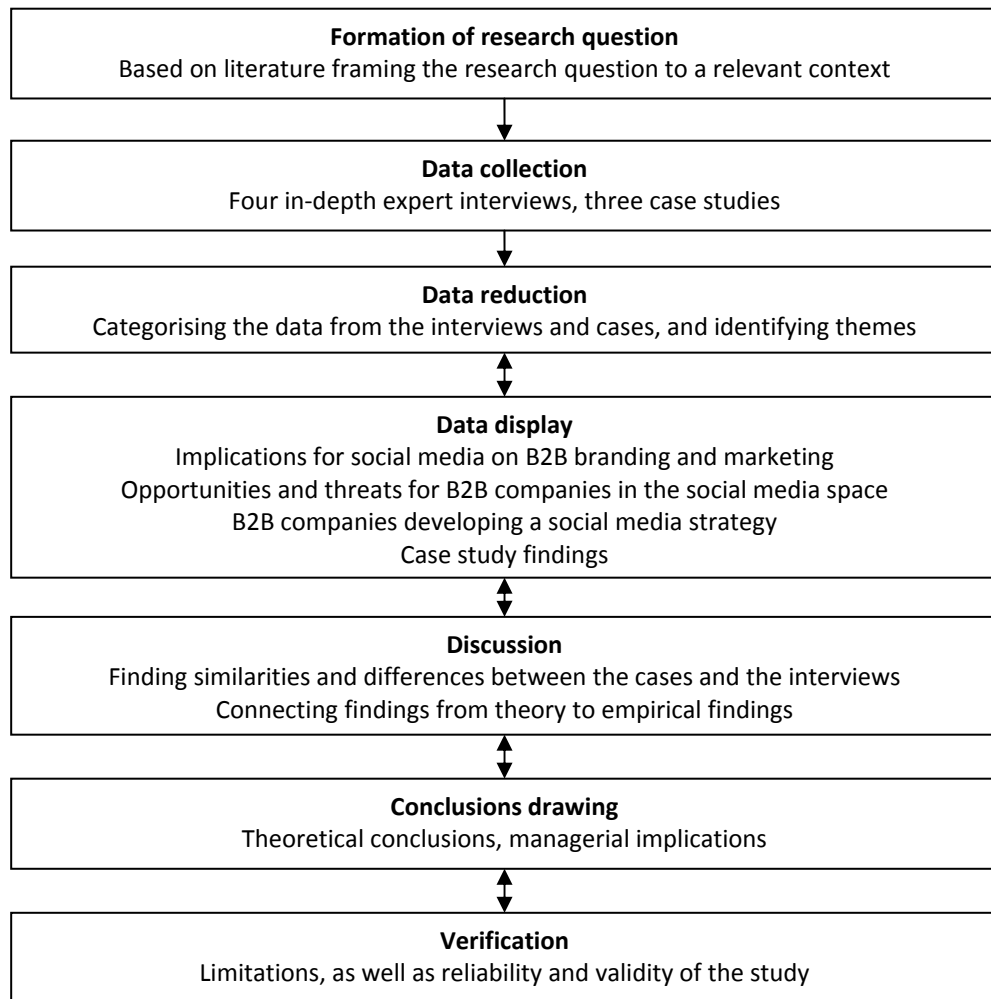Limitations, as well as reliability and validity of the study

Figure 4: The research process

3.2 Data collection and analysis

The interviews are the main data source of the study, whilst case studies based on secondary sources are used to illustrate and triangulate points made by the interviewees. During the data gathering process the researcher was based in the United Kingdom, and attended the Internet World Expo 2010[1], the largest Internet industry exhibition in Europe, and at the B2B Marketing seminar "Twitter and blogs: How to integrate within the digital marketing strategy"[2]. At these two events the interviewees and two of the cases were selected.

3.2.1 Interviews

It was decided to do a few, but in-depth, interviews with industry experts on social media. In order to get different perspectives, a heterogenic group of experts with different backgrounds were selected. Everyone did however have backgrounds related to B2B and social media; a digital marketing academic from a business university, practitioners from a B2B marketing agency and a B2B social media agency, and one PR manager from a large corporation.

The credibility of their expertise on the topic was demonstrated by all of them being speakers on the topic, and three of them spoke at the two mentioned conferences. The fourth one, Scot McKee, was selected because he was a the CEO of a B2B marketing agency, a monthly columnist in the B2B Marketing Magazine[3] and was the author of the book "Creative B2B Branding (No, really)" (McKee, 2010), which also had a section about B2B social media. Taken these factors into account, it was still a convenience sample due to them being speakers, and the conference and agreeing on conducting interviews. No one declined to do an interview, thus these four people are the only four ones that was asked. One of the interviews was conducted in person and three was conducted through Skype. The duration of each interview was about an hour.

An interview guide was prepared before the interviews, and the same guide was used for all the four interviews (see appendix 1). The objective of the interviews was to get an understanding of how practitioners and academics perceived social media for business-to-business organisations in a real-world context on a strategic level. Details, tactics and tools (e.g. how to use Twitter or Facebook) were not the focus, one of the reasons being because the social media space evolves so rapidly that the technologies will quickly become outdated. The interesting part and the focus of the study was the strategic impact of social media and how a B2B organisation can approach it.

Questions for the interview guide were developed to give answer to the research questions without being leading. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as it

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[1] Internet World Expo: http://www.internetworld.co.uk/
[2] Seminar programme: http://www.mardev.com/Events.asp
[3] B2B Marketing Magazine: http://www.b2bm.biz/

provides a structure for what topics to be covered and similar wording to the questions asked. At the same time a semi-structured interview allows for flexibility; questions may not follow in the same order as outlined on the schedule as the interviewer can pick up different threads related to the answer of the interviewee. It also gives the opportunity to probe the answers of the interviewee to get a deeper understanding of the issue discussed (Bryman, 2008, pp. 438-42). All interviews were audi-recorded in order for the interviews to later be transcribed and analysed. This reduced the possibility of misinterpreting the interviewees. It was chosen not make the interviewees anonymous in order to keep the study as transparent as possible. All interviewees agreed to both being recorded and being named in the thesis.

Table 3: Interviewees

Name	Date	Position	Expertise
Nationality	*Where/how*	*Company*	
Jeff McCarthy	7th May, 2010	Senior Lecturer	Digital sports marketing
United Kingdom	*MMU, Manchester*	*MMU Business School*	experience from B2B
Steve Lamb	19th May, 2010	Technology PR manager	Using soc. med. as a
United Kingdom	*Skype*	*Microsoft UK*	tool in day-to-day work
Mike Rowland	20th May,.2010	CEO	B2B social media and
USA	*Skype*	*Impact Interactions*	online communities
Scot McKee	27th May, 2010	Managing Director	B2B marketing and
United Kingdom	*Skype*	*Birddog*	branding, social media

3.2.2   Illustrative case studies

In order to triangulate the findings from the expert interviews case studies was chosen as a method to illustrate points from the interviews. The three selected case has a great variety in terms of what was done, how and why. It is difficult to find good case studies on B2B social media, again due to the novelty of the field.

Only secondary sources were used for the illustrative case studies, but there were few sources for two of the cases. This resulted in a deeper coverage of the ShipServ case whilst the ShipServ case study is more in-depth. Coloplast is based upon one academic case study, and Celebrity Cruises are based upon one case study presentation. The selected studies are a heterogenic group of cases, chosen due to their three different usages of social media. Whilst Coloplast develops a community, ShipServ use a comprehensive content marketing strategy, where as Celebrity Cruises UK only focus on connecting and building relationships with their agents through Twitter. All provides three different perspectives on how social media could be utilised to build the brand.

Company *Industry*	Social media use	Type of sources
Coloplast *Healthcare*	Building a community for stoma care nurses to enhance the brand. *Objective:* Enhance brand loyalty	Mainly one academic study, Andersen (2004), albeit the case study takes a different focus. Only triangulated by the website of the company and recognition received.
ShipServ *Maritime trading*	Using social media platforms to drive people back to the main site, thereby building the brand by increasing awareness and giving ShipServ a personality. Generates leads based on users behaviour on the website. *Objective:* Brand awareness and create high-qualified leads	Multiple sources; industry press, a presentation and slides by the CMO, articles
Celebrity Cruises UK *Travel*	Developing relationships with travel agencies by utilising the features of the social media platform Twitter. *Objective:* Establish close relationships with their agents	Mainly one single source; a presentation given by one of the people working with the Twitter initiative

3.2.3 Data analysis

All the four interviews were transcribed in full based on the audio-recordings. The content of the interviews were read through in order to get a preliminary idea of the main themes. An open coding practice reduced the interviews into key themes (see Table 5), and deconstructed the interviews into manageable amounts of data in order to be systematically reviewed through a thematic analysis (Bryman, 2008, pp. 543-55). Each theme was then synthesised and important points made by the experts were quoted. This data was then presented the empirical findings.

Table 5: Themes and sub-themes from the interviews

Theme	Sub-themes
Impact of social media on B2B branding	Current impact The future Impact for whom
Control	Guidelines Ownership
Opportunities	Opportunities
Threats and challenges	Threats and challenges
Strategy	Approach Social media strategy Targeting
Measurement/ROI	Qualitative Quantitative

A cross-case study was conducted on the three cases in order to highlight similarities and differences through an explanation-building approach. Yin (1994, p. 110) argues the approach is often utilised as a part of a hypothesis-generating process used for exploratory case studies, and its goal is not to conclude but develop ideas for further study.

Both the empirical findings from the case studies and the interviews were discussed, and comparison was drawn between them as well as against relevant theory. The case studies were also used to illustrate the findings from the interviews, in order to achieve an understanding of how people in real-world organisations use social media.

3.3 Reliability and validity

Reliability and validity are important criteria in assessing the quality of the research regardless of whether it is qualitative or quantitative studies. For qualitative studies the criticism is that generalisation to a larger population from a very small sample is impossible. Whilst this is true it is however possible to generalise theory (Bryman, 2008, pp. 391-2). It has been suggested that reliability and validity in qualitative studies is better suited as trustworthiness and authenticity (Bryman, 2008, pp. 377-80). Trustworthiness is made up of four criteria; credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability.

The credibility for the interviews is proven through triangulation towards the cases, and in the discussion chapter by reaching resonance with existing online literature on the topic, i.e. blogs, quasi-scientific white-papers and opinion pieces. In order to determine the credibility of the literature available on the topic a qualitative assessment has been made based upon the author's status with regards to the topic, e.g. if it is a blog post by looking at the number of comments and discussions around the topic, or if it is an agency white-paper the reputation of the company is reviewed. Several surveys are also conducted and whenever studies are cited their origin is mentioned. The method of the different surveys available has also been reviewed before being used.

In terms of the illustrative case studies the credibility varies. ShipServ is triangulated around multiple sources and verified the findings by approaching their chief marketing officer with the case study in order to get feedback on if the case study presents their efforts in a correct way. In the case of Coloplast the main source used was an academic paper on web-enhanced communities (Andersen, 2004), and the case study was rewritten to fit a social media branding context using the data presented in the study. The academic nature of the study does however implicate that it has been through a review process and a quality control. Only a few more sources have been used to triangulate the findings. In the case of Celebrity Cruises UK only one source is used, a presentation given by one of the people from the marketing agency creating the social media initiative, and also suffers from a lack of the strategic context. These limitations are however related to the lack of available

studies on successful B2B social media. During the research process the ShipServ case study was published the author's blog to get feedback, and it spread through social media being picked up by a popular B2B blog and distributed through the social space which support the argument of few available case studies[1].

Transferability is good considering the study is explorative; the empirical dataset is small but the interviewees are speaking about a general area in order to provide insights into how experts perceive best-practice B2B social media usage, in order to present ideas on how social media can be managed in a B2B branding context. Due to the limited number of interviewees their names are not made anonymous, as the transferability of the empirical findings relies upon the knowledge of the interviewees. By having transparency it addresses generalisation, the key issue with qualitative research, that the readers themselves can decide the expert's credibility.

Replication is difficult in general for qualitative studies. The interview transcripts are readily available, as well as field notes from seminars. Even though the author has a profound interest in the social web, the transparency of the research objects, as well as strictly objective descriptions of the empirical findings which are separated from the discussion does go a long way to prove the confirmability of the study.

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[1] BusinessGrow.com: http://businessesgrow.com/2010/06/20/a-fascinating-hardcore-b2b-social-media-success/

Chapter 4: Empirical findings

Chapter three described the methodology of the study and how the data was collected. This chapter presents the empirical findings from the four interviews and three case studies. The interviews are conducted with professionals coming from different point of views. Whilst the interviews are synthesised based upon topics, the illustrative case studies are described separately. The three case studies show B2B companies have utilised social media in different ways to enhance their brand.

Interviews

The group of interviewees consisted of four people who work with social media on a daily basis and could provide four different perspectives on social media in the B2B environment and the B2B brand. The interviews are synthesised together based on three topics; the research question and the two sub-questions.

- Jeff McCarthy, specialist in digital and sports marketing, Manchester Metropolitan University Business School
- Steve Lamb, Technology PR Manager, Microsoft UK
- Scot McKee, Managing Director, Birddog (B2B marketing agency)
- Mike Rowland, CEO, Impact Interactions (B2B social media agency)

Case studies

These three illustrative case studies are based on secondary sources and were selected to show three different ways social media was used to support the brand.

- Coloplast: Building a community for stoma-care nurses
- ShipServ: Using social media as beacons to drive people to the site, in order to use automated CRM tools to qualify visitors as leads
- Celebrity Cruises UK: Utilised Twitter to connect, engage and support their travel agents.

4.1 Interviews: The experts

Four in-depth interviews have been conducted in order to gain a thorough understanding on the topic. The interviewees are coming from four different perspectives, whom all have background and knowledge about social media and B2B; an academic from a business university, and practitioners from a B2B marketing agency, a B2B social media agency, and one PR manager from a large corporation. The findings are divided in terms of the different research question topics:

- What implications do social media have on B2B brand management?
- What opportunities and threats does a B2B brand face in the social media space?
- How should a B2B company enter the social media space in order to build the brand?

Jeff McCarthy (UK) is a specialist in digital sports marketing at the Manchester Metropolitan University Business School (business.mmu.ac.uk, 2010). McCarthy has run his own business since April 2003 focusing on digital publishing, and he has over 15 years of experience in e-commerce, m-commerce, interactive and direct marketing both in B2B, B2C and the public sector. McCarthy is now involved in studying social network sites and their impact on relationship marketing.

Steve Lamb (UK) is Technology PR manager at Microsoft in the UK and is a speaker on the topic. Lamb use social media as a tool to reach people, even though he is measured on traditional media metrics. Whilst he has worked as a PR manager the last two years, he had a four-year stint as an evangelist for Microsoft's products. Working as an evangelist he started using social media by blogging which achieved half a million hits from a hundred thousand unique users each month.

Scot McKee (UK) is Managing Director and owner of the London-based B2B marketing agency Birddog. He has worked with marketing his entire career and has led global brand strategies in B2B organisations of all sizes. As well as being known as a controversial speaker, he has written the book "Creative B2B Branding (no, really)" (McKee, 2010). McKee was a reluctant social media convert, but once he learned the potential and the impact it had on B2B marketing, he realised Birddog had to pursue digital marketing strategies in order to stay competitive.

Mike Rowland (US) is the CEO and founder of Impact Interactions, an American consulting business solely focusing on online communities and social media for B2B. He graduated with an MBA in marketing and consumer behaviour pre the Internet, but the Internet early caught his interest. He joined Participate.com, a leading online-community management company, and helped amongst others SAP, Cisco and Mercury Interactive (later acquired by HP) launch their first online communities. Participate.com made a lot of the same mistakes as other companies throughout the dot-com bubble, but Rowland realised the potential for interactive services, features and support for B2B organisations, and formed Impact Interactions in 2003.

4.2 Interviews: What implications do social media have on business-to-business brand management?

This chapter address issues directly related to the overall research question, whilst the two following chapters address the two sub-questions. Key issues are the impact of social media on B2B marketing and branding, what type of B2B companies' social media are appropriate for, as well as how social media initiatives should be managed and controlled at a general level.

4.2.1 Impact on B2B marketing and branding

All of the four interviewees perceived social media to be very important today, and even more important in the future, for business-to-business companies due to the immense growth in social media usage.

> *"In order to be heard now, you have to be online, and you have to be engaging in social media. (...) Everyone will have to be involved. The world has decided that this is how they want to communicate."*
> *Scot McKee*

Whilst social media does not change how businesses do business, it is a new but very important communications channel which will prove to be a significant change in the market. People do not need to engage with push marketing anymore, and with social media people have the possibility to "switch off". Rather than having to engage with push marketing, people can use the facilities of the social spaces to ask their online "friends" for information. "Friends" are not necessarily people they know, but people who they trust online. Through asking questions on e.g. Twitter or LinkedIn people can find information that they believe to be more independent, more reliable and more trustworthy in order to shape their perceptions of a brand they are interested in. This provides a new challenge for B2B marketers.

> *"Brands now have to manage their reputation and conversations in a much wider environment in order to influence different people on the way."*
> *Scot McKee*
>
> *"What social media allows you to do is not only move beyond from who you know to who you don't know – and that's the effect of the network – but it also allows you to measure it and speed the transaction time, and speed up the time for building influence, versus the more traditional methods."*
> *Mike Rowland*
>
> *"I think they've recognised that there's a platform which allows them to communicate with their audience in a more informal manner."*
> *Jeff McCarthy*

McKee added that social media is a necessity to remain competitive, and Rowland agreed by stating that companies who does not appreciate the ongoing conversations in social media space about a brand "is a dinosaur", and will ultimately end up losing business to competitors who are willing to engage and build relationships online.

None of the interviewees thought that social media would replace traditional marketing methods, but rather provide an added dimension by engaging with people and brands on a one-to-one basis and by doing that giving the brand "a different tone of voice and a personality", as McKee coined it. The interviewees also agreed that social media needs to be used different from traditional media.

> *"You don't stop going to trade shows, you don't stop doing direct mail, you don't stop doing demand management through call centres etc, just because you're using social media. When I think of how this fits into the marketing mix, this is another set of tools – albeit a much more efficient and easier to measure tool than perhaps some other advertising or marketing efforts."*
> *Mike Rowland*

> *"What we have with social media is another layer, and I think that if you approach it as another layer rather than trying to reshape social media into a traditional format, then you're in a much better place to take advantage of social media and the benefits it can deliver."*
> *Scot McKee*

> *"Traditional marketing assumes a group of people are interested in its product and it shouts at them. I think social media is self-moderating in many respects."*
> *Steve Lamb*

Democratising the business

Building two-way relationships and having conversations was a theme throughout all of the four interviews. An important point was how social media would influence the relationship between the company and its users, using social media to listen to customers and how they can ultimately help the company improve.

> *"You want to build relationships with your clients, where you can discuss things on their time and on their terms."*
> *Mike Rowland*

Lamb specifically spoke of how customers can engage and influence the product development team directly; pre-social media the input customers could give directly to major corporations were quite limited unless they were very senior or very large organisations with large accounts. This is changed with social media where the audience will get the opportunity to provide feedback to the company. Lamb put forward an example regarding a new legislation in the UK, the digital economy bill,

where people on Twitter during the debate in the Chamber had a discussion about the new legislation with some of the MPs; random people on the Internet had an opportunity to influence people within the political process based purely on arguments. The same principle could be applied to e.g. product development.

> *"Social media absolutely change it around so that individuals (...) can still get their voice heard. (...) It's the democratic way that social media enables people to have a voice regardless of their financial influence or status, and is one of the best things about social media."*
> *Steve Lamb*

> *"Social media has made the marketers having to be a lot more aware of the fact that customers do want to get their opinions back to the organisation."*
> *Jeff McCarthy*

B2B social media going forward

Social media is a very new field, and as B2B companies traditionally are slow movers in adapting new technologies this also holds true for social media. The interviewees agreed that B2B companies are trying to position social media within the B2B environment, both in terms of marketers and companies becoming aware of the potential as well as understanding the dynamics of the social media environment. The common conception is that social media is a very new field, and at the moment there is a lot of testing and failing as business and marketers are looking at how one best can utilise social media for their specific objectives. It was suggested that when more companies and marketers understand social media and its potential, their objectives will start to evolve and strategy will start to develop.

> *"I think that there's an uneasy relationship between the two [traditional and social media], but that's mainly the corporate brands coming to terms with social media. (...) That's purely a function of traditional marketing people struggling to understand how to adopt and implement social media policy. Once they do that (...), I think we'll see progress. At the moment there's a lot of trial and error."*
> *Scot McKee*

> *"We are really, I don't want to say we're at the beginning, but we're not even at the middle yet of the number of companies adopting and using social media that could. When you think about the benefits that it provides in terms of spreading your message out, in terms of allowing your message to be read and understood by potential customers on their terms instead of when you want them to; when you look at the network impact, and then you put it against the total costs of social media and using tools, the efficiency of B2B social media could be tremendous, if you do it properly."*
> *Mike Rowland*

> *"I would suggest that social media skills, going forward, should be a core expectation of people working in marketing, B2B or consumer. (...) That doesn't mean people have to engage in it, but they have to be aware of it and understand it."*
> Steve Lamb

4.2.2 Social media is not appropriate for all B2B companies

All the four interviewees were clear on that any B2B company should have a social media strategy, but that the level of engagement varies depending upon needs, their industry, and their objectives. Social media is better suited for some companies than for others, even if they are in the same industry. For some companies just monitoring and listening to what people are saying about a brand, a product or an industry is enough, whilst for others it the best way utilise social media is to build an entire community.

> *"I don't think social media should be used for everything."*
> Steve Lamb

> *"I think all companies should be involved in social media. But finding the right level of engagement, the right channel and so on is very different from company to company."*
> Scot McKee

The difference between social media used from a corporate point of view, compared to individuals within the corporation using social media was also highlighted; employees might use social media as a tool for building their personal professional network, staying updated on developments within their industry or trade, utilising their network for getting help to more efficient problem solving, getting tips on purchasing and so on, as a means to ultimately enhance their own productivity without ever thinking about their own involvement in terms of a larger objective or strategy. From a corporate point of view it is something completely different; before entering the social media space a company should have an objective for what it seeks out to achieve, rather than just going along for the sake of "me too". It is a difference between having a conversation with a corporate social media account, and talking to other people within a corporation.

Whether or not companies decide to engage in social media there was an agreement that ultimately it comes down to the business model, the culture, the industry and the audience. In some cases you do not want to allow your employees represent your brand online, as they are less likely to represent it in accordance with how the company wants their brand to be perceived.

> *"If your business employs people for the least possible money for jobs that they don't enjoy and are not passionate about... (...) You know there are people with that business model, some commodities for example are like that, maybe some fast food outlets are like that,*

> *some manufacturing maybe like that. If that's the case then don't*
> *encourage those people to represent your brand on social media*
> *because they are unlikely to represent it they way you'd wish. It's*
> *about being realistic."*
> *Steve Lamb*

4.2.3 Control

If a company decides to establish a presence in the social media sphere, a key discussion is often about which part within the organisation that should control and manage the social media initiatives. The interviews did not provide any definite agreement, but several important key points were elaborated upon.

A point made by McCarthy was that in case of handling a potential crisis through social media then the question of ownership was an important issue; if social media is used for marketing, does that department have ownership or is it someone at another level which ultimately has control and responsibility. In addition you have the day-to-day management of it in terms of putting content online where new questions arise; is it managed by an individual, a group of people, and what processes are in place to make sure that it is in accordance with the social media guidelines and policies.

Rowland is quite confident that a company needs someone who coordinates social media throughout the organisation, because any initiative in any social media channel will be met with questions from the audience ranging from support issues to product features, even though the main objective with the initiative is one specific, e.g. marketing.

> *"Social media is not just a marketing function, it's not just a support*
> *function, it's not just advertising. It's a lot of everything. That when*
> *you open up a channel that'll allows your stakeholders online to*
> *interact with you, you may be open it as a marketing channel but*
> *you will quickly find out that people will use it as a support channel*
> *as well. (..). It doesn't really matter where and who owns the social*
> *media portion of your business. Whoever is doing it must understand*
> *that they need to build a network within their company of other*
> *people and other functional areas, in order to support the effort."*
> *Mike Rowland*

Lamb compared the use of social media to the telephone. In the same way as no one should control how people use the telephone, unless they work in a call centre, no one should have ownership of how individuals should use social media. Some larger corporations banned social media tools as to not make employees waste their time, and perceive social media as a threat to efficiency rather than an opportunity for value creation.

> *"I think that most of them are running scared at the moment. (...)
> There are rather larger corporations who simply won't engage with
> it, because it doesn't fit the traditional corporate model where all
> social media tools are banned from the office environment."*
> *Scot McKee*

The overall strategy used by companies will also affect how their employees are
allowed to engage in social media. Lamb pointed to the fact that Microsoft had over
4,000 bloggers in addition to all the people using Twitter and engaging on other
platforms, and it allows for people outside Microsoft to engage with people inside
which proves valuable in terms of creating better relations between clients,
prospective clients and also rivals. Using social media as broadly as Microsoft is
clearly is the opposite of crafting and controlling a message.

Guidelines

Even though the interviewees did not provide a definite general agreement on how
the ownership of social media within a business should be managed, they all agreed
upon the importance of using guidelines as a tool to manage the social media efforts.
Guidelines should in essence provide guidance on how employees should conduct
themselves in social media; a tool to align employees to behave in a way which both
creates value and benefit for the corporation, as well as making people conduct in a
way which do not put the company in a bad light.

> *"The guideline should be basically a reminder that when you go on
> to a social media site as a representative or as an employee that you
> do represent the company. (...) The idea is really to help your
> employees to understand what's appropriate and what's not."*
> *Mike Rowland*

> *"Social media requires the people in your business to be free to
> share their passions for the products and the technology you are
> trying to sell, and I think an important predict of a business being
> successful in social media is that the business trusts its employees,
> and gives them clear guidelines on what's acceptable and what's
> not, and enables them to connect directly with their audiences if
> they choose to. There are some huge challenges that come with that
> of course. Most businesses don't trust their employees, or don't
> seem to anyway, and therefore they constrain them."*
> *Steve Lamb*

The employees and the company culture should also be taken into consideration
when establishing guidelines; you do not encourage your employees to engage in
social media if they are unlikely to represent the brand in a positive way. In the case
of Microsoft the corporate culture is about allowing passionate employees share
their thoughts and experiences in any kind of ways, including social media. Microsoft
has a two-words general guideline; "blog smart". Obviously the guideline is more

comprehensive than those two words, but the phrase captures the essence of what people should have in the back of their mind when engaging in social media. McKee quoted and agreed upon Microsoft's approach to social media.

> *"Before you hit the send button you just think about 'is this a smart thing to do, am I saying the right thing in the right way that's going to support the brand in whatever capacity'."*
> Scot McKee

> *"We have an ethos of 'blog smart', and the idea there is – and this extends to broader social media – you have to be prepared to accept that things you say and write and share could end up on the front page of a major newspaper, TV, website or anything like that. And you need to be prepared to stand by that, and if you're not sure – then don't post it."*
> Steve Lamb

It also became apparent that a guideline should not be used as a tool to discipline the employees when something was inappropriately put out in the social media sphere, and that any discrepancies between behaviour and the guidelines should be solved through dialogue rather than by punishment. McCarthy pointed out that the lack of guidelines among companies could turn out to be a problem, especially since social media in its own nature can develop momentum very quickly. There has been a few cases were slip-ups have become high-profile and given companies a lot of negative press.

> *"The high-profile gaffs that you see tend to come from someone who's representing the organisation (...) saying something inappropriate and trying to take that comment back. Once it's out there, it's out there. (...) I think it's the, which clearly also is the big opportunity, it's the fact that it's developed its own momentum. If there aren't any standard processes in place within the organisation of how to deal with something like that, quickly and appropriately, then that momentum can develop in a very negative way very quickly."*
> Jeff McCarthy

4.3 Interviews: What opportunities and threats does a business-to-business brand face in the social media sphere?

The opportunities and threats social media poses for B2B companies is an important issue to address when deciding what impact social media will have on building the B2B brand. There are also significant challenges connected to engagement in social media.

4.3.1 Opportunities

One of the recurring points from the interviews was that the uniqueness of a company, in terms of business model, industry, social media objective, organisational culture, their relationships with their stakeholders and etc, will define what opportunities companies have in social media, and how they can utilise them. The core idea of social media is to enable relationships on a many-to-many basis, and businesses need to look at how they can take advantage in terms of listening to existing conversations, initiating conversations, create awareness, and ultimately trust.

The nature of social media is an opportunity in its very own way. How people connect, how something within the social media space develops momentum so fast even though it becomes uncontrollable, the way entire audiences can be moved and the scale of which you can do it.

Social media provides several opportunities for the B2B brand, many of which are interleaved, in terms of positioning the company as a thought leader, highlighting the competitive advantage, the reach where a company can target niche markets, demonstrate brand personality, and use the opportunity for first mover-advantage. But it all depends on the company and its target audience.

> *"It depends on the organisation, what sector they're in, what particular product or service they provide within that sector, what the relationships with their customers, clients, partners and wider networks, the frequency of that relationship and so many more factors that clearly influence when and how they can use social media."*
> *Jeff McCarthy*

Active listening

Social media provides companies with immense listening capabilities. People have conversations about anything in the social media space, and looking what people are saying in the open space about a brand, a competitors brand or the industry in general can be used to learn and improve by acting upon the acquired knowledge. These listening capabilities can be enhanced by active listening; asking questions in a conversation or a community in order to get more specific answers on important

topics the business could benefit from – still without having necessarily to put the opinions of the company out in the public. Active listening is a cheap and inexpensive way to perform in-depth market research.

> *"The real insight they potentially can generate [from active listening] gives them real, genuine, ongoing opinion and feedback."*
> *Jeff McCarthy*

The power of one was also mention as a vital key point to keep in mind; by listening to what is going on in the social media space one single piece of input, e.g. an idea, can make a company sit up and take notice which may or may not benefit the company if they choose to take action on the received input. Through active listening, companies can also learn how customers potentially can be utilised if collaboration was facilitated.

Building relationships and networking

For employees social media can be used very effectively as a tool to build, manage and utilise their professional network. A person could ask their network a question and get an answer back which helps that person in his professional realm. This can result in a higher productivity which again benefits the company. One example that was mentioned was that if someone was looking to buy a particular product or solution, they could ask their network to learn about other people's experience before making e.g. a purchasing decision.

> *"They have the facility in social spaces to ask their 'friends' (...). These aren't necessarily people they know, individually or directly, but they are who they trust online. They'll ask questions on Twitter or using LinkedIn Groups and so on, to find information that they believe to be independent, more reliable, and more trustworthy in order to shape their perception of a brand that they're interested in."*
> *Scot McKee*

Another example put forward was that social media could be used as a tool to enhance the value created by events and conferences. People who were at the conference can easily pick up the thread by adding new people to their professional network, and the social media tools used to accompany the event can serve as a platform to enhance discussions about the event – both before and after the event. This can further enhance the value for the people at the event, which in turn enhance the brand of the event and its host. By allowing people to connect and share expertise and knowledge it enables professionals to connect across industries, companies and countries.

If a company have built a presence and relationships with their clients and prospective clients, partner and other various stakeholders, social media allows for people to sample their ideas on the target audience quickly, efficient and cheap.

> *"If you're thinking about doing something with the business you can try that idea without spending any money on it on your target audience. You know "I'm thinking about releasing a product or building a product to do this, what do you think?". Obviously you need to be careful to protect your IP and to consider that some potential rivals may be listening and might get there first, so there need to be some savvy in how you do that. But there are definitely benefits from sampling ideas like that, and deciding something actually isn't going to work and not investing the time and money in it at a really early stage."*
> Steve Lamb

Providing a point of differentiation

There was agreement among the experts about using social media to provide a point of differentiation. The B2B companies can differentiate themselves from competitors who are not using social media simply by establishing a presence and engaging in the social B2B space.

> *"By using social media in a B2B world you are providing a point of differentiation; (...) to build relationships with your clients, where you can discuss things on their time and on their terms."*
> Mike Rowland

Social media can also be used to highlight the competitive advantage of the company, as is possible with any other type of marketing communications. This requires the core business skill of "what is unique with our company", a business skill it was suggested that many B2B companies lack. Getting to the core of the value proposition about what factor makes a company truly unique could be challenging process, even more so important when entering social media.

Establishing presence on various social media platforms is an ideal way to create awareness, but in order to create awareness a company has to provide a reason for its audience as to why they should engage and connect with the brand. Having an account on a social media platform or a blog is of no use unless it is interesting and useful. In order to be perceived interesting the company needs to provide its audience with content that is of value to them.

B2B companies tend to possess a lot of specific and unique expertise internally which can be leveraged to create value for other business people on social media. Providing thought leadership on topics of value to the audience creates awareness among this audience. Using thought leadership highlights the competence of the company and effectively positions it within the marketplace.

First-mover advantage

Some companies have the opportunity to exploit first-mover advantage by becoming the authoritative and leadership voice if nothing is happening in the space on the specific topics relevant to the brand. This is an opportunity for companies to build a loyal network around the brand.

> *"It gives you the opportunity to build a very loyal cadre of enthusiasts who will help spread your message faster and more efficiently throughout their networks than you can do on your own, and there is definitely cost savings associated with that."*
> *Mike Rowland*

The first-mover advantage also holds true even if other companies are involved, albeit not utilising social media to its full extent. By using the first-mover advantage the other companies who follow will have to compare their efforts and offerings to the authoritative position the first-mover has claimed. Rowland underlined that the first-moved advantage does not equate to a sustainable competitive advantage because the barriers to entry are so low, and that it is possible for any company to do social media well.

Demonstrating the brand personality

B2B brands tend to convey little or no personality, which obviously is connected to the relatively sparse focus on B2B branding in general. Social media gives the opportunity for companies to make their brand more accessible and easier to engage with, which in turn helps demonstrating the brand personality. It is also easy to convey the fact that a company is not just a faceless brand, but people, which is something it was suggested companies could benefit from quite quickly. Liverpool Chamber of Commerce[1] was an example mentioned by McCarthy, where they had repositioned themselves through Facebook, in order to mitigate the image of being "many grey suits".

Brand personality can be demonstrated through both corporate accounts and through employees' social media engagements, depending on the objectives of the company and the needs of the audience. Some people might be far more interested in talking to individuals within companies, rather than talking to a corporate brand, because it adds value in terms of their network; their ability to connect with other professionals and leverage from each others' expertise.

Reach and targeting niche markets

Social media provides companies with an economic feasible way to reach both large geographical markets and globally dispersed niche markets. The power of social media to gather people from the long tail with the same needs allows companies to

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[1] Liverpool Chamber of Commerce & Industry on Facebook:
http://www.facebook.com/pages/Liverpool/Liverpool-Chamber-of-Commerce-Industry/121109155798

effectively target potential customers through social media, which can be very beneficial for small businesses operating within niche markets.

> *"Small pockets of specialist individuals can be contacted and gathered together on a global basis. Not just in a local market, but on a global market. You can find information and groups of likeminded people and start conversations, interactions, engagements that bring them together, and allow them to share and benefit from that. And I think that both the market – the consumers, the individual people and the corporate brands – will and are benefiting from that ability."*
> Scot McKee

4.3.2 Threats and challenges

The interviews identified both threats and challenges, and a combination of both, with social media. By not taking part companies risk might becoming detached from what is going on in the industry and risk being left behind. Social media has also produced some high-profile gaffs which have been elevated to traditional media channels, receiving a lot of attention from the public. More often than not, this attention is negative.

There are also significant challenges in terms of misusing the medium, both by looking at social media at something it is not, e.g. a new direct marketing channel, and on the opposite side of the scale, to devote too many resources and put too much focus on it. Another highlighted challenge is that if a company choose to engage in social media the culture of the organisation needs to be ready to handle the challenges coming with social media; it is not a campaign, it is an ongoing process.

Not taking part

As mentioned in the chapter "Impact on B2B marketing" (page 33) the experts perceived the digital space to grow in importance. Digital strategy had become increasingly more important the last couple of years, and especially the last 12-18 months. Within the social media space conversations are in most cases taking place already, and the question companies need to address is whether or not they are going to listen to these conversations or if they choose to ignore them. If they chose not to, they have to consider the risk attached to that whilst at the same considering that their competitors might listen. It becomes a question of either the conversations taking place somewhere a company does not know about it, or if the company should provide tools which facilitates conversations between clients, prospects and partners which is more manageable and easier to monitor.

Choosing to ignore these conversations could provide a significant risk. Companies who fail to adapt the new environment risk being detached from what is going on, and could risk lagging behind its competitors – just like if companies does not adapt to other changes in the environment. Companies could still be successful, but over

time the success will diminish and the traditionalists will be left behind – and the threat of obsolescence looms large.

One of the threats is that many companies fail to adapt or embrace the opportunities because they cannot see the immediate benefit or measure the ROI directly. The lack of understanding of the complexity of the social media environment is a major barrier for companies to overcome in order to get involved.

> *"They refuse to engage because of lack of evidence. What are the measurement tools for social media, what am I going to get back, what's the ROI, why should I invest in this when I can't seek a tangible financial benefit? And you know the tangible financial benefit will come, as will the tools for measurement, but I think there's a real threat to companies that don't start the process whilst they're waiting for those tools to be available."*
> *Scot McKee*

Bad press

During the social media revolution a lot of high-profile gaffs have been fronted on newspapers, television and on the large news sites. This is attributable to the nature of social media where viral stories can spread in an instant, without the ability for people or companies to control the situation.

> *"There is no delete button."*
> *Steve Lamb*

There is a tendency for people to shoot from the hip and engage directly without enough thought, which can cause stir and bad press if the incident is so controversial that it gathers momentum in terms of distribution and forwarding. It is a challenge to maintain the authenticity, passion and excitement, whilst at the same time being mindful that what is put online cannot be taken back. As a big brand the ability to walk away from something is limited, and as the brand is both valuable and vulnerable it makes companies wary about letting their employees engage online.

A common reason for these incidents to build momentum is because audiences often tend to assume authority the sender do not have. When something is put out in the space it is vital that companies are ready for other people wanting to dispute, challenge, question, or just engage proactively whatever that is put up in the space. This has led to some companies trying controlling the conversations by e.g. removing a certain type of unwanted comments. Transparency is an important value in social media, and people engaging do not accept being moderated or controlled. This can elevate a bad situation into an even worse situation.

> *"Whilst I can see the rationale behind that, there are so many case studies now that basically show that the worst thing you can do is to try to control the conversation."*
> *Jeff McCarthy*

Misuse

Traditional marketers struggling coming to terms with social media tries to apply traditional marketing methods to this new way of communicating. Instead of e.g. looking at the opportunities to establish relationships, some marketers try to use social media tools as databases for prospecting. The problem is that people do not want to engage with direct marketing through social media. Push marketing is the exact opposite of the pull nature of social media.

> *"Fame rarely leads to fortune. While it can be appropriate for some things you're usually much better off meeting interesting people, having interesting conversations, and influencing those people by appealing to the things they want and are interested in, then you are simply spamming lots of people and trying get as much noise as possible."*
> *Steve Lamb*

Difficulties can also arise when there is too strong focus on B2B social media at the expense of traditional marketing activities. McKee pointed to the threat of companies over-analysing the use of social media in terms of trying to quantify its performance and using automatic CRM tools to help aid the social media initiatives. Whilst this is helpful in some respects, McKee argues automatic process-driven CRM tools to track and measure the performance downplays the qualitative aspects of one-to-one communication and the opportunities to demonstrate a brand personality further down the pipeline.

> *"I think if companies avoid social media or try and measure it to death they miss the whole opportunity and the whole point of it."*
> *Scot McKee*

Rowland did however disagree with this; in order make best possible use of social media you have to be able to measure the initial efforts. Chapter 4.4.3 will look at this disagreement more in-depth.

Not being ready for it

People will not necessarily use the social media channels a company has established as they were intended to from the perspective of the business. If a company's customer service team establish e.g. a Twitter account to provide customer support, they will quickly find out people asking questions about products and features which typically are handled by the marketing department. These questions need to be addressed, and the organisation must be clear on processes to deal with such issues. Another important challenge is that a company has to be aware that parts of the audience might dispute, challenge, question, or just engage in a proactive way, and provide a response to people who actively tries to connect with a brand. Failing to respond to people engaging with a brand is worse than having no presence at all. Social media is not a campaign, it is a continuous process, and it does require resources and a prepared organisation.

4.4 Interviews: How should a B2B company enter the social media space in order to build the brand?

The two previous chapters addressed social media's implications on B2B branding, why companies should be aware of social media, the issues of keeping control, as well as opportunities and threats for B2B companies. This chapter looks to connect the dots of impact, opportunities, threats and challenges by how a company can approach a social media strategy process.

Addressing the issue of how B2B companies should build their strategies to utilise the opportunities in the social media sphere is further divided into three sub-chapters. The first part looks at how companies should approach social media initially in order to develop a strategy. How companies build that social media strategy is the second part, whilst the final chapter is about how companies should look to measure their performance with their social media initiatives.

4.4.1 Approaching social media

Whilst every company should be aware of what people are talking about online, the interviewees also agree that the level of social media engagement differs based on the needs of the company, their networks, the nature of their relationships and the industry. The interviewees mentioned three key tasks to do when approaching social media; set an objective, listen externally and listen internally.

Listen externally

Listening to what is going on online can provide insight in terms of familiarising the company with the ongoing conversations; where are they happening, who are engaging, what are the topics and tones of the conversations. Social media cannot be ignored and companies need to identify what is happening in the sphere, in order to take decision whether they want to continue just listening or actively engage. Participation evolve around common sense and good manners; get a feel for the conversation before the company jumps into it.

> *"I think they should definitely look at it [social media] and listen to what's going on, what the trends are and certainly what their competitors are doing."*
> *Jeff McCarthy*

Listen internally

How a company can utilise social media depends on the existing organisational culture, because ultimately B2B social media is about building relationship and it is people within the organisation that are going to build these. McKee argues to start the approach by mapping out potential current social media users among the employees. Even though a company does not have corporate social media strategy, people within the organisation could be, and often are, participating in the space already; networking with fellow professionals on LinkedIn, reading industry blogs, or engaging in discussion in industry communities relevant for their day-to-day tasks.

The company can then leverage these peoples knowledge, networks and experiences about their relevant social media space. From that they can start developing a corporate social media strategy based on what they are comfortable with in terms of allow their brand to engage, as well as identifying how social media could work for that company. Lamb agrees by stressing the importance of understanding how social media works, either by the use of external agencies or through someone internally who have the knowledge and/or wants to acquire the skills.

> *"You start from a point of a familiarity then, rather than from something that could be quite alien to a corporation. Once you personalise it to the people within the corporate it becomes easier to adopt, and there's more support within the business often than the company realises."*
> *Scot McKee*

Set an objective

Before starting to engage in social media the perception among the interviewees was that a company need to identify the objective before proceeding with the strategy. It is important to be clear on what the company want to achieve, just like any other marketing method, whilst keeping in mind that not all things are appropriate and interesting. The questions companies have to ask themselves could be how the company would like to develop the relationship with the clients, prospects, partners and wider network, or what business objective is going to be reached through social media.

> *"It starts by not focusing on the tools and the tactics, but focusing on what is it that you really want to get out of using social media. So at the end of three months, at the end of six months or a year and then three years, which is probably pushing it, but just to frame the conversation around; what is the business objective that you're trying to solve or you're trying to realise by offering social media. "*
> *Mike Rowland*

Prepare internally

Rowland pointed out that the organisation has to be ready for the social media effort, because it is not a marketing campaign but rather a continuous process. As mentioned in the chapter on threats and challenges, social media is a lot of everything, and whether the initiatives are to support marketing or customer service, the audience will use it as they please. Therefore there has to be someone who coordinates throughout the organisation and builds a network within the company of other people and areas.

> *"So that mean that if you launch a support community, you'll also need to get engaged with your product managers and your marketing teams, because you're going get those marketing questions. It means that if you are doing social media as a strictly*

> *marketing function to generate leads, that you also have contacts*
> *within your support organisation."*
> *Mike Rowland*

The company has to make sure that when those questions come up there have to be people who follow up the inquiry by either providing the information from other parts of the organisation, or providing a resource where they can find this information. In line with this reasoning, Lamb said that nothing is worse than a brand getting your interest, and then the brand is not being there to listen and engage. It would actually do more harm than good. People within the organisation has to understand and accept that social media is not a campaign solely run by the PR or marketing department.

4.4.2 Social media strategy

Before a company starts developing their social media strategy it was a shared view amongst the interviewees that they needed an objective; how social media would change the relationships or how it can work out for the benefit of the company. The objective is the foundation of the social media strategy, and it was recommended to develop the strategy before choosing the tactics, i.e. technologies and applications; don't lead with tactics and technology, lead with strategy.

> *"Unfortunately in our experiences too many companies start with*
> *what we would call 'tool addiction'. They love the tool, they love the*
> *game playing of "do we use Twitter or Facebook or MySpace or*
> *LinkedIn groups or Zinga". That's all irrelevant. You start off by*
> *focusing on what matters to the organisation. The tools come*
> *secondary. If you're focusing on the tools first, you will probably*
> *never achieve what you could, or you will not achieve it as quickly."*
> *Mike Rowland*

McKee mentioned an example where a client with "tool addiction" came up with the brief of "we want to be on Twitter". After some research it was discovered that their audience, doctors and high level researchers, did not have a presence on that particular platform. Rather than focusing on Twitter they created a blogging strategy with a more dynamic blog then they already had to publish information at, which allowed for comments and discussions on the blog posts. This allowed doctors to find their blog as a part of their research, rather than through the use of Twitter, a strategy which proved to be successful.

Rowland argued that the key questions to answer when developing the strategy was to figure out how success was measured, and what the success measures were. Based on that the company should put together a key point indicator (KPI) and put numbers on what should be regarded as a success, an average result and failure. Only when this was established companies should start thinking about choosing the tactics to achieve those KPIs and success metrics.

Even though all companies have to do something, they do not have to do everything at once. McKee suggested a slightly different approach to Rowland; strategy was an evolutionary process where the company through internal listening identified what might work for the business, and what they could feel comfortable with their brand engaging in. The key point was to set milestones as a part of a bigger strategy, quite opposite of traditional media having big ideas, big goals and big objectives. By using the internal knowledge they could start to experiment and ease the way into social media and finding their own path; the right tools and the right entry point for the business where they can see potential benefit, and then deliver against those expectations where both the strategy and the expectations evolves along the way.

Hub-and-spoke strategy

When the company has decided where and how they want to engage the most common strategy, and recommended by all of the interviewees, to adopt is what McKee coined a "hub-and-spoke" strategy. The hub in the centre is the core brand, i.e. the website, whilst the spokes lead back to the centre. Social media is a fragmented marketplace where there are endless options of platforms a company could join, and whilst it is impossible to be present on every social media communication channel a company needs to be represented on more than one.

In a hub-and-spoke strategy the presence on different social media communication channels are used as beacons to drive people back to the main site, by signalling to the audience that the core website has new and interesting, content available. This does not necessarily mean pushing links and press releases, but providing value for the people subscribing to the company on that platform, i.e. befriending, following or being a fan.

> *"Social media on its own, the content disappears very quickly. So I think it's almost useful as an index, an editor's choice if you like. But not the extent of just being a link, obviously you need to have some value in the tweet or the equivalent as to why somebody might want to follow that."*
> *Steve Lamb*

B2B social media is about building relationships that translates into long-term financial value for the company. People want to know about the thoughts and the plan of the company, but it was also suggested that people not necessarily trust the company's own description of their products and services; people today are expecting to get awareness and build their perception of a brand through multiple channels, whilst the corporate website and other marketing material is probably the last place people want to go to for information. Having a presence on several platforms used by their audience is important, because ultimately it is down to the customers to decide where they want to engage with the company.

> *"You build the environment, you create the tools, you use them, but you have to let the customer decide where they want to engage."*
> *Scot McKee*

The important reason to use a hub-and-spoke strategy, according to Rowland, was that third party applications are in general poor at measurement so the company needs to drive their audience back a specific page on the website in order to be able to measure the social media efforts.

Content strategy: Thought leadership
By using a hub-and-spoke strategy to push people through different social media platforms back to the main site, the destination website has to contain content valuable to the audience. Based upon this the company has to recognise what their audience finds useful and interesting, and provide people with a reason for why they should want to engage with the company.

> *"In business-to-business people want to build relationships with your company. In order to do that you need to provide a reason for why that person should engage with your company. What that means is providing thought leadership, and by providing thought leadership, that's how you differentiate yourself, that's how you build awareness. The tools will push that out, but you have to have a solid content strategy behind that."*
> *Mike Rowland*

Thought leadership is about providing access to industry or topic specific expertise by utilising the knowledge of its employees. What kind of content the company need to deliver to their audience depends on their value proposition; why and how is the company competitive in the market place. Lamb mentions that the business skill of identifying the differentiators of the company is particularly applicable to social media. Just like in traditional media it is important to cut through the clutter albeit by being interesting, not making the most noise. If the company is genuinely interesting, respectful, open and transparent they are likely to capture attention and maybe even brand advocates.

A mistake many companies do is to use the social media tools to push out press releases and product promotion; according to Rowland that is doing it exactly backwards. Instead of focusing on hard selling offers, the focus should be on attributes and features that are beneficial to the audience. That could be by for example providing a community to handle support, or have a section on the site featuring blogs, videos and pictures with customer references and success stories in an engaging way in order to highlight e.g. reliability. In other words; give the audience the confidence that the company is the right one to do business with.

> *"If you actually contribute and give some value and are trying to be*
> *interesting, you are much more likely to influence people positively."*
> *Steve Lamb*
>
> *"Build relevance, but also value, online by using B2B social media."*
> *Mike Rowland*

Targeting

The interviewees agreed that targeting was a challenge with social media. To a certain extent the company does not know if they are engaging with the people they want to influence, as is with traditional marketing. How a company should target its audience depends on what objective the company is trying to reach through using social media. Getting people to use customer support needs a different approach than providing differentiation through thought leadership. McCarthy suggested that different target audiences need to be treated like traditional target audiences where different segments are approached in different ways. Social media should be perceived as a wider communication network with the people the company is engaging with, i.e. clients, partners, competitors and other various stakeholders.

A key point of targeting is to apply context to the message. If the company engages in a discussion on e.g. a LinkedIn Group where issues relevant to the target audience are discussed, just the fact that the discussion happens in that group and/or discussion topic applies context to the message. A company can also decide who they want to include in their network, e.g. when using Twitter one can be selective of who one follows and chose to engage with.

Using social media as beacons to drive people back to the specific landing pages makes it possible to analyse their behaviour; if there is a call-to-action, e.g. a whitepaper download, or viewing a webcast or a video which requires a registration revealing the identity of the people consuming the content, web analytic tools can be used to measure by those call-to-actions, who they are and what content they have consumed. In turn this data can be utilised to decide whether or not they are reaching their target audience or not. Without a call-to-action the visitors will consume the content and leave. This principle is easily used with thought leadership; if the company gives a visitor something of value, the visitor will be happy to provide something of value and return, i.e. name, e-mail, position and company name.

> *"The idea is to have that call-to-action, because you have to*
> *understand that if you are driving in thousands of people to a*
> *specific page and not giving them a call-to-action, you have no idea*
> *whether you're reading the right audience or not, because they'll*
> *consume the content and leave. So what you need to do is to have*
> *that registration or have the download of a specific topic, and then*
> *measure the traffic against the number of downloads to see how*
> *targeted or specific your audience was in terms of – again – your*
> *strategy."*
> *Mike Rowland*

4.4.3 Measurement

Professionals are struggling with the challenge of how to measure ROI on B2B social media, and this was reflected in the different approaches the interviewees had on how the ROI of social media initiatives could be measured. Measurement is often important for management to give acceptance and funding to social media initiatives, as they would like to see some hard ROI numbers on their investments. McCarthy suggested that marketing managers or others might have to point out both the shorter and longer term potential.

The interviewees were roughly divided on whether or not to use qualitative or quantitative measurements. Whilst Rowland provided a methodology to get ROI figures, the others had a more qualitative approach on what the ROI from using B2B social media were. Differences between different companies with different strategies and objectives with social media are important factors in determining how companies should measure the ROI. For example Lamb worked in PR and was measured on traditional media metrics, and using social media as a tool to reach those metrics. McCarthy suggested that company will find their own ways in how they go about measuring ROI.

McKee argued that companies should not even be driven by measuring ROI initially, but rather be prepared to invest in the social media space purely on the basis that their customers use the social media space.

> *"They shouldn't be driven by [measuring ROI] in social media*
> *initially. I think they should be prepared to invest and engage in*
> *social media spaces purely on the basis that it's what their*
> *customers wants.(...) This is where people want to be, and the*
> *customer will decide."*
> *Scot McKee*

Qualitative

All the interviewees except for Rowland had a qualitative approach to measuring ROI, albeit not exclusively. McKee argues it is very difficult to have a direct attributable, hard-wired connection between social media initiatives and ROI. The initiatives in social media are measured, but it is a link in the chain and should have a different perspective from traditional sales and marketing ROI. Through social media ongoing conversations will shape the perception of the company's employees and further down the line the perception of the company's brand. The brand should encourage people at various at various touch points, also outside the social media space, in order to guide them through the sales cycle at the end of which the company measures sales performance and ROI.

There are several qualitative aspects a company can look at based upon the objective of their strategy. One could look at how the audiences'' relationship with the brand has changed over time, which is difficult to measure.

> *"Too many people worry about how many followers you've got, how many blog hits you get, how many of x, y and z. I'm much more interested in reaching people I can learn from, and also people who may be interested in what I have to say who'll do something about it."*
> *Steve Lamb*

It was also pointed out that some social media strategists might even choose metrics which make them look more favourable within their own organisation, e.g. how many followers the company has on Twitter do not necessarily equate to success, as those followers might be outside the target group.

Companies should consider "the power of one" looks how input received through the social media sphere has influenced the company, rather than just looking at pure volume.

> *"I think you probably can [measure ROI on social media], I think it's just what you're measuring, and whether or not you're looking at pure volume or combine that with 'the power of one'. Maybe trying to bring it back to 'this is what we heard, this is what we did as a result, and look at the impact that's has had on an area of the business'."*
> *Jeff McCarthy*

All of McCarthy, McKee and Lamb agreed upon that even though not all things could be measured, companies should attempt to measure the social media footprint and social media and potential ROI. The key point furthered was to not over invest by trying to analysing social media to death, but rather do what the company thinks is right and proceed. Lamb compared using social media to going to conferences.

> *"Will they [conferences] have a direct positive impact on my work and possibly social life? Yeah, I'm sure they will. But I can't measure that, I don't know what those are. I couldn't tell you 'what is the right number of such conferences to go to, to get benefit'. I don't know, I don't think it's as measurable as that."*
> *Steve Lamb*

Quantitative

Rowland was of the opinion that you needed to measure ROI quantitative, even though a lot of the common literature says companies does not need to do that. He argued the literature said so because they do not understand how, and presented the principles in how his company measure ROI for his clients.

There are several ways one could measure ROI, but the cost avoidance argument is the simplest one to do. By counting the number of interactions online and comparing it to how much those interactions would at average cost to do in the call centre, one would get a percentage of how much money was saved.

$$cost\ avoidance = \frac{(interactions\ online) \cdot (avg.\ cost\ per\ call\ in\ call\ centre)}{total\ cost}$$

The more difficult ROI to measure are related to marketing initiatives and the marketing key performance indicators. Social media could help a company do multiple things within the sales cycle, and the two common ways of measuring social media are traffic and behaviour.

- **Traffic:** visitors, page views, most popular content, unique users etc.
- **Behaviour:** what people do, i.e. conversion (registration), conversion (registration + add content), consumption (just reading), contacting the company (beginning of qualification of sales)

Rowland pointed out that a company could not get to the ROI by using traffic or behaviour measures alone, but also had to measure the value of what people do. In order to get people to reveal their identity, there needs to be some kind of call-to-action where they e.g. provide some sort of registration. In order to measure the value this in principle means to connect the CRM system to the web analytics and look at how people coming online are doing in the sales pipeline, and then look at how social media helps accelerate the sales cycle or generate new leads. Both of those have an economic value associated. It is not to say that B2B social media led directly to the sale, but B2B social media initiatives can be given an influence metric in order to derive a revenue claim on behalf of those customers as a part of the ROI equation. This process requires a thorough analysis of data and is difficult.

> *"It's hard to do, you have to have good relationships within your company, and you also have to be a bit of a data hound and like working with data in order to get there. But it can be done."*
> *Mike Rowland*

The ROI expectations should be balanced to the expectations of the overall sales cycle, lifetime value of a customer, lifetime support of a customers, and when the costs occurs during the lifetime. A measurement framework can be developed and measured after a few months, but it will probably take at least a year before the company starts to see any true value in terms of ROI. Economical social media benefits takes time to establish before it is possible to measure the economic gain.

> *"It's not instantaneous, it doesn't happen overnight, but it does happen, and when it does it is generally very high."*
> *Mike Rowland*

4.5 Case study: Coloplast

Coloplast built the community StomaNet for Swedish stoma care nurses (SCNs). Their objective was to utilise the strength of an online community to connect with their professional users of their ostomy care products, and enhance their brand equity. A case study of Coloplast (Andersen, 2004) looks at the effect of using web-enhanced brand communities as a lever for relationship-marketing communication in the B2B sector, and this case study uses the article as its main data source.

4.5.1 About Coloplast

Coloplast is a Danish-owned multinational health care company with more than 7,000 employees and annual sales of approximately 8,820 million DKK (Coloplast, 2009). At the time of Andersen's case study, 97 % of Coloplast's sale was abroad, and their main market is Europe accounted for 76 % of their sales (Andersen, 2004). Coloplast develops and manufactures products for the health care sector, in niche markets with a few large competitors. Their main product areas are ostomy care, continence care and wound & skin care.

Ostomy care is the care for surgically created openings in the body, and ostomy-related surgery changes the lives of the patients whom must handle and change cumbersome ostomy-related bags. Due to the changed living-conditions because of the nature of these surgeries, patients adhere to advice given by the SCNs. The SCNs are specialised nurses belonging to a community of specialists, often organised in associations specifically focusing on stoma issues. Coloplast have since the outset regarded the nurses as the key influencer in matters relating to post-operation care, and have always committed to developing and maintaining a strong relationship with their professional users, the nurses, in order to help them provide better care for their patients (Andersen, 2004).

4.5.2 StomaNet: A community for stoma care nurses

Since Coloplast launched their first website in 1996 they have gradually developed their presence online. In 2000 they decided to allocate more resources to initiatives on the web, and one of the outcomes was StomaNet; an online community for SCNs (Andersen, 2004). Coloplast identified a need amongst SCNs for virtual facilities that enabled information sharing;

> *"The important thing to understand here is the hospital hierarchy, where it strengthens their professional identity to have a set of virtual facilities which exclusively is for them and managed by their own organisation".*
> *Michael S. Amundsen, StomaNet Project Manager*
> *Source: Andersen (2004)*

Coloplast decided to collaborate with the SCNs associations in order to make sure the online community StomaNet would be appreciated and used among their target group. As both the associations and the professional nurses believe in their

independency as an important part of their legitimacy, Coloplast had to downplay their own role in order to get acceptance for StomaNet. The editorial board of StomaNet included representatives from the national associations of SCNs. StomaNet was created both in Swedish and in Netherlands (Andersen, 2004).

Coloplast thought at first that the online community would appeal to young nurses, but later discovered that the master-apprentice mechanism amongst the nurses applied to the online community as well. Young nurses would use the community to pick up on jargon and seek information exchange with the more experienced nurses (Andersen, 2004).

Features of StomaNet

StomaNet is an online community exclusively for SCNs which are meant to enable knowledge-sharing between professionals. It was important to facilitate interaction between nurses, where obtaining information and exchanging knowledge were perceived as important drivers for participation. Four types of users were classified; browsers, enthusiasts, light browsers, contributors. Coloplast put together an list of features which made it a one-stop-shop for SCNs (Andersen, 2004):

- Information retrieval
- Knowledge-banks
- Chat
- Discussion forums
- Online conference facilities
- Event calendars
- Literature
- Training modules
- Expert advisory boards
- Announcements of courses and other educational facilities

Coloplast had the role of administrators for the community, and influences activities such as events, activities and themes. For the themes the editorial board of SCNs and web managers invited experts on specific issues with a focus on a single topic for an extended period of time, e.g. one theme running for three months. During this period StomaNet hosted virtual conferences, invited both experts and community members, initiating direct questions and discussions where nurses SCNs shared their experience. Every theme was concluded by issuing a printed update sent to all members of the association for SCNs (Andersen, 2004).

4.5.3 How StomaNet created value for Coloplast

One of three corporate values of Coloplast is "closeness, to better understand" (Coloplast.com, 2010), which sums up their objectives with StomaNet. The process of developing StomaNet in close cooperation with the nurse associations built strong links, as Coloplast initiated and built legitimacy about being there to help SCNs and their patients. By building a community for SCNs differentiates Coloplast from its competitors, and creates a competitive advantage it is difficult to imitate (Andersen, 2004).

Nurses have a high ethical standard which makes it counterproductive to try marketing products towards them; downplaying their brand building activities was an important part of Coloplast's web community strategy. The target is not to raise awareness of the Coloplast brand or increase short-term sales, but the community building efforts is a natural continuation of Coloplast's loyalty building programme towards the nurses in order to enhance the brand values.

> *"We are dealing with nurses with a professional life span ranging over 40 years. Most of them know our product already, and measuring the frequency of click throughs is meaningless in a brand communication context where you not are really interested in awareness."*
>
> *Steffen Eichner Hovard, eBusiness manager at Coloplast*
> *Source: Andersen (2004)*

StomaNet provides Coloplast with listening and learning capabilities especially as it engages specialists in discussions and exchanging ideas. The users' represents a unique source for product usage patterns, applications, drawbacks and improvement possibilities both on their own and competitors' products. In addition they also have the capability to influence the users to discuss themes with relevance to their products – the users understand their incentives, but accepts it because Coloplast focuses on functionality rather than their brand. This unique source of listening capabilities is used actively in product development, novel product ideas, general knowledge and awareness of products are used, and they also use it to pinpoint actors whom can be useful resources in product development processes; in 2001 alone more than 25 customer groups were active in product development (Andersen, 2004).

> *"One of the advantages of having a brand community site which not only represents our products is the comparison issue. All comments on all products will also be offered to us. For instance – comments on users' experiences with poor product quality – whether it is a competing product or our own is useful information"*
>
> *Thomas Kongstad, IT manager at Coloplast*
> *Source: Andersen (2004)*

The ROI was difficult to measure. Coloplast was gaining market share in new markets, and click through rations provide no accurate measurement either. The key performance indicators Coloplast used to measure the success of StomaNet was involvement (number of SCNs using the site), frequency of visits as well as preference for StomaNet as an information source compared to both other online and offline sources on ostomy-related issues. Coloplast did also link their web community activities to measurement of customer satisfaction in order to measure the performance of StomaNet, due to the focus is on improving the brand values on a long-term basis rather than increasing short-term sales (Andersen, 2004).

> *"A survey of SCNs in Sweden and the Netherlands showed a strong awareness of the site and a high level of satisfaction among the nurses. Thus, a top-of-mind analysis revealed that StomaNet was mentioned first among other potential ostomy-related websites by a majority of nurses. StomaNet also met the majority of respondents' expectations with regard to information quality, functionality and services."*
> *Source: Andersen (2004)*

4.5.4 Epilogue

StomaNet was a successful tool for Coloplast in order to enhance brand image and recognition amongst what was identified as an important group in the buying centre in their target market. This case study reviewed the Swedish and Dutch StomaNet's, but Coloplast did also create StomaNet for the French SCNs. StomaNet.se (Swedish version) and StomaNet.fr (French version) are still active, whilst StomaNet.nl (Dutch version) does no longer exist. StaomaNet.fr was presented on the ECET Congress in 2005 as a successful case in the use of information technology in patient care (ECET, 2005) which adds weight to the argument that StomaNet was a success.

4.6 Case study: ShipServ

ShipServ designed a social media strategy which evolved around using social media platforms as beacons to drive traffic to their main site, in order to qualify the rank the "readiness-to-buy" of visitors by tracking and nurturing them with an automated marketing solution. Whilst their product is an innovative technological service, the target audience are conservative late adopters; the challenge ShipServ faced was solved by creating relationships with their target audience through multiple social networks backed by a high-quality content marketing strategy.

4.6.1 About ShipServ

ShipServ is the leading e-marketplace in the maritime industry by providing "an innovative portfolio of software, services and hosted applications designed by shipping people, for shipping people" (ShipServ.com, 2010a). The company was founded in 1999 by Paul Østergaard with the vision to drive out inefficiencies and increasing competitiveness in the global maritime shipping industry by using the Internet to create an e-marketplace where global maritime suppliers meet to do business (ShipServ.com, 2010a). ShipServ also have the chairman of the non-profit organisation Maritime eCommerce Association which governs the industry standard Marine Trading Mark-up Language (MTML), which utilises XML to standardise the electronic exchange of purchasing information in the maritime industry (MeCA.org.uk, 2010a, xml.coverpages.org, 2010, MeCA.org.uk, 2010b).

The core product of ShipServ is TradeNet, an e-commerce platform connecting buyers and suppliers. Currently ShipServ have approximately 150 shipping companies managing 5,000 ships, which are connected to their approximately 30,000 suppliers. The suppliers are also listed in ShipServ's online directory of ship suppliers, ShipServ Pages (ShipServ.com, 2010b).

TradeNet increases trading efficiency by leveraging the power of information technology in order to reduce the overhead made by the "communication chaos" buyers are facing; multiple ships, with multiple agents, suppliers and logistic companies through multiple communication channels with multiple transactions. TradeNet reduces the order cycles and the procurement costs. TradeNet connects directly with the existing purchasing, fleet management and asset management systems using MTML , thus also reducing the possibility for human errors which can happen when information is manually entered into multiple systems (ShipServ.com, 2010c, ShipServ.com, 2010d).

4.6.2 Social media as an integral part of the marketing strategy

ShipServ had grown a lot in a short period of time, and with a strong focus on closing sales, they rapidly faced becoming an impersonal enterprise. Faced with a limited marketing budget and few employees they also needed to improve their marketing efforts in order to keep up with the overall growth of the company. A major challenge faced was that their innovative e-marketplace solution for the maritime industry was a big change in how their customers conducted business, thus in order

to close sales they had to spend resources to educate their risk averse and conservative audience, in an attempt to secure the sale by lowering the barriers for customers to purchase and use TradeNet. Trust was vital to foster an advisor relationship towards the industry which was dispersed geographically worldwide. ShipServ also had to improve their productivity and efficiency on sales calls (B2BM.biz, 2010a, DestinationCRM.com, 2010a).

The solution was an automated marketing system which automatically nurtured and ranked the quality of the leads based on users' behaviour on the website. The solution lessened the burden of following up on leads, as well as increasing productivity for sales calls because the leads being passed over to their sales teams were of a higher quality. The automated marketing solution became a cornerstone of their new strategy, and as a result of that it became even more important to increase the traffic to the website shipserv.com (DestinationCRM.com, 2010b).

ShipServ recognised that their target audience were quite eager to network, even though faced with the significant challenge of the maritime industry traditionally being a conservative "paper and phone"-based community, usually late to adopt new Internet technologies. This late adopter behaviour was also reflected in ShipServ's e-commerce survey, see Figure 5 (B2BM.biz, 2010a, B2BVoices.com, 2010, VelocityPartners.co.uk, 2009a).
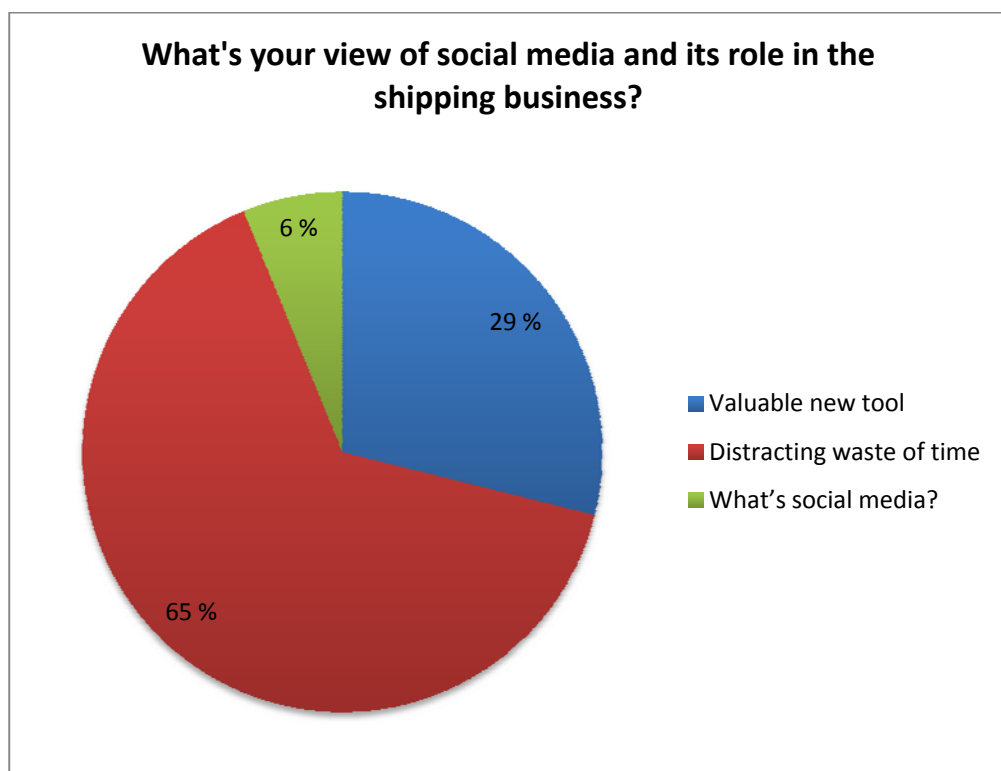

Figure 5: ShipServ's survey to map the role of social media in the shipping business
Source: ShipServ e-commerce survey, April 2010 (Watton, 2010)

Objectives

Because of the automated marketing system ranking visitors in terms of leads, it was an important objective to drive people to the site. On a three month timescale they aimed at a 50 % increase in traffic to ShipServ.com. The marketing team also sat the objectives of raising the awareness of the ShipServ brand throughout the global shipping industry and increase the demand for their services the e-commerce platform TradeNet and the online directory ShipServ Pages – traditional marketing objectives in other words. In addition to the traditional objectives ShipServ looked to connect with their users by engaging in conversations and building an online community of maritime purchasing professionals (B2BVoices.com, 2010, VelocityPartners.co.uk, 2009a).

By using social media ShipServ wanted to move from a broadcast type of market communication towards discussion and engaging its audience for constructive, open and ongoing dialogue. The marketing division changed their focus from being an impersonal enterprise to giving their brand a personality; from the traditional shouting, promoting, persuading, instructing and selling to their prospects, they wanted to use social media and change the focus to listening, entertaining, participating, inspiring and nurturing. Customers should no longer "use ShipServ", the idea was to make customers "members of ShipServ" (Watton, 2010).

Table 6: ShipServ objectives

Objectives
• Raise brand awareness throughout the shipping industry
• Increase traffic to shipserv.com by 50 % in three months
• Engage with the audience in an open, ongoing dialogue, and start to build a community whilst extending and deepening the conversation
• Nurture prospects through drip-feed of relevant content

Sources: VelocityPartners.co.uk (2009a), B2BVoices.com (2010)

The role of social media strategy: Positioning ShipServ as a thought leader

In order to achieve the goals set out the marketers used social media and a strong content marketing strategy as important components to. By emphasising on delivering high-quality content relevant for their users, ShipServ wanted to position the company as a thought leader in the industry. The strategy for delivering content was to establish key themes on a quarterly basis and develop editorial content around the themes. In addition the automated marketing solution drip-feed the high-quality content to their leads as a part of the nurturing process (VelocityPartners.co.uk, 2009a, DestinationCRM.com, 2010a).

> *"Content marketing is turning your insight and advice into campaigns that change people's minds and incite action."*
> *John Watton, CMO, ShipServ*
> *Source: Watton (2010)*

4.6.3 Implementation of the social media strategy

The implementation of ShipServ's social media strategy manifested itself throughout many dimensions;

- Finding out where their audience currently are
- Revamp of their website with focus on usability, quality content, and doing search engine optimisation including keyword planning and optimising the landing pages
- Promoting content on ShipServ.com through existing social media platforms
- Establishing a community hub by creating a LinkedIn Group and encouraging membership

Finding the audience

One important starting point was to find out where their online audience currently were engaging in social media, as it was important for ShipServ to participate in the ongoing conversations. Google Adwords was used to identify keywords used for solutions in their market, and the web aggregator Netvibes was used to find conversation about ShipServ and the industry. Niche maritime blogs were uncovered, but there were far between mentions of ShipServ (DestinationCRM.com, 2010a).

> *"Our objective as a small business is getting our name known. No one talks about ShipServ... [We're] almost surprised by the mention of [our] company. We recognized that we can have a point of view, have a human face, and get involved in conversations."*
>
> *John Watton, CMO, ShipServ*
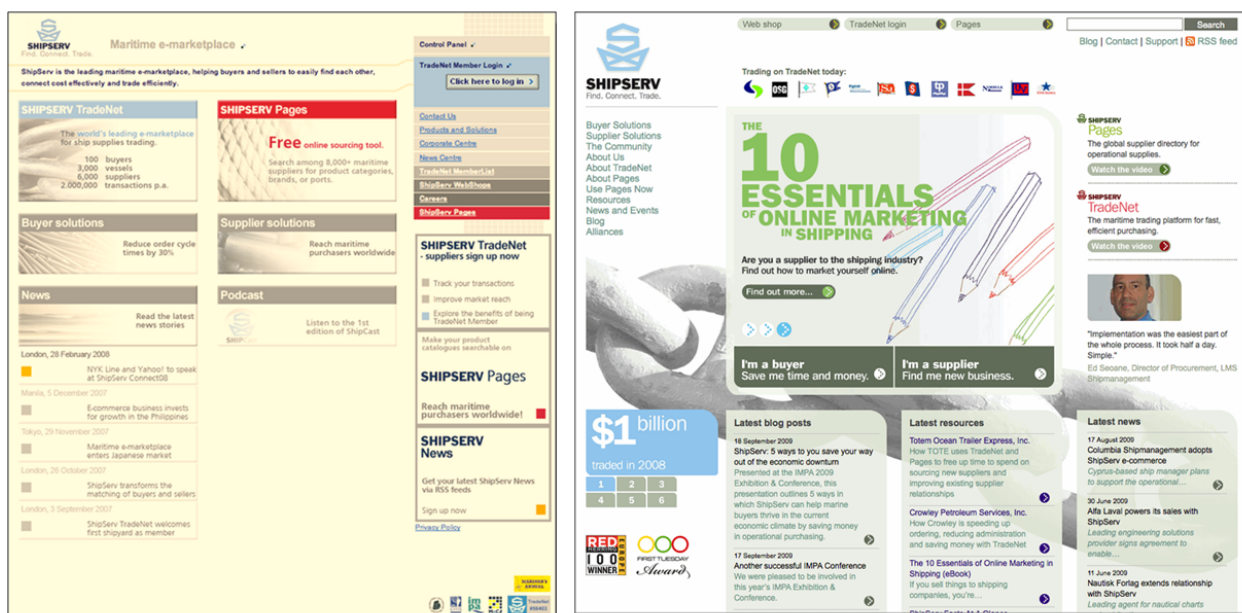> *Source: DestinationCRM.com (2009b)*

Figure 6: Redesign of ShipServ.com
Source: Watton (2010)

Revamp of ShipServ.com

ShipServ revamped their website from the impersonal enterprise look and language to a more customer-centric website (see Figure 6). ShipServ.com essentially became the main hub of ShipServ's marketing efforts, with focus on high-quality content to position ShipServ as a thought leader in the industry. As social media platforms were used as beacons to drive traffic back to the main site, they also did thorough work on search engine optimisation, undertook keyword planning and developed customised landing pages, catered to different market segments with optimised call-to-actions as a part of tracking visitor behaviour for the lead nurturing and scoring (B2BVoices.com, 2010, DestinationCRM.com, 2009b, B2BM.biz, 2010a).

Through their site and communication in social media they also added personality to their brand; the new website moved away from the arch typical corporate language and started using light-hearted, easy-going language to prove that "we're people just like you". In addition they also started "bigging up" their customers and clients by giving them mentions and praise in various articles. A blog was also introduced on the website containing opinions and enabling feedback and discussions in the comment area (B2BVoices.com, 2010, Watton, 2010).

Using social media as beacons to drive traffic to the main site

As the website ShipServ.com became the main hub the different social media platforms were used as beacons to attract users back to the main site. A stream of content and micro-content was developed around six themes which helped attract visitors to the site; white papers[1], blog posts[2], Twitter tweets[3], e-newsletter[4], viral videos to lighten the discussions[5], podcasts[6], a Facebook page[7], social releases[8] and discussions in a ShipServ LinkedIn group[9]. Whenever a new piece of content was posted online, it was automatically published to their social media beacons (see Figure 7). The company newsletter was also revamped to be more point-of-view oriented, and included an introduction to different pieces of content with a "read more" link. When users visited the site, the automated marketing solution could then work to analyse the visitor's behaviour and uncover valuable leads (VelocityPartners.co.uk, 2009b, Watton, 2010).

The use of viral videos on services like YouTube and Vimeo also drove traffic back to the main site; humorous videos were used to lighten the conversation, the conversations themselves, and the general tone and language of the website gave

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[1] White paper: http://lp.shipserv.com/Top_Marketing_Tips_for_Maritime_Suppliers.html
[2] Blog: http://www.shipserv.com/info/category/blog/
[3] Twitter: http://twitter.com/shipserv
[4] E-newsletters: http://www.shipserv.com/info/category/news-and-events/newsletters/
[5] Example of a video: http://www.shipserv.com/info/2010/05/17/shipserv-pages-the-movie/
[6] Podcasts: http://www.shipserv.com/info/category/resources/podcasts-resources/
[7] Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/pages/ShipServ-Maritime-Trading-Network/209142614873
[8] Press releases the social media way through PitchEngine.com
[9] LinkedIn: http://www.linkedin.com/groups?gid=1496327&trk=myg_ugrp_ovr

ShipServ a new dimension in terms of giving the brand a personality (see Figure 8). One example is the unveiling of a winner in a contest to name the new e-newsletter; a video was put on YouTube where CMO John Watton read up all 200 entries before announcing the winner[1] (B2BVoices.com, 2010).

ShipServ also reused old content by "re-pimping" it to be published a second time and pushed out through the beacons. For example, ShipServ created a white paper and promoted it via an e-mail campaign. This led to approximately 400 downloads. Seven months later they pushed out the same white paper for a second campaign to a larger pool of e-mail addresses, but excluding those who responded to the first campaign by arranging their e-mail lists with the automated marketing solutions. The second campaign yielded another 600 downloads (B2BVoices.com, 2010, DestinationCRM.com, 2009b).

> *"If you're small, you don't want to spend time on data quality, you just want to sell."*
> *John Watton, CMO, ShipServ*
> *Source: DestinationCRM.com (2009b)*

Building an online community

ShipServ chose to leverage the social network LinkedIn rather than developing a new community platform. They created a group called "ShipServ Maritime Trading Network", and encouraged purchasing people in shipping companies and suppliers to join the community hub. The group currently counts 863 members (per 16.06.2010). During the listening process ShipServ identified five other maritime groups which they joined in order to connect and engage with their audience, and expanded the reach of their community. They utilised content relevant to the community from the new sections of the website; simply participating was not enough, but they rather focused on providing value through interesting and useful research, surveys, information, opinions, knowledge and more that mattered to their community, which they ultimately tried to influence (VelocityPartners.co.uk, 2009b).

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[1] ShipServ Newsletter Naming - The Results: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zv7KyvIDRig
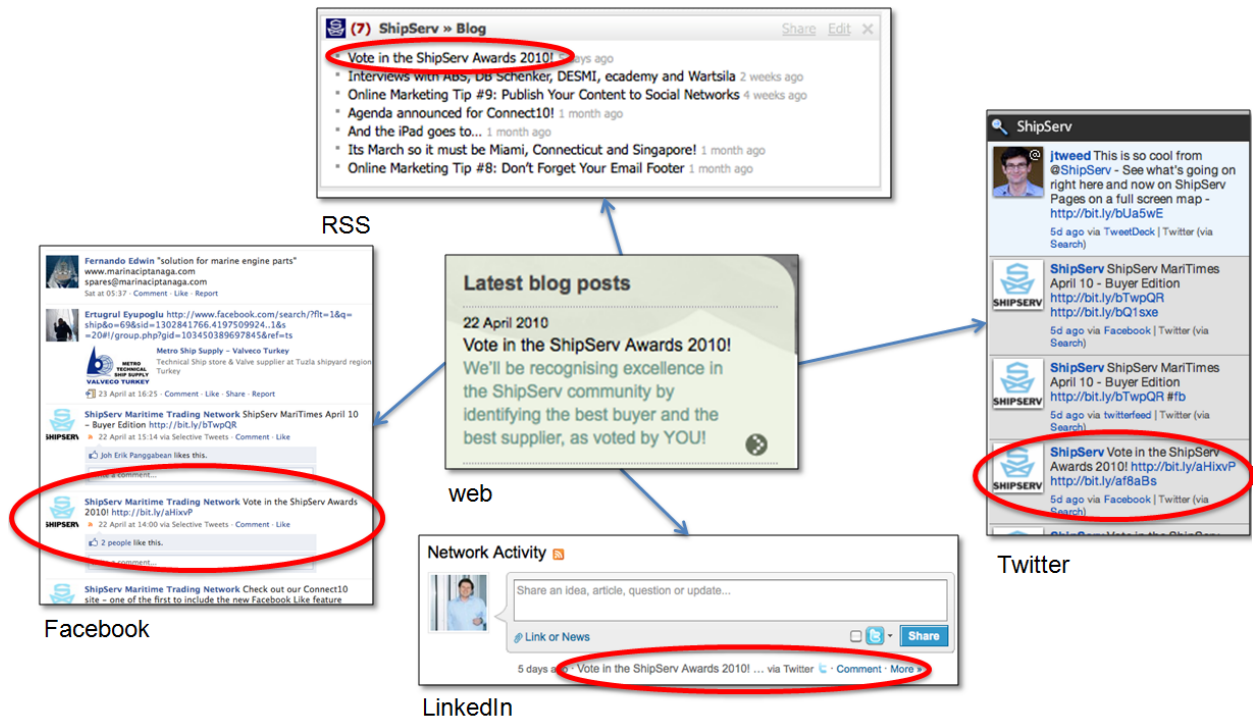
RSS

web

Twitter

Facebook

LinkedIn

Figure 7: ShipServ publishing the same content to several social media platforms
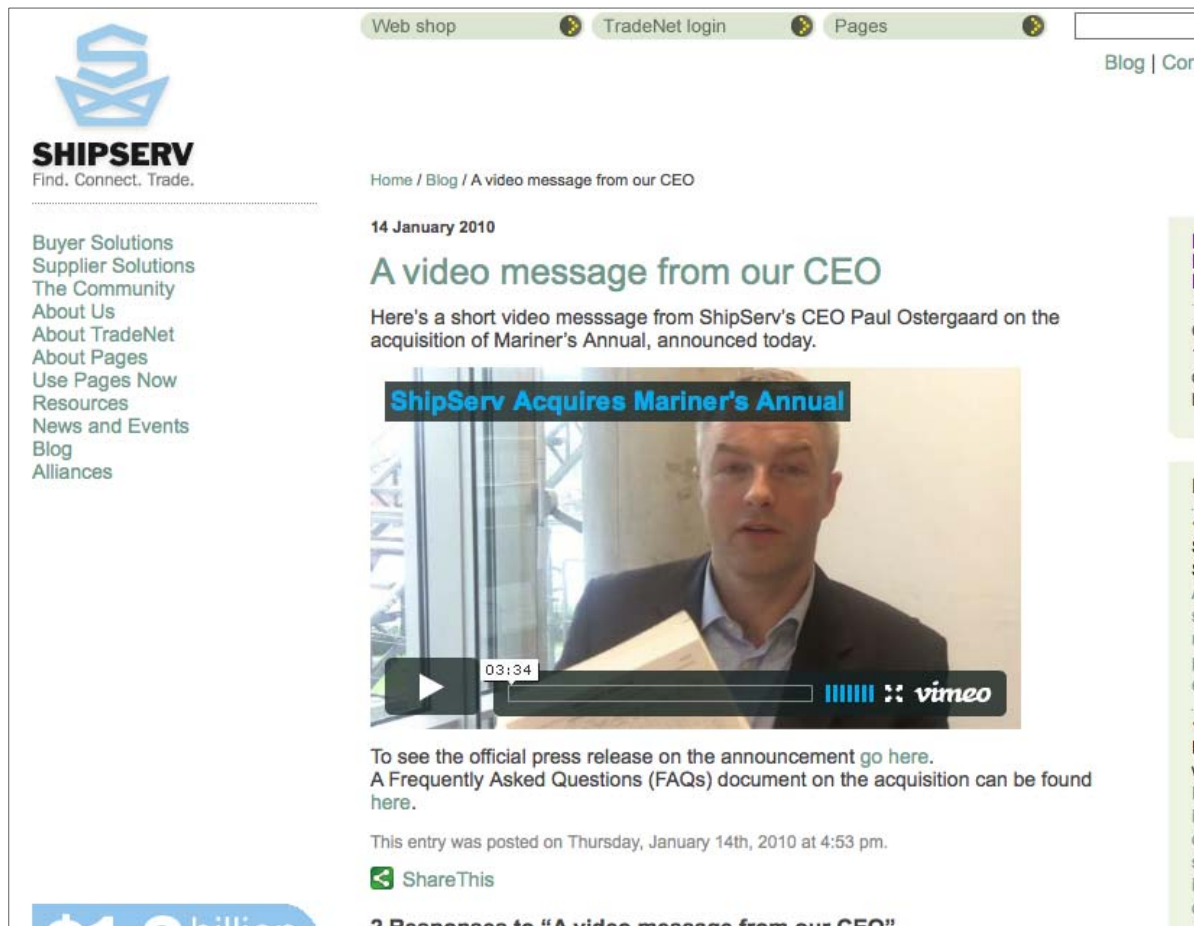Source: Watton (2010)

Figure 8: Videos used to enlighten the content and bring personality to the ShipServ brand
Source: Watton (2010)

4.6.4 Results

The social media initiative of ShipServ is an ongoing process still running; brand awareness increased and their presence throughout the shipping industry has been extended. More visitors are visiting their website, they spend more time on the site and they look at more pages when they are visiting. Their community grew steadily, and their social media beacons are generating traffic to their main site ShipServ.com.

ShipServ is maximizing the power of digital marketing to qualify leads and drag prospects through the marketing funnel by automatic nurturing, before handing over scored sales-ready leads to the sales department. Over the final quarter of 2008 the number of sales-ready leads increased by 400 %. Social media was an important driver to drive the visitors to their website, who then were ranked as leads on the automated marketing solution (DestinationCRM.com, 2009b, B2BM.biz, 2010a).

A full return on investment was achieved in three months, and the actual costs were less than £20,000. CMO John Watton estimated that the same results would have cost £100,000 through traditional media efforts (VelocityPartners.co.uk, 2009a). ShipServ's marketing agency Velocity Partners did however point out that one should be cautious about predicting hard-core ROI from social media, as the nature of social media is about listening to the community, rather than telling it what do to and think. Being recognised as a relevant participant in conversations is hard to measure by direct responses or click-through rates (VelocityPartners.co.uk, 2009b).

Website statistics (1ˢᵗ quarter of 2009)
- Visitors increased by 59 %
- Pageviews increased by 70 %
- Average time on site increased by 25 %
- Generated over 1,000 downloads of a white paper

Community statistics
- 378 members in the ShipServ Maritime Network group on LinkedIn[1]
- 300 visitors to the blog
- Over 50 relevant followers on Twitter
- Over 600 views of the viral videos, 62% of which came via email distribution and 18% via shipserv.com/LinkedIn distribution
- LinkedIn and Twitter have gone from zero to the top 20 traffic sources

Business statistics
- Increased contact-to-lead (landing page contact) conversion by 150 %
- Increased lead-to-opportunity conversion by 50 %
- Decreased campaign management costs by 80 %
- Increased the number of sales-ready leads by 400 %
- Closing a deal went on average from six to two calls with a qualified prospect

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[1] Discrepancy with the number mentioned earlier due to keeping the numbers in context with the other numbers displayed on the result page.

Sources for statistics: B2BM.biz (2010a), VelocityPartners.co.uk (2009a), DestinationCRM.com (2009b). Website and community statistics are gathered from Velocity Partners (ShipServ's marketing agency) and B2B Marketing Magazine (industry press). Business statistics are from Destination CRM (industry press) and B2BVoices.com (2010) who gathered the data, in addition to other mentioned sources. All statistics dates to April and May 2009.

Recognition

Through this campaign ShipServ, piloted by CMO John Watton, won the CRM Elite Award by CRM magazine. The CRM Elite Award is given to CRM implementations that push new boundaries, and the campaign was recognised by the jury for "its holistic use of Marketo, Salesforce.com, and social media" (DestinationCRM.com, 2009c). In the New New Media Age Effectiveness Awards 2009 "ShipServ social media" was shortlisted for the best business-to-business campaign, even though another company won it in the end (New Media Age, 2009). CMO John Watton was also given the B2B Marketer of the Year 2009 prize in the B2B Marketing Magazine Awards '09, and their marketing agency Velocity Partners received a "Highly Commended" mention for the "Content and Social Media Marketing Campaign for ShipServ" at the same awards (VelocityPartners.co.uk, 2009c).

4.7 Case study: Celebrity Cruises UK

Celebrity Cruises utilised Twitter to "specifically target trade partners ranging from small travel agents to large groups". Twitter and its facilities were leveraged as an integral part of Celebrity Cruises marketing and communication strategy towards its trade partners. The digital agency behind the campaign was the London-based firm Positive Digital (Frost, 2010).

4.7.1 About Celebrity Cruises UK

Celebrity Cruises was founded in 1989 providing luxury cruises with a promise of an extraordinary performance level of their cruise experience, and they claim to have set the worldwide standard of what is expected of a luxury cruise; "high quality, superior design, spacious accommodations, grand style, attentive service and exceptional cuisine" (CelebrityCruises.com, 2010b). In 1997, Celebrity Cruises merged with Royal Caribbean International and formed Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd. and today they have 29 ships, including ten Celebrity Cruise ships (CelebrityCruises.com, 2010a). In 2009 they had over 60,000 employees and sales of $5,889.8 million (Hoovers.com, 2010).

4.7.2 Utilising the social media space

Positive Digital was aware of the increasing adoption of social media for B2B, and "how social media offers brand the opportunity to engage with customers in a pre-qualified and relevant way". A thorough research was conducted prior to planning the Twitter initiative, and the increase in social media usage the recent years was an important key point; the amount of web traffic brands received from social networks increased by 153 % in 2009 in the UK, advertising on social networks was expected to rise, as well as the average time spent on social networks were increasing. On Twitter time spent was on average increased from less than ten minutes to 30 minutes in one year (Frost, 2010).

Why Celebrity Cruises UK chose Twitter

Positive Digital and Celebrity Cruises identified Twitter as an opportunity to establish a presence online, and explore this new and growing channel to acquire highly relevant prospects. In addition they could develop a dialogue with the audience base and the channel influencers. Through Twitter it was also possible to position the brand within the marketplace. Their research also revealed that there was an increasing adoption of B2B audiences to use Twitter for product research, and that Twitter increased search engine optimisation and traffic generation to the website in general. By establishing a presence on Twitter the company could tap into current conversations as well as monitor mentions of their products and services (Frost, 2010).

Twitter was perceived as the right channel for several additional reasons (Frost, 2010);

- A 974 % growth of Twitter in the UK makes it the fastest growing social media channel.
- Provides the brand a greater degree of reach than trade press from a coverage perspective within the travel sector.
- Accordingly, social media has proven to be a fertile and appropriate platform from the brand.
- Research suggested B2B companies are more likely to engage in micro-blogging on Twitter than B2C companies.
- Twitter in particular plays a significant role in B2B at the stage where prospects are identifying suppliers (UK research, Base One (2010)).

4.7.3 Using Twitter to target trade partners

An analysis pinpointed several opportunities Celebrity Cruises could utilise on the Twitter platform; "Increase representative productivity, improve customer success, drive evangelism and PR, improve search engine optimization strategy, generate leads, harness innovation, gain customer insight and create competitive differentiation". The strategy of Celebrity Cruises was to develop connections and relationships with trade partners, and offer an opportunity to interact with the brand which in turn would build the brand personality (Frost, 2010).

The Twitter account @CelebrityUK[1] (see Figure 9) was targeting trade partners in the UK market, ranging from small travel agencies to large groups. Through using online monitoring tools[2] Celebrity Cruises identified the most appropriate dialogues, i.e. those who was talking to and about the company, and supported conversations about the brand by inspiring the audience to discussion. It was early discovered that interactions with relevant players in the market generated a higher level of followers, rather than simply broadcasting the messages. Celebrity Cruises started engaging the trade partners in order to develop a deeper understanding, relationships and brand awareness (Frost, 2010).

Cruises in general have a lot of activity online; people blog about their experience while trade partners create and share their promotion material. Rather than wordy and complex posts, Celebrity Cruises focused on being informative and easy-to-understand in order to provide their trade partners with easily reusable campaign elements. Through Twitter Celebrity Cruises also promoted the user and travel agent generated content, which in some cases proved to be more valuable for their network of travel agents compared to material produced by them. This included real customers blogs about experiences, panoramic product views etc. In order to supply their audience with additional relevant and valuable content, they also promoted themes ranging from announcing exclusive trade focused competitions and the

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[1] The Twitter profile of Celebrity Cruises UK: http://twitter.com/CelebrityUK
[2] Online monitoring tools: Google Alerts, Netvibes, Yahoo Pipes, Monitter and Technorati

winners, to specialist product launches. In other words; the content they provided aimed to increase the productivity of their trade partners (Frost, 2010).

Through conversations Celebrity Cruises were able to present the brand with a human face and a facility to respond to people engaging with questions, queries or simply seeking some feedback to the brand in a timely fashion; a real-time time customer relationship management. Their online presence provided the company with a point of differentiation in the marketplace, as well as an opportunity to talk to the community influencers. Paul Frost argued that Twitter offered Celebrity Cruises a perfect environment for trade partner advocates and smaller travel agent audiences alike (Frost, 2010).

Figure 9: Celebrity Cruises Twitter account, @CelebrityUK
Source: Screenshot of http://twitter.com/CelebrityUK, 21.06.2010

4.7.4 Results

In a three month period Celebrity Cruises got 1,300 followers, and Twitter is responsible for generating 8 % of the traffic to their trade collateral platform. Through their Twitter channel it become possible to specifically target trade partners, ranging from small travel agents to large groups. In key purchase periods their Twitter account is able to complement the trade partners' product marketing activities by providing offers and promotion (Frost, 2010).

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter will discuss the findings from the interviews and case studies the context of the existing literature. The key findings from the interviews will be put forward and discussed. A cross-case analysis will be conducted on the case studies, and compared with the findings from the interviews. The implications for managers and theory will be presented on the basis of the interviews, the case studies and the conceptual background. What implications the findings will have for theory as well as suggestions for further research will be elaborated upon. The discussion chapter will conclude with an evaluation of the study as well as its limitations.

5.1 Cross-case analysis

This analysis will compare the differences and similarities between the cases through an explanation-building approach. The POST-method proposed by Li and Bernoff (2008), described in chapter 2.3.3, will be used to analyse their approach.

People, objective, strategy and technology are the four steps in the POST-method to establish the social media strategy. Take note of that the Coloplast case study was conducted before the use of social media exploded, the term was not even adopted. Further examples from the cases will be connected in the next chapter.

5.1.1 People

The target audience of the three case studies differ significantly. Whilst Coloplast targets stoma care nurses, a niche within the healthcare industry, ShipServ targets the whole maritime trading industry. Celebrity Cruises does also target an industry, the travel agents, but at the same time they provide information and engage with B2C customers as well.

One could suppose that all stoma care nurses (SCNs) more or less face the same day-to-day challenges, but at each hospital there is a limited number of SCNs to share experiences and knowledge. The opportunity to connect and engage in discussions with other SCNs outside their working place was limited to conferences held by their national associations due to SCNs being geographically dispersed in Sweden. At the same time the healthcare problem SCNs deal with affects the lives of their patients significantly, and the interest to share knowledge for better to help their patients would be high. The need for an online community to facilitate knowledge was identified, but the question was whether or not the SCNs would use this online service especially considering the relatively small number of SCNs. In terms of the importance of the issues SCNs would have a lot to benefit from participating. By collaborating with the national associations to create the community, the SCNs both got an ownership and Coloplast could utilise the national associations to create awareness of the new community, to draw users and ultimately enhance their brand value "closeness, to better understand".

This opportunity was not present with ShipServ; seeking to increase sales by selling a platform which changes the workflow from paper, phone and fax to a software solution, they needed to educate their audience on how this would improve the efficiency of their operations. Users were tech-reluctant, and similar to Coloplast, dispersed geographically but in an entire industry. Whilst for Coloplast almost all bits of content would be interesting to their entire audience, ShipServ had a far more difficult job in terms of getting the attention of their users. Getting people to engage would be more difficult than in the case of Celebrity Cruises and Coloplast, yet research revealed several maritime groups on LinkedIn, which signalled the opportunity to enable networking even though it would not be the number one priority.

In between these two the audience of Celebrity Cruises can be positioned. Geographically dispersed and targets a whole industry as well, but the travel agencies selling their luxury cruises would be interested in building relationships with the company in order to increase their own efficiency and sell more – and earn more money. Research prior to the establishment found several cruise actors and channel influences already engaged in conversations online, and they identified that people would be interested in engaging in conversations with the company. Celebrity Cruises could however extend to their B2C customer group as well.

5.1.2 Objectives

Before entering the social media space all three companies had an objective; Coloplast wanted to strengthen their brand value "closeness, to better understand" by providing the community, as well as the collaboration process to develop it, gain insights into the challenges and issues SCNs had, and utilise their customers in product developments. In terms of the Groundswell terminology presented by Li and Bernoff (2008, pp. 68-9) Coloplast was embracing their customers by including them within the business processes – one of the most challenging business objectives to reach when using social media. They managed to do this because of the support they got from the national associations and the niche audience they targeted. Direct selling and branding was however not an opportunity due to the SCNs strict on maintain their professional independence, but by allowing SCNs to help them develop products and give their opinions it automatically forged bonds between the company and its users.

For ShipServ it was the exact opposite; social media was used to basically increase the number of visitors to the site in order qualify leads to generate more sales and be more efficient when educating their users – i.e. creating brand awareness. ShipServ utilised social media mainly for the Groundswell objectives listening and talking. Celebrity Cruises had a similar approach by wanting to utilise social media to engage with their travel agents to support them selling (more of) their products, increase brand awareness and provide a point of differentiation. They pursued the Groundswell objectives listening, talking and supporting.

None of these companies jumped on the social media bandwagon for the sake of "me too"; they all did research prior to the initiatives both in terms of their audience and what business objectives they wanted to support by the launch of social media initiatives. Social media was used by all the three cases to support the brand.

5.1.3 Strategy

The strategy of Coloplast was to establish a close community exclusively for the SCNs in order to create a closer relationship. They wanted to become the leading community for SCNs which would provide them with a competitive advantage it would be difficult to imitate. ShipServ used a thought leadership content marketing strategy to differentiate the company from competitors and to create awareness, as well as becoming more personal and engaging. It was important to provide its

audience with high-quality content and establish a community where their users could network and discuss issues related to maritime trading. Celebrity Cruises wanted a social media presence to connect with the audience, gain a deeper understanding and help travel agents sell their products.

Coloplast operated in a niche market within an industry – more or less any content on the topic would be of interest to specific niche audience. Their users would be able to participate in product development and bring their opinions easily back to the organisation, as well as Coloplast wanted to facilitate a knowledge sharing between the SCNs. ShipServ on the other hand targeted an entire industry where not all content would be relevant for their users thus it was more important to have a wide presence and reach.

Celebrity Cruises had a more targeted approach by focusing on engaging in conversations. There is a significant difference between all three of them, caused by the three different objectives.

5.1.4 Technology

In today's environment Coloplast would have many more opportunities when selecting what platforms, technologies and tactics they wanted to use compared to that of today. They could have created a Linkedin Group or a Facebook page with lots of the same features in order to create an online community. Nonetheless, due to the high relevance for SCNs and their interest in an online community, a closed standalone community dedicated to the SCNs would have been the best option to reach their objectives also today.

For ShipServ it became a question of revamping the site to make it more customer-centric in terms of giving their brand a human touch, as well as establishing a blog where they could publish their high-quality content. Several existing social media platforms were used in order to push out the content to maximise the reach, as well as establishing a community at an existing platform where their customers could network. Using existing platforms also lowers the barriers for people to join; it is easier to join a group with an existing platform, rather than having to go through the process of creating a new profile for that exact objective.

Celebrity Cruises identified Twitter as the viable platform to connect with their travel agents .Twitter is all about having conversations and receiving valuable information and as their audience already were engaging on the platform they wanted to utilise that.

5.2 Interviews revisited

This chapter will extract the key points made in the interviews and discuss both the common ground between the interviewees as well as address and discuss the issues they differ on. Connections towards the case studies will also be made. The four experts all came from different backgrounds, thus triangulating the aspect of social media from different point of views.

5.2.1 Impact on B2B marketing and branding

No one did however doubt the growing impact of social media both today and in the future for business-to-business companies. Social media does not change the way businesses conduct business but it provides a new important channel and several opportunities for the B2B brand to connect and engage with their customers. It is not to say that social media will replace traditional media, not at first at least, companies still need to do traditional marketing like direct sales, going to trade shows, advertising in industry press etc. What social media provides is another layer with new opportunities for the marketer to build the brand.

All three case studies extended their brand into the online space to capitalise on the opportunities, and it did not replace traditional marketing. There are few competitors among the producers of stoma care related products, and being one of the leading companies in the market most of SCNs already knew the Coloplast brand, thus it was not important to create brand awareness. Coloplast rather strengthened one of their core values "closeness, to better understand" by establishing the online community in close collaboration with the associations for SCNs, after the discovering the need. Having identified the SCNs as the key influencers in the buying centres, the targeting is impeccable. By downplaying the role of Coloplast in their initiative they also demonstrated their brand value through action.

ShipServ repositioned their brand efficiently through a major facelift of their online brand components to become less corporate and more personal. The efforts were created to establish a community to facilitate trading, but they did not have the same opportunities to target the customers directly as in the case of Coloplast. Creating brand awareness and becoming personal through multiple social media activities proved to be a successful strategy. Celebrity Cruises used Twitter to identify brand ambassadors and inspired to conversation by facilitating distribution of customer experiences.

Social media can decrease the transaction times as well as the time for building influence; a thorough branding process through social media can enhance the B2B branding strategy of a company. The B2B brand is often underestimated by the companies themselves. Many companies does not have a branding strategy, or does focus on product attributes and features among the brand values rather than emotional values (Kotler and Pfoertsch, 2006, p. 2, McKee, 2010, p. 47). Several studies have focused on the importance of emotion as an important driver in brand value (Lynch and Chernatony, 2004, Canovic, 2006). Social media can be a driver to

enhance the focus on emotions rather than product features and attributes in the branding process. It enables the brand to demonstrate a personality, put human faces on the brand and engaging in conversations with the customers, just like proven in the case of ShipServ. People are able to give feedback to the company regardless of their financial influence or status which can provide significant value to both the customers and the company, like in the case of Coloplast. B2B companies are traditional late adopters, but the threat of obsolescence looms large if companies fail to adapt to changes in the environment. If there is an active social media space relevant for the company, it is a change in the environment.

But social media is not appropriate for all B2B companies. It all depends on the company, the industry, its products, its stakeholders and its employees – not even companies in the same industry have the same need for social media. Apple is one of the most successful brands in history, leading on new technology loved by early adopters. Whilst many of their competitors utilise social media, Apple discourages their employees to participate in the social media space, and even in some cases sue their brand ambassadors in order to protect the band upon which they thrive (Fleet, 2008). Ultimately it comes down to what business objective the company wants to solve through social media. Rather than allowing their employees use social media, CEO of Apple Steve Jobs answer e-mail from fans in a short and timely fashion whenever the community need feedback – because he knows these will be published and spread by the brand ambassadors[1]. Some have argued Jobs is a one man social media machine (Gray, 2010). Yet the argument stands; social media is not appropriate for everyone.

In some cases a company do not want to allow their employees to represent their brand widely online, like in the case of Apple. It is however very important to listen to the social media space related to the industry, the company itself, the competitors etc., in order to keep up with what is going on in the environment surrounding the business. There is no doubt that even though Apple has no blog, Facebook or Twitter presence, they are dependent upon their brand ambassadors and is monitoring the activity in the social media sphere.

It was also claimed by the experts that businesses need to meet their audience where the people are; if people are engaging in the social media space there has to be strategy in place how to manage it. Apple does this through Steve Jobs' e-mails. A study conducted by Base One (2010, p. 5) supports the argument that people are shifting towards the use of the Internet, and in particular the social media space, for information when making business decisions. Having a presence on these various touch points where people engage will help influence how the company is perceived, but the presence needs to be aligned with the brand strategy. This will also meet customers on their terms as they are in an increasing extent shaping their perceptions through multiple sources, both online and offline, sources regarded as more reliable and trustworthy than the company itself.

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[1] Example: http://www.emailsfromstevejobs.com/

Guidelines

Social media does however not only have implications for the high-level branding and marketing strategies. Individuals within companies might be using different social media channels even though there is no overall corporate social media strategy. Without the senior management necessarily knowing about it, people might use LinkedIn to manage their professional network, Twitter to talk about their industry or a blog to air opinions about work-related topics they are passionate about. One of the core values of social media is transparency, and if people use social media within their work there is every reason to believe that they do tell who they work for. In practice, employees might be exposing the brand without being conscious about it.

In other cases people might be advocating the case of the company purely due to passion for the product, but doing so carelessly. This happened in the major Norwegian telecom Telenor who is involved with launching the music streaming service WIMP[1]. One of Telenor's employees working with WIMP engaged in discussions about poor reviews of the software. He kept his anonymity, denied he worked for Telenor when it was suggested, and used multiple nicknames to criticise the reviewers and make arguments for WIMP. He was ultimately uncovered by the tracks he left, and the incident received wide attention known as "#wimpgate" on Twitter. This picked up by the national press[2]. In the end it did not turn out to be a reputation crisis for Telenor, but it was a stark reminder that there is a need for social media guidelines among companies (Hedløv, 2010).

Every company should establish guidelines for how their employees are allowed to conduct themselves in social media, and educate them on what is appropriate and what is not, in order to manage the brand; the brand is what people perceive it to be, and the employees of the company clearly influence that. How strict these guidelines should be depends upon the company. Whilst Microsoft has 4,000 bloggers and many more tweeters, allowing their employees to share their passion about Microsoft products with the ethos "blog smart", their head-to-head competitor Apple has the exact opposite policy of discouraging its employees from participating in the social media space at all. It all depends on the business.

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[1] About WIMP: http://www.telenor.com/en/about-us/our-business/the-nordic-region/products-and-services/wimp-norways-answer-to-spotify
[2] NRK.no - Wimpgate: http://www.nrk.no/nyheter/norge/1.7076909

5.2.2 Opportunities and threats

The expert interviews revealed opportunities (see Table 7), threats and challenges in relation to the online environment. What opportunities and threats a company face differs from company to company, from industry to industry, based upon factors mentioned earlier.

Table 7: Opportunities and threats identified in the interviews

Opportunities	Threats and challenges

• Active listening; in-depth market research instrument.
  o Sample ideas
  o The power of one
• Building relationships and networking
  o For the brand
  o For the employees
• Differentiation through
  o Thought leadership
  o Demonstrate brand personality
  o Highlighting the competitive advantage
• Reach
• First-mover advantage
	• Not taking part; digital strategy is increasing in importance, and the company might face being left behind
	  o Fail to embrace the opportunities because no proven ROI
	• Bad press; no delete button. A slip up can get focus in the press, and hurt the brand
	• Misuse
	  o Using it as traditional media
	  o Focusing too much on traditional media at the expense of other marketing activities.
	  o Over-analysing the performance and trying to measure the qualitative aspects of 1-to-1 communication
	• Organisation not being ready for it
	  o Internal processes in place to deal with the continuous process social media instigates
	  o Be ready for people disputing, challenging, questioning, and engaging in a proactive way

Listening and building relationships through social media is probably the opportunities that are easiest to embrace. Tech savvy marketers can easily and on relatively short time read tutorials and learn how to use free tools monitoring tools to discover ongoing conversations about their brand, their competitors and other relevant topics for their industry. If companies do not listen to the activity in the online space they might face being left behind its competitors; there may or may not be activity relevant to the company online, but it needs to be monitored.

There is no reason why any company should not listen to the people already engaging out there. Once a listening framework, with keywords, concepts, tools, relevant blogs etc, is formed it would demand few resources to monitor the social space regularly at least on a superficial level. If there are too many mentions for it to be easily manageable, it might be a sign for establishing a social media presence; if people are talking about a brand, the company better listen. The listening processes could also be extended to active listening where the company directs the conversations by asking questions and engaging, which would be a highly valuable and cheap in-depth market research tool.

Social media provides a new dimension in terms of branding; a brand can demonstrate a personality and put a human touch to the company, maybe reflect the corporate culture. In terms of providing a point of differentiation, just having the presence and giving the customers or prospects the opportunity to build relationships and ask questions on an informal and unobtrusive way. Another point of differentiation can be to highlight the competitive advantage of the company by leveraging of the internal expertise in order to be interesting and provide value to the audience. This is what ShipServ did – they positioned themselves as a thought leader within maritime marketing, and targeted as many as possible through difference social media beacons. In terms of reach, it is a very cost effective way to reach people on a global basis or even if they just are geographically dispersed like in the case of Coloplast.

At the same time it is important not disregard traditional marketing activities, as social media is another tool in the toolbox to build the brand. The B2B branding literature recommends to build the brand through multiple customer touch points, and social media would be one of those additional thought points (Webster Jr. and Keller, 2004). The scope of the case studies was limited to their social media initiatives, but neither of ShipServ, Coloplast or Celebrity Cruises focused solely on using social media. It was another set of tools to build their brand, and was used as a complement to traditional marketing efforts. For example, the quarterly themes on StomaNet was summarised in a printed issue which was sent to all members of the SCN associations, and ShipServ has continued to participate on events in the maritime industry.

There is an opportunity for first-mover advantage for entering the social media space, where as anyone following have to compare their offerings to the one of the existing actor. It is however not sustainable because the barriers to entry are low, and anyone has the potential to do the exact same and better. But as seen in the case of Coloplast, establishing a community which engages users, the barriers for the users to switch to a new community would be high because the value was related to StomaNet was the facilitation of information exchange between the SCNs. Obviously, because of the size of the market and the collaboration with the SCNs associations it would be very difficult to imitate the community they created.

Many companies disregard the use of social media and ban it from their office environments because it is perceived to be distracting the employees, when actually allowing its employees to build and maintain their professional networks through social media could prove to increase their effectiveness; by having a easy-to-reach network of trusted people, employees can get feedback and recommendations which makes them more efficient in their realm. It is also possible to use their networks to sample ideas and collaborate. By participating in this space the employees also build the brand and demonstrate brand personality without necessarily doing so through a corporate account. Some people may not feel any value attached to engaging with a

brand, and rather wants to connect directly through "their contact" within the organisation.

Whilst the momentum social media can build is an opportunity, it is also a challenge; there is no delete button. Once a message is out there, it is not possible to take it back. Wrongdoings or disrespectful behaviour could put the company in a bad light, and as social media was perceived to be word-on-mouth on steroids it is impossible to control (Qualman, 2010). A social media guideline would help mitigate this challenge by letting their employees know – and make them conscious of – what the appropriate way to behave is in terms of maintaining both the reputation and the brand. Employees within companies might already be using social media for their own individual reasons, and the company needs to address how to conduct and represent the brand in the online space. Aligning employees to the support the brand is thoroughly discussed in the academic literature; the brand values need to be supported at all the different customer touch points, and the employees need to be trained to deliver upon the brand promises the company is trying to build. Obviously the same principle applies to conduct in social media; allowing employees to engage with the customers is the exact opposite of crafting and controlling a message.

It is the sum of these opportunities that makes the real opportunity; allowing employees to engage, highlighting competitive advantage, building a community, giving the brand a personality and utilising the power of one. The opportunities are as if made to be used simultaneously are easily to do many at once of, just like the case of ShipServ illustrated.

5.2.3 Social media strategy

The social media strategy is divided into two parts for discussion. The first is approaching social media whilst the latter is the different strategies.

Approaching social media

The interviewees mentioned several things a company should do prior to engaging in the social space, all of which could be combined. These can be divided in terms of when a company should start these activities.

Table 8: Approaching social media

Task	When	Description
Listen externally	Now	What is happening in the social media space already? Get a feel for the conversation and the opportunities.
Listen internally	Now	Find out how employees are using it already internally, and utilise that knowledge for the company's approach and guidelines.
Set an objective	Prior engagement	Be clear on what the company wants to achieve before choosing the strategy and the tactics. Key question is "what business objective do the company try to solve through social media".
Prepare internally	Prior engagement	Efforts need to be coordinated, social media is not a campaign but a process. Establish an internal network to provide answers to any questions being received; social media is a lot of everything.
Guidelines	If individual use of s.m.	A tool to manage the efforts, and avoid high-profile gaffs. Everyone needs to be internally aligned to support the brand.

The level of engagement needed for companies varies depending upon the unique properties of a business, its culture, its network and its value proposition. Due to company culture the company may not be ready to start engaging in social media. Listening internally and externally is however of importance to all companies and is two activities any company should do regardless of their initial stance towards participation in social media. By monitoring the online space relevant for their company they would see how the environment changes and make a decision on whether or not to establish a presence through that. Employees internally might already be engaging, and in terms of managing the brand and the reputation, these activities should be managed. If the employee's are using social media individually, the best tool to manage the employee's social media usage is by developing a set of guidelines. These do not need to be comprehensive, but needs to make sure the brand is represented in a positive way aligned with the brand strategy. Guidelines will make the both the company and its employees conscious on how the brand is represented online.

If a company decides to engage in social media there are two essential issues that need to be addressed before the strategy starts developing; set an objective and prepare internally. In order to be successful in social media the company has to tie the usage of social media to a business objective. When assigning resources to social media one needs to be clear on what one wants to achieve, rather than participating

online for the sake of "me too". The objective could either be to e.g. get marketing insights, active listening, or offering customer support.

That is not to say that companies cannot or should not simply explore the opportunity online by easing into the online space through what the company believes are the right entry points, because that could be a viable objective for the initial social media approach; finding possible ways to use social media, getting the feel of the landscape, and then evolve their strategy and objective based on what they learn. But in order to create value for the organisation they need to find out what business objective they want to solve through social media.

Steve Lamb, from the interviews, started blogging six years ago because he trusted his advisors in that it was good use of his time. By using his e-mail time to generalise questions received by e-mail and posting them on his blog, he managed to reach more people and use his time more efficiently. The blog grew in popularity and by the time he finished he was getting half a million hits per month thus reaching a large audience which his role as an evangelist ultimately evolved around. Even though he did not start out with the intention of becoming a major blog on his topic, his strategy evolved as the opportunities and benefits became apparent.

If a company makes the decision to enter the social media space it is important to be aware of two things at first; the social media channels will be used as the customers please, and there are people who will want to engage with the brand in whatever capacity. By establishing a presence and giving the opportunity to people to engage with the brand people will expect a response. In practice when a company establish a presence at any social media platform to support a specific objective, e.g. customer support, there is every chance that they will also receive inquiries about things not related to their objective, e.g. pre-sales questions. The organisation needs to be prepared for this sort of engagements, as well as people challenging, criticising and engaging in a proactive way. An internal network needs to be established in order to provide responses to give appropriate feedback.

Social media is a lot of everything, a tool that can be just as well used for product development as for marketing, but someone needs to coordinate the efforts. The brand needs to be consistent at every customer touch point including social media, even though no specific department of the business should claim ownership of the tool.

Strategy
A branding strategy should be aligned towards business strategy, and in the same line of thought a social media strategy should be aligned towards the branding and business strategy. Based upon the company's objective with social media the strategy should be derived. The experts presented to approaches. The first was to ease the way into social media through an evolutionary process where both the objectives and strategy evolves along the way, using the tools where they see benefit. Then measuring the performance based on the expectations that evolves

along the way. The other approach was to establish a set of key performance indicators (KPIs) based upon the objectives, in order to predetermine how one could measure if the initiative is a success, an average result or a failure. Only when the objectives and KPIs are set one could start choosing what technologies. Whilst both ShipServ and Coloplast had a strong strategy by clearly stated objectives, Celebrity Cruises familiarised itself with the platform before the engagement before finding the correct usage – an evolutionary process.

It is difficult to recommend a set of strategies because every company have different needs, but a strategy focused on providing differentiation, demonstrating the brand personality and the competitive advantages of the company is one common adopted approach, illustrated by the case of ShipServ. The social media environment is very fragmented, and it is impossible to establish a presence on every platform – but having a presence in more than one channel is recommended. By establishing the company website as the main hub, social media platforms can be used to pull people back to the main site. The facilities of those platforms one decided to engage on should also be used for engaging with the audience, but the content and links the company needs to provide needs to be interesting and of value to the audience.

A marketing strategy focused on delivering high-quality content that is of interest to the audience will attract the visitors to the site. This content can be produced by the by leveraging off the internal expertise within the company, in order to demonstrate their competitive advantage by providing thought leadership. People in the space will also be interested in what the company thinks about certain issues and what their plans are; "is this the right company to do business with". The focus should not be hard selling as that strategy is bound to fail due to the self-moderating nature of social media.

Targeting the correct users, e.g. the influencers within the buying centre, provide a challenge for companies. To a certain extent it is not possible to know if the company is targeting the right audience, especially regarding whether or not the participants have significant influence within the buying centre. In order to target users context have to be applied to the messages, and relevant actors within the online space needs to be targeted. For example did ShipServ participate in four LinkedIn groups in the maritime industry, and Celebrity Cruises engaged with channel influencers. When driving people back to the hub, i.e. main website, a company can provide measurable call-to-actions making the users reveal their identity, e.g. by having to register their names and addresses to download a whitepaper like in the case of ShipServ. The company then gets exact information of who is interacting with their website, including the company and their job title.

5.2.4 Measuring success

Measuring success of social media initiatives is something B2B marketing professionals and marketers are struggling with because social media influence is often a link in the chain. But it is a question whether social media should be measured in direct relation to the resource allocation in terms of direct impact on the bottom line. A quantifiable success rate of a campaign could prove to be vital in order to ensure reallocation of budgets to continue the social media initiatives.

Whilst web traffic in general is easy to measure and provide statistics of, it is more difficult to measure the influence and the value of the influence – just like it is with traditional marketing activities. The expert interviews and cases provided two perspectives on measuring ROI. It was argued that one should be prepared to invest in the social media space if the audience is there, and that quantifying one-on-one interactions with the audience is difficult due to the lack of a hard-wired connection between different influence touch points through the sales cycle.

There are however statistics available to measure the social media performance, but not necessarily linked to measuring ROI. The social media beacons provide statistics in terms of subscribers, how many forward the messages and links put out there, how much engagement are there in terms of commenting, conversations and discussions. These numbers are indicators of how successful the initiatives of the companies are. A key point to keep in mind would be to differ between e.g. subscribers that are relevant and those who are not, and measure the social media beacons towards the objectives of the initiative. If social media is used for generating ideas for product development one could measure the impact of the provided ideas, rather than the number of ideas.

An additional set of easy-to-measure data is from the website. There are several free tools measuring web traffic, i.e. number of visits, visitors, pageviews, time-spent-on-site, where the traffic is coming from and so on. It is also easy to measure behaviour, i.e. registration, comments, contacting the company, or if the users are just consuming and leaving. For Coloplast and Celebrity Cruises success was measured in qualitative terms; the number of users they attracted gave then a quantitative measure on their performance, but the number of users of social media initiatives alone provides no way to measure the ROI. Coloplast looked at the number of SCNs registered and their frequency of visits, whilst Celebrity Cruises looked at their numbers of relevant followers and traffic generated to the main site. Coloplast also implemented a link to their online community in other activities measuring customer satisfaction.

But these methods does not equate to measuring the hard quantified return on investment. One of the experts claimed most of the literature said companies did not need to measure ROI because they did not know how, and suggested several ways to measure the economical value. The easiest was cost avoidance, i.e. how much have the company saved in the support centre by support request being handled online.

The harder one to do was to use call-to-actions on the website, make users unmask themselves, and connect them to the CRM system in order to see how they are doing in the sales pipeline. Give the social media initiatives an influence metric, and it would be possible to provide a quantified return on investment. The most comprehensive case study, ShipServ, provided ROI based on generating more leads which reduced the number of average calls to close a lead. This could be attributed to the overall strategy which evolved around bringing visitors to the site so the automated CRM solution could qualified the leads based on their behaviour on the website.

Measuring ROI is much debated among practitioners online, and in some cases initiatives are much more measurable compared to other cases. Whilst the online community Coloplast could not point to a direct ROI because they wanted to increase brand loyalty, ShipServ looked to generate leads and could measure the performance of calling a qualified lead vs. a non-qualified lead. Chapman (2010) suggests plotting social media activity towards sales revenue, transactions, new customers, loyalty data and market research, and by comparing and contrasting both sets of data one would be able to see a correlation between social media efforts and enhanced performance. The expert interviews suggested that the tools to measure will become available as the social media environment evolves, but the experts forwarded a warning; do not wait until social media initiatives are measurable before the engagements starts – it might already be too late.

Whether the monitoring is quantitative, qualitative or a combination of both; the return on investments does not come overnight like traditional marketing campaigns. The effects of social media comes gradually as a result of hard work over time, but when the result comes they have the potential to be significant, see Figure 10 (Toolbox.com, 2009).
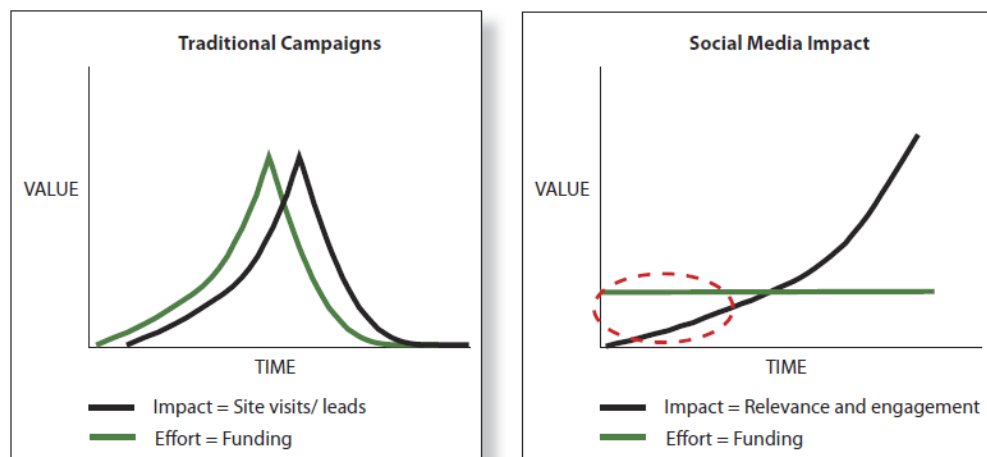
Source: Pauline Ores, IBM

Figure 10: Traditional ROI vs. social media ROI
Sources: Pauline Ores, IBM, via Toolbox.com (2009)

5.3 Implications for managers

Companies may risk being left behind its competitors if they do not change according to changes in the environment, and if there is significant activity in the social media space it is a change in the environment. Managers need to be aware of social media and its increasing adaptation also for B2B companies. Social media is not appropriate for all B2B companies and it does not fit with any business strategy; whilst not every company is fit to do everything, everyone should at least do something.

5.3.1 Pre-entry

What all managers should do is to map out their social media space in order to monitor the activities relevant for their business should there be any; monitoring the brand and conversations about the brand, monitoring what their competitors are doing, follow on the trends in the industry. Establishing a framework of free online tools to monitor the social space would require few resources, and could provide valuable insights. Even if nothing is discovered that is still an insight. Simultaneously to listening externally managers should map out the social media activity internally; how are the employees using social media, are they engaging in professional discussions or reading blogs relevant for the industry. These could be valuable starting points for deciding upon the company's engagement in social media.

Based upon internal and external listening the company would be able to look what opportunities they have to enter social media. For some it might be establishing thought leadership, for others it might be to create a community; the opportunities are defined based on the unique properties of the company. Before entering the social media space managers need to define an objective of their engagements, rather than for the sake of "me too". Social media strategy needs to be aligned towards business goals in order to provide value for the company.

5.3.2 Prepare the organisation

If the employees are engaging in social media on a professional level the company need to establish a set of guidelines to manage how employees conduct themselves. As professionals they represent the company in the social space even though they may not be conscious of it. Guidelines will provide directions on what is acceptable and what is not. There have been a lot of high-profile gaffs happening in social media and elevated to national press, in turn hurting the brand. Guidelines will to a certain extent mitigate these types of occurrences to happen by accident.

The guidelines also have to consider how to support the brand promise; it is important for the brand promise to be delivered upon on every customer touch point. This also holds true for social media, whether it is through a company effort or as individuals.

If the company decides to engage in social media it is important to remember that any imitative in social media may not necessarily be used in the way the company has intended; a channel established for marketing can by the customers be used as a

customer support function or vice versa. Before the company launches the initiative the organisation has to develop an internal network to manage the efforts, consisting of people from various parts of the organisation ready to provide feedback. Nothing is worse than a brand not responding to requests. The organisation needs to be aware that social media is not a campaign; it is a continuous process.

Employees engaging with social media should also be aware that people can question, challenge, criticise, or just engage in a positive way, and their responses need to be adequate. Trying to control the conversation is regarded as censorship and is not tolerated in the social media space.

5.3.3 Engaging in B2B social media

If the opportunities are perceived to be there it is possible to explore the opportunities evolutionary. By starting small and letting the strategy and objectives evolve as the company explores and familiarises itself with the environment, the company can find its own way. Sooner rather than later the company needs to establish an objective and work towards that objective.

It is however important for managers not to treat social media as traditional marketing. Hard-selling, one-way communication, product promotions and press releases does not work in social media; the focus is on establishing valuable relationships. Social media is a new platform that allows for communication on an informal basis, on the receivers time and terms. Customers and other stakeholders will be given the opportunity to provide feedback straight to the company. Conversations and engagement can demonstrate a brand personality to further differentiate the company in the marketplace. It does no longer need to be a faceless company, but it can e.g. reflect the company culture. In addition the reach of social media can be tremendous if done properly, where it is possible to gather niche markets on a global basis.

One of the most common approaches for companies to enter social media is through a hub-and-spoke strategy. In practice this means to establish presence on several social media platforms, and provide content on those platforms that drive the audience back to the main site. In order to make people subscribe to the company, it has to provide value by being useful for the audience; again, no hard-selling. Often a B2B company possess a lot of internal expertise, and this expertise can be leveraged to create relevant content on topics of interest to the audience the company want to target. By providing thought leadership the company differentiates from its competitors and can highlights the competitive advantage. Interesting content being spread throughout social media networks will generate traffic to the site where it is published, which in turn generates brand awareness.

There is an opportunity for a first-mover advantage which can create a competitive advantage. By being first those who follow will have to compare their offerings to the leader in the space. The competitive advantage is however not sustainable because the barriers to entry are so low.

The economical performance of social media initiatives is difficult to measure, but managers should try to measure the ROI footprint as best they can. This study does however not provide any answer to how ROI should be measured, merely suggestions on how success can be measured; the qualitative aspect of engagement, as well as web traffic and behaviour which can be analysed through web analytics software.

There is also a word of warning; managers should not over-analyse the performance of social media initiatives, as they may miss the whole point of one-to-one communication. Nor is social media a substitute for traditional marketing activities, but it is rather a complementary activity. Companies will have to find their own ways in order to find out where value can be created.

Business and practitioners are currently exploring this new field, and there are many opportunities to discover for B2B companies. As long as B2B users keep flocking to social media sites and platforms there will be opportunities for B2B companies to innovate and find new ways to increase the competitiveness of their brand.

5.4 Implications for theory and further research

Due to the exploratory nature of this study and its small empirical dataset no definite conclusions should be drawn. The study has covered a lot of different topics and has scratched the surface of the impact of social media on B2B branding, how to approach it, the opportunities, threats and challenges, as well as strategy and measurement of the initiatives.

It is viable to suggest there is a significant theoretical gap on how the B2B brand can thrive within social media. This study does not suggest that social media changes the entire landscape, but rather that B2B brand online will increase in importance; not only in terms of the website but also through two-way dialogue in social media channels, which the website can be one of. B2B brand management on its own is an under-researched area, but the growth of social media may further its importance as the need for differentiation will be increased when the worlds is more connected and reachable.

It seems like B2B social media could fit into a holistic perspective on B2B brand management; both branding and social media should be tied towards business objectives, social media would extend brand communications through the online media, and internal branding would be important to educate the entire organisation in delivering brand value also in social media. The continuous process of the holistic perspective advocated by Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006) fits also well with the perceived implications of social media. As branding should be seen as means to strengthen business strategy, a social media strategy should be aligned towards branding and business strategy. Branding and social media needs strengthen and reinforce one another in order to fulfil the superior business strategy in order to create competitive advantage. Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006) six phase iterative approach to brand management consists of the steps planning, analysis, strategy, brand building and audit. A similar model for approaching social media could also be viable but it needs further investigation.

- Planning = listen internally and developing guidelines
- Analysis = listen externally
- Strategy = choose an objective and plan the strategy
- Brand building = choose tactics, tools and technologies
- Audit = see how the social media initiatives are performing

Directives for engagement in social media, both from the corporate and employee point of view, should be developed in the form of social media guidelines aligned with how the company wants to be perceived. As employees are able to engage in the social media space, it is important to be aware that social media slip-ups can be elevated to national press and damage the brand, and it seems guidelines will mitigate the possibility of accidental slip-ups. As guidelines is perceived to be an important tool to manage social media initiatives, further research on how guidelines should be developed is needed.

This study suggests that a hub-and-spoke strategy is one of the most common and recommended strategies to enhance the B2B brand. Social media gives the company new opportunities to show their competitive advantage through thought leadership. Further research could be conducted to draw lines between brand leadership and thought leadership, and eventually how thought leadership could strengthen a brand leadership strategy. Other B2B social media strategy approaches, like online communities, providing customer support, utilising it for product development etc, would also be viable to study further in depth and the same goes for ROI measurement practices which are unclear at the moment.

In terms of the B2B brand itself, it is reasonable to suggest that the social media space will add a new layer to B2B branding; McKee (2010, p. 179) coins it "brand engagement". Companies now have the opportunity to establish a brand personality and have conversations with their audience on an informal basis through an unobtrusive platform, i.e. on their time and on their terms, with a far higher efficiency, a wider reach, and on a higher frequency than was possible with traditional marketing methods. Traditional websites pushed the reach of marketing, but social media adds the opportunity to interact with people interested in engaging with the brand, thereby connect with the emotions of buyers on a deeper level.

It is suggested that more and more employees are using social media individually as a tool for their day-to-day work, both in terms of engaging with customers, competitors, people from the industry, people from other industries, clients and probably also prospects. LinkedIn is built for professional networking, but employees could also be engaging in professional discussions on blogs and forums. It would be important to focus on internal branding to make the employees delivering upon the brand promise and maintain brand consistency also throughout their individual professional social media space. Further research could be conducted on the social media user behaviour of employees within B2B organisations. How does the different types of people use social media, what social media platforms are most popular, how much they trust their online network, how much influence has social media on e.g. purchasing decisions, what phase of the buying process do they utilise it and so on.

Through social media it is possible to build and nurture long-term relationships in an efficient way. Further research could be conducted on the effects of B2B social media on relationship marketing; social media is a touch point where informal conversations can happen effectively on a very frequent basis in an informal environment.

This study also shows there are opportunities to utilise social media in other contexts than B2B. Social media is an efficient tool to bring out messages to people who have signalled an interest, and there would be opportunities in the field of public management in terms of getting the message across efficiently and by developing relations towards interested groups of people, have conversation and utilise social media as a large focus group.

5.5 Limitations and evaluation of the study

There are several limitations to this study, in addition to those addressed in chapter 3.4. This study has not taken into account the cultural differences or similarities, but the empirical data origin mainly from Europe and the UK; interviews with three experts from the UK, one expert from the US, one case from Sweden and two cases from the UK. Additional statistics have been included and the origin has been stated. Most of it is North American and British.

The experts view on the importance of social media could be biased due to their involvement on the subject. This is however only a problem when it comes to discussing the importance of social media. As the case studies are based upon secondary sources there was some distance to the unit of analysis, which might lead to misinterpretation of the results. The author has however tried to be as objective and thorough in the interpretation of the cases involved. The ShipServ case was verified by the CMO, but Coloplast and Celebrity Cruises were not verified by the companies. But as the cases are used to illustrate points made by the expert interviews, these are not severe limitations to the study. ShipServ, the most extensive case study, has both been triangulated and verified by the company.

The conceptual background for this study is B2B brand management and was based upon a literature review conducted prior to this thesis, but a thorough systematic literature review on social media has not been conducted. This study has however tried to look at the big picture, especially outlining the connection between the B2B branding and social media, based upon what is perceived to be the most appreciated literature available on social media. The point of the research is to provide insights into how B2B companies could utilise social media.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

The objective of this thesis has been to answer the research question "what implications do social media have on business-to-business brand management", by looking at the impact, opportunities, threats, challenges and strategies for B2B companies entering social media. The previous chapter discussed the findings from the interviews and the illustrative case studies, compared it and analyzed it in accordance with existing theory. Implications for managers, implications for theory, suggestions for further research and the limitations of the study were also presented.

Based upon the findings and the discussion, this chapter will draw a conclusion to the research question. By answering the main research question, the two sub-questions will also be answered.

What implications do social media have on business-to-business brand management?

As the new digital world embraces participation, openness, conversation, community and connectedness through social media, it brings new opportunities and challenges to B2B branding. It is not to suggest that social media will change how businesses do business, but it is another layer to brand management that needs to be treated different from traditional marketing efforts.

The brand has never been what the boardroom wants it to be; the brand is a perception of what a company is, instilled in the minds of the audience. Previously informal conversations regarding people's perception of the brand, both positive and negative, took place in the offline world. But the business-to-business brand now has to be managed in a much wider environment; as the era of digital communication evolves, these conversations are now also happening online – and they are searchable. By using software companies can monitor people's perception of the brand without having to perform expensive and extensive market research. Companies can either choose to ignore those conversations whilst at the same time hoping their competitors also ignores them, or they can use the opportunity to sit up and take notice; either passively through observation, through active listening, or by participation in order to ultimately influence the perceptions.

The B2B brand is becoming more accessible, and the audience can now engage on their time and on their terms with the brand. Core values of the brand can be further enhanced by connecting, engaging and building relationships with various stakeholders. Business-to-businesses marketers have the option to embrace these opportunities. By engaging in the social media space the brand now has the chance to demonstrate an added dimension of branding; the brand personality. Through social media the brand can more efficiently demonstrate thought leadership, increase awareness, establish trust, and highlight the competitive advantage with a reach potentially covering all people connected to the Internet. Social media can gather people in niche markets on a global basis.

But in the world of social media there is no delete button. Once a comment is out there, it is out there and it cannot be taken back. A slip-up can build momentum and have a tremendous negative impact on people's perception of the brand. Social media is word-of-mouth on steroids, and that is both the opportunity and threat. As employees within companies are participating in the online space through networking platforms, commenting on blogs or participating on forums, they are representing the brand. The employees need to be made aware of that, and they need to be provided with guidelines in order to keep the brand consistent through all customer touch points.

Companies should listen internally and externally to find out where the conversations are happening. The opportunities present for each company depends on the unique properties of the company. Two companies within the same industry with the same

products or services can have different objectives with social media, just like Microsoft with over 4,000 bloggers compared to Apple with the one-man-social-media-machine Steve Jobs.

Based on internal and external investigations, the company should establish an objective with their social media engagements; companies should ask themselves what business objective they want to solve through social media. Participation in social media should not be focused hard-selling, but on providing the audience with content or features of value. When the objective is identified, the company should create a strategy. Only when the strategy is in place the company can start thinking about which tools, tactics and technologies they want to use. Where companies go from there depends on the objective, the strategy and on the unique properties of each company.

> *"I realize everyone is telling you social media is a unicorn, but maybe it's just a horse?"*
> *Jay Baer, social media strategist*
> *Source: Bard (2010)*

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Chapter 8: Appendixes

Appendix 1: Interview guide

8.1 Interview guide: Social media in B2B branding

Opening

1. **Please tell me a bit in terms of your background in relation to social media in a B2B marketing context.**

Theme 1: Challenges and Opportunities

1. **Is social media a major change in how businesses do business, or is it merely another tool and another channel in the marketing mix? Or anything in between?**
   - o How are traditional media and traditional brand building efforts affected?
   - o Is it possible for B2B companies to ignore social media?

2. **What opportunities do social media present for the B2B brand, i.e. how could a B2B company gain competitive advantage through social media?**

3. **Which threats or challenges does a B2B brand face in the social media sphere?**
   - o ...by not knowing what's happening there?
   - o ...by engaging in it?
   - o Should companies be careful when engaging in social media?

Theme 2: Strategies for B2B Brand Management in Social Media

1. **What implications do social media have on corporate/marketing/brand strategy?**
   - o What part of the organisation do social media affect? Marketing, PR, tech - agencies?

2. **How should a B2B company build a social media strategy?**
   - o What factors are important when deciding whether or not to engage in social media?
   - o Where do you stand in the debate on using social media as beacons to drive traffic to the main site/blog/community versus utilizing e.g. Twitter to achieve business goals?
   - o (Which platforms are most popular for B2Bs?)
   - o Are there any differences between small and large companies?

3. **How do you target your users?**
   - o How can you map the user behaviour of important players in the buying centre?
   - o How do you know you are targeting the correct people?

4. **How do you measure ROI on social media initiatives?**
   - o KPI – what metrics?
   - o Is it possible? If not, how do you measure success?

Closing

1. **How important do you think social media will be for B2B companies and their brand building efforts in the future?**
2. **Can you tell an anecdote about social media and B2B? Any success stories or failures?**