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Understanding Perceptions Towards, and Usage of, Social Media in the Context of Relationship Building: A Generational Comparison

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Abstract

- Title:** Understanding Perceptions and Usage of Social Media in the Context of Relationship Building: A Generational Comparison
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- Authors:** Lovisa Haglind and Caroline Jonsson
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- Keywords:** Generations, Social Media and Relationship Building
- Thesis purpose:** The purpose of this study is to examine on what basis diverse generations' perceptions towards, and usage-habits of social media can be understood. By exploring how three social media platforms are perceived and used by consumers, the aim is to distinguish commonalities and patterns within distinctive generations. Further, the objective is to understand what have influenced a certain generation's perceptions and usage and what implications these characteristics have in the context of relationship building. By recognising similarities and differences between diverse generations' social media characteristics, the aim is to distinguish whether it seems beneficial to use generational segmentation as an initial effort for creating consumer relationships.
- Methodology:** Since the study aims to understand consumers' perceptions towards, and usage of, social media a qualitative interpretive approach is taken. By using a comparative research design, similar and unique characteristics have been distinguished between generations.
- Theoretical perspective:** Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing, The Theory of Reasoned Action, Consumer-Company Identification Model and User Generated Content
- Empirical data:** Qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted with consumers belonging to one of the studied generations
- Conclusion:** The main findings of this study suggest that generations' perceptions towards, and usage of, social media can be understood by considering: common social media characteristics within a generation, generational characteristics found in existing literature and other personal characteristics. The study also proposes that it does not seem efficient to use generational segmentation in social media. Unique features discovered for each generation are however suggested to benefit initial engagement with the generations separately in social media.

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Lund May 24 2012,

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	6
1.1 Background	6
1.2 Literature Review	7
1.3 Research Question	9
1.4 Purpose	9
1.5 Delimitations	10
1.6 Definitions	11
1.7 Thesis Disposition	12
2. Theoretical Framework	14
2.1 Part I: Motives for Consumer Behaviour	14
2.1.1 Building Blocks of Motives for Consumer Behavior.....	14
2.1.1.1 Consumer-Company Identification Framework	15
2.1.1.2 The Theory of Reasoned Action.....	16
2.1.1.3 Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing.....	18
Re-examination of the Commitment-Trust Theory.....	19
2.2 Part II: Consumer Activity in Social Media Settings	21
2.2.1 Building Blocks of Consumer Activities in Social Media Settings	21
2.2.1.1 Transport- and Exposure Model.....	22
2.2.1.2 User Generated Content	22
2.2.1.3 Electronic Word-of-Mouth.....	23
2.3 Part III: Consumer Characteristics According to Generational Belonging	24
2.3.1 Building Blocks of Consumer Characteristics According to Generational Belonging	24
2.3.1.1 Baby Boomers.....	25
2.3.1.2 Generation X.....	26
2.3.1.3 Generation Y.....	27
2.3.1.4 Generation Z.....	29
3. Methodology	31
3.1 Research Philosophy	31
3.1.1 Relationship between theory and research	31
3.1.2 Epistemological and Ontological approach.....	32
3.2 Research Design	32
3.2.1 Qualitative Research.....	32
3.3 Data Collection	33
3.3.1 Method for Collecting Qualitative Data.....	33
3.3.1.1 Recording and Transcription	34
3.3.2 Sample	35
3.3.2.1 Sample Size	35
3.4 Conducting Interviews	36
3.5 Data Analysis	37
3.6 Critical Evaluation of the Chosen Method	38
3.6.1 Limitations with qualitative research	38
3.6.2 Difficulties with Interviews.....	39
3.6.3 Evaluation of Primary and Secondary Data	40
4. Empirical Data and Analysis	42
4.1 Generation Baby Boomer	42
4.1.1 Perceptions Towards Social Media and its Usage	42
4.1.2. Online Interaction with Companies	44
4.1.3 Perceptions Towards User Generated Content.....	45
4.1.4 Perceptions about Information in Social Media	46
4.1.5 Summary: Baby Boomers	48
4.2 Generation X	48
4.2.1 Perceptions Towards and Usage of Social Media.....	48

4.2.2 Perceptions of Trust in Social Media.....	49
4.2.3 Personal Interests in Social Media	52
4.2.4 Summary: Generation X.....	53
4.3 Generation Y	54
4.3.1 Perceptions and Usage of Social Media	54
4.3.2 Interaction with Companies.....	56
4.3.3 Attitudes and Expectations on Company’s Activities.....	57
4.3.4 Summary: Generation Y	59
4.4 Generation Z	60
4.4.1 Social Media Lifestyle.....	60
4.4.2 Social Media Activity.....	62
4.4.3 Critical Thinking	64
4.4.4 Summary: Generation Z.....	65
5. Discussion and Implications.....	66
5.1 Discussion of Analysis	66
5.1.1 Generational Similarities.....	66
5.1.3 Unique Features	69
5.1.1 Conclusion	72
5.1.1.1 Research Contribution.....	73
5.1.2 Limitations	74
5.2 Future Research.....	75
5.3 Managerial Implications.....	76
6. Bibliography	79
7. Appendix	87
7.1 Appendix I: Defining Social Media	87
7.1.1 Web 2.0 and Social Media	87
7.1.2 Facebook.....	88
7.1.3 Twitter	88
7.1.4 YouTube	89
7.2 Appendix II: Interview Guide.....	91
7.3 Appendix III: Extracted Illustrations of Social Media Activities.....	92
7.3.1 Facebook.....	92
7.3.2 Twitter	94
7.3.3 You Tube	94

Table of Tables and Figures

Table 1 Social Media Glossary.....	11
Figure 1 Consumer-Company Identification Framework.....	16
Figure 2 Factors determining a person’s behaviour.....	17
Figure 3 The KMV Model of Relationship Marketing.....	18
Figure 4 Extended KMV Model.....	21
Figure 5 The Matrix of Media Form and User Mode	23
Figure 6 Data Analysis.....	37
Figure 7 Profile Baby Boomer.....	47
Figure 8 Profile Generation X.....	53
Figure 9 Profile Generation Y.....	59
Figure 10 Profile Generation Z.....	64

1. Introduction

The introductory chapter initially presents the background to the thesis subject followed by a literature review that examines earlier research related to this particular study. Thereafter, research questions and purpose that have guided the study, is presented. Then, study delimitations are described in order to explain choices that have been done in order to conduct the study in a beneficial way. The chapter ends with a social media glossary.

1.1 Background

New technologies have led to the creation of what is called social media. Social media can be described as “(...) a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Web 2.0 allows users to share, discuss and collaborate with each other and therefore it is sometimes referred to as the “participative web” (Jones, 2010, pp. 144-145). Thereby, one of the main purposes for consumers to use social media is to communicate with other consumers through diverse platforms (Gupta, Armstrong & Clayton, 2011). One type of social media platform for communication is a social network where users can create profiles and network with other users (Kaplan & Haelein, 2010). In 2011, half of the Swedish population were active on such online social networks sites (Carlsson, 2011). Due to the available information online, individuals have the ability to find information by themselves and can easily relate on their peers for references about products and services (Bernoff & Li, 2008). This implies that customers become empowered in relation to the seller, since they effortlessly can find different value propositions online and chose the supplier that offers the best value (Pires, Stanton & Rita, 2006).

In social media, interaction is not only improved between consumers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Companies’ ability to talk to consumers as well as consumers’ ability to talk to companies is enhanced (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). In traditional relationship marketing it is suggested that business success is depending on customer insights, so that continuous value officering’s can be created, which in turn will make customers stay because they are satisfied (Blomqvist, Dahl and Haeger, 2004). Since social media facilitates direct interaction between customer and seller, companies now have the privilege to direct access of customer input (Bernoff & Li, 2008). By embracing these inputs, preferences and complaints, the company can deliver value propositions that match customer demands (Blomqvist, Dahl and Haeger, 2004). Social media is therefore offering prerequisites for deep customer understanding and further, the time it takes to gain knowledge about how customers’ evaluate a company and its activities is shorten dramatically

(Gupta, Armstrong & Clayton, 2011). Therefore, it has become increasingly common for companies to use social media in their business (Gupta, Armstrong & Clayton, 2011).

Even though social media is offering tremendous opportunities to create customer relationships, companies seldom have a plan with their social networking before they start (Reynolds, 2011). Armelini and Villanueva (2011) mean that even though it is cheap and easy to open up accounts online, it requires both time and creative skills to come up with the right content (Armelini & Villanueva, 2011). Gupta, Armstrong and Clayton, (2011, p. 11) agrees that it is not as easy as just “(...) setting up a Twitter account and then hoping that it generates incremental sales” rather it requires a reconstruction in the organization regarding implementation of social media in the current marketing strategy. In this study, the authors argue that two-way communication and relationship building at social media platforms would be improved if companies had prior knowledge about consumers’ usage those. Since consumers “no longer want to be talked at” in social media, efficiency of marketing activities would be improved if companies had an initial understanding for consumers’ perceptions of company encounters (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011, p. 250).

In order to distinguish individuals’ perceptions towards, and usage of, social media it seems appropriate to segment the market and seek understanding for individuals’ social media characteristics on group-basis. The use of generations as target groups can be seen as one type of demographic segmentation (De Pelsmacker, Geuens & Van den Bergh, 2010). It is suggested that it is beneficial to consider generations rather than technology, income, gender or ethnicity when segmenting the market (McCrindle, 2003 in Parment, 2008). Further, generational studies suggest that values, needs and behaviours to a certain extent are generational dependent (Parment, 2008:16; Schewe & Noble, 2010: 41). Williams and Page (2011, p. 2) state that “Not every generation is alike, nor should they be treated by marketers in the same way”.

1.2 Literature Review

Substantial research has explored social media in the context of relationship building without considering generational belonging (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden, 2011; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011; Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011; Wilson Guinan, Parise & Weinberg, 2011; Pires, Stanton & Rita, 2006). Rowley (2004) is discussing how companies should approach Internet and social media in order to communicate effectively. The three main cornerstones are creating presence, relationships and mutual value (Rowley, 2004).

Further, Armelini and Villanueva (2011) are discussing how companies should implement the usage of social media in a company's already existing marketing mix. Kietzmann et. al. (2011) explores prerequisites for creating relationships on diverse social media platforms. Consequences that consumer-empowerment, owing to social media, will have on companies marketing strategies is examined by Pires, Stanton and Rita (2006). Here it is argued that current consumer-centric marketing strategies for social media are not functioning and that companies need to retake the power over their marketing strategies (Pires, Stanton & Rita, 2006).

These referred authors are discussing issues that are related to companies' implementation of social media as a marketing tool, but not in the context that is to be examined in this study. By introducing generational segmentation, in order to understand consumer' perceptions and usage of social media, companies ability to encounter consumers might be enhanced. To use generational understanding as an initial step toward engaging with consumers, the prospect for relationship building in social media is suggested to be superior. Research that has touched upon the context of generational understanding as a prerequisite for creating online relationships is limited. Trese (2011) suggest that a marketing approach, which take age differences into account, will be more effective. Efficiency can be reached by adapting language and technology to different ages characteristics (Trese, 2011). Finally, Trese (2011, p. 21) is stating that, "(...) marketing is not a one-size-fit-all process". Williams and Page (2011) take another approach, and are talking about multi-generational marketing. They suggest that companies should find needs or behaviours that are common within more than one generation, which might help the company to reach more individuals (Williams & Page, 2011). Moreover, Williams and Page (2011) express the importance of following trends within these groups, as it will enhance consumers buying behaviour. In order to use a multi-generational marketing strategy, marketers need to understand the different generational groups separately (Williams & Page, 2011). This implies that although Williams and Page (2011) state that it is useful to find common characteristics between generations, it seem fundamental to initially understand each generation's characteristics independently.

In line with these arguments, it seems efficient to acknowledge generational differences when segmenting the market for marketing related purposes. Individuals from the same generation shares history, lifestyles, expectations and values, which affect are suggested to affect consumer behaviour (Williams & Page, 2011; Smola & Sutton, 2002). This implies that it might be possible to distinguish that some generational characteristics are affecting individuals' social media

behaviour. As social media usage is suggested to differ dramatically with age, examination of social media perceptions and usage, based on generational belonging, seem to be highly relevant. In Sweden, the number of persons using social media and more importantly, which social media activities they participate in, distinctively differs with age (Nordicom-Sverige, 2011). Therefore, it can be argued that social media marketing is not efficiently performed if age characteristics are ignored. When Armelini and Villanueva (2011) for example suggest that platform, profile and content should be determined before companies engage in social media; it could have been beneficial to know how different generations perceive messages and activities, on a certain platform. It may also be critical to know which generational target group that is present on a particular social media platform.

Since previous research seem to have examined either: social media and prerequisites for companies to perform marketing- and relationship building activities, or the effectiveness of segmenting consumers based on generational belonging, this study is exploring a relatively new area. It seems to be an original context where generational understanding is centralized in order to enhance the effectiveness of companies' initial consumer encounters in social media. It is suggested that understanding for diverse generations' characteristics, social attitudes and communication patterns are essential in order to attract them as consumers (Parment, 2008). On this note it seems as if emphasis should be put on understanding generations' perceptions towards and usage of social media, and what might have influenced a certain perception or usage pattern, to occur. Therefore, understanding consumers are necessary in both relationship- and multi-generational marketing (Williams & Page, 2011; Blomqvist, Dahl and Haeger, 2004).

1.3 Research Question

- Main Question: In what way can diverse generations' perceptions towards, and usage of, social media be understood?
 - Sub Question: How can understanding for generations' perceptions towards, and usage of, social media be considered in the context of relationship building in social media?

1.4 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine on what basis diverse generations' perceptions towards, and usage-habits of social media can be understood. By exploring how three social media platforms are perceived and used by consumers, the aim is to distinguish commonalities and patterns within distinctive generations. Further, the objective is to understand what have

influenced a certain generation's perceptions and usage and what implications these characteristics have in the context of relationship building. By recognising similarities and differences between diverse generations' social media characteristics, the aim is to distinguish whether it seems beneficial to use generational segmentation as an initial effort for creating consumer relationships. The reason for conducting this study is thereby to contribute with knowledge about diverse generations social media characteristics. The study allows initial understanding for how to approach consumers in social media, which should be used by companies that have a long-term objective of creating beneficial relationships with their customers.

1.5 Delimitations

The study is delimited to understand consumers' perceptions towards, and usage of, three selected social media platforms. To focus on three specific platforms is suitable since it allows deeper understanding for some medias, rather than a more diffuse understanding for social media platforms in general. The delimitation is thereby beneficial for the study since it acknowledges a deep contextual understanding for consumers on the selected platforms. The chosen social media platforms are Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. These particular platforms are chosen because they are among the most frequently used social media platforms in Sweden (Alexa, 2012; Marketing Charts, 2012; Elvelid, 2011; Nordicom, 2011). To explore consumers' attitudes towards Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are thereby relevant.

Since generational differences and similarities of social media usage are searched for, consumers are divided into four generational groups based on generational classification (Williams & Page, 2011). The study is delimited to examine Swedish consumers belonging to the following generations: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Y and Z. Baby Boomers consists of individuals born between 1946-1964 (Williams & Page, 2011). Persons belonging to Generation X were born between 1965-1977, Generation Y between 1977-1994 and Generation Z consists of individuals born in 1994 until today (Williams & Page, 2011). Delimiting the study to examine four generations is perceived to benefit the study. By focusing on few generations, rather than all generations that constitute the Swedish population, more time is devoted to truly understand these generations' characteristics. Moreover, as persons belonging to Baby Boomers, Generation X, Y or Z are responsible for the vast majority of the social media usage in Sweden, it is implied that the study is focusing on consumers that most likely have articulated perceptions towards, and usage of, social media (Nordicom, 2011).

1.6 Definitions

Social media related words, concepts, and terms that are perceived to be relatively new and might lack unified meaning for diverse readers, are defined in the glossary below. By implementing the glossary, the reader and authors will have equal understanding for what the words imply. A more exhaustive description of Web 2.0 and social media, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are provided in Appendix 1 due to these terms' centralized position in the thesis.

Term	Definition
Social Media	““Social media” refers to a type of website, application or communications vehicle where people connect with one another; discuss and interact; share content and ideas; and build relationships (...)” (Anita Campell in McAlear (ed), 2009, p. 1) (<i>see Appendix 1</i>).
Social Media Platform	This is a type of Internet based software, that enable social media sites to be built upon.
Social Media Page	The profile a user creates when becoming a member. It can be used both by private individuals and by companies. On this page it is possible to publish photos, statuses, etc.
Social Network	A social network site is a place where users can create their own profile, become friends with other members, write updates or messages and share pictures (Kaplan & Haelein, 2010).
Facebook	Facebook is a social network that was founded in 2004 and in 2011 the site had over 800 million members (Piskorski, Eisenmann, Chen & Feinstein, 2011). Facebook is offering different functionalities such as: profile pages, wall posts, applications, groups, tags, status updates and photos (Hansen, Shneiderman & Smith, 2011) (<i>see Appendix 1</i>).
News Feed	The users' Facebook homepage where recent activities of friends are published (Piskorski et al., 2011).
Like	To 'like' is a way to show appreciation for friends' activities such as comments or photos (O'Neill, 2010). It is also possible to 'like' Company's Facebook Pages which will result in the company's activities will appear in the users' News Feed.
Twitter	Twitter is a micro-blog that was founded in 2006 (Kierkegaard, 2010). A micro-blog is different from an ordinary blog due to the limited amount of characters that can be used in a single post (Hansen, Shneiderman, & Smith, 2011). On Twitter each post can solely contain 140 characters, which implies that short and informal messages can be posted (Hansen, Shneiderman, & Smith, 2011) (<i>see Appendix 1</i>).
Tweet	The posts on Twitter are called tweets (Kierkegaard, 2010). A tweet can only contain text and the tweet will appear on the user webpage, where it can be read by the public or by chosen persons (Kierkegaard, 2010).
Follow	On Twitter, persons who follow X are called followers and persons followed by X are called friends (Barash and Golder, 2010 in Hansen, Shneiderman, & Smith, 2011). Once a tweet is published, it will appear on the followers' pages (Barash and Golder, 2010 in Hansen, Shneiderman, & Smith, 2011).
YouTube	YouTube is a social media forum created in 2005 and it is currently the world's most popular site for video sharing (Rotman and Golbeck, 2011 in Hansen, Shneiderman, & Smith, 2011). YouTube allow users to search for, watch and upload videos to the public (Zink et al., 2008)(<i>see Appendix 1</i>).
Share	Sharing implies an activity where users are able to receive, change and distribute

	content (Kietzmann et al., 2011). It is possible to share links, photos, statements etc.
Link	Is to post an Internet-link to a site to show friends and followers.
Commenting	Express an opinion about something someone else has done in social media (Gupta, Armstrong & Clayton, 2011).

Table 1- Social Media Glossary

1.7 Thesis Disposition

Chapter 1: Introduction. The introductory chapter initially presents a background to the thesis subject. Further, a literature review, which examines earlier research related to this particular study, is presented. In relation to existing research, the specific context that is researched in this study is revealed and argued for. Thereafter, research questions and purpose that have guided the study, is presented. Then, study delimitations are described in order to explain choices that have been done in order to conduct the study in a beneficial way. Lastly, words, concepts and terms are defined in a glossary in order to unify the readers and authors understanding for what certain words imply.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework. The theoretical framework consists of three sections. Combined, the sections are shaping an framework, tailor-made for fulfilling the purpose of this study. In the first section theories that explain consumer behaviour are recited and combined. These theories aim to distinguish how consumer intentions and attitudes drive behaviour. Secondly, concepts that explain how diverse types of social media users are inclined to act in social media settings are included. Thirdly, literature characterising Baby Boomers, Generation X, Y and Z is incorporated. The generational literature aims to summarize how conditions for growing up have formed each generation's attitudes, for example towards technology and advertising, but also their intentions for behaving.

Chapter 3: Methodology. Methodological choices that have guided the study, in order to be able to answer the research question and fulfil the purpose, are presented and argued for in chapter three. First the research philosophy is discussed regarding the relation between theory and research, further epistemological and ontological approaches are described. This is followed by a description of the research design, characterised by a qualitative research approach. Further the data collection is described, which is followed by information regarding conduction of interviews. Thereafter the data analysis method is exhaustively presented. Lastly, critical

evaluation about a wide range of the methodological choices, and how these possibly have affected the study outcome, is discussed.

Chapter 4: Empirical Data and Analysis. This chapter is divided into four parts where perceptions towards, and usage of, social media is presented and analysed according to generational belonging. In each section, protruding characteristics that are common for one generation is presented and analysed. These characteristics originated in collected data for each generation, which implies that some characteristics were similar between generations. The analysis focuses on gaining understanding for why a perception is common for a certain generation, by taking use of the theoretical framework. What type of social media user each generation is characterised by, and the implications that this usage imply, is also emphasised. Characteristics describing each generation's social media perceptions and usage are summed up in a generational profile at the end of each generation's analysis.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications. In this chapter the generational characteristics discovered in chapter five, are further discussed. Similarities and differences between the profiles are discussed from a relational perspective, with focus on distinguishing whether generational segmentation seems beneficial for founding relationships. The underlying influences that has formed perceptions towards, and usage of, social media are also discussed in the context of relational implications. The discussion ends up in a conclusion, followed by a section presenting theoretical contributions that the study has provided. Limitations of the study are mentioned and future research, inspired by the findings in this study, is suggested. Lastly, managerial implications are presented regarding initial efforts for engaging consumers, belonging to diverse generations, in social media.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theory chapter is divided into three sections. The first section consists of theories that aim to explain underlying motives for consumer behaviour. The second section presents concepts describing and distinguishing diverse type of social media users. The third section consists of generational literature that explains the characteristics of each generation.

2.1 Part I: Motives for Consumer Behaviour

2.1.1 Building Blocks of Motives for Consumer Behavior

This first part of the theoretical framework consists of theories that aim to explain what might be underlying motives or intentions for consumers to behave in social media. These theories have not been applied to explain consumer behaviour in a social media setting previously. Thereby, they present an original basis that tries to cover diverse perspectives for what might explain consumer behaviour in social media.

The Consumer-Company Identification Framework is appropriate to use since this study is focusing on relationship building activities that is depending on consumer understanding, rather than examination of specific company's characteristics, values, brands or products. Since the incentives for interacting with certain companies in social media might depend on a consumer's perception of company's identity, and to what extent this identity can be related to, this framework might be used to explain what drives behaviour in social media. In addition, the Theory of Reasoned Action is beneficial for examining social media behaviour since it enhances the possibility to understand an underlying motive that have resulted in certain behaviour to occur. The theory allows understanding for perceptions and usage of social media that might have been influenced by personal and/or social influences. To consider that attitudes might have originated in perceptions of external individuals, adds value to consumer understanding since it is acknowledged that social media behaviour might not solely be due to individual needs. Finally, the Theory of Commitment-Trust is beneficial to include in the theoretical framework since it allows an additional aspect to distinguish what influences consumers to act in a certain way. It is relevant to distinguish how trust might have an impact on consumers' ability to commit to companies in social media. Since it is discovered that both trust and commitment to a great extent have an impact on how consumers behave in an online setting, understanding for consumers' intentions, might be explained by considering these aspects. Even though the re-examination of the theory of Commitment-Trust is considered for an online setting in general, it

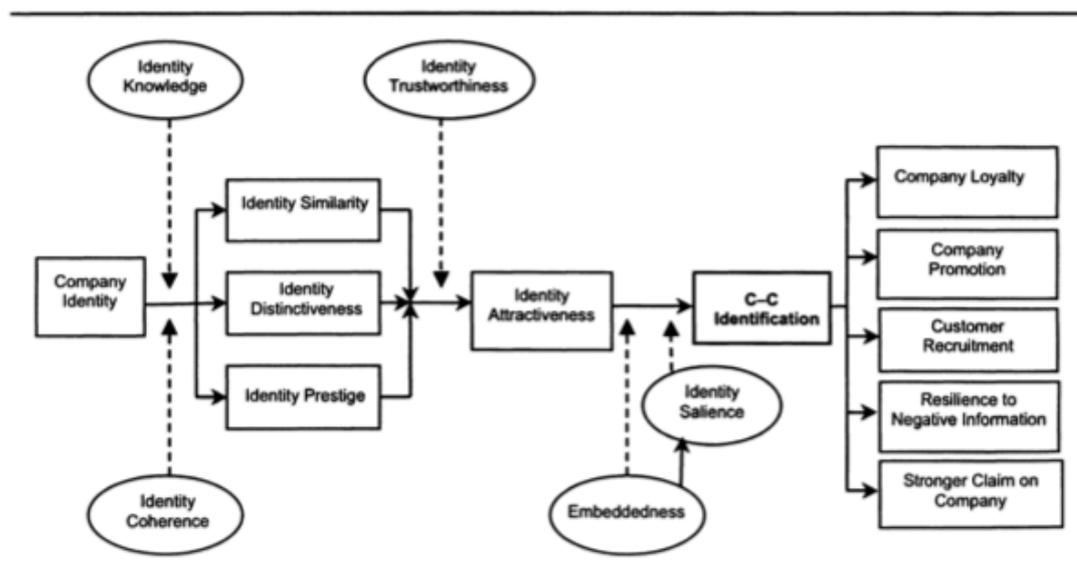
is still function as a guideline for understanding what prerequisites are needed in order for a consumer to commit to or trust a company in social media.

2.1.1.1 Consumer-Company Identification Framework

In order to understand consumer incentives for establishing relationships with companies a Consumer-Company Identification Framework, presented by Bhattacharya and Sen (2003), was used (*see Figure 1*). The Consumer-Company Identification Framework is based on social identity and organizational identification theories and is “active, selective, and volitional on consumers' part and causes them to engage in favorable as well as potentially unfavorable company-related behaviors” (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003, p. 77). In social identity theory it is believed that individuals do not only have a personal identity, a social identity is also established, in order to make sense of self (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). The social identity is created when consumers identify with a context around them and sees themselves as members of a social category such as gender, occupation or sports teams (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Adding to a person's social identity a person can also identify with organizations (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Identification with an organization occurs when perceptions about an organization becomes self-defining (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003).

Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) focus on individuals' identification with the non-product aspects of a company in their Consumer-Company Identification Framework. The first part of the model centralizes the connection between company's identity and to what extent the consumer is attracted by that identity (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). The model presumes that: similarity between company and consumer identity, distinctiveness of identity traits and prestige of the identity, will have an impact on how attractive the identity is for a consumer (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Continuing, the framework suggests that the more the consumer know and trust the company the more likely that company will be judged and evaluated (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Trustworthiness is thus, a main influence for finding a company attractive (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). The second part of the framework emphasises the link between Identity Attractiveness and Consumer-Company Identification (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). If the consumer finds a company attractive, the closer the consumer will get to it and consequently, the consumer becomes embedded in the organisation (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). This in turn, enhances the recognition for identity salience, which increases the chance for Consumer-Company Identification (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail (1994 in Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003) argue that the degree of attractiveness will have an impact on how strong the

identification is. In other words, the more attractive a company identity is, the stronger identification will arise (Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994 in Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Further, identification will only establish if the interaction between consumer and company is “significant, sustained and meaningful enough to embed them in the organizational network” (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003, p. 82). The last part of the framework illustrates the impact that Consumer-Company Identification has on consumer behaviour towards the company (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003).



Source: Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003, p. 79

Figure 1- Consumer-Company Identification Framework

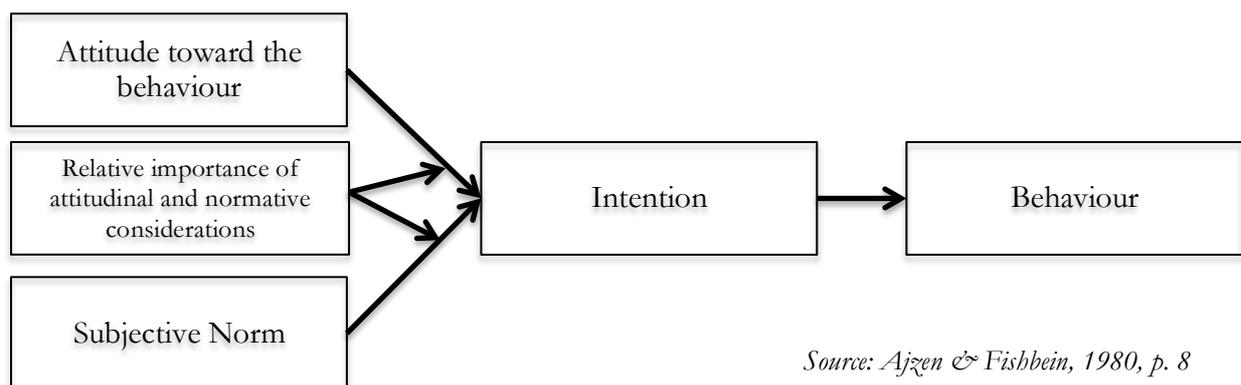
The congruence of personal and company’s identity can be used for self-definitional purposes to a great extent, which explains why consumers establish relationships with companies (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Even though products and brands also explain relationships; shared values, demographics and networks etc. can create strong bonds between consumer and company, which will have an impact on how a relationship is played out (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003).

2.1.1.2 The Theory of Reasoned Action

The Theory of Reasoned Action, developed by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), investigates the relationship between intentions and behaviours. Behaviours, in all cases, involve a decision or a choice, for example, whether or not to buy something (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). In order to come to a decision, consumers use information available, and depending on the information, a behaviour is approached in a rather systematically way (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Moreover,

consumers often think about the consequences that can arise from certain behaviour before they actually make the decision (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980).

The Theory of Reasoned Action focuses on the *intention* as the determinant of behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Intention can be divided into two functions (*see Figure 2*), the first function, which is highly personal for each consumer, is called *attitude toward the behaviour* (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Here, the individual's positive or negative perceptions about a performance, is essential for making a decision (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Therefore, a consumer will have a positive attitude if the beliefs about the result are positive (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Further, the beliefs that are influencing the attitude towards certain behaviours are called *behavioural beliefs* (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). The attitude is also affected due to the favourableness or unfavourableness towards behaviour; the likelihood that a consumer intends to perform certain behaviour increases, if the attitude is favourable (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980).



Source: Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980, p. 8

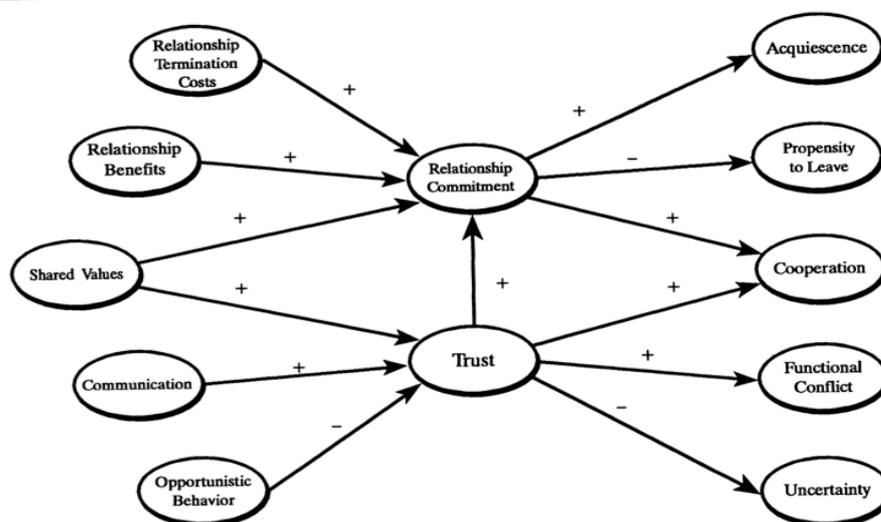
Figure 2- Factors determining a person's behaviour

The second factor is called the *subjective norm* (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). This covers the influence that the social environment has on the consumer (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). This factor is only mirroring the perceived perceptions the consumer has towards certain behaviours due to its social surroundings (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Therefore, when it is perceived that others think a consumer should do something, and when this person's own estimation is positive, it is most likely that the individual intend to perform that certain behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Moreover, the subjective norm, does not imply what important others actually think about a certain behaviour, rather, it is the *perception* that a consumer holds of what people, important to her, thinks about the behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Therefore, the consumer will intend to perform a behaviour the stronger the perception of the important others thoughts are (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). This also leads to positive attitudes if the surrounding is positive towards the

behaviour, or to negative attitudes if the perceptions of the surroundings do not think she should perform the behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). The underlying beliefs for subjective norms are called *normative beliefs*, and implies that the individual do as others think she should act (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980).

2.1.1.3 Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing

According to Morgan and Hunt (1994) commitment and trust are fundamental aspects that need to be present in order to achieve successful marketing relationships. After having tested commitment and trust as Key Mediating Variables (KMV) between five relationship antecedents and outcomes in their KMV model of Relationship Marketing, both variables was concluded to be the hubs of relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In the model (*see Figure 3*), trust and commitment from one party in the relationship is tested to see how it affects the relationship cooperation (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Trust has to do with one party's belief that the other part should perform activities that are beneficial for the cooperation and that the cooperating party should not do anything unexpected that has a negative impact on the outcome of the relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). It is, for instance, fundamental for a company to achieve trustworthiness since a consumer normally have to buy a product before it is tested and therefore company reliability can determine if a purchase is made (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Trust is perceived as a foundation for partnership and it is only after trust is present that a party is willing to fully commit to a relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Commitment implies that the parties involved perceive the relationship with the other party to be as important as maximum efforts are invested to maintain the relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Commitment also needs to be mutual if it should benefit the relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).



Source: Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 22

Figure 3- The KMV Model of Relationship Marketing

The Commitment-Trust Theory finds that without mutual trust or commitment between for example company and customer, the benefits drawn from the relationship will not be experienced to its fullest (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Even though, this finding is relevant for this particular study, it is preferable to use theory that more extensively describes the consumer incentives for trusting and committing to relationships with companies. On that note, a re-examination of the Commitment-Trust Theory that mainly focuses on consumers has been used as a framework in this study. Since the extended Commitment-Trust Theory study is examining commitment and trust in an online setting, the appropriateness of including that study in the theoretical framework, is enhanced.

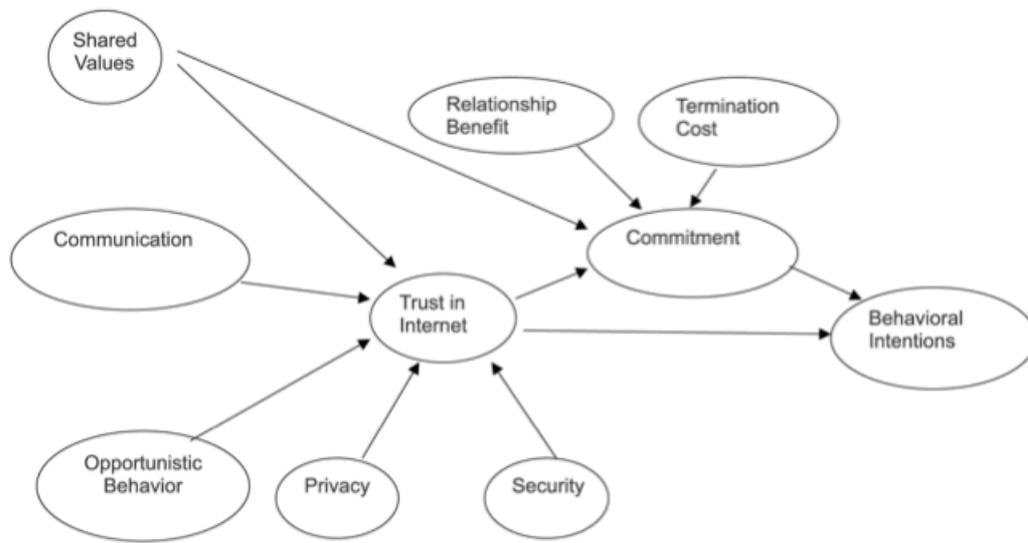
Re-examination of the Commitment-Trust Theory

As Internet has become one of the most important drivers of economy and business is increasingly conducted online, the trust and commitment theory was re-examined in an online setting (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). Since there is a physical separation between buyer and seller online it is suggested that trust is even more fundamental to achieve, in order to create relationships (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). Contrary to traditional relationship marketing a consumer is not developing trust towards a seller but rather, the trust in the technology itself will determine if a consumer is committing to a company online (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). Besides the distance between buyer and seller, online trust is suggested to differ from offline trust in terms of absence of simultaneous existence in time and space, absence of human network attributes and absence of feedback and learning capability (Nohria & Eccles, 1992 in Mukherjee & Nath, 2007).

Mukherjee and Nath (2007) present an extended KMV model that mainly aims to explain the role of electronic trust in online retailing (*see Figure 4*). However, both trust and commitment are found to be significant for consumers engaging in relationships online (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). Five antecedents to trust and two antecedents to commitment are determined to have an impact on long-term relationships online (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). *Shared values* are a determinant for trust online and it is also seen to increase the consumer commitment (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). If a customer and company share values, the customer can associate and connect with the company, which has a positive impact for creating long-term relationships (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). The deep connection and long-term involvement initiate trust (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). *Communication* between company and consumer is also suggested to have a positive effect on consumer trust (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). If a company manage to effectively deliver

information that is helpful, easy and well timed, a trust-based customer relationship is likely to develop (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). *Opportunistic behaviour* has a negative correlation to trust which means that the more likely the consumer believes that a company is violating rules and regulations, the less the consumer trusts the company (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). *Privacy* is the greatest determination for consumer trust, where privacy policy is emphasised for founding long-term trust-based relationships (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). Therefore, if trust should be established, it is fundamental that consumers rely on companies' policies that personal information should stay within the company (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). *Security* is, furthermore, the second most important determination for consumer trust (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). If the consumer perceives a website's security to be high, there is a greater willingness to provide personal information and to make purchases online (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). *Relationship benefits* have a positive impact on commitment, which means that if a consumer believes that she can benefit from personalized service and loyalty rewards, a relationship is likely committed to (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). Moreover, *termination costs* are negatively correlated with commitment, meaning that a consumer is not likely to commit to a relationship because there are high termination costs to end the relationship (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). In contrast to the original Commitment-Trust Theory, relationship termination costs are not an influential factor for consumers to commit to a relationship (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). This might depend on how terminations costs are considerably lower online than offline since the consumer has access to other companies' offerings a click away (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). The ascendants to trust and commitment are perceived to be critical aspects that need to be present if a consumer should establish a relationship with a company online.

Interestingly, both trust and commitment has a positive impact on customers' incentives to behave online (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). Trust is found to be the most influential aspect of consumer online behaviour and the higher level of perceived trust, the more likely the consumer is to "engage in e-transactions" (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007, p. 1193). Relationship commitment and trust function as key mediators for online behaviour including consumers incentives for spreading positive word of mouth, purchase intentions and continued interaction with a company online (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). Therefore, trust and commitment is vital building blocks for long-term relationships between consumer and company online (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007).



Source: Mukherjee & Nath, 2007, p. 1183

Figure 4- Extended KMV Model

2.2 Part II: Consumer Activity in Social Media Settings

2.2.1 Building Blocks of Consumer Activities in Social Media Settings

The second part of the theoretical framework consists of models and concepts that aim to explain diverse types of social media users and what implications a certain type of social media usage might lead to. Thereby, this theoretical basis allows extended consumer understanding from a user perspective, with focus on implications that might occur *as a result* of certain social media behaviour is performed.

Both the Transport-and Exposure Model is incorporated in the theoretical framework since they allow distinction between different types of social media users. Depending on whether a consumer is active or passive social media user, it will require diverse implications for communicating with consumers in a marketing related manner. Further, it is relevant to incorporate understanding for how diverse consumers are inclined to produce User Generated Content in the theoretical framework since it enhances an understanding for consumer's behaviour in social media. By considering what distinguishes an active or passive social media user, consumer incentives for contributing on social media platforms might be revealed. Further, extended consumer understanding might reveal what possible implications social media usage has in the context of relationship building, for example to what extent a consumer seem to rely on other user's information, rather than messages communicated by companies. Similar to User

Generated Content, it is beneficial to consider WOM, and particularly eWOM, in the theoretical framework since the concept might distinguish consumers' incentives for relating to company encounters in social media.

2.2.1.1 Transport- and Exposure Model

In order to encounter consumers in a marketing manner, Dahlén (2002) present communication models to be used on Internet. The most commonly used model is called the *Transport Model*, as the name implies, the model focuses on making the user active and transport it the sender's website (Dahlén, 2002). This will happen only if the user click on companies' online advertisement since new media, such as social media, is run by interaction and activities from the user's standpoint (Dahlén, 2002). This model requires that the users are active, but if they are not, the model loses its function (Dahlén, 2002). Therefore, Dahlén (2002) is presenting another model that might work better as it only is focusing on that the users should be able to see the advertisements and not to get transported to any website (Dahlén, 2002). This model is called the *Exposure Model*, and the objectives for companies are rather to show presence, which might influence the customer in a later stage (Dahlén, 2002). Therefore, the Exposure Model does not expect the consumers to be active when being exposed to the advertising, rather just to make them aware of the company (Dahlén, 2002).

2.2.1.2 User Generated Content

It is possible to outline a shift between traditional media and social media in the sense that the users are able to be more active (Jensen, 2008; Dahlén, 2002). Social media is driven by User Generated Content (UGC), which means that end-users can share and create information of their own (Jensen, 2008). According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2007) there are three criteria to reach if information should be classified as User Generated Content (OECD, 2007). These are; that the content need to be published, it needs to be creative and add something new, and finally the content need to be done by someone unprofessional (OECD, 2007). User Generated Content can for example consist of videos, photos, texts, music, opinions and advices, shared on different social media platforms (OECD, 2007). This type of content is able to be distinguished as "conversational interactivity" (Jensen, 2008, p. 130).

The rise of User Generated Content indicates that it has been a shift between mainstream media and social media (Jensen, 2008). Mainstream media is created by professionals and published in for example TV, radio and newspaper; therefore it is possible to distinguish a sender and a

receiver (Jensen, 2008). On the other hand, rather social media is founded by unprofessional individuals by using computers or mobile phones for the purpose of creating dialogues, social relationships etc. (Jensen, 2008; OECD, 2007). The opportunity to create User Generated Content has made it possible to make a distinction between active and passive online users (Jensen, 2008). As professionals create mainstream media, the users are overall passive, but in the social media environment users themselves can also be active (Jensen, 2008). This implies that the user of social media can switch between being either passive or active (Future Exploration Network, 2006). An active user social media user is distinguished by creation of User Generated Content and in the contrary; the passive user is solely consuming this kind of media content (Jensen, 2008). In Figure 5 these relations are described: an active social media user is creating for example profiles on Facebook, videos on YouTube or publishing photos where as the passive user is watching these videos or profiles (Jensen, 2008). Considering mainstream media, an active user sends SMS or MMS photos to broadcast TV or sending emails to programs in radio, the passive mainstream media user is rather watching broadcast TV or reading newspapers (Jensen, 2008).

		Media Form	
		Mainstream media	Social Media
User Mode	Passive users	Traditional broadcast	Consumption of UGC
	Active users	Production of UGC to mainstream media	User-generated media and content

Source: Jensen, 2008, p. 130

Figure 5 – The Matrix of Media Form and User Mode

2.2.1.3 Electronic Word-of-Mouth

An additional concept focusing on consumer activity, such as sharing experiences and opinions at social media platforms, is word of mouth. Word of mouth (WOM), in an offline setting, implies an activity where consumers share experiences, which in turn can influence behaviour (Dellarocas, 2003). The phenomenon can be explained as “informal communication” between consumers (Westbrook, 1987, p. 261). Sometimes WOM is suggested to have greater influence on consumer behaviour than advertising (Steffes & Burgec, 2009; Godes & Mayzlin, 2004). WOM can be considered as a result of three different involvements, these are: *product involvement*, *self-involvement*, and *other-involvement* (Dichter, 1966; Westbrook, 1987). *Product involvement* imply that

the consumer talks about the certain product and its fulfilments, *self-involvement* is rather when the consumer want to draw attention or status while talking about the product (Dichter, 1966; Westbrook, 1987). Finally *other-involvement* occur when the consumer strive to help others by sharing her own experiences (Dichter, 1966; Westbrook, 1987).

Owing to development of Internet and User Generated Content, WOM has developed in the direction to electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Henning-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler 2004; Stettes & Burgec, 2009; Jalilvand, Esfahani & Samiei, 2011). This allow Internet users to share their thoughts and experiences of for example products, companies or events (Dellarocas, 2003). eWOM communications include “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet“ (Henning-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 39). eWOM is an asynchronous process which implies that the time might differ from when a consumer publish a message, to the time and place, when someone else is reading or sharing it (Steffes & Burgec, 2009; Hansen, Shneiderman and Smith, 2011). Additionally, eWOM is an interactive tool, which performances create cooperation between consumers that have never met (Dellarocas, 2003). Moreover, if an information source is known to the consumer, it will most likely trust the information more than if an unknown source was sending the information (Steffes & Burgec, 2009). This further implies that a consumer becomes increasingly influenced by a known information source than an unknown (Steffes & Burgec, 2009).

2.3 Part III: Consumer Characteristics According to Generational Belonging

2.3.1 Building Blocks of Consumer Characteristics According to Generational Belonging

The third part of the theoretical framework consists of literature that aims to explain how the four generations: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Y and Z, have been described in previous researches. The focus is to describe each generation in a nuanced way with emphasis on how individual's, belonging to a certain generations, childhood have affected their attitudes and behaviours. The literature is mainly describing generational characteristics that do not consider social media usage. Thereby, this theoretical part present generational characteristics, mainly explaining behaviours in offline settings, which in this study function as a basis to explain what drives consumer behaviours in social media.

2.3.1.1 Baby Boomers

The Baby Boomer generation was born in the post-war era, in the years of 1946-1964 (McCrandle & Wolfinger, 2010; Williams & Page, 2011). The end of World War II shaped this generation since the war was replaced by a healthy economic growth with good job opportunities, which encouraged optimism (Leiter, Jackson & Shaughnessy, 2009; McCrandle & Wolfinger, 2010). Baby Boomers want to be independent; they are well educated with good English skills (Parment, 2008). It is important for a Baby Boomer to feel needed and to be connected to people (Coleman, Hladikova & Savelyeva, 2006). A Baby Boomer also wants to stay young (Coleman, Hladikova & Savelyeva, 2006). Therefore, this generation is curious about trying new things such as new technologies, cultures or careers. This generation is open-minded and most often responding to messages that will improve their lives (Coleman, Hladikova & Savelyeva, 2006).

Moreover, Baby Boomers are familiar with using Internet when it comes to surfing the web and to shop online (Coleman, Hladikova & Savelyeva, 2006). The convenience and customization that Internet offers are two characteristics that individuals in the Baby Boomer generation prefer (Williams & Page, 2011). Online shopping usually consists of train- or concert tickets, hotels or books (Parment, 2008). When it comes to material products that own distinctive features and characteristics, a Baby Boomer prefer to be able to feel and touch the product in real life (Parment, 2008). Further, they would also appreciate to have the opportunity to talk to an employee in-store (Parment, 2008).

Furthermore, Baby Boomers have purchasing power and are very quality-conscious; therefore they require good services and high quality products (Parment, 2008). When this generation retire they are most likely entering an era where good food, pleasure and healthy habits are flattering (Parment, 2008). The Baby Boom generation consist of individuals that want to live in the moment and not make savings for the future (Parment, 2008). As Fry (2004, p. 52) state “The core of their consumerism is not about owning – it’s about lifestyle and living”. Nevertheless, Baby Boomers seem to think rationally when it comes to making decisions, which is a consequence from growing up in a rational thinking culture (Parment, 2008) Despite that, this generation shops because they want to, not always because it is needed, but it is however important tat they perceive that they get value for their money (Parment, 2008). Baby Boomers also prefer to buy things on sale since it is cheaper, even though they might never use the product, something their children (Generation Y) are criticizing them for (Parment, 2008).

Open and direct communication with much information is needed to persuade a Baby Boomer (Williams & Page, 2011). Traditional media that Baby Boomers are influenced by are lifestyle magazines and advertisements in newspapers (Parment, 2008). When marketing towards this generation, it is important to use rational arguments, with truthful and attractive messages (Parment, 2008). To get an advantage, marketers or companies should tell a story about the product in order to convince a consumer from the Baby Boomer generation (Nyren, 2005).

2.3.1.2 Generation X

Individuals belonging to Generation X were born in the years of 1965-1977 (Williams & Page, 2011). They have been called Baby Busters, Slacker, Latchkey generation and Xers, but Generation X is the most commonly used name (McCrinkle & Wolfinger, 2010; Williams & Page, 2011). The names are suggested to origin in that Generation X is squeezed in between Baby Boomers and Generation Y that is much greater generations when it comes to number of individuals (Keene & Handrich, 2011). Generation X is a well-educated generation that are team-minded, practical and self-reliant (Keene & Handrich, 2011; Mitchell, McLean & Turner, 2005). As a majority of the generation grew up in a dual-income household they had to learn to be independent and to be on their own in an early stage of life (Mitchell, McLean & Turner, 2005; Leiter, Jackson & Shaughnessy, 2009). Another reason to their independence is because they grew up in a culture where divorces and violence were rising (Williams & Page, 2011). These aspects have resulted in that individuals from Generation X value their families more than other generations, but it also led them to be less traditional, since according to them, nothing is permanent (Williams & Page, 2011).

Individuals in Generation X are more restricted with dating and therefore they are seen to marry at an old age (Williams & Page, 2011). Instead they have focused on longer careers to a greater extent than earlier generations (Levickaite, 2010). When individuals in Generation X create families, they are very accurate to divide the time between work, life and family to get a balance (Keene & Handrich, 2011; Leiter, Jackson & Shaughnessy, 2009; Williams & Page, 2011). Individuals in Generation X is also keen to, and enjoys to, keep in contact with friends through emails, texts, phone calls or meetings (Keene & Handrich, 2011). Moreover, these individuals enjoy being outside and practising water sports, skiing, and hunting, as they value freedom and friendship (Keene & Handrich, 2011). Except for this, Generation X is a generation that are active members of the community (Keene & Handrich, 2011). They support organisations that

their children are part of and other professional associations, and are not afraid of volunteer work (Keene & Handrich, 2011).

Generation X grew up with computers and therefore, they have good technical skills (Leiter, Jackson & Shaughnessy, 2009). Nevertheless, this generation is difficult to affect due to their scepticism towards marketing and commercialism (Parment, 2008). This generation has grown up with more advertisement than any generation before, which has made them dislike commercials (Parment, 2008:17). This attitude has also contributed to a cynical approach towards products and shopping (Williams & Page, 2011). When communicating to individuals within Generation X it is important to use a straight talk. When buying something, individuals from Generation X are more satisfied if they think that they are receiving value (Mitchell, McLean & Turner, 2005). Another aspect to be aware of is that individuals in Generation X want to know what features the product have, and why these are essential (William & Page, 2011). As a marketer it is crucial to be able to show the meaning of the message, and the message should be designed to meet the specific customer, otherwise they will not be hooked (William & Page, 2011).

2.3.1.3 Generation Y

Generation Y consist of individuals born in the years of 1977-1994 (Williams & Page, 2011). The name Generation Y is said to origin in the word 'why' since this generation is known to question what is going on around them (Pihl, 2011). This generation has also been called Generation C (consumers), Moklofs (mobile kids with lots of friends) and the Connected Generation (Pihl, 2011; Skiba, 2005 in Nimon, 2007). These names indicate which characteristics persons from this generation possess, which ultimately will have an impact on how they behave (Pihl, 2011).

Generation Y grew up during a time of social welfare where the children has been the centralized member of the family (Pihl, 2011). Due to having technology present, these individuals have had access to information about the adult life at an early stage (Pihl, 2011). This has resulted in persons from Generation Y being treated as grown-ups at an early age (Hill, 2002). Generally, persons born in Generation Y had a safe childhood where the parents have isolated them from failures (Nimon, 2007; Pihl, 2011). During 1980-1990's the term 'curling parent' was invented which means that parents have allowed their children to make their own decisions at an early stage of life and that the parents have supported their children in times of struggle (Pihl, 2011). During the 1980's in Sweden, the concept of winners and losers was dampened in society (Pihl, 2011). For example, games should not name one winner; rather the collective should experience

success or failure (Pihl, 2011). These efforts were all made to protect the individual from losing self-esteem (Pihl, 2011).

A highly significant condition, which has great impact on Generation Y, is the exposure of brands and communication available through technology (Pihl, 2011). Being brought up in an era of technology, where adaption to new technologies has been a commonality, this generation is used to rely on Internet (Pihl, 2011). Further, it has also affected Generation Y's ability to handle external signals (Pihl, 2011). It is estimated that a person from Generation Y can handle information from five channels simultaneously (Pihl, 2011). Moreover, instant communication and accessibility to worldwide news has resulted in Generation Y being the first generation that perceive themselves as members of the "global whole" (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 16 in Nimon, 2007, p. 29).

Internet offers individuals the possibility to network and take part of information from friends all over the world (Pihl, 2011). This makes Generation Y a conscious generation that probably owns more knowledge than the seller (Pihl, 2011). Having been used to advertising exposure during their whole life, Generation Y are well aware of companies attempts to attract customers and therefore they are critical to the messages they are exposed to (Bernoff, 2003). In addition, Generation Y is confident and individualistic, where self-interest and self-realization is the main driver for action (Pihl, 2011). This behavior origin in their childhood as it offered great prerequisites for personal development and encouraged own decisions (Hill, 2002). The critical approach combined with self-actualized behavior has resulted in disloyalty to brands and companies (Pihl, 2011; Bernoff, 2003). Further, the highly informed Generation Y consumer puts pressure on companies to increase quality on offered products and services (Pihl, 2011). The skepticism to mass media and the appreciation of privacy had led to interpretation of persons from Generation Y as being the "hard sell" (Morton, 2002a in Beard, 2003, p. 218).

Due to the individualistic and self-fulfilling need, the typical consumer from Generation Y is shopping with the heart (Pihl, 2011). Generation Y believes that what one do and purchase reflect whom an individual is or want to become (Pihl, 2011). Since the generation are accustomed to speed and instant information, immediacy is valued higher than accuracy (Skiba, 2005, in Nimon, 2007; Oblinger and Oblinger, 2005). The importance of time and quality combined with a disloyal behavior seem to make companies' ability to entertain Generation Y a critical prerequisite (Sheahan, 2005). If a seller does not manage to keep Generation Y interested, they

will not remain customers (Sheahan, 2005). Further, the need to be entertained and informed through a wide range of medias increases the pressure on companies (Wolberg & Pokrywczyński, 2001). It is therefore suggested to approach this generation with “irony” or “ unvarnished truth” (Wolberg & Pokrywczyński, 2001, p. 37). This is probably due to the great knowledge and critical approach that the customers possess, which makes them reject campaigns where they perceive that a company is manipulating the consumer to make a purchase (Wolberg & Pokrywczyński, 2001).

2.3.1.4 Generation Z

Generation Z, also known as the Net Generation, Digital natives or Dot-com kids is born after 1994 (Williams & Page, 2011; Levickaite, 2010). The names clearly illustrate what has been the greatest influence on this generation, namely technology and social media. During their childhood Generation Z has been used to computers and other technology (Grail Research, 2011). As long as individuals belonging to Generation Z have lived, Internet has been available (Williams & Page, 2011). This has resulted in most children being computer knowledgeable before they start school and also that individuals in this generation are used to find information online at the same moment that they need it (Wellner, 2000). Consequently, Generation Z is the first generation to gather information independently without help from teachers or parents (Williams & Page, 2011). This has led to Generation Z interpreting the world as being accessible and observable without time or space restrictions (Levickaite, 2010).

The parents of Generation Z are older and so are their teachers at school (Levickaite, 2010). Combined with being exposed to, and therefore becoming knowledgeable of, technology at an even younger stage in life than Generation Y, Generation Z is estimated to grow up even faster (Williams & Page, 2011; Levickaite, 2010). Further, they are suggested to be even more resistant to mass targeting advertising than Generation Y (Williams, 2010). This might depend on the fact that Generation Z has been brought up in an environment full of information, which has made them aware of certain aspect such as environment (Grail Research, 2011). This might have an impact on their attitude towards companies and their businesses (Grail Research, 2011). Therefore realness is a core value for Generation Z, which companies should try to communicate in their advertisements (Williams & Page, 2011).

The technological environment, allowing information and communication with the entire world, have resulted in individuals from Generation Z being flexible and tolerant of diverse cultures

(Grail Research, 2011). Generation Z want to interact socially, mainly through digital media, and the knowledge of friends and their experiences will most likely have an impact on how decisions are made (Grail Research, 2011). Generation Z is concerned about being accepted by peers and self-fulfillment is probably more determined by the belongingness to a group than Generation Y (Williams & Page, 2011).

That Generation Z is used to being encountered with information from several sources, might have had an effect on their ability to manage several tasks at once (Levickaite, 2010; Williams & Page, 2011). Living in an information society where information are accessible to persons in decreasing ages, it is important to acknowledge that also children are producing knowledge rather than replicating and embracing old knowledge (Wellner, 2000). This will consequently have an impact on Generation Z consumption where customers will be knowledgeable and informed (Wellner, 2000).

The great familiarity Generation Z has towards technologies, smartphones, social media, and even multimedia in school, will put companies in a more difficult position trying to capture Generation Z's attention (Grail Research, 2011.). Further, the customer power that has arisen with technology may affect Generation Z's demand regarding companies' offerings (Williams & Page, 2011). Internets prerequisites for developing diverse experiences, is making Generation Z growing up in a customized environment (Wellner, 2000). This will in turn effect what this generation expects from the marketplace and therefore they will put more emphasis on services and products that are customized to meet personal needs (Wellner, 2000). Moreover, this will have an impact on the way marketing will be conducted to Generation Z (Wellner, 2000). Functionality and easy-to use products are suggested to be successful since this type of product will match the multitasking lifestyle that persons from this generation embrace (Grail Research, 2011). Taking into consideration that individuals in this generation are almost overly dependent on technology, a company has to be present online, in order to get this generations' attention (Grail Research, 2011).

3. Methodology

In this chapter the methodological choices that has guided the study are presented. The research philosophy is discussed, which is followed by an argumentation of chosen research design and data collection method. Thereafter the method for analysing empirical data is described. After providing information about how interviews were conducted, the chapter ends with a critical of evaluation of the methods used.

3.1 Research Philosophy

3.1.1 Relationship between theory and research

This study aims to explore knowledge that previously has not been investigated to a great extent. In existing literature, knowledge about Baby Boomers, Generation X, Y and Z has been explored in terms of how their childhood have had an impact on behavior, attitudes and consumption patterns (Parment, 2008). Research about relationship building in social media has expanded the last couple of years, where opportunities for creating relationships with customers have been explored. Suggestions about how companies should act beneficially, among other findings, include how to track, monitor and respond to customer insights online (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden, 2011; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011; Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011; Wilson Guinan, Parise & Weinberg, 2011; Pires, Stanton & Rita, 2006). Since this study aims to contribute to existing knowledge, where previously researched areas are combined to create a new specific context regarding relationship building in social media, this study is taking an inductive approach. The aim is to contribute with new knowledge in the field of social media marketing and relationship building online by exploring customers' attitudes/characteristics determined by age intervals. To generate new theory as a result of a study is characteristic for an inductive study (Bryman and Bell, 2007). However the usage of theories at an initial stage of the study implies that a lapse from an exhaustive inductive approach is taken (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Since pre-studies regarding generational characteristics, relationship building online and social media in general has been conducted; the research subject was not a result of the study. Rather, the study emerged from existing knowledge. However, the usage of theories and concepts as a foundation for the research is not a representable characteristic for this study. No hypothesis, based on previous theories, has been tested and therefore the study is not considered to be deductive (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The knowledge gained from exploring existing theories and concepts before conducting the study has been beneficial since it allowed an understanding for the context that has been studied. Since the research origin in a mixture of previous theories and concepts that has not been explored in the same context previously, this study would not have been conductible if knowledge about

previous theories and concepts were lacking. Consequently, induction is considered to be the relevant approach between theory and research in this study since generating new knowledge is the main objective of the study as a whole.

3.1.2 Epistemological and Ontological approach

The main research question: “In what way can diverse generations’ perceptions towards, and usage of, social media be understood?” implies that reality is not observable externally and that individuals cannot be studied objectively (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Since it is the underlying motives, that have formed individuals’ perceptions and usage of social media, that are essential to capture, it is implied that personal insights are needed to create knowledge. This means that the research is interpretive (Bryman & Bell, 2007). In an interpretive research, emphasis is put on understanding individuals’ behaviors rather than explaining it (Bryman and Bell, 2007). To understand how individuals in different ages perceives social media platforms and companies’ relationship building activities online, it seems fundamental to capture the subjective meanings that have contributed to the individual’s perception. The subjective meaning of social media, most likely origins in personal experiences and social interaction between people. Therefore this study is taking a constructionism approach (Bryman & Bell, 2007). It is fundamental to recognize that the knowledge captured in this research is built in an ever-changing context (Bryman & Bell, 2007). In this context interaction between individuals will form what is meaningful for them and how a phenomena is perceived (Bryman & Bell, 2007). This implies more concretely, that this study recognizes how generational belonging has had an, and continuously will have, an impact on the way in which social media is perceived. Supposedly, experiences and interaction between individuals at different ages will have an impact on how social media and online activities are appreciated. Consequently, the studied phenomenon is a social construction that is built up by persons and their actions (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The aim is to understand why individuals, belonging to diverse generations, own certain point of views (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2008). This requires focus on individuals’ descriptions and thoughts, which implies that the human interest is perceived as the main driver of science in this study (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2008).

3.2 Research Design

3.2.1 Qualitative Research

Since this study is: approaching the relationship between theory and research inductively, aiming to understand how individuals interpret a phenomenon and acknowledging the social

construction where meaning is founded, it is taking a *qualitative* approach (Bryman & Bell, 2007). That the study is qualitative implies that it has not been focused on collecting qualitative data, which in a measurable manner can distinguish differences and relationships between different concepts and persons (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Rather it has centralized the issue to capture a phenomenon from the interviewee's perspective. The aim is to see the world from the interviewee's point of view by focusing on what aspects are perceived as meaningful and important (Bryman & Bell, 2005). The study will also focus on the context, the generational prerequisites, in order to describe what have contributed to the interviewee certain point of view (Bryman & Bell, 2005). Details about occurrences and other growing up conditions that might help understanding why the interviewee holds a certain viewpoint is therefore considered important (Bryman & Bell, 2005). Further, knowledge about social media features and how the interviewees use social media is also essential since it contributes to an overall understanding for each generation's social media behaviour.

Since one of the study objectives is to distinguish similarities and differences between generations' perceptions towards, and usage of, social media, a *comparative research design* is appropriate to use. In a comparative research two or more cases are used as a basis for examination where the aim is to find relevant differences between the groups while comparing them to each other (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The cases can be identified as either individuals, groups, organizations or societies (Bryman & Bell, 2007). This study defines a case to be a group of individuals belonging to one specific generation. Therefore, this study constitutes of four cases, namely: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z. Each case's characteristics are based on common perceptions and insights, revealed during interviews, which are combined in an overall profile for the entire generation. Thereby, the first step of comparing the cases with each other is to combine and analyse each case independently. After having distinguished characteristic features for each generation, the cases are compared to each other. Similar or contrasting findings originated by the comparison, are key for generating new knowledge, in the context of relationship building in social media.

3.3 Data Collection

3.3.1 Method for Collecting Qualitative Data

In a qualitative research applying a comparative research design, it is suitable to conduct *qualitative interviews* as data collecting method (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The discussion above, stating that personal insights are fundamental to capture in order to answer the research question, indicate

that interviewing is a preferable method for gathering data in this research. Further, interviews are suitable since the aim is to capture interpretations about social media, and its usage, important for the interviewees (Bryman & Bell, 2007). That the intention has been to capture aspects about the context that the interviewee origin in, namely a generational group, also required a method that allow rich and detailed answers (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

The qualitative interviews in this study were *semi-structured* since a mixture of structure and flexibility was beneficial when trying to capture as relevant insights from interviewees as possible (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The semi-structured interviews were conducted by using an interview guide with carefully prepared topics, and some specific questions to discuss (*see Appendix 2*). The questions aimed to be asked in such a manner that the interviewee could answer quite freely (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The possibility for the interviewee to answer the question relatively free, is considered a fundamental criterion for conducting this study, since it allow the interviewees' individual insights and perceptions to be distinguished (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Another reason for conducting semi-structured interviews originated in the flexibility to change order on the questions being asked, or to add new questions (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Since experiences and knowledge, that have had an impact in the way which social media is perceived, can be highly individual it was difficult to determine questions beforehand that would capture diverse individuals insights. Therefore it was beneficial to extend the interview in a certain direction when a topic seemed to have influenced the interviewee's point of view, and to discard directions that did not seem important for understanding the interviewee's perceptions (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2008).

Since interviewees' knowledge of social media was not known prior to the interview, the interviewer had to be prepared to describe certain social media features that the interviewee did not understand. Therefore, extracted illustrations of social media activities on Facebook and Twitter, and a YouTube clip, were brought to the interviews in order to enhance the interviewee's ability to answer (*see Appendix 3*). Using pictures can be a means for interviewees to describe and discuss situations more detailed (Bryman & Bell, 2007). This appeared to be the case in this study where interviewees, during some instances, needed assistance in order to relate to an interview topic.

3.3.1.1 Recording and Transcription

In order for the interviewer to deepen the interview in aspects that were essential for understanding the interviewee's point of view, a complete focus on how and what were being

said was needed (Bryman & Bell, 2007). To take notes during the interview might have prevented the interviewer's ability to pay attention to essential insights or inconsistencies in the answers, which further would have had a negative impact on the quality of the gathered data (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Therefore, the interviews were tape-recorded. On this note, the interviewer had all prerequisites for understanding the dynamics in the interview and the possibility to rehear and analyse some answers further (Kvale, 1997). Once the interviews were completed the tape-recorded material was transcribed into text. As the interviews were held in Swedish, the native language of both the interviewer and the interviewees, it was necessary to first make the transcriptions into Swedish before translating it into English (Bryman & Bell, 2007). While transcribing, spoken language is transformed into written language that does not include details or the social contextual interaction between human beings (Kvale, 1997).

3.3.2 Sample

The interviewees participating in the study were selected based on a convenience sample. A convenience sample is a non-probability sample, which means that the sample was not selected randomly, and therefore some persons in the population might have had a higher probability of being chosen than others (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Thereby, the interviewed individuals were simply persons that were available to participate in an interview at a certain time (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Since this study aims to understand a phenomenon through the eyes of the interviewees, and to generate new knowledge to a relatively unexplored research area, it is not relevant to conduct a study that is generalizable to an entire population (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Rather, this study aims to contribute with an initial understanding of a specific context in which generational differences affect relationship building through social media, and therefore the focus has been to produce knowledge mediating deep understanding rather than statistical results.

Since the sample was based on convenience, implied that the interviewer did not know in advance if the interviewees had an account or were active on any social media platform. That an interviewee's social media usage was not evident prior to the interview was beneficial for the research since it indicated characteristic features describing generations' social media usage.

3.3.2.1 Sample Size

Even though the sample was based on convenience, it was essential that the sample consisted of persons belonging to one of the four different generations. To include persons belonging to each generation was important since the study aims to capture rich descriptions of perceptions towards, and insights about, social media from different age groups. The study is comparative in

its nature and is emphasising similar or contrasting findings between generations' perceptions and usage of social media. Therefore, it was desirable to include a somewhat similar number of interviewees from each generation in order to have similar amount of data for each generation when analysing. The objective has been to reach theoretical saturation in the answers, which implies that data collection has been conducted until there was variation in the answers and no additional data seemed relevant (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The idea of sampling to a point when the data is sufficient to generate new knowledge has been applied while gathering data in this research (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

3.4 Conducting Interviews

The interviews were held between 2012-04-23 and 2012-04-26, at different locations in Lund and Malmö. The first interview functioned as a pilot study, where the interviewee's ability to answer and understand the questions was tested. As the first interview seemed to be perceived in a desired way, the interview guide remained unchanged for the remaining interviews. The interviews were conducted in a one-to-one setting, since it most likely would enhance the interviewee's ability to describe its perceptions towards, and usage of social media, without becoming influence from a third party (Bryman & Bell, 2005) As Swedish was the native language of both the interviewees and interviewer, the interviews were conducted in Swedish. This most likely benefited the way the interviewees were able to express their answers and descriptions (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

The interviews started by asking the interviewees' age; in order to distinguish which generation she belonged to. Since Baby Boomers are the oldest generation included in the study, persons born before 1946 were not able to participate in the interviews. Persons belonging to Generation Z, and born after 2002 were also excluded from the study since the young age is perceived to limit their ability to answer the interview questions. Further, a short presentation about the study's theme was given, which was followed by an interview that lasted approximately 25 minutes. All in all, 16 interviews were conducted, with four interviewees belonging to each generation. That this amount of interviews were conducted, originated in the perception that the interviews generated rich information, and that approximately they same amount of data seemed gained for all generations. When the interview was over, the interviewees were thanked for their time and participation.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data analysis has been superficially inspired by a grounded theory analysis approach (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The idea of concepts as building blocks of categories has been influential for analysing the data (Bryman & Bell, 2007). However, there has not been an ambition to generate new theory or to follow a grounded theory process exhaustively (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Interviews conducted in the study have aimed to distinguish and understand interviewees' perceptions towards, and usage of, social media. This implies that the initial step in analysing the data has been to understand each individual separately. After each interview was conducted, the interview was examined in order to find protruding characteristics for that specific interviewee. Once one individual was understood independently, it was compared in relation to other interviewees from the same generation. This step of the analysis was somewhat inspired by the process of open coding in the sense that examination and comparison of the data from every interview is analysed in itself and later, in relation to other interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2007). This analytical process enabled constant update of the gathered data, which in turn allowed the interviews to continue until no new data seemed relevant. When enough data seemed gathered for a generation, commonalities and patterns that appeared to be characteristic for the generation as a whole were distinguished. This implies that protruding characteristics from each individual in a generation, were compared in order to find commonalities that seemed characteristic for the generation overall. Thereby, a protruding characteristic for a generation might be compared to what is referred to as a concept in grounded theory, while an overall generational profile might be compared to what grounded theory calls category (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The relationship between generational characteristics and profile might be further understood by considering Figure 6.

The process of interpreting data from one generation independently implied that some commonalities and protruding characteristics that seemed to distinguish one generation, was found to characterise another generation as well. In addition, theory was used as an attempt to *understand why* a generation is characterised by certain protruding perceptions or usage habits of social media. It also focuses on examine the implications of generations' social media usage. This implies that two generations, which are characterised by the same features, might be understood in differently even though they seem to share a similar characteristic.

For a study that is comparative in its nature it is fundamental to have somewhat similar prerequisites to base the comparison on. It is important to acknowledge that the generational characteristics, presented and analysed, originated in the same interview guide and by similar questions. The characteristics presented are however the most protruding for each generation, which implies that a characteristic that appear in several generations are similar, and a characteristics that are presented for one generation, is unique. Similar and unique findings are further discussed from a relational point of view, where the characteristics are compared when it comes to the relational implications.

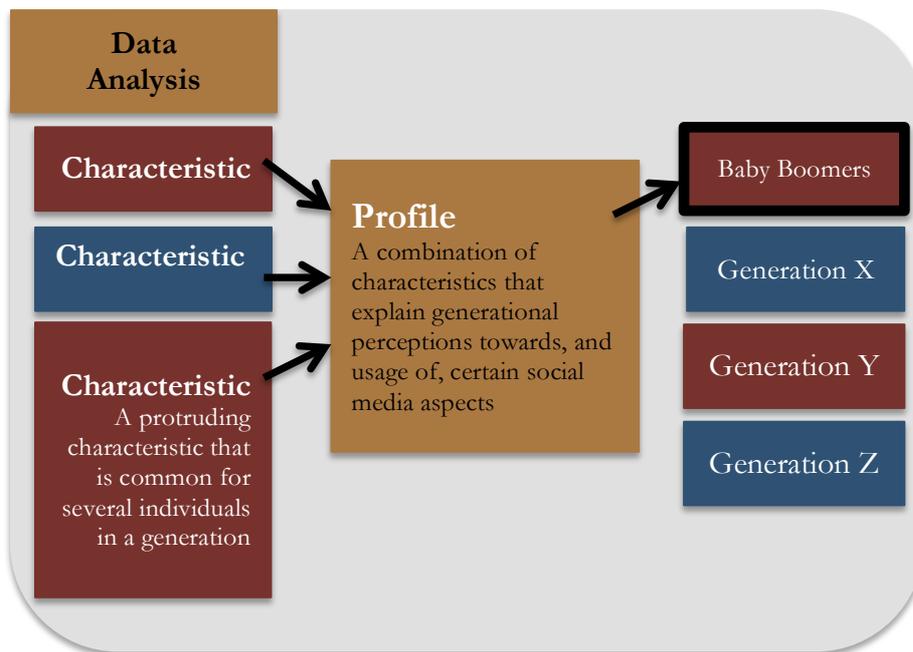


Figure 6 - Data Analysis

3.6 Critical Evaluation of the Chosen Method

3.6.1 Limitations with qualitative research

It is important to acknowledge eventual limitations and shortages that the methodological choices have implied. Firstly, the choice of making a comparative study may entail some limitations. It is suggested that comparative studies makes the researcher pay little attention to the context in which each case origins and instead focuses on comparing the cases (Bryman & Bell, 2007). It is also a risk that the focus put on comparing the cases will limit the possibility for the research to contain a complete open-ended approach (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Contextual insights and an unstructured research approach are fundamental building blocks in most qualitative research, also in this research (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Since emphasis is put on both

understanding each interviewee and each case as a whole, the context from which each case origin is considered extensively. Focus has been to understand to what degree generational belonging has affected the interviewee's perceptions towards, and usage of social media, and therefore this limitation has most likely been avoided. Further, it has been crucial that the four cases (Baby Boomers, Generation X, Y and Z) turned out comparable in some aspects. Therefore, the interview guide was used to make sure that some essential aspects were covered in the interviews, which in the end allowed comparison between the cases. Therefore, the comparative approach is acknowledged to somehow have framed the research, but since there has been room to capture individual insights, the study has been open-ended to a preferable extent.

Secondly, a convenience sample implies that it is uncertain to what extent the interviewees in the sample represent the overall population that they belong to (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Therefore, the interviewees in this study are not considered representative for all individuals belonging to a certain generation. Rather, the interviewees' answers aimed to be generalized to knowledge than to populations (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The aim has been to collect rich data of high quality and therefore the inability to generalize the study to a population and making the findings statistically valid, is not a relevant objective (Mitchell, 1983 in Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Thirdly, the semi-structured qualitative interviews have had an impact on the replication possibilities (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Since the interviews consisted of defined topics to cover, and some predetermined questions, the interviews included possibilities for the individuals to talk freely. Since the interviewer was allowed to pick up on topics and direct the interview in the most interesting direction, the outcomes of each interview depended on the interviewees' individual experiences and insights. This implies that the procedure used for conducting the interviews somewhat differed with every interviewee and is most likely impossible to replicate one interview with another interviewee (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

3.5.2 Difficulties with Interviews

While conducting the interviewees it was important to acknowledge the complicatedness of understanding an interviewees point of view (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2008). It is required from the interviewer to capture relevant insights, but it becomes more difficult to understand interviewees' perceptions, if the interviewee itself has not considered it's point-of-view of a certain matter (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2008). Some interviewees seemed to

be signified by being unaware of intentions during some parts of the interviews. Therefore, it was essential to ask questions that encouraged the interviewee to think about aspects that had not been thought about previously and that facilitated their ability to answer. Other aspects of the interviews, such as discussions around the usage of a certain social media platform, were however seen as a less complex and more articulated matter that did not require as much support from the interviewer in order to make the interviewee answer.

Since the aim with the qualitative interviews has been to understand each interviewee's perceptions towards and usage-habits of social media individually, the study has not been performed objectively which in turn implies that the study include bias (Kvale, 1997). However, it has been fundamental to keep an unbiased view when it comes to what to expect from different generations, as well as not expecting individuals from the same generation to answer similarly. This means that after an interview was conducted, the interviewer tried to leave these experiences behind while entering the next interview with a person from the same generation. This implies that the effort to understand each individual independently has been maximised.

3.6.3 Evaluation of Primary and Secondary Data

The primary data, collected through qualitative interviews, are appreciated to be of high quality. Since the data is collected to serve the specific research purpose of the study, the accuracy of the data is estimated to be high (Malhotra, 2010). As the authors themselves collected primary data, according to a procedure that was well thought-through, implies that the primary data is perceived to be dependable (Malhotra, 2010).

The secondary data used in the study has mainly been found in articles, books and in online sources. Starting with the articles, the majority has been published in academic journals. Since the source where the articles were found, is perceived to be trustworthy by the authors of this study, the dependability of the information found in the articles are perceived to be high (Malhotra, 2010). As the majority of the articles are published within the last five years and thereby includes up-to-date information; further implies that the articles currency is perceived to be high (Malhotra, 2010). Regarding the books used, the content is perceived to be relevant in relation to the information needed, which implies that the accuracy of information is high (Malhotra, 2010). The books also seemed dependable due to perceived trustworthiness of the content (Malhotra, 2010). Lastly, some Internet sources have been used as sources for secondary data. For example, pdf-documents available to download from an online source have been considered for

information gathering. The information collected from online sources is perceived to be dependable, since this study's authors regarded the legitimacy of the company or organisation responsible for the webpage (Malhotra, 2010). Data accessible from Internet has only been used if the sender was perceived to be trustworthy and if the data implied accurate information that was crucial to include in the research (Malhotra, 2010).

4. Empirical Data and Analysis

This chapter is divided into four parts where perceptions towards, and usage of, social media is presented and analysed according to generational belonging. In each section, protruding characteristics that are common for one generation is presented and analysed.

4.1 Generation Baby Boomer

4.1.1 Perceptions Towards Social Media and its Usage

Interviews with Baby Boomers indicated that this generation mainly seem to perceive social media as a tool to communicate with others. It was indicated that Baby Boomers did not seem to have accounts on social media platforms other than Facebook, since they were unable to relate to other platforms. A common motive for why Facebook was used, appeared to be personal; a Facebook account was created in order to maintain personal relationships with friends, which might be illustrated in the following quotes:

“I use it [Facebook] to keep in touch with friends and acquaintances, about what is happening in each others’ lives but also to discuss and comment events.”

Male Baby Boomer

“I’m on Facebook more because it was a fun way to keep in touch with people you might not meet so often.”

Male Baby Boomer

According to the Theory of Reasoned Action, the subjective norm might influence the intentions for an individual to behave in a certain way (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). This means that the social context that the individual takes part of can be influential for one individuals’ perception of how one should behave (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). This further implies that Baby Boomers might use Facebook for personal communication since they perceive that persons in their personal surrounding consider this to be an accepted behaviour. Friends and family are actively communicating on Facebook and therefore Baby Boomers adept their behaviour to what is perceived to be the social norm. From the generational literature, Baby Boomers are described to appreciate connectedness with friends and they also want to feel needed (Coleman, Hladikova & Savelyeva, 2006). This aspect might also be considered when understanding Baby Boomers intentions to use Facebook.

Even the interviewees that did not have an account on any social media platform indicated that if they would, they would use Facebook for personal communicational reasons as well. As one non-user expressed it:

“I’m not on Facebook myself so I can’t say much about it, well it is a way to communicate with a lot of people and to stay connected.”

Female Baby Boomer

Interestingly, the Baby Boomers that did not use social media at all described that they either did not have an interest in having an account or that it would be too time-consuming to have a social media account. One interviewee even implied that social media usage was perceived as a different way of living. The following description was given to why that interviewee did not have a Facebook account:

Really, I think more about time, actually, because I’m the kind that think it [social media usage] also has to do with the way we live, when I get home at night I do not sit with my phone or computer (...) I think if you should be there [on social media platforms] you should of course be a bit active and all that, and I don’t feel that I have time, really. I do not prioritize to put the time on that.”

Female Baby Boomer

Another non-user said:

“It feels like I need to join Facebook to know what it is, to feel or to keep up, but I feel no need for it but maybe I’ll do when I join.”

Female Baby Boomer

Examining these perceptions from the Theory of Reasoned Action, the reason for Baby Boomers not to use social media might depend on the attitude that the interviewees have towards social media usage (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). As implied above, some Baby Boomers might have an attitude that social media will affect their lifestyle. In order to manage a social media account, it is perceived that the daily routine needs to be changed, which does not seem preferable to all Baby Boomers. This in turn will, according to the Theory of Reasoned Action, make the intentions to use social media vague, which in turn prevent behaviour from occurring (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). The persons that do not seem to be influenced by the subjective norm might further be

understood by considering the literature about Baby Boomers. Here, Baby Boomers are described to be a generation that consists of independent individuals (Parment, 2008). This might in turn also imply that Baby Boomers do not feel a need to create a social identity in addition to their personal identity (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003).

4.1.2. Online Interaction with Companies

No interviewee from the Baby Boomer generation expressed that they had been in contact with a company through Facebook, Twitter or YouTube. Neither was it indicated that the interviewees had visited a company page at any of the social media platforms. Rather the corporate webpage seemed to be enough for them. According to the Theory of Commitment-Trust, consumers' commitment and trust for a company online will have a beneficial impact for interaction with companies (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). In the re-examination of the Commitment-Trust Theory it was also established that shared values are an important factor for establishing trust between two parties in a relationship (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). During the interviews, Baby Boomers did not indicate that lack of trust or commitment was the reason for why they had not been interacting with companies in social media. Contrary, there were interviewees that expressed that they would be interested in visiting a company page on, for example, Facebook if they had a personal interest in the company. One interviewee said:

“I must have an interest, or I would never choose to spend time on it [a company's social media page]. I expect that I will develop or gain insight into things by following them.”

Male Baby Boomer

This implies that Baby Boomers seem open towards communicating and interacting with companies they share values with, in social media. That they not seem to do it today might then not depend on lack of trust, but it could rather be understood from a Theory Reasoned Action perspective (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). If Baby Boomers attitudes towards interacting with companies in social media settings are not perceived to be superior to offline interaction, their intentions to interact in social media will be limited. According to the Theory Reasoned Action this, in turn, would most likely prevent them from interacting with companies through social media (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Baby Boomers indication about not seeing the benefits with communicating with companies in social media might be understood by studying literature about

this generation. According to that, Baby Boomers are still perceived as consumers that want to talk to employees in-store and they also prefer to see and feel the products (Parment, 2008).

Other parts of the interviews distinguished how Baby Boomers do not seem to interact and engage much in social media settings. Almost all interviewees' indicated that they have not been transported from a company website to for example, the company's Facebook page. One interviewee had never thought about that possibility and stated:

“I've never gone from their [the company's] webpage to their Facebook page, that's nothing I've thought about doing.”

Male Baby Boomer

In addition, no interviewee could recall a situation where they discovered a new company or product, due to online activities. These indications suggest that Baby Boomers are not active online users, which can be compared to the Transport Model suggested by Dahlén (2002). The Transport Model requires interaction and activity from users, which will lead to transportation between different company's sites (Dahlén, 2002). This implies that Baby Boomers do not seem to be active users that will surf the web, find new companies and transport themselves between different sites and social media platforms.

4.1.3 Perceptions Towards User Generated Content

No interviewee from the Baby Boomer generation indicated that appreciation or dissatisfaction for a certain company had been expressed in social media through for example sharing, 'linking' or commenting on Facebook, Twitter or YouTube. This implies that Baby Boomers do not seem to create User Generated Content on social media platforms, which in turn might characterize them as being passive social media users (Jensen, 2008). In order to understand the underlying reasons to why Baby Boomers might be characterised as rather passive social media users, that do not share content with others, their attitudes towards expressing experiences at social media platforms are emphasised. Some Baby Boomers appeared to believe that experiences are shared in social media in order to help others in their decision-making process. One interviewee described it in the following way:

“One want to show friends (...) to mobilize opinion against, or for, that company and their product or services and I think that it is good that this is possible to do.”

Male Baby Boomer

In addition to the interviewees that were able to reflect about the reasons for why content is shared, some interviewees did not know why to share or express experiences at social media platforms:

“Well... no, I don’t know. It might be as you want to show your friends.”

Male Baby Boomer

The lack of knowledge for sharing content might indicate why Baby Boomers do not seem to produce User Generated Content. Limited creation of User Generated Content might further be understood by considering opinions about peer recommendations that became apparent during the interviews. Here, Baby Boomers seemed to indicate that comments from other consumers solely had limited influence for their decision-making process. When asking if other consumers’ comments influenced them one interviewee answered like this:

“No, no, it don’t affect me, at leased not what I’m aware of. It’s my own interest and need [that’s in control].”

Male Baby Boomer

Another interviewee answered in the following way to the same question:

“I think I rather go, mostly, on the companies’ information.”

Female Baby Boomer

The attitude that Baby Boomers seem to have about peer recommendation will, according to the Theory of Reasoned Action, not result in strong intentions for sharing experiences with peers (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Further, that Baby Boomers are perceived to be independent individuals, that want to feel and look at a product themselves before purchasing it, might also explain why this generation is not creating User Generated Content substantially (Parment, 2008).

4.1.4 Perceptions about Information in Social Media

Interviewees belonging to the Baby Boomer generation indicated that information stated by companies in social media overall seemed to be trusted. One interviewee described it in the following way:

“Yes, [I trust it] as much as I trust everything else they [the company] write. There is no difference between social media or other channels.”

Male Baby Boomer

In addition it was also indicated that Baby Boomers seemed to believe that as much information could be found in an online setting, as in an offline setting. The way that most answers were expressed, however indicated that Baby Boomers believed that equal information is to be found online, but they do not search and use online information to the same extent as the answers might indicate. Continuing, the interviewees did not seem to be sceptic towards leaving private information to companies. However, the interviews implied that Baby Boomers seemed to feel secure about leaving private information, such as bank account number or telephone number, directly to companies, probably when purchasing something such as travels from a company’s website. On social media platforms though, it was indicated that the Baby Boomers were more precautionous, but they did not seem to feel uncomfortable about leaving personal information such as their interests and what they do. As one interviewee described it:

“I’m probably restrictive, well, I wouldn’t speak widely or brag about myself on Facebook for example (...) I think it’s another thing to provide information to a company.”

Female Baby Boomer

Therefore, as Baby Boomers seemed to feel secure about leaving private information directly to companies and as they indicated to trust information communicated by companies, is according to the Commitment-Trust Theory a great prerequisite for creating a trust-based relationship (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). Why Baby Boomers seem to have a rather liberal attitude towards different types of information online might be understood by considering generational literature about this generation. Here, Baby Boomers are described as being individuals that want to stay young and thereby they are open toward trying new things, such as new technologies (Coleman, Hladikova & Savelyeva, 2006). Even though, Baby Boomer’s attitudes seemed to be rather open-minded towards information found on social media platforms, it seems as if they are not yet using or leaving out information themselves. This might be understood according to the Theory of Reasoned Action where attitudes that are not yet substantially articulated, will lead to lacking incentives for behaving in a certain way (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980).

4.1.5 Summary: Baby Boomers

Overall, the interviews indicated that Baby Boomers are not active social media users in the sense that the generation: do not appear to use social media accounts substantially, do not seem to create User Generated Content, which indicate their activity level, and do not seem to use links and transport themselves from companies corporate websites to their social media pages. They also appear to be individualistic considering that they do not seem to be affected, neither by the subjective norm, that one should have a Facebook account since the friends have it, nor by peers' comments at social media platforms. Baby Boomers that use social media seem to have accounts on Facebook, primarily to keep contact with family and friends. They also seem interested in interacting in social media with companies that they share values with. In addition, the liberal attitude towards leaving information to companies and the perception of how online information correspond to offline information, indicate that Baby Boomers attitudes towards social media might lead to enhanced intentions for behaving online. According to the Theory of Reasoned Action, behaviour is likely to occur the stronger the perception is (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980).

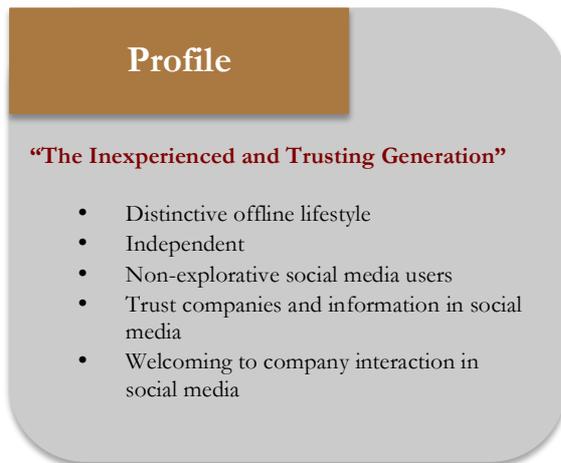


Figure 7- Profile Baby Boomer

4.2 Generation X

4.2.1 Perceptions Towards and Usage of Social Media

Interviews with individuals belonging to Generation X indicated that social media is used rather substantially. This generation seemed to use both Facebook and Twitter regularly, which is a characteristic feature for Generation X. Facebook was described as being a platform used for keeping updated about, and keeping in touch with, friends and family. Twitter on the other hand, was perceived as a platform where other persons or companies that the individual did not know personally, were followed. Even though both Facebook and Twitter was used, a common opinion seemed to be that the primarily purpose for using social media was to keep in contact

with friends. One interviewee described the usage of keeping contact with friends through Facebook in the following way:

“It is easy to get in touch with those you do not meet every day, or talk to every day. It's an easy way to keep in touch.”

Female Generation X

The reason for why Generation X indicated daily usage of social media, and a rather articulated usage of Facebook to keep in contact with acquaintances might depend on diverse underlying motives. Firstly, the generation is described to have experienced technical skills as they grew up with computers (Leiter, Jackson & Shaughnessy, 2009). This might indicate why social media seem to be incorporated into their daily lives overall. Secondly, Generation Z's behaviour might depend on a subjective norm, which means that it is perceived in a social context that one should keep in contact with each other on Facebook. According to the Theory of Reasoned Action, Generation X's usage of Facebook would then depend on the perception that certain behaviour is the right behaviour to perform in a certain situation, and thereby an individual is behaving accordingly to that perception (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Thirdly, Generation X's Facebook behaviour might depend on a genuine interest in keeping in contact with acquaintances. This implies that their attitudes towards using Facebook for keeping in contact are articulately influencing their intentions for behaving in a certain way (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). The subjective norm is likely to have influenced an initial step towards creating a Facebook account. The individual attitudes for using Facebook might however be the most influential source for behaviour, since the interviewees indicated a strong personal interest for using Facebook to nurture personal relationships.

4.2.2 Perceptions of Trust in Social Media

Interviewees belonging to Generation X indicated that diverse sources were trusted in social media. Firstly, it was indicated that individuals in Generation X seemed to trust information communicated by companies in social media. Communicated information is, according to the interviewees, perceived to be more trustworthy if the sender is a well-known company or if profile presentation seems to be of high standard.

Another characteristic, which an interviewee used as a sign of trustworthiness, was the voice behind communicated messages:

“It [the trust] depends, it depends very much on what kind of company it is. If there is a voice behind, which you can see quite clearly, if there is an agency that writes something it will come through, but if it is an individual who manages a company’s Twitter account so you can see that, and then you’ll probably trust that voice rather than anything a company says.”

Male Generation X

Why Generation X seemed to trust company’s information might be understood by considering how Generation X has been characterised in previous literature. Here, the generation is described as being overall sceptical towards marketing activities (Parment, 2008). If this characteristic were to be true for the interviewees in this study, it might be implied that Generation X might not consider communicated information in social media to be marketing activities. If information is not considered as a marketing activity might in turn have positive impact on consumers’ ability to trust company incentives. In the re-examination of the Commitment-Trust Theory, it is suggested that helpful and well timed communication will have a positive impact on how trustworthy a consumer perceives a company to be (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). The prerequisites that seem to enhance Generation X’s incentives to trust companies (well-known company, high standard profile and personal rather than corporate voice) might imply that there are additional dimensions of how companies could communicate in a manner that will have a positive influence on trust.

Secondly, Generation X also seem to trust, and relate to, information that friends and other consumers have shared online. One interviewee expressed it like this:

“One can surely imagine that you should be able to trust what is written, I probably would. (...) I read it [other consumers’ comments] quite a lot.”

Female Generation X

That other consumers’ comments and reviews seemed to influence Generation X when making decisions, appeared to be a shared opinion among the interviewees. This characteristic implies that Generation X is consuming other users’ content. In addition to solely consuming content, the interviewees indicated that they had been producing their own User Generated Content. By

sharing, 'linking' or commenting, Generation X implied that they had shown satisfaction or dissatisfaction about a product or service in social media. Having indicated to both use and produce User Generated Content, it is implied that Generation X are active social media users (Jensen, 2008). Further, the active social media behaviour is likely to have a positive influence on the generations' ability to spread eWOM. eWOM implies expression of previous experiences and opinions about, for example, companies and products (Henning-Thurau et al., 2004). From the interviews it was distinguished that Generation X, owing to eWOM and User Generated Content, had been transported to new websites that previously had been unknown. This is a further indication of Generation X as being active social media users since they seem to explore, search and find new experiences due to peer recommendations. One interviewee described it in the following way:

“If I have seen many positive reviews about a product or a company, it might make me interested, therefore I make a follow up which maybe lead to a purchase later on.”

Male Generation X

In order to understand why Generation X seems to rely on peers' experiences and why they seems to produce their own content might have to do with eWOM and User Generated Content being an asynchronous processes. This means that the process of production and usage can be set to different time settings (Steffes & Burgec, 2009; Hansen, Shneiderman & Smith, 2011). Thereby, it is possible for individuals to search for information, and produce information, whenever they have time. Since Generation X is in the age where work and family is likely to take much time, the fact that they can consume information whenever they want might benefit their time-schedule. The literature is further suggesting that it is important for Generation X to divide time between family, work and friends (Keene & Handrich, 2011; Leiter, Jackson & Shaughnessy, 2009; Williams & Page, 2011).

In addition to this reason, Generation X might relate to peers since they are described as being sceptical towards marketing and commercials (Parment, 2008). If this is true for the interviewees in this study, it might be implied that Generation X trusts peers recommendations more than companies marketing activities. Further, it was indicated that individuals belonging to Generation X seemed to use and rely on online information when making decisions. This might explain why this generation seems to spend time online to read other persons comments. That Generation X seems to appreciate content from others, might explain why they seem to create it themselves. According to the Theory of Reasoned Action intentions for behaviour might origin in an attitude

that certain behaviour is favourable (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Since Generation X seems to value content produced by peers, their attitude toward User Generated Content might be favourable, which in turn might imply incentives for them to produce content themselves.

4.2.3 Personal Interests in Social Media

A characteristic feature indicated from interviews with Generation X was their interest of ‘following’ or ‘liking’ companies on social media platforms. Interviewees indicated that they had done this on either Facebook or Twitter. Reasons for following companies seemed to depend upon consumers’ personal interests, and the simplicity of receiving updated information. When talking about why companies are followed in social media, one interviewee described it in the following way:

“I ‘follow’ some companies that develop apps that I have on my iPad or iPhone, to get like “Now we have done this..”, and I follow other apps on Twitter to know when new updates are released.”

Male Generation X

In addition to information access, it is interesting to distinguish what seemed to influence Generation X to ‘follow’ or ‘like’ companies in social media. Interviewees indicated rather articulately that one only ‘follow’ a company if there is a strong personal interest for that certain company. Therefore, when a personal interest is lacking most interviewees would not ‘like’ or ‘follow’ a company page. One interviewee described it in the following way:

“It has to be an exceptionally great offer in order for one to like something because of the offer’s sake.”

Female Generation X

Thus, as personal interest seems to be important for Generation X in order to ‘like’ or ‘follow’ companies in social media, might imply that the consumer and company *share values*. According to the Theory of Commitment-Trust, shared values enhance the possibility for a consumer to bond with the company as well as it has a positive impact on commitment (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). This theoretical aspect can therefore be used to understand why consumers in Generation X choose to commit, ‘like’ or ‘follow’, to companies they share values with. After performing this activity the consumers will receive continuous information updates, which might enhance the chance to bond with the company and its activities.

There might be other motives that explain why Generation X 'like' or 'follow' companies in social media. In the framework of Consumer-Company Identification, consumers are described to identify with organisations or social categories to make sense of selves (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). By 'liking' or 'following' companies, a personal identity might be more articulated to the consumer itself since it feel belongingness to different social contexts. When a consumer starts to follow a company that she has a personal interest for, it might thus be implied that the consumer shares identity characteristics with the company. According to the Consumer-Company Identification Framework a consumer finds a company attractive if it is perceived that they have similar identities, and if the consumer knows and trusts the company (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). It is thus implied that the Generation X consumers finds the 'liked' or 'followed' company attractive. The more attractive a company is perceived, the closer the consumer gets to it (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). As information access is facilitated through a 'like' or 'follow', the consumer might get more embedded in the organisation of interest due to regularly updated information. If a consumer is embedded in an organisation it will most likely identify with it (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Consequently, it might be that some companies that Generation X has 'liked' or 'followed' in social media, are identified with. Even though identification might not be established every time, individuals from Generation X seemed to perceive a company to be attractive, if they 'like' or 'follow' it. This might imply prospects for future identification once the individual have become further embedded in the organisation (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003).

4.2.4 Summary: Generation X

Overall, the interviews indicated that Generation X appears to be a generation that appreciate the functionalities of social media, and have an active online lifestyle. The interviewees also indicated that Generation X seem to trust the information online, both from other consumers and companies. Generation X do not seem to only take advantage of other consumers' comments, they are also creating User Generated Content themselves. This implies that Generation X is both active and passive social media users. Finally, Generation X seems to value personal contact with friends, and therefore, social media platforms might be perceived as a necessity to be able to communicate on a daily basis. Due to shared values, and maybe even social identification, Generation X's somewhat active social media behaviour might imply positive prospects for them to commit to companies (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007).



Figure 8 - Profile Generation X

4.3 Generation Y

4.3.1 Perceptions and Usage of Social Media

Interviews with individuals belonging to Generation Y indicated that social media seem to be perceived as a tool to keep in touch with friends, and as a tool to receive and distribute information with. The interviewees seemed to use Facebook extensively while Twitter and YouTube accounts appeared to be more rare. The reasons not to use Twitter seemed to be due to the lack of interest as well as lack of knowledge for the purpose of using it. Moreover, YouTube seemed to be a platform only used for amusement. One interviewee described Facebook usage in the following way:

“One can keep in touch with people, even those you met on travels, and even like classmates, and job comrades, everyone is there, it is a very easy way to keep in touch (...)”

Female Generation Y

Characteristic for this generation was the reasoning around Facebook as a place where “everybody is present”. It was suggested that if one would not be active on Facebook, information such as updates from friends and invitations to events could be missed. This implies that interviewees from Generation Y substantially seem to incorporate Facebook into their lives. Therefore, a part of the social life might be depending on information that is distributed through Facebook. The reason that individuals in Generation Y seemed to use Facebook, because everybody in their acquaintance did, might be understood considering the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). The theory implies that if individuals perceives that persons in

its surrounding consider a certain behaviour to be correct, than these perceptions can influence the individuals to act in a certain way (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). This means that if a person from Generation Y perceives that her acquaintances believe that one should have a Facebook account and that substantial parts of the social life should be distributed through Facebook, the intention to create a Facebook account will be great. In addition to reflecting around the importance of having an account, Generation Y was also contemplating persons' intentions of using Facebook. Several interviewees perceived Facebook as a place where individuals are doing and expressing certain things in order to receive attention and become acknowledged. One interviewee described the usage of Facebook in the following way:

“Quite a bit it has become, what do you call it, that you should highlight yourself and only write statuses of things you are good at and what you do, and all that. It can be a vicious, not circle, but it highlights the people like ‘superhumans’ that does not exist, and personally I can sometimes feel that it becomes too much, like, that you get an inferiority complex if adding up other peoples lives and think “what about my life I don’t do anything”.”

Female Generation Y

To reflect about Facebook as a tool used for gaining acceptance from others and to maintain an image, was a distinguishing feature for this generation. Even though the interviewees themselves did not express that they used Facebook for this purpose, it might be that interviewees were not comfortable with sharing this type of information or that they did not perceive themselves to use Facebook for this purpose. Moreover, that the interviewees from this generation reflected about, what might be perceived as negative aspects of Facebook usage, might at least mean that their Facebook usage is substantial enough to consider these aspects. Why Facebook is used for self-expressional purposes might be understood by considering literature about Generation Y's characteristics. Here, Generation Y is portrayed as being confident, individualistic and driven by self-interest (Pihl, 2011). Therefore, individuals from this generation might not feel intimidated by expressing and defining themselves in social media.

4.3.2 Interaction with Companies

The interviews with persons belonging to Generation Y further indicated that they had been 'liking', commenting, recommending, 'sharing' or 'linking' to other pages in social media. One interviewee said:

“Yes I have done it some times, like free-product campaigns or if it is a great deal. It's like “friends check this out” (...) it's to be nice.”

Female Generation Y

This implies that a general individual in Generation Y might be perceived as an active social media user. Being an active user means that an individual is producing User Generated Content rather than solely consuming it (Jensen, 2008; OECD, 2007). Generation Y implied that companies were 'liked' on Facebook in order to receive informational updates, to take part of competitions, to register for free-products and for supporting companies. The following quote describes why an interviewee from Generation Y has 'liked' companies on Facebook:

“There have been campaigns, like the type as this; 'like us to get a lip gloss' (...) but then I also 'like' my job, my employer, I do not do it to get something, but more because I stand for them so I think it's good (...)”

Female Generation Y

Generation Y seem to use social media for additional reasons than receiving information, which is perceived to be characteristic for this generation. The interviewees indicated that free-products and offerings were appreciated which in turn might imply that interactive activities in social media are valued. Literature about Generation Y describes that this generation has been brought up with, and have an ability to adapt to, technology (Pihl, 2011). This aspect might explain why interactive activities in social media seem appreciated. Since Generation Y might be perceived as extensive social media users that are used to technology, they might want to explore diverse features available at social media platforms. Moreover, Generation Y are recognised to be consumers that need entertainment in addition to information in order to stay interested (Wolberg and Pokrywczynski, 2001). This might also explain why interactive and engaging activities are appreciated by this generation.

Even though Generation Y seem to be active users that create User Generated Content and interacts with companies in social media, the interviewees also indicated that this was only done if a personal interest for the company was present. Interviewees from Generation Y indicated that they had not been visiting a company's social media page solely because it had been advertised. Rather, it was implied that Generation Y is actively visiting the social media pages of companies that they have a personal interest in. One interviewee described it in the following way:

“In order to visit and follow, I have to have an interest. I have never done it when I have not been interested myself”

Male Generation Y

According to the re-examination of the Commitment-Trust Theory, shared values will have a positive impact on one parts commitment to the other part in the relationship. This aspect might be used to understand why Generation Y seems to commit and engage to companies that they share values with. That the consumer needs a personal interest for a company, in order to interact with it in social media, might be perceived as an obvious criterion. It might also be that interaction with companies, especially when it comes to free-products etc., is based on other attitudes solely than shared values. For example, companies might be 'liked' out of greed or curiosity. This behaviour might be understood by considering general characteristics for Generation Y. In the literature, self-interest and self-realization is described to be the main driver for why Generation Y is acting in a certain way (Pihl, 2011). This behavior is said to origin in them being encouraged to make own decisions at a young age (Pihl, 2011).

4.3.3 Attitudes and Expectations on Company's Activities

Interviewees belonging to Generation Y seemed to have a rather critical and opinionated attitude towards companies' intentions with performing marketing related activities in social media. These attitudes were indicated when talking about information communicated by companies in social media. The interviewees seemed to trust information from companies, but it was also indicated that even though information was trusted, companies' incentives for communicating with consumers was see-through. For example, it was distinguished that interviewees from Generation Y seemed to have opinionated attitudes for companies' intentions with gaining 'likes' or 'follows' on Facebook and Twitter. The opinions was indicated when the interviewees expressed, what seemed to be articulated and value-laden descriptions about companies intentions with social

media activities. One interviewee described companies' intentions with why persons should 'like' or 'follow' them in social media like this:

“If one 'like' something on Facebook or so, then it is displayed on ones page and thereby one is spreading it further to the rest. It is me that will help them [the company] promoting something because I might like that company, and then it becomes free advertising for them.”

Female Generation Y

Another interviewee described the following when talking about why companies want consumers to 'like' or 'follow' them on social media platforms:

“We will spread it [the message] to our friends, and when we think something is good our friends think so too, or our friends will also believe more in the company.”

Male Generation Y

Generation Y's articulated opinions regarding companies' interaction with consumers in social media, can be seen as an attempt to show that they are sceptical toward creating relationships. Eventual scepticism might be understood by considering existing literature about Generation Y where continuous exposure of advertising during their lifetime is described to have affected their knowledge about companies' intentions with advertising (Beard, 2003).

Further, the opinionated perceptions might also be interpreted as Generation Y is being high-expecting consumers. According to the literature, Generation Y is accustomed to find information though Internet and they are also used to being encountered with all sorts of advertising (Beard, 2003; Pihl, 2011). Sometimes consumers from Generation Y are described as possessing even more information than the seller (Pihl, 2011). This might imply that Generation Y consists of well-prepared consumers, which in turn will make them expect much from another party if they should be able to trust it. For example, the interviewees from Generation Y implied that they expected companies, which have a corporate page in social media, to answer consumers' questions within one day. One interviewee expressed that attitude in the following way:

“Yes if they invite to questions of course I expect they will respond (...) within a day, or no, less than one day. If they have a support line they should have it going.”

Male Generation Y

According to the Theory of Commitment-Trust, commitment involves that the parties perceive the other part to be important that maximum effort is pushed into the relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Further, communication is pointed out as an important building block for establishing trust (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). If the company manage to deliver information that is helpful and trusted by the consumer, a trust-based relationship is likely to evolve (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). As information is easy to find online, the individuals in Generation Y might think that they can find the information themselves instead, if they do not get an answer quickly enough. Consequently, it might be implied that if individuals from Generation Y does not perceive a company to commit to consumers in social media, they will not commit whole-hearted to the company either. The lack of commitment will, according to the Theory of Commitment-Trust, also have an impact on a consumers' long-term trust for a company (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007).

4.3.4 Summary: Generation Y

Overall, the interviews indicated that Generation Y seems to be active social media users in the sense that the generation: seem to use social media (primarily Facebook) extensively, appear to be active User Generated Content users when it comes to 'liking', 'sharing' and commenting and they also seems to appreciate the interactive aspects of social media. Generation Y seems to use social media for personal interests but an interest for interacting with companies was also indicated. This generation appear to be driven by a subjective norm, that one should have a Facebook account, and a large part of their social life seemed to depend on social media interactions. In addition to following the subjective norm, and the intention to behave like acquaintances do, Generation Y's actions seem to be driven by self-interest. The self-fulfilling characteristic might result in Generation Y being perceived as attention seekers that wants to maintain an image. When it comes to business interactions, their self-interest might seem to result in them having high expectations on companies activities. This might imply that it is challenging to gain trust from Generation Y. Further, persons from Generation Y do not seem interested in interacting with a company if personal interest for the company is lacking.



Figure 9 - Profile Generation Y

4.4 Generation Z

4.4.1 Social Media Lifestyle

Interviews with individuals from Generation Z indicated that this generation seemed to think of social media as a global communication tool. Social media appeared to be used to keep in touch with friends over the world and it was also distinguished that Generation Z spent much time on social media everyday. According to the interviewees, Facebook seemed to be the platform where all the interviewees had an account. The reason for having a Facebook account seemed common among the interviewees; all friends are there and therefore it is a must to be active there. When trying to describe Facebook, one interviewee expressed the following:

“Something that most individuals have. It is beneficial for keeping contact with persons from all over the world.”

Female Generation Z

When the same person was asked to describe why she had a Facebook account, this was the answer:

“Because most friends have it, so I went with the flow and created an account when everybody else did.”

Female Generation Z

It might be possible to analyse why individuals in Generation Z are using Facebook due to their friends' usage, from the perspective of the Consumer-Company Identification Framework. According to the framework, a persons' social identity is established when the consumer identify with a context around them. This context might, according to Bhattacharya and Sen (2003), be a social category such as a sports team or an organisation. Becoming active on Facebook because ones friends are might therefore be understood by supposing that individuals in Generation Z want to become part of a social category.

Interviewees from Generation Z also indicated a tendency of 'liking' and 'following' companies in social media. This seemed to be made particularly on Facebook. These incentives can be compared to the Consumer-Company Identification perspective. When a consumer finds a company attractive and perceives a company to have similar identities, it is likely that the consumer will identify with it (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). A consumer identifies with a company if its perceptions about it become self-defining (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Thereby it might be indicated that Generation Z not only seems to identify themselves by *having* a Facebook account, further they seem to express a social identity *within* Facebook by 'liking' companies in social media that they want to be related to.

These findings might thus imply that persons belonging to Generation Z, to a great extent use social media to make sense of their identity, but it might also be analysed from another perspective. Interviewees from Generation Z pointed out the image aspect of being active on Facebook, which was characteristic for this generation. One interviewee described the image aspect in the following way:

“If I post a picture I'd like people to show what they think, not just scroll past it. (...) friends should see what I like.”

Male Generation Z

The expressional attitude of using social media, that Generation Z seem to indicate, might be understood by considering how this generation is described in the literature. Here, Generation Z is described to value acceptance from peers and to feel belonging to a group (Williams & Page, 2011). Thereby, a social media identity might, for Generation Z, imply an attempt to genuinely make sense of self or as a way to maintain a social identity that might not authentically mirror ones true identification, but rather a desired one.

4.4.2 Social Media Activity

The interviews indicated that interviewees, belonging to Generation Z, seemed to be active users on social media platforms. Firstly, the interviewees indicated that usage of social media platforms took much time of the day. Interviewees shared the following comments when describing their social media usage:

“It’s at least once a day (...) if I’m bored, sitting at school and during breaks.”

Male Generation Z

“Facebook is sufficient because I have enough friends there, and it will be more pressure on me to have Twitter too because that would require even more time by me and Facebook is already taking enough time of my weekday.”

Female Generation Z

Secondly, Generation Z seem to be active creators of User Generated Content, as features such as ‘sharing’, ‘linking’, writing statuses (especially on Facebook) seemed to be a common characteristics for the interviewees. It was further indicated that User Generated Content seemed to be produced in order to inform others. One interviewee described it in the following way:

“I have shared links, or written something, or shown friends and things like that, well, I share pictures, especially if you know anyone within the company, that’s the whole thing of using social media, like the whole network (...) to spread it further.”

Female Generation Z

In order to understand why Generation Z seems to produce User Generated Content, existing literature about generational characteristics might be considered. Here, Generation Z is described of using social media in order to communicate socially, and that friends are influencing each other’s decisions (Grain Research, 2011). It seemed to be a common characteristic that comments and reviews from other consumers, both known and unknown, were influential when Generation Z is making decisions. This indicates passive user behaviours, as it is indicated that Generation Z consumes User Generated Content (Jensen, 2008).

Thirdly, individuals in Generation Z did not appear foreign to be linked between websites. The interviews indicated that interviewees seemed to have been linked between a companies’ corporate websites and their Facebook-page, which is perceived to be characteristic for this

generation. Transport between webpages appeared to occur when a company seemed interesting, or if attractive offerings was presented. One interviewee said the following about getting transported between webpages:

“I’ve done it a few times, if I like their thing, like radio stations that I visit frequently.”

Male Generation Z

This behaviour implies that Generation Z might be applicable to the Transport Model, which requires active users to click on links that take them to another site where the company wants them to go (Dahlén, 2002). Therefore, it appears that Generation Z might be susceptible to a particular campaign if they found it interesting or entertaining. This might be perceived as contradicting the literature, that describes Generation Z to be generally sceptical towards commercials and marketing (Williams, 2010; Grail Research, 2011).

An aspect that might be perceived to contradict the perception of Generation Z as being active social media users, are their sceptical attitude towards publishing private information about themselves in social media. The interviewees indicated that they would prefer to leave information directly to a company of interest, in order for not appear on a list for surveys or telemarketing. Interestingly, this perception about leaving private information might not be expected from Generation Z since they were brought up in an era of technology. Their behaviour might be understood by considering that this generation is suggested to grow up faster than other generations (Williams & Page, 2011; Levickaite, 2010). The restrictive attitude of publishing private information might also be interpreted as lack of trust in technological systems rather than lack of trust in companies (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). Since individuals from Generation Z mostly seemed open towards sharing private information with a company directly, it might be implied that the consumers do not trust the regulations for privacy (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). Further, an interviewee in this generation mentioned that Facebook felt more secure than Twitter, as she had heard about Twitter-accounts that had been hijacked. Which also implies the importance of security. If the website seems secure, the consumer are more willing to share private information (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). Because of these issues, individuals in Generation Z might have negative attitudes towards leaving private information on social media platforms. If an attitude is negative, their behaviour will be influenced and therefore they might not leave certain information (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980).

4.4.3 Critical Thinking

Interviews with individuals from Generation Z also indicated that this generation seem to have clear opinions about companies' incentives to use social media for marketing activities. Initially, interviewees expressed rather articulated opinions regarding companies' motives for wanting 'likes' or 'followers' in social media. One interviewee described her perception towards companies' intentions for wanting consumer interaction in the following way:

“Companies receive marketing which means that when someone ‘like’ something, its friends will see it and then they will go in and check it out. Thus, if one [a company] is present [in social media] you might gain 100 new persons that did not know what was and that will find out what that company is.”

Male Generation Z

Further, this generation also seemed to reflect around the lack of company commitment towards individual persons in social media. Generation Z seemed to believe that companies, through social media, rather communicate to the great mass than to certain individuals. Moreover, companies' social media activities seemed to be perceived as an attempt to create consumer-relationships on a superficial level. This attitude was implied by descriptions such as the following:

“(…) The one [consumer] who has liked something, let's say it's for example a museum, then one [companies] want that person to visit the museum and simultaneously when that particular person has been there and have told 200 persons, then one [companies] will ignore that person [in future activities].”

Male Generation Z

It might be possible to imply that consumers in Generation Z seem to be generally critical towards interacting with companies. This might be due to their perceptions about companies' intentions with social media activities and the perceived lack of interest for the individual person. The interviews revealed that this generation seemed to trust company's information in social media:

“As much as I trust advertising.”

- Male Generation Z

This might imply that Generation Z perceive companies' activities as a selling opportunity rather than a possibility to get to know their customers. According to the Theory of Commitment and Trust, both parties have to trust and commit to a relationship if it should be beneficial (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Commitment requires both parties to perceive the relationship to be of utmost importance and maximum efforts should be putted into the relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Since Generation Z appears to believe that companies are not interested in them personally, they might find it difficult to interact extensively with companies. Consumers' perceptions of Commitment and Trust will have an impact on how they behave online (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). This might explain why no interviewee from Generation Z seemed to have interacted with a company on a social media platform.

4.4.4 Summary: Generation Z

Overall the interviews indicated that Generation Z seem to use social media on an everyday basis. When being online, this generation seem to be carrying out extensive personal interaction. Interviews indicated that Generation Z might also be characterised by being explorative social media users as they have been: linked from one site to another and experiencing new companies and products due to social media usage. New experiences have most likely originated in decisions based on peer recommendations through eWOM. In addition to consuming other users content, Generation Z seem keen to influence others by sharing links, commenting and write statuses. The indication of extensive social media usage might also imply that Generation Z uses social media for social identifying purposes. Even though Generation Z to a great extent might be characterised as a multifaceted social media user, they also seem to be sceptical towards companies' intentions for performing social media activities. The sceptical attitude might have an impact on how Generation Z behaves in an online setting, for example to what extent they interact with companies at social media platforms.



The graphic is a rounded rectangular box with a light grey background and a brown header. The header contains the word "Profile" in white. Below the header, the text "The Self-Defining and Cautious Generation" is written in red. Underneath, there is a bulleted list of five characteristics: "Everyday, extensive private interaction", "Explorative users", "Peer-influenced", "Social-identification in social media", and "Careful about leaving information and interact with companies".

Profile

“The Self-Defining and Cautious Generation”

- Everyday, extensive private interaction
- Explorative users
- Peer-influenced
- Social-identification in social media
- Careful about leaving information and interact with companies

Figure 10- Profile Generation Z

5. Discussion and Implications

In the final chapter, generational characteristics distinguished in the analysis are discussed further. Similar and unique features, will be discussed from a relational point-of-view. The discussion ends up in a conclusion that answers the research question and purpose of this study. Theoretical contributions are further distinguished and limitations are revealed. Lastly, managerial implications including initial efforts for engaging diverse generations, originated in their unique characteristics, are presented.

5.1 Discussion of Analysis

5.1.1 Generational Similarities

A similar characteristic for the four generations was that the primary reason for using social media seemed to be to keep contact with friends and acquaintances. The main platform used for this purpose was Facebook and a common explanation was because ‘one should have Facebook’. This implies that all generations are somewhat affected by the subjective norm. However, Generation Y and Z seem to assign part of their social life into interaction on Facebook, which implies that most contact with friends is on a daily basis focused to social media. Considering Generation X, their motive for using Facebook might be due to their lack of time to meet friends in real life due to work and family duties. Therefore, they keep contact with friends more sporadically on Facebook. As far as Baby Boomers are concerned, this generation seem not to depend on the subjective norm to a greater extent, which might be understood by their independent behaviour and that they seem to use other communication channels. These findings suggest that Facebook is the most efficient platform for creating relationships. In the context of relationship building the generational diversity might imply that companies are more likely to encounter Generation Y and Z at Facebook since they spend much time there. It is also implied that these generations are most influenced by the subjective norm, which might make them more likely to do as others do on Facebook. If a campaign becomes popular on Facebook, these generations might ‘like’ it if everybody else does. Generation X and Y’s perception of Facebook as a platform to encounter companies further implies that these two generations might be most open towards company interaction in social media.

Similarities between generations were further distinguished when considering intentions for ‘liking’ and/or interacting with companies in social media. Interviewees from all four generations indicated that there has to be a personal interest for a company in order for one to ‘like’ or ‘follow’ it on Facebook or Twitter. Personal interest implies that the consumer might *share values* with the company (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). The analysis further distinguished that personal

interest for companies, might be understood from an identification perspective. Thereby, aspects of the Consumer-Company Identification Framework were applied in order to understand what might be the underlying motives for why the interviewees in general, 'liked' or 'followed' companies in social media (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). It might be hard for companies to strategically plan for the relational benefits that are achieved when a consumer *share values* or *identifies* with a company. Individuals might perceive and value company aspects individually and therefore they might not be understood by considering generational belonging, rather other factors are likely to influence such attitudes. However, it might be beneficial to be clear and articulate about company values in social media activities since that may enhance the chance for consumers to relate to, or identify with, company values that are concrete. Since 'liking' and 'following' companies are suggested as initial steps for a consumer to identify with a company, it might be beneficial to gain followers on social media platforms. Once a consumer follows a company, it can be advantageous that the company gathers knowledge by its customers, either by an individual or segment-level (that is not generational dependent). Customer knowledge is key for delivering an appreciated value proposition to the consumer, which in turn increases the chances for that consumer to remain (Blomqvist, Dahl & Haeger, 2004).

Further, generational similarities were indicated when considering User Generated Content and the incentives for creating it. Generation X and Generation Z in particular, seemed to produce and use content or comments from their peers. These two generations described that content was created in order to recommend or warn acquaintances from certain products or services. The reason for why these two generations seemed to be characterised by relating to peers might be understood by considering existing literature about Generation X and Z. According to Williams and Page (2011), Generation Z strives to get accepted by peers and belongingness to a group is needed in order to feel self-fulfilled. In addition, Generation X is characterized by valuing family and friends, they are also fond to take part of communities and support organizations (Keene & Handrich, 2011). Since these peer-relating generations seem to trust and relate to friends recommendations, it might be suggested that relationship building initially can be a challenge. Peer relating possibly implies that decisions are based on peers' influences, which in turn might indicate that these generations are not as observant to companies' encounters. Further, WOM is suggested to have stronger influence on behaviour than advertising, which might support the challenging aspects of building relations with these generations (Steffes & Burgec, 2009; Godes & Mayzlin, 2004). However, as these generations, X and Z, are not solely relating to peers' comments and content, but also producing their own content, these generations are likely to

share their own experiences. This might imply that Generation X and Z are likely to be messengers for products and services that are appreciated. Suggestively it might be beneficial for companies to follow what is being said about the company at social media platforms in order to understand what generates consumer value. Customer knowledge might enhance the prerequisites for offering value to consumers, since they can focus on what is appreciated and avoid what is not (Blomqvist, Dahl & Haeger, 2004). It is also possible for companies to protect their reputation through commenting on messages on social media platforms that seems wrong, or to show appreciation for beneficial comments. The information stream between customer and company is perceived as a fundamental activity for maintaining relationships between consumer and company (Blomqvist, Dahl & Haeger, 2004).

Generation Y and Z indicated a similarity due to their opinionated attitudes toward companies' intentions with conversing with consumers. Interviewees from these generations indicated a sceptical attitude towards committing to companies since they perceived companies motives, to make profit, to be seen through. These perceptions might origin in the generational attitudes that these generations are characterised by in the literature. Both Generation Y and Z are described to be sceptical toward mass media after having been encountered with advertising from a very young age (Morton, 2002; Williams, 2010). Technological familiarity might also have contributed with understanding for company benefits that can be drawn from social media. This attitude might imply an initial challenge for companies in the context of relationship building. It seems fundamental for companies to gain trust from the critical consumer in order for a relationship to arise. Trust, is suggestively gained by encounter Generation Y and Z with truthful and straightforward communication. In the literature, realness is suggested to be a core value for Generation Z and therefore, companies are advised to communicate that in their advertisements (Williams and Page, 2011). Once trust is gained, the critical generations are likely to commit to a company. This might for example imply that the consumer finds intentions for interacting with a company in social media (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). From interaction, valuable consumer knowledge might be discovered that can be used for improving the value proposition (Blomqvist, Dahl & Haeger, 2004). Continuous communication is a key aspect for maintaining relationships with consumers and thereby, it seems crucial to maintain trust from the critical generations if a relationship should be rewarding.

Finding similarities between generations are an interesting finding since it might imply that relational implications are similar regardless of generational belonging. Therefore, it might seem

efficient to treat generational similarities in the same manner. In the instances where attitudes that drive perceptions or usage are similar for multiple generations, knowledge for one generation might imply knowledge for all generations that share the same characteristics. This implies that relationship-building activities might have the same implications for all generations that share the same characteristics.

Generational similarity further implies that it might be difficult to specify generations as distinctive market segments. Rather, it might be beneficial to base segmentation on other consumer characteristics that are non-generational dependent. Intention and attitudes toward behaviours might just as well depend on personal characteristics that are not shared amongst generations. As this study did not explore consumer perceptions and behaviour that were not generational dependent, it can solely be speculated about what might function as a beneficial segment basis for understanding the similar characteristics that are discussed in this section. Consumers personal characteristics might for example, depend on *activities*, *interest* and *opinions* (Vyncke, 2002). Activities imply what consumers do such as: hobbies, work, sports etc., while interest rather indicates what the consumer finds stimulating such as: food, family or fashion (Vyncke, 2002). Moreover, opinions suggest a position towards concerns like social issues, business or culture (Vyncke, 2002). Further these personal similarities can also be due to what social class the individuals belongs to as it is grounded in an early stage in life through relatives transmitting things as cultural capital (Ahrne, Roman & Franzén, 2003). These transmissions might influence the actions an individual take (Ahrne, Roman & Franzén, 2003).

Suggestively, any of these personal aspects might function as a beneficial basis for finding an appropriate market segment that discover: consumer motives for liking certain companies in social media, which consumers that are distinctively critical towards company interaction with consumers and which consumers that are likely to produce and relate to User Generated Content. After finding a suitable segment, that are representative in all generations, distinctive relationship building activities that relate to the narrow attributes of the segment, can be decided upon. Moreover, it seems difficult to distinguish a specific segment for Facebook since it appears to be widely used by all types of individuals.

5.1.3 Unique Features

The analysis allowed discovery of selected characteristics that seemed to be common and protruding within one single generation. For example, Baby Boomers illustrated unique

characteristics in the sense that they were the generation that seemed to use social media least often. Their usage habits seemed to origin a rather unique attitude, indicating that social media usage would change their everyday life. This might somewhat be perceived as a resistance to change, where there is a resistance towards changing behaviour and explore what social media usage would imply. In general, Baby Boomers might be perceived as being in an in-between phase where social media behaviour is likely to expand, the stronger attitudes towards usage benefits become (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). This implies that companies, trying to create relationships with Baby Boomers, might solely find a limited part of their target group in social media. The prerequisites for Baby Boomers to trust companies in an online setting seem positive, which in the future might lead to a positive impact on Baby Boomers interaction with companies though social media (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007).

In this study Generation X was distinguished by being the most extensive users of Twitter out of all generations. Twitter seemed to be used in order to get information updates about parties that the consumers did not know themselves. Why Generation X use Twitter might be explained by the eased access to receive dense information when they want it. As Generation X are characterised by having to divide time between family, work and friends (Williams & Page, 2011). This implies that it might be beneficial for companies to be present on Twitter if they want to target individuals belonging to Generation X but also to make informative and frequent informational updates. If the information is perceived as helpful and well timed by consumers, they are likely to commit more to a company (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). Further, Twitter is perceived as a tool to solely communicate information, which might imply that a relationship is nurtured and developed at other social media platforms, such as Facebook, or eventually in offline settings as well.

Generation Y illustrated a rather unique characteristic due to their openness towards using social media for finding product trials and free offerings etc. In contrast to only 'liking' companies on Facebook to receive information, this generation seems to be welcoming towards more interactive and creative approaches. This perception most likely origin in Generation Y's experienced Internet usage and as they seek to be entertained in order to stay interested (Wolburg & Pokrywczynski, 2001). By understanding Generation Y's high-expecting characteristics on companies interaction abilities, relationships are likely to be found if the company manage to create innovative and interactive activities in social media.

Further, a unique characteristic for Generation Z was the indication that this generation seemed to be positive towards being transported between company's webpages and social media pages. Generation Z seem to be active users and are likely to transport themselves where companies want them to go, which might be beneficial in a relational context. This behaviour opens up possibilities for companies to facilitate consumers' usage, by providing links between pages that the consumer might find interesting. If a company manage to deliver information that is helpful and well timed, the consumer is more likely to commit and interact with that company (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). Long-term communication will also increase the chances for making the consumer trust the company (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). Thereby, companies should aim to encounter Generation Z with interconnected links between diverse social media pages (and the corporate webpage).

Interestingly, it seems as if these unique characteristics, might somewhat be understood by considering the generational characteristics that has been described in previous literature (Williams & Page, 2011; Pihl, 2011; Leiter, Jackson & Shaughnessy, 2009; Coleman, Hladikova & Savelyeva, 2006; Parment, 2008; Keene & Handrich, 2011; Wolburg and Pokrywczynski, 2001; Levickaitė, 2010; Wellner, 2000). In that case, it would be implied that attitude and behaviour that generations previously have been signified by in offline settings, might be transferable to social media settings as well. Considering these unique characteristics, it is implied that it might be possible to create segments based on generations. In that case each segment attributes would rely on the unique characteristics that were discovered in this findings. Since there were more similar characteristics between the generations, than there were diverse, segmentation on generational basis is however not a successful idea. The unique characteristics that have been found seem to offer limited possibilities to distinctively separate the segments from each other. However, these protruding characteristics should not be overlooked. Even though segmentation on generational basis seems to be inefficient in social media, emphasis should still be putted on these unique features. By acknowledging what has formed and contributed to a single generations perceptions towards, and usage of, social media, relationship building might be conducted beneficially. Relationship building is suggested to depend on customer knowledge (Blomqvist, Dahl and Haeger, 2004). By recognising what most likely will bring value to consumers, the prerequisites for creating a long-lasting relationship are suggested to be positive (Blomqvist, Dahl and Haeger, 2004). Therefore these initial findings, distinguishing characteristics that the diverse generations seem to be represented by, might imply a possible indication of what diverse generations value at social media platforms. By grasping this knowledge, an initial step toward engaging with

consumers in social media might be taken. The aim should be to create a two-way dialogue where companies listen and react to preferences and inputs from consumers (Keitzmann, et. al, 2011). In this way companies gain understanding for consumers, which in turn can enhance value propositions and thereby improve relationships (Rowley, 2004).

5.1.1 Conclusion

The purpose of the study has been to examine on what basis diverse generations perceptions toward, and usage-habits of, social media, can be understood. By exploring how three social media platforms are perceived and used by consumers, the aim has been to distinguish commonalities and patterns within distinctive generations. The study has found that perceptions toward, and usage-habits of, social media can be understood by considering diverse perspectives. Firstly, it was implied that individuals within each generation to a certain extent seem to share attitudes and intentions for behaving in social media. That implies that understanding for perceptions toward, and usage of, social media can be understood by considering *common social media characteristics* within a certain generation. Further, it seemed possible to apply generational characteristics found in existing literature to the context of social media behaviour, which is an interesting finding. This implies that different generations perceptions towards, and usage of, social media to a certain extent might be understood by selected *generational characteristics that are described previous existing literature*. Thirdly, since the study focused on finding commonalities within each generation independently, it was found that particular characteristics were similar between generations as well. Thereby, some perceptions toward and usage-habits of, social media might at first glance appear to depend on generational belonging when the generations are considered separately. While comparing them to each other, it might however be suggested that several perceptions and usage-habits seem to be common for several generations. This implies that other characteristics than generational belonging, such as *personal characteristics*, also should be taken into consideration in order to understand generations' perceptions and usage of social media.

Continuing, the study has also aimed to apply understanding for generations' perceptions toward, and usage of, social media in the context of relationship building. By recognising similarities and differences between diverse generations' social media characteristics, the aim has been to distinguish whether it seems beneficial to use generational segmentation as initial effort for creating consumer relationships. Findings in the study propose that enhanced consumer understanding positively affects the prerequisites for understanding how relationship building activities should be performed in social media overall. Facebook was found to be the platform

that was most frequently used by consumers, which implies that this platform is beneficial to use for creating and nurturing relationships with all four generations. Further, it was distinguished that similar perceptions towards, and usage of, social media between generations, had *parallel* implications for relational activities. This implies that similar efforts might be used for engaging consumers in social media, even though they belong to diverse generations. Since similar characteristics between generations were dominating the unique characteristics, it does not seem successful to specify distinctive segments based on generational belonging. The unique generational characteristics that were discovered do not seem to reveal enough consumer attributes to represent social media usage for a generation. Thereby it is proposed that it does not seem efficient to use generational segmentation in social media. The unique features that were discovered are however suggested to benefit initial engagement with the generations separately in social media.

5.1.1.1 Research Contribution

This study is perceived to contribute to several dimensions of existing theories or concepts. Firstly, the study has generated further knowledge to the generational literature when it comes to enhanced understanding of Baby Boomers, Generation X, Y and Z. The main focus has been to explore characteristics that define these four different generations when it comes to perceptions towards, and usage of, social media. That the previous literature, regarding the four generations' main features, to a certain extent could be transferred to explain social media perceptions and usage, is a highly relevant contribution. This implies that generational features, that previously has been characterising a generations attitudes and intentions for behaviour in other situations than social media settings, is found to influence attitudes and behaviour in social media usage as well (Williams & Page, 2011; Pihl, 2011; Leiter, Jackson & Shaughnessy, 2009; Coleman, Hladikova & Savelyeva, 2006; Parment, 2008; Keene & Handrich, 2011; Wolburg and Pokrywczynski, 2001; Levickaitė, 2010; Wellner, 2000). This is an interesting finding that is still only suggested on a very speculative level. However, the implication of this theoretical contribution could mean that consumers' social media behavior could be extensively understood. By taking advantage of existing consumer knowledge, with regards to generational differences, companies could offer better value propositions since they are familiar with generations 'offline' characteristics.

The study's findings further seem to support Trese (2011) that is discussing the importance of considering age when performing marketing activities. This study suggest that diverse generations might respond differently to relationship building activities, due to unique characteristics that only seem to represent the generations independently. Thereby, age sensitivity in a marketing

context, as suggested by Trese (2011), seems to be supported by selected findings in this study. Contrary, William and Page (2011) propose a multi-generational marketing approach where common characteristics among several generations should be recognised before making strategic decisions of marketing activities. This argument is supported by this study as well. As several protruding characteristics have been similar across diverse generations, in this study, it is suggested that marketing activities can be effectively performed in the same manner to several generations. That there are possibilities to encounter more than one generation at once, by considering generational similarities, support multigenerational marketing arguments stated by William and Page (2011).

Another possible contribution might be the extended usage of the Consumer-Company Identification Framework (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). This framework describes consumers' social identification with non-product aspects of companies as an attempt to take part of a social category such as sports or gender etc. (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). The Consumer-Company Identification Framework has in this study been used to understand why individuals 'like' or 'follow' companies in social media. The initial drivers in the Consumer-Company Identification process were considered when trying to understand why certain companies were 'liked' or 'followed' in social media. This implies that consumers knowledge of a company identity, the 'identity coherence' between consumer identity and company identity, identity 'trustworthiness' and 'attractiveness', have been considered as main drivers that might explain why certain companies are 'liked' or 'followed' (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). Further it was speculatively suggested that a consumer that 'likes' a company in social media is likely to become embedded in the organisation, due to being encountered with increased information from the company. An embedded consumer is likely to identify with an organisation (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). Thereby, this study has explored the activity of liking companies in social media by applying aspects of a theory that might not have been used in this context before.

5.1.2 Limitations

Diverse limitations, which might have had an impact on the outcome, can be distinguished in this study. To begin with, the choice of theories and interview questions might have had an impact on the study's outcome. Since the study has been exploring a previously limited researched area, there have not been theories that concretely have been suitable for the research purpose. An extensive research where theories and concepts, that seemed appropriate to use in order to understand the researched phenomena, were conducted. Despite this, it might be that additional

or different theories should have been even more beneficial for understanding generations' perceptions towards and usage of social media. Further, the chosen interview questions might have had an impact on the study's outcome. It might have been possible to ask different or additional questions that possibly could have had generated richer or different data, beneficial to include in the study. Further, other types of questions might also have resulted in other findings, where generational similarities or differences would have been discovered in additional aspects.

Another limitation might be the time aspect. With more time, it would have been possible to conduct additional and more deeply interviews, which possibly could have affected the study outcome. The 16 interviewees that took part of the study allowed rich data to evolve, but it might be that this data could have turned out different, if 16 other interviewees would have been chosen. Since the interviewees were chosen based on a convenience sample, it is not possible to know if these interviewees' attitudes are characteristic for other persons in that generation (Bryman and Bell, 2007). It might solely be that the four chosen interviewees within each generation accidentally had common perceptions and usage habits, which in that case have led to a somewhat misleading description of that generation. Regarding Generation Z, some aspects that possible should have led to an enhanced understanding of their social media characteristics, might have been missed out due to the decision to exclude individuals that are born after 2002.

These limitations imply that there is room for improving the quality of the data. The conclusion is a primary attempt to understand generational characteristics and to what extent those have an impact on relationship building activities. Therefore the result should not be considered a fact, but rather as an interesting foundation for developing further knowledge within this area.

5.2 Future Research

This study has allowed a discovery of several interesting areas that could be examined further in order to develop knowledge, when it comes to generational characteristics and their implication on relationship building, in social media. First of all, it would be interesting to test the findings, that was implied in this study, in a quantitative manner. By using a larger sample that is statistically supportive, and not based on a convenience sample, the characteristics found for each generation can be tested in a larger context. To statistically test the findings, implies that it would be further understood whether these initial findings are characteristic for the four generations or not. It would also be interesting to further examine if general generational characteristics, as in

this study are proposed to explain aspects of generations social media behaviour, seem to be supported statistically.

Secondly, the relationship building activities (suggested to be suitable for initially engaging each generation) could be examined practically. It would be interesting to discover if understanding for generations' perception toward, and usage of, social media can improve the effectiveness of targeting consumers in social media. To discover concrete results from relationship building strategies that do, or do not, consider understanding for generational characteristics, would be an additional interesting aspect.

Thirdly, there is room for exploring whether age difference within a generation is distinguishing additional useful aspects understanding a generation. For example, perceptions might differ between consumers that are born in the beginning or in the end of an generation. This type of additional knowledge might reveal that segmentation can be efficiently performed based on a more narrow age basis.

Finally, further research might examine 'liking' and 'following' companies by using the Consumer-Company Identification Framework by Bhattacharya and Sen (2003). Suggestively, it might be interesting to follow a consumer in an ethnographical manner and examine the prerequisites for 'liking' and 'following' companies. After having 'liked' or 'followed' a company in social media, it could be discovered whether the consumer becomes further embedded in the organisation or not, which might result in consumer identification. The discovery that consumers might identify with the companies that they 'like' or 'follow' in social media, might possibly imply that companies put increased emphasis on gaining followers at social media platforms.

5.3 Managerial Implications

This study suggests that Facebook are a preferable platform to use for creating or maintaining relationships with consumers. Further, it has been distinguished that consumers that 'like' a company on Facebook might have an initial interest for the company. Therefore, companies' prerequisites for communicating with consumers on Facebook seem positive, since consumers most likely are interesting in accessing information from, and participating in online activities performed by, the 'liked' company. Literature suggests that companies should focus on informing and educating consumers and to meet independent customers needs, at social media settings (Rowley, 2004). In order to meet individual needs, it is beneficial to engage consumers in a two-

way dialogue where companies listen and react to preferences and inputs from consumers (Keitzmann, et. al, 2011). In this way companies gain understanding for consumers, which in turn can enhance value propositions and thereby improve relationships (Rowley, 2004). By acknowledging the unique generational characteristics proposed in this study, a first step toward engaging each generation in social media is established. Initial activities for engaging the diverse generations through Facebook, are suggested below. Once consumers start to engage in social media, companies should find a way to continue the dialogue, and to implement consumer input in strategic decisions, by that the relationship can develop (Blomqvist, Dahl and Haeger, 2004). The following suggestions are based on indefinite findings from the study, which implies that they should be considered as inspiration for developing relationship-building activities, rather than concrete suggestions that are guaranteed to succeed.

- As Baby Boomers do not seem to be extensive users of social media, companies should try to engage them by continuously communicating information about the company and by asking questions that involves the consumers. The questions might be asked in a manner so that the answers reveal personal preferences and insights about Baby Boomers, which in turn might give the company a better understanding for this customer segment.
- In order to engage Generation X, companies should communicate information-rich messages that are helpful and well timed. Twitter might be used as a complement to Facebook. Companies might then use compact informational messages to “stay top-of mind with their consumers” (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011, p. 279). By keeping track of consumer inputs, responding quickly and delivering updated information; companies are likely to get to know Generation X. The more helpful and engaging the company is, the more likely it is that Generation X engages in the relationship with the company.
- In order to engage Generation Y, educational and entertaining activities are preferable. A company should strive to inform Generation Y about products or services, but favourable, an additional aspect such as a product trial or giveaway, might be added to a campaign. It is essential to conduct on-going activities, to keep Generation Y interested. When signing up for, for example a giveaway, personal data about the consumer can be gathered so that greater understanding for this consumer segment is achieved. This information might also be used for future campaigns.
- Companies should strive to attract and engage Generation Z by including several interaction possibilities on their Facebook page. This implies that links that will transport

the visitor to related sites such as videos, communities and games, are beneficial in order to keep Generation Z's interest. Generation Z might also be a suitable target group for an integrated social media campaign where several platforms are used. By keeping track of what is discussed at communities, and by requiring consumers to share sign-up information to participate in competitions, information about this segment is revealed which might enhance understanding for Generation Z.

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7. Appendix

7.1 Appendix I: Defining Social Media

7.1.1 Web 2.0 and Social Media

Web 2.0 is known as the second generation of Internet technology, a generation that has had extensive impact on how Internet is used (Jones, 2010). Similar to previous research, Web 2.0 and Social Media is in this study treated as the same phenomena (Jones, 2010). In contrast to the first Internet generation, users are now able to do much more than solely researching and downloading information online (Jones, 2010). Web 2.0 allows users to share, discuss and collaborate with each other and therefore it sometimes is called the “participative web” (Jones, 2010, pp. 144-145). Sharing and discussing is usually done at “online, word-of-mouth forums” such as blogs, social networking sites (such as Facebook), collaborative websites (such as Wikipedia) or sharing sites (such as YouTube) (Mangold & Faulds, 2009, p. 358). On these sites users have the possibility to create and edit content online, in other words, they are able to create User Generated Content, which to a great extent increases the interaction possibilities between the users (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009; Krumm, Davies & Narayanaswami, 2008). These changed conditions for online usage represent a lapse from passive to active communication (Jones, 2010). In social media interaction is not only improved between consumers, companies’ ability to talk to consumers as well as consumers’ ability to talk to companies is enhanced (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Overall, social media is an effective tool that increases communication possibilities between parties (Jones, 2010). Therefore social media can be defined in the following way: *““Social media” refers to a type of website, application or communications vehicle where people connect with one another; discuss and interact; share content and ideas; and build relationships. The most important word in the phrase “social media” is “social.””* (Anita Campell in McAlear (ed), 2009, p. 1).

Web 2.0 can also be beneficial for consumers since consumption may be eased (Jones, 2010). Information possession, purchase behaviour and post-purchase evaluation are examples of consumer behaviour where social media has been influential (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Enhanced interaction between company and consumer are beneficial for the parties to understanding each other, which might enhance consumers’ perception of companies’ value propositions (Jones, 2010). On the other hand, Web 2.0 also infers some challenges, for example, is the ownership of information on Web 2.0 diffuse (Jones, 2010). Both users and producers might be the sender of information, which result in various reliability and quality of online content (Jones, 2010).

7.1.2 Facebook

Facebook is a social network that was founded by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004 and in 2011 the site had over 800 million members (Piskorski et al., 2011). A social network site is a place where users can create their own profile, become friends with other members, write updates or messages and share pictures (Kaplan & Haelein, 2010). Facebook is offering different functionalities such as: profile pages, wall posts, applications, groups, tags, status updates and photos (Hansen, Shneiderman & Smith, 2011). Facebook is focusing on connecting and creating relationships between users and its popularity is mainly based on the simple design and demographic attraction (Nielsen, 2009; Kietzmann et. al, 2011). Becoming friends on the social network is the most common way to found connection between two individuals (Hansen, Shneiderman & Smith, 2011). After becoming friends on Facebook, a user is exposed to news feed from its friend's most recent activities on their personal home page (Piskorski et al., 2011). Further, the parties are able to interact by writing open or private messages to each other (Hansen, Shneiderman & Smith, 2011). There is also a 'like' button that is used to show appreciation for someone's photos or comments, etc. (O'Neill, 2010; Hansen, Shneiderman and Smith, 2011).

The literature proposes different reasons for why consumers are using Facebook (Doğruer, Meneviş, & Eyyam, 2011; Nadkarni & Hofmann 2012). Firstly it is suggested that the typical user spends time on Facebook as a daily routine to stay in contact with friends but also for other entertaining purposes (Doğruer, Meneviş & Eyyam, 2011, p.2645). Other motives for using Facebook are found to origin in personal need for belonging and for self-presentation (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012). These personal needs might depend on cultural background or personal traits (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012). Swedish persons are found to use Facebook for the prior reason. Almost every day Swedish Facebook users are online to receive an update of what their friends are doing, but also to update other about their own experiences (Findahl, 2011).

7.1.3 Twitter

Twitter is a microblog that was founded by Williams, Dorsey and Stone in 2006 (Kierkegaard, 2010; Hansen, Shneiderman & Smith, 2011). A microblog is different from an ordinary blog due to the limited amount of characters that can be used in a single post (Barash & Golder, 2010 in Hansen, Shneiderman, & Smith, 2011). On twitter each post can solely contain 140 characters, which implies that short and informal messages can be posted (Hansen, Shneiderman & Smith, 2011). The posts on Twitter are called tweets (Kierkegaard, 2010). A tweet can only contain text and the tweet will appear on the user webpage, where it can be read by the public or by chosen

persons (Kierkegaard, 2010). On twitter people become connected by subscription of other people's tweets (Barash & Golder, 2010 in Hansen, Shneiderman, & Smith, 2011). As long as a user does not have a restricted subscription, another can start to follow that user (Kierkegaard, 2010). In comparison to Facebook, the relationships on Twitter can be one-sided, which means that if X is following Y, Y does not have to follow X (Hansen, Shneiderman & Smith, 2011). Therefore user X's followers are not the same persons that user X is following (Barash & Golder, 2010 in Hansen, Shneiderman, & Smith, 2011). To make the distinction more concrete, persons who follow X are called followers and persons followed by X is called friends (Barash and Golder, 2010 in Hansen, Shneiderman, & Smith, 2011). Once a tweet is published, it will appear on the *followers'* pages (Barash & Golder, 2010 in Hansen, Shneiderman, & Smith, 2011). Thereby the tweet can be read almost in real time, which is favourable for building relationships (Jansen, Zhang, Sobel & Chowdury, 2009). The instant communication possibility is also beneficial for sharing of information, keeping updated on the latest news and for keeping in touch with friends (Barash and Golder, 2010 in Hansen, Shneiderman, & Smith, 2011).

7.1.4 YouTube

YouTube is a social media forum that was created in 2005 and is currently the world's most popular site for video sharing (Rotman & Golbeck, 2011 in Hansen, Shneiderman, & Smith, 2011). Sharing implies an activity where users are able to receive, change and distribute content (Kietzmann et al., 2011). More specifically, YouTube allow users to search for, watch or upload videos to the public (Zink, Suh, Gu & Kurose, 2008,). Both amateurs and professionals are uploading videos on YouTube in order to spread information, knowledge or entertainment (Rotman & Golbeck, 2011 in Hansen, Shneiderman, & Smith, 2011). Although the most important functionalities on YouTube are sharing, it is also a platform where individuals can build groups and participate in discussions (Kietzmann et al., 2011, p.248). Similar to for example Facebook, it is possible create a personal profile on YouTube (Rotman & Golbeck, 2011 in Hansen, Shneiderman, & Smith, 2011). The profile function as a user-channel that other users can subscribe to (Rotman & Golbeck, 2011 in Hansen, Shneiderman, & Smith, 2011). A subscription is one-sided which implies that the following user is receiving all video uploads that are made in the other users channel (Rotman & Golbeck, 2011 in Hansen, Shneiderman, & Smith, 2011). Further it is possible for users to become friends, but it requires that both parties agree to the friendship (Rotman & Golbeck, 2011 in Hansen, Shneiderman, & Smith, 2011). Other features that YouTube provide are the opportunity to suggest friends and to get alerts about certain activities (Rotman & Golbeck, 2011 in Hansen, Shneiderman, & Smith, 2011). In

Sweden, 78 % of the population is using YouTube primarily to watch videos, 44 % of the population is using it at least once a week (Findahl, 2011).

7.2 Appendix II: Interview Guide

1. Premise: What is social media for you? How do you perceive social media for example, why do you use it and what is it good for?

2. Motivation and incentives for using social media

Topics:

Reason for using certain Social Media platforms

Benefits drawn from usage

Main Question: What are your perceptions of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube regarding usage and what it is good for? What do you expect to get out from using these medias?

3. Consumers perception towards interaction with companies

Topics:

Reasons for Online Conversation

Expectations on Companies

Main Questions: Have you ever participated or conversed with a company through Facebook, Twitter or YouTube? Why? What makes you visit a company online in any of these social medias? Is it often because of your own interest or because of company advertising?

4. Consumers critical evaluation of companies' relational intentions

Topics:

Companies Communication

Privacy and Security

Main Questions: Why do you believe that companies want you to follow them on (mainly) Facebook and Twitter? Are you critical towards their intention for communication certain things online? Have any company lost their legitimacy as a consequence of something they communicated online? Are you sceptical towards leaving information about yourself to a company on Facebook, YouTube or Twitter? Does your privacy concerns prevent you from interacting with companies online?

5. User engagement and online characteristics

Topics:

Sharing

Motives for Online Behaviour

Main Questions: If you like a company, have you ever expressed that in social medias? How? Why do you want to express that appreciation in social media? Have you ever changed your attitude towards a company thanks to an online activity that affected your offline perception? In what way?

7.3 Appendix III: Extracted Illustrations of Social Media Activities

7.3.1 Facebook

Extracted illustrations that were chosen in order to provide the interviewee with a wide range of diverse social media activities on Facebook. These examples aim to illustrate a competition, one interactive and one simple question on certain companies Facebook pages. No emphasis is putted on the sending company, solely on the activity itself.

Facebook Competition

Årets kock Klas Lindberg gästar helgen den 20-21/4. Tag chansen att vinna en övernattnig för två i dubbelrum deluxe, Klas femrättersmeny (exkl. dryck) samt en härlig frukostbuffé dagen efter. Allt du behöver göra är att gilla facebookside samt dela denna statusen med dina vänner. En lycklig vinnare utses den 30/3. Lycka till!



Sluta gilla · Kommentera · Dela

👍 419 💬 82 📄 429

Source: Grand Hotell Lund Facebook, 2012

Facebook Question 1

Brighten up your 60's look with neon colours! Read more about the latest trends on H&M Life at <http://bit.ly/yNYXlx>. 1,2,3 or 4 - what look will you go for? — med Jolie Aboo Boo och 43 andra.

Visa översättning



Source: H&M Facebook, 2012

Facebook Question 2

Chocolate lovers! Vad vore mumsigast att blanda i Mjolkchoklad tycker ni?

- Lingon ...
- Saltlakrits ...
- Tropiska frukter ...
- Kex ...
- Banan ...

Source: Marabou Facebook, 2012

7.3.2 Twitter

Extracted illustrations that were chosen in order to provide the interviewee with diverse types of social media activities on Twitter. These examples aim to illustrate an informative ‘tweet’, one competition and one question ‘tweeted’ by certain companies. No emphasis is putted on the sending company, solely on the activity itself.

Twitter Informative

Source: H&M Twitter, 2012

I samarbete med UNICEF Sverige säljer den perfekta julklappen;
gåvobevis på skolpaket. Se även andra gåvor på unicef.se

Twitter Competition

Vad skulle du säga om att åka iväg på en mini-semester? Nu ger vi
dig chansen: ow.ly/a1shj #tävling #april #vår

Source: Lugna Favoriter, Twitter 2012

Twitter Question

If you dunk an Oreo cookie in chocolate milk, does it taste extra
chocolatey?

Visa

Source: Oreo Twitter, 2012

7.3.3 You Tube

One YouTube clip was chosen in order to provide the interviewees with an example of how companies can create interactions with videos. No emphasis is putted on the sending company, solely on the activity itself.

Name: Hunter and Bear's 2012 Birthday Party - TipEx

Published 11 April 2012, 3 354 445 views

Source: TipEx