The B2B Sector:
Using Social Media Effectively
To Enhance Business Development

By

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Abstract

Title: The B2B Sector: Using Social Media Effectively to Enhance Business Development

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Research Question:
1. In which ways can social media in a B2B context be utilized to identify prospective customers, business partners or other stakeholders; to strengthen relationships; to create long-term value; to enter new markets or to develop products?

2. How can B2B companies achieve full potential of their social media activity?

3. Is it possible and recommendable for B2B companies to take a 'B2C approach' to social media in order to leverage business development?

Research Purpose: The purpose of this research is to develop a deeper understanding of the social media phenomenon in a B2B context in relation to business development.

Method: This research qualitatively analyzed contrasting case examples. The empirical data was collected through semi-structured interviews and assessed with the help of the thematic framework method. The theoretical chapter was built through an iterative approach.

Conclusion: The empirical data of this analysis strongly indicate that social media can be used to enhance business development in the B2B context. Social media provides opportunities for B2B organizations to identify leads, to increase brand awareness, to sustain and develop relationships, to enter new markets and to innovate products and business processes.

Key Words: *Social media, B2B, effective, business development, long-term value*

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1. Introduction

Social media is one of the buzzwords of the 21st century. Today, more than one billion users are registered on Facebook, making it the third largest country in the world (Sedghi, 2014). This increased the pressure on companies to join the networks of their consumers. While it appears to be quite reasonable for consumer brands to be present on social media, one might probably wonder if there is also a way for business-to-business (B2B) companies to become as successful online as their B2C counterparts. In order to answer this question, our study looks at the B2B social media phenomenon in connection to business development, meaning that we perceive the online activity to be successful only if it creates growth opportunities for the company (Sørensen, 2013) or provides long-term value in any way (Pollack, 2012). Therefore, the focus of this research falls on finding effective ways in which B2B companies can leverage their social media activity in terms of business development.

To date, it is apparent that opinions about the role of social media in the industrial context are highly diverse. Authors like Jussila, Kärkkäinen and Leino, (2011, in Simula, Töllinen & Karjaluoto, 2013) stress that there lies much more potential in social media usage for B2B companies than it is actually exploited today. Other researchers like Inks, Schetzsle and Avila (2012) found that, except for 'Heavy Users', most practitioners perceived no increases of productivity by using social media tools. Nevertheless, many B2B companies still attach relevance to this medium and predict increasing importance of social media for achieving their business objectives in the future (Inks, Schetzsle & Avila, 2012; Järvinen et al., 2012, Simula, Töllinen & Karjaluoto, 2013). Thus, an increasing number of companies plan on engaging in social media in the future and also intend to increase their budgets (Forrester Research, 2014; Leek & Christodoulides, 2011a; Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christodoulides, 2011).

In addition, a huge wave of young professionals is currently entering the job force. These people not only grew up with social media (Bolton et al., 2013), but also "do not distinguish between online and offline environments [anymore] as a full range of digital media have become an integral part of their lives" (Davidson & Martellozzo, 2013, p.1471). Thus, these young individuals largely demand social media usage at work, which makes it increasingly important for organizations to implement social media usage in their strategy in order to stay a competitive, desired employer (Cho, Park & Ordonez, 2013). Thus, it is assumedly only a matter of time until every company will need to be on social media. Therefore, companies will not even have an option anymore whether or not to engage in social media (Reiss-Davis, 2013). The question is no longer if, but rather how companies can utilize social media more effectively.

In order to provide B2B companies with a better understanding of the social media environment and the principles to success, this study aims to explore good practice examples (see chapter 3.5). One of the participating organizations is Volvo Trucks. They achieved to become a very popular social media brand due to their "live tests" YouTube campaign for the launch of a new truck series, including videos such as 'The Epic Split' or 'The Ballerina Stunt'. This campaign intended to demonstrate the sophistication of Volvo

Trucks' technology in an entertaining, exciting way, and achieved a 'viral' reach with more than 100 million views (McGreal, 2014; Volvo Trucks, 2014a). This campaign certainly proved all assumptions wrong that only consumer brand-related content could go viral on the social web. Certainly, some could still argue that trucks are quite similar to a consumer product such as a car, however, other practice examples demonstrate that even with products such as bottling plants – far from most consumers' interests – B2B companies have achieved to grow large communities on their social media accounts, such as Facebook, etc. (Waldmannstetter, 2013).

While mainstream applications such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter or YouTube are the most popular tools utilized among B2B companies in general, and salespeople (Moore, Hopkins & Raymond, 2013) or B2B marketers (Brennan & Croft, 2012) in particular, companies have far more ways to engage in social media. Blogs, white papers, wikis or company-hosted online communities are other ways for B2B companies to interact on social media (Järvinen, Tollinen, Karjaluoto, & Jayawardhena, 2012). Beyond this, B2B companies have also come to utilize social media for the support of their innovation management. Taking the example of Salesforce, they developed their own IdeaExchange online community, which invites users to share and develop ideas collectively (Salesforce, 2007). Built on this concept, Dell hosts a similar web community named IdeaStorm whose purpose is to collect customer suggestions to support and improve the company's innovation processes such as product development (Israel, 2012). Following the same logic, Skåne Food Innovation Network, another participating company in our study, is hosting the OpenUp Innovation Network (letsopenup.se) to allow companies from the food and packaging industry to innovate together.

The vast adoption of social media by consumers and also organizations has resulted in an increasing academic interest in this phenomenon in the past decade. So far, the majority of social media studies have focused on a B2C context while only little research has explored the social media phenomenon in a B2B environment (Järvinen, Tolänen, Karjaluoto, Jayawardhena., 2012). According to Google Trends, web interest in B2B social media only arose in 2010 (Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christodoulides, 2011). Thus, social media usage in a B2B context is still a fairly young research topic where the literature is still scarce and fragmentary. So far, first studies have addressed the B2B social media phenomenon in relation to sales (Agnihotri, Kothandaraman, Kashyap & Singh, 2012; Marshall, Moncrief, Rudd, & Lee, 2012; Moore, Hopkins & Raymond, 2013), to branding (Brennan & Croft, 2012), to social media messaging (Swani, Milne & Brown, 2013), to innovation and product development (Kärkkäinen, Jussila & Väisänen, 2010; Nordlund, Lempiälä & Holopainen, 2011; Sawhney, Verona & Prandelli, 2005) or to the general usage patterns of B2B firms (Järvinen et al., 2012; Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christodoulides, 2011), but none of them has addressed B2B social media in relation to business development.

Today, many B2B practitioners still often lack understanding of how to utilize social media effectively. Further, the lack of resources such as time, money, manpower or experiences all caused a far slower adoption of social media by B2B companies than by their B2C counterparts (Järvinen et al., 2012; Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christodoulides, 2011). It needs to be emphasized that despite a few examples of early-adopters, general usage is still very low (Inks, Schetzsle & Avila, 2012; Kärkkäinen, Jussila & Väisänen, 2010) since the

majority of B2B companies, a total of 73%, does not utilize social media to achieve, for example, brand objectives according to Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides' (2011) survey among British B2B SMEs. 61% assumed social media not to be relevant for their business and 44% did not see how social media could be beneficial to their company or brand (Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christodoulides, 2011). Social media is also believed to be more appropriate for large corporations, but still was not considered a crucial success factor for their business (Järvinen et al., 2012). A further challenge refers to the lack of appropriate tools for the assessment of the effectiveness of social media activities (Järvinen et al., 2012; Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christodoulides, 2011). Surprisingly, today, most B2B companies barley assess or do not measure at all the impact of their social media activities on business (Institut für Marketing, 2013; Järvinen et al., 2012; Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christodoulides, 2011).

In light of these developments, we see a strong need for more research that sheds further light on this highly controversial field of social media usage in a B2B context. Today, the literature cannot give satisficing answers about the usefulness of social media, namely the impact it can have on a company's business. In addition, many B2B practitioners still remain uncertain whether or how to utilize social media effectively. Therefore, our study attempts to explore the phenomenon 'social media in a B2B environment' in the context of business development in order to promote deeper understanding for B2B practitioners. Thus, we ask how the effectiveness of social media usage in a B2B setting can be increased in order to impact the creation of growth opportunities, which are implied in the notion of business development.

More precisely, this study will provide insights on the following problems:

1. In which ways can social media in a B2B context be utilized to identify prospective customers, business partners or other stakeholders; to strengthen relationships; to create long-term value; to enter new markets or to develop products?

2. Bearing in mind that most B2B companies lack experience and knowledge how to utilize social media as a strategic tool, we ask: How can B2B companies achieve full potential of their social media activity?

3. Considering the successful adoption of social media by B2C firms, we further ask: Is it possible and recommendable for B2B companies to take a 'B2C approach' to social media in order to leverage business development?

In order to answer the research question, rich data was created through interviews with six business practitioners with considerable experience in B2B social media usage, working in different organizations such as Volvo Trucks, Axis Communications, Magenta Consulting, The Duffy Agency and Skåne Food Innovation Network (see chapter 3.5 and chapter 4.1 for detailed participant profiles).

2. Theoretical Framework

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The theoretical framework constitutes the basis for this study's data analysis. We therefore present previous studies and existent theories relevant to our research topic. Firstly, we start off by defining and characterizing the 'Web 2.0' and 'Social Media'. Further, we present a comparison of social media usage in a B2C and a B2B context with a particular focus on the peculiarities of the B2B setting. In more detail, the role of social media in relation to sales and branding will be investigated. In the second part, previous studies on the role of social media in regards to open innovation and product development will be discussed. In the last part, the concept of business development will be defined and the main theories of the theoretical framework will be highlighted as they build the foundation for this study's analysis.

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2.1 The Era of the 'Web 2.0' and 'Social Media'

2.1.1 Definitions

Scientific interest in social media has increased tremendously in the past years. However, terms such as 'social media' or the 'Web 2.0' are still often not clearly defined (Wirtz, Nitzsche & Ullrich, 2014). Therefore, we feel obliged to provide clarity about how we refer to social media and the Web 2.0 in our study.

In the past decade, a major transition from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 has taken place. While the former implied a static one-way communication, the Web 2.0 is now characterized by interactivity and user-generated content (Wirtz, Nitzsche & Ullrich, 2014). More precisely, the Web 2.0 can be understood as an integrative network that allows the connection of Internet-based applications (O'Reilly, 2005), which are collaboratively and continuously altered by all users (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Therefore, the Web 2.0 is considered to be the fundament for social media, referring more to the technical dimension while the notion of social media emphasizes the social aspects of these digital applications (Constantidines & Fountain, 2008, in Simula, Töllinen & Karjaluoto, 2013; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Assumedly, most people's first association with social media is Facebook, YouTube or Twitter. However, the term needs to be understood much broader than these mainstream applications (Simula, Töllinen & Karjaluoto, 2013). We use Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) widely adopted definition, which suggests that "Social Media is 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" (p.61). This definition emphasizes user interactivity as a major characteristic of social media, which is not to be confused with the term digital media that refers to the electronic availability of information, for example, in the form of e-mails or online advertising banners (Simula, Töllinen & Karjaluoto, 2013). However, due to the integration of share buttons, the concepts of social and digital

media are growing closer together, which makes it increasingly difficult to clearly differentiate between the two (Simula, Töllinen & Karjaluoto, 2013). Therefore, we follow Simula, Töllinen and Karjaluoto's (2013) suggestion to view social media as "an enhancement to, rather than a replacement for other digital media" (p.123) and to "regard social media as integrated elements, platforms, and tools of digital marketing that facilitate social interaction between businesses and customer networks" (p.123).

Lastly, we need to clarify how we refer to the concepts of 'user' and 'customer' even though (or maybe just because) they are often used interchangeably in the literature as well as in practice (Wirtz, Nitzsche & Ullrich, 2014). In our study, we adopt Wirtz, Nitzsche and Ullrich's (2014) broad understanding of a 'user' who "is understood to be an individual who interacts with a company or another individual via social media platforms" (p.65). In contrast, we understand a 'customer' as an individual or a firm who buys products or services from a seller, either an individual or more commonly an organization.

2.1.2 New Challenges for Companies due to Empowered Consumers

The rise of social media has changed the roles of users and companies dramatically. Through social-networking technologies that make geographical boundaries rather negligible, people from all over the world can easily connect to each other, interact with each other and create or share content (Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christodoulides, 2011; Sawhney, Verona & Prandelli, 2005). In addition, users can now directly interact with companies, select and forward messages and share feedback, ideas or complaints with them in public. Thus, a decisive shift in power occurred. Companies no longer have full control over their marketing messages and the information available about them, but have been forced to increasingly adopt the roles of mere 'observers' (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) or 'participants' (Simula, Töllinen & Karjaluoto, 2013) in user conversations on social media. In contrast, users have been empowered to content-creators, networkers, influencers and distributors of marketing messages and co-creators of digital platforms (Hanna, Rohm & Crittenden, 2011; Parent et al., 2011, in Simula, Töllinen & Karjaluoto, 2013). Thus, users are now considered the key actors in the Web 2.0 era. This causes both challenges and opportunities for companies.

Moore, Hopkins and Raymond (2013) argue that "[o]ne of the primary benefits of social media is its ability to make possible meaningful interpersonal disclosure and conversation-like dialogues among users that can be initiated by anyone using an application or within a network" (p.50). This makes it possible for companies to not only directly interact with their customers and market to them, but also to listen to their needs (Urban & Hauser, 2004) and to involve them in innovation processes (Kärkkäinen, Jussila & Väisänen, 2010; Simula, Töllinen & Karjaluoto, 2013; Sawhney, Verona & Prandelli, 2005). However, a multitude of companies are not accustomed to the new 'empowered' role of consumers, which leaves them often paralyzed in regards to how to act on social media. To encounter these new challenges, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) compiled a list of ten principles to be respected by companies in order to be successful on social media. Namely, companies need to (1) select the most appropriate social media applications, (2) use either external platforms or make their own sites, (3) integrate all platforms into one coherent strategy, (4) use social media in

completion to traditional media, (5) define guidelines for social media usage for their employees, (6) be active on all platforms they are present on, (7) develop interesting, user-oriented content, (8) be humble, (9) put less importance on perfection but be cool instead, and last, (10) be honest. Järvinen et al. (2012) propose that B2B marketers need to create content that addresses their customers' needs and provides solutions in order to leverage their social media presence. They further stress that B2B companies need to acquire expertise in social media marketing, namely hiring people with knowledge, and also need to find metrics to measure their social media performance. Schultz, Schwepker and Good (2012) stress that employee trainings in social media will need to become a regular part of sales trainings, which is also supported by Moore, Hopkins and Raymond (2013).

2.2 Social Media Usage: B2C versus B2B

In order to understand how B2B companies can leverage their social media activity, it is important to understand the differences and similarities between the B2B and B2C business environments and their impact on social media strategies.

2.2.1 Target Audience

Even though "B2B e-commerce is valued at more than three and half times that of B2C e-commerce" (Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christodoulides, 2011, p.1153) the social media usage in the industrial field is much lower than that in the B2C sector. This discrepancy is nourished by the way B2B and B2C companies perceive their target audience (Swani & Brown, 2011), meaning that the social media strategy, and the marketing orientation as a whole, are based on the assumptions that the company has regarding its customers. Today, researchers are still debating to what extent B2B and B2C clients differ and whether social media is equally beneficial to B2B and B2C enterprises in reaching their target audience.

To begin with, the B2C clients are believed to spend a great time online interacting with each other (Brennan & Croft, 2012) and searching for information about products (Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christodoulides, 2011). This and the fact that "B2C costumers tend to demonstrate less involvement and are more informal when purchasing a product or a service" (Swani & Brown, 2011, p.519) has pre-determined a fast adoption of social media among B2C companies. B2B customers, on the other hand, are highly involved with the buying process (Swani & Brown, 2011), are less emotional, require a great attention to details and cannot be mass targeted (Basich, 2013). Taking this into consideration, B2B companies believe that their clients need an individual approach that cannot be achieved on online social platforms (Matties, 2012). Swani and Brown (2011) support this statement by saying that social media in B2B should be viewed as a supplement to the overall selling process rather than an important communication platform, especially because it cannot describe explicitly all technological complexities of industrial products, nor deal with the intricacies of extensive B2B negotiation process. This belief is primarily promoted by B2B managers, mostly baby boomers representatives that are said to be slower in adopting new digital technologies than their younger counterparts (Agnihotri, Kothandaraman, Kashyap &

Singh, 2012; Inks, Schetzsle & Avila, 2012; Järvinen et al., 2012; Schultz, Schwepker & Good, 2012). Schultz, Schwepker and Good (2012) argue that B2B and B2C buyers are very different to each other since B2B buyers are much more concerned about risk-reduction than the B2C buyer. However, Sood and Pattinson (2012) stress that still, both B2B and B2C customers tend to be very similar and use social media in the same way. They explain that due to the rapid pace of the technological advancement, B2B clients have turned to social media as a source of information to support their buying purchases. Once online, the B2B customer becomes a 'human-to-human' one and, in consequence, a perfect target audience for social media. In addition to this, Moore, Hopkins and Raymond (2013) emphasize the fact that social media usage is increasing not only among the young audience, as traditionally thought about, but also among baby-boomers that, as stated above, occupy decision-making positions within B2B organizations. Leek and Christodoulides (2011b) also sustain the idea that B2C and B2B customers are alike, especially in the way their opinions are influenced by how much they trust the seller's brand. Leek and Christodoulides (2011b) claim that both B2C and B2B clients need to trust the company they are purchasing from, therefore, both B2C and B2B organizations should develop "cognitive and affective ties with stakeholders" (p.830) and the most efficient way to do this is through the implementation of a multi-channel communication and marketing strategy.
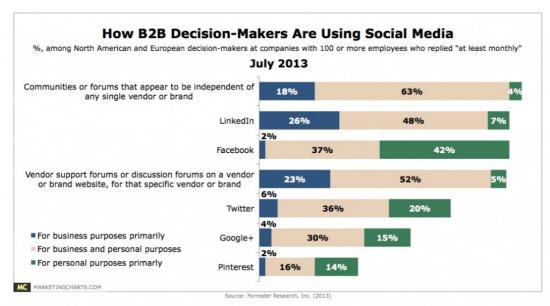
In conclusion, the literature on B2B social media underlines the tendency of B2B companies to use social media more for building and developing relationships with their target audience (Harvard Business Review Analytics, 2010; Jansen, Zhang, Sobel & Chowdury, 2009; Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christodoulides, 2011; Rodriguez, Peterson & Krishnan, 2012). However, as argued before, more research is required in order to fully convince B2B decision makers upon social media advantages in this regard (Järvinen et al., 2012; Swani, Milne & Brown, 2013)

2.2.2 Social Media Channels

Another greatly debated topic in the social media world is whether B2B and B2C companies should use different online channels to communicate with their target audience or not. There is no doubt that B2C organizations are only limited by their creativity when choosing the online platforms to be present on (Crittenden, Peterson & Albaum, 2010). However, according to Lilien, Grewal, Bowman, Ding, Griffin, Kumar, Narayandas, Peres, Srinivasan and Wang (2010) the same thing does not hold true for B2B companies. Lilien et al. (2010) argue that „firms in business markets tend to rely heavily on direct channels and favor the sales force over more impersonal communications media in their marketing mix" (p.288). Therefore, Moore, Hopkins & Raymond (2013) state that B2B salespeople are more inclined to use professional networking websites, while B2C salespeople tend to use more social networking sites. In a broader picture, B2B sellers prefer to use social media channels that give access to the decision makers of their prospective clients (Rodriguez, Peterson & Krishnan, 2012). As shown in Figure 1 (Marketing Charts, 2013), for business purposes decision makers are primarily using LinkedIn, forums strictly connected to their industry and communities or forums that appear to be independent of any single vendor or brand. This network (LinkedIn) as well as online conferencing, slide share websites and YouTube are

found by Moore, Hopkins and Raymond (2013) to be the most commonly used in professional selling in the B2B setting than in the B2C one.

Figure 1

How B2B Decision-Makers Are Using Social Media
%, among North American and European decision-makers at companies with 100 or more employees who replied "at least monthly"
July 2013

Source: Figure 1 (Marketing Charts, 2013).

Even though there is evidence that B2C and B2B consumers' behavior online becomes more and more similar (Leek & Christodoulides, 2011b; Sood & Pattinson, 2012), none of the research papers discusses whether B2B companies can and should go out of the box and use social networks more actively to achieve their business objectives.

2.2.3 The Purpose of Social Media Usage

Even though social media should be ideally used "to generate viral effects, consumer evangelism and positive word-of-mouth (WOM) advocacy" (Järvinen et al., 2012, p. 103), marketing practitioners still believe that these results cannot be achieved in the same way in both B2B and B2C sectors (Järvinen et al., 2012). First, because B2B organizations do not have as many clients to share WOM as a B2C company has (Lilien et al., 2010; Järvinen et al., 2012) and second, B2C and B2B companies are generally pursuing different marketing objectives (Brown, Zablah, Bellenger & Donthu, 2012). Despite the differences, B2C and B2B companies are still pursuing quite similar goals on social media, although at different degrees. Surveys unveiled that B2B organizations prioritize the acquisition of new customers over the maintenance and promotion of existing customer-relationships in their social media usage (Järvinen et al., 2012; Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christodoulides, 2011). Social media is also utilized to create brand awareness, however, this purpose is higher ranked by B2C than B2B companies (Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christodoulides, 2011). B2B companies also utilize social media to receive feedback, to conduct consumer research, to foster inter- and intra-organizational collaboration (Järvinen et al., 2012; Michaelidou, Siamagka &

Christodoulides, 2011; Moore, Hopkins & Raymond, 2013), to engage in virtual co-creation (Kärkkäinen, Jussila & Väisanen, 2010; Simula, Töllinen & Karjaluoto, 2013) or to recruit employees (Bolton et al., 2013). In the following, theories will be reviewed that previously explored how social media is utilized in regards to the business objectives of branding and sales with a particular focus on the B2B context.

Branding

A strong brand enhances the reputation of the company in the market (Brown et al., 2012; Cretu & Brodie, 2007; Kapferer, 2012) and increases the perception a company's capability to perform (Persson, 2010). Despite this advantage, branding is still considered to be a concept more suitable for the B2C industry, rather than for the B2B one (Brennan & Croft, 2012). This comes as a result of B2B companies not seeing a direct relationship between branding activities and their impact on sales (Järvinen et al., 2012). This idea is also supported by Leek and Christodoulides (2011b) who claim that B2B companies, when choosing a product, prioritize pricing, logistics and service offered over the seller's actual brand (p.831). However, some literature still highlights the fact that B2B companies are gradually changing their perceptions about branding (Leek & Christodoulides, 2011b), and today, those who are willing to invest in their brands "are rewarded with enhanced reputations and improved financial performance" (Brown et al., 2012, p.508). Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides (2011) state that "a strong brand is more likely to enjoy high loyalty … and more referrals from buyers" (p.1154), which makes branding an excellent marketing tool for B2B companies due to their emphasis on relationship-oriented sales practices (Brown et al, 2012; Leek & Christodoulides, 2011b, Moore, Hopkins & Raymond, 2013). Secondly, in today's highly competitive B2B environment, a powerful brand image can help the company stand out in the industry (Brown et al., 2012; Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christodoulides, 2011; Schultz, Schwepker & Good, 2012), command premium prices (Persson, 2010; Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christodoulides, 2011) and generate leads (Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christodoulides, 2011).

Even though B2B companies can learn tremendously from B2C branding practices, there are still differences between these two industries that should be taken into consideration (Backhaus, Steiner & Lügger, 2011; Brown et al., 2012). First, as opposed to B2B companies, B2B firms are more concerned with promoting their corporate brands, rather than their individual products (Swani & Brown, 2011). Second, Backhaus, Steiner and Lügger (2011) claim that image-related brand functions work best in the B2C markets, while this does not hold true in the B2B field. In the B2B field, clients are considering a strong brand that one that offers risk and information cost reductions. Therefore, B2B organizations "should invest in their brands using tactics that support the reduction of risk and information search costs for customer decision making" (Backhaus, Steiner & Lügger, 2011, p.1082). These two differences should be taken into consideration when creating the social media strategy, as they directly impact how the company should presents itself in the online world. It is worth noting that, in this case, social media helps building market driving brands, which position the company as being an opinion leader and a visionary "seeking to influence the direction in which markets evolve by providing content-rich social media material" (Brennan & Croft, 2012, p.111).

In addition to the above, branding also helps companies become more attractive in the eyes of current and future employees (Sivertzen, Nilsen & Olafsen, 2013). Thus, by having a strong and liked brand, the company not only retains its employees, but also has higher chances in hiring brilliant minds of the industry (Sivertzen, Nilsen & Olafsen, 2013).

Sales

One of the major business objectives, which both B2C and B2B organizations are pursuing, is the increase of sales. While personal selling is considered to be most effective in the B2B context since products are complex, buyers are few and negotiation processes are long (Swani & Brown, 2011), it is believed that the sales process can be strongly supported through a two-way conversation with customers on different social media platforms (Rodriguez, Peterson & Krishnan, 2012). According to Agnihotri et al. (2012), social media is an important tool for B2B salespeople to reach the decision makers of their prospective clients, to find new potential customers as well as receive referrals that result in new revenue. By being present online, salespeople not only receive access to their target audience, but also increase their chances of closing a deal. In this regard, Rodriguez, Peterson and Krishnan (2012) talk about the phenomena of "networked familiarity" (p.366), which means that buyers get a feeling that they know the seller outside of the web and therefore tend to help the buyer's proposal to go to the next stage. This, in turn, decreases the time and transaction costs associated with the B2B buying process (Rodriguez, Peterson & Krishnan, 2012). Inks, Schetzsle and Avila (2012) stress that social media will become an increasingly important tool for relationship management in the B2B sales environment. This was also found by Rodriguez, Peterson and Krishnan (2012) who emphasize that B2B salespeople will need to adopt social media as an important tool to sustain and promote long-term relationships with their customers.

Overall, social media can help B2B salespeople find leads in the early stages of the sales cycle, learn about their needs straight away and consequently build deeper relationships by sharing product information adopted to their necessities (Rodriguez, Peterson & Krishnan, 2012). However, in order to fully benefit from social media, salespeople should adopt a "pull" sales strategy rather than a "push" sales strategy (Rodriguez, Peterson & Krishnan, 2012, p.375), meaning that a focus on building customer relationships online is more efficient in driving up profits rather than short-term oriented sales pitches (Schultz, Schwepker & Good, 2012; Brennan & Croft, 2012). Brennan and Croft (2012) emphasize that the purpose of social media usage needs to be the creation of trust "with a view to generating a medium- or long-term business pay-off" (p.106). Because a great majority of salespeople lack training in this regard (Schultz, Schwepker & Good, 2012), Matties (2012) argues that companies should take full responsibility of their social media presence on a centralized level, meaning that social media should be maintained by social media professionals, rather than by sales representatives and in sales purposes. In other words, Matties (2012) believes that the activity of B2B salespeople on social media can have a great impact on the overall corporate brand, and in conditions in which reputation and trust is highly valued in B2B business relationships, companies should be careful with whom and how they enter the social media on behalf of the company. However, this conservative view on social media is not shared by Schultz, Schwepker and Good (2012) who state that due to the fact that more Millennials are

entering the B2B sales industry, the importance of social media will continue to grow in sales negotiations, as well as the level of professionalism in handling social media practices.

Another difference from B2C social media usage is that B2B companies lack sufficient tools how to assess the impact of social media on the overall company's profitability (Järvinen et al., 2012). Even though it is known that social media in B2B can "generate value for their brands through information, knowledge, conversations, relationships and e-commerce" (Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christidoulides, 2011, p.1154), B2B companies still lack the measurement tools that would quantify these findings (Järvinen et al., 2012; Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christidoulides, 2011). Despite this fact, more and more companies are implementing social media into their sales strategies, due to the overall hype in the market regarding this subject, "believing not adopting the new technology represents a lost opportunity or will otherwise put the organization at a competitive disadvantage" (Inks, Schetzsle & Avila, 2012, p.2).

2.3 Social Media as a Tool for Innovation

2.3.1 The Concept of Open Innovation

While social-networking sites enable individuals to connect to each other, meet new people, strengthen relationships or exchange ideas and knowledge, the latter has become increasingly interesting for the innovation processes of organizations (Sawhney, Verona & Prandelli, 2005). Firms have come to understand that users are no longer passive recipients of marketing messages or mute buyers and consumers of products, but have evolved to "central sources of ideas and feedback" (Nordlund, Lempiälä & Holopainen, 2011, p.285) or even to "active players and co-creators or co-producers of value in products and services" (p.285). This means that social media sites are a cost-efficient and easy way for companies to interact with their customers as well as other users (potential or prospective customers) in order to listen to their needs (Urban & Hauser, 2004) that users either directly address to companies or express in 'unofficial' user conversations (Trainor, 2012). In addition, companies can even involve users in product development processes, inviting them to share their ideas for product improvements or new products that better fit their needs, thus making them co-creators in product development processes (Simula, Töllinen & Karjaluoto, 2013; Sawhney, Verona & Prandelli, 2005). It is apparent that social media has evolved to a prosperous channel and source for the support of a company's innovation processes (Kärkkäinen, Jussila & Väisänen, 2010).

The idea of opening innovation processes to external contributors is based on the concept of 'Open Innovation', a term that was decisively shaped by Chesbrough (2003). He defines open innovation as

> "a paradigm that assumes that firms can and should use external ideas as well as internal ideas, and internal and external paths to market, as the firms look to advance their technology. Open Innovation combines internal and external ideas into architectures and systems whose requirements are defined by a business model" (Chesbrough, 2003, p.24).

A later, updated definition suggests that

"Open Innovation is the use of purposive inflows and outflows of knowledge to accelerate internal innovation, and expand the markets for external use of innovation, respectively. Open innovation is a paradigm that assumes that firms can and should use external ideas as well as internal ideas, and internal and external paths to market, as they look to advance their technology" (Chesbrough, 2006, p.1).

In both definitions, Chesbrough highlights the idea that companies need to combine internal and external ideas and knowledge to support their innovation activities. As Kärkkäinen, Jussila and Väisänen (2010) elaborate, companies not only need to look inside to locate knowledge and information, but more importantly also need to go beyond their organizational boundaries to uncover new ideas and other innovation-related information to support their innovations. In other words, open innovation assumes that knowledge, ideas and information are not limited to internal staff, but are much wider distributed. It suggests that customers, other companies, suppliers, scientists, public actors or even non-users can possess valuable knowledge, ideas or other innovation-related information that could support organizational innovation processes (Kärkkäinen, Jussila & Väisänen, 2010; Sawhney, Verona & Prandelli, 2005). Therefore, Chesbrough (2006) stresses "that even the most capable R&D organizations must identify, connect to, and leverage external knowledge sources as a core process in innovation" (p.2). In his notion, Chesbrough (2006) further emphasizes that open innovation also revolutionizes the way in which internally or externally created innovation is brought to market. He stresses that companies no longer should limit themselves to internal channels, but must attach equivalent importance to external channels.

Social media has clearly facilitated the implementation of open innovation in a firm's organizational culture and business strategies. Sawhney, Verona and Prandelli's (2005) study on collaborative innovation found that companies are using different sets of Internet-based tools to involve their customers in different stages of new product development processes. The authors highlight that the Internet leverages user dialogues to a much broader reach, implying that much more users coming from all over the world can interact with each other on a continuous basis. It is hence a very cost-efficient way for companies to tap into the knowledge of their customers and even go beyond that by also listening to potential customers or other users who may have an interest in the product or topic and who may not even be living in a market where the company is present today (Sawhney, Verona & Prandelli, 2005). Consequently, Sawhney, Verona and Prandelli (2005) conclude that "the characteristics of the medium – interactivity, reach, speed, persistence, and flexibility – permit firms to explore new frontiers in co-creation of value" (p.14).

However, Trott and Hartmann (2009) argue that the concept of open innovation is much older than Chesbrough's (2003) definition and further criticize this highly talked about paradigm for some of its insufficiencies: "it is the ability to capture ideas from R&D and convert these into products and services that people want to buy that is more significant than idea-generation" (Trott & Hartmann, 2009, p.726). Thus, the authors stress that in practice, the implementation of ideas is the bigger challenge than the acquisition of these.

2.3.2 Online Communities as Sources of Innovation

Internet-based communities and specifically virtual co-creation platforms made it extremely easy to access the knowledge of people from all over the world (Chesbrough, 2003; Sawhney, Verona & Prandelli, 2005). Therefore, in the following it will be presented how online communities can bring value to a company's innovation, primarily by taking a closer look into the internal structure of virtual networks.

Online communities are a place that unites a multitude of users with similar interests and complementing skills (Von Hippel, 2005) who "develop a stock of common, shared knowledge as well as shared values and attitudes" (Nordlund, Lempiälä & Holopainen, 2011, p.288). However, among the many users, there can be even found some very skilled and talented users with advanced technical knowledge (Franke & Shah, 2003; Kozinets, 2002; Sawhney, Verona & Prandelli, 2005; Von Hippel, 2005; Von Hippel and Von Krogh, 2003). These users are often referred to as 'lead users' or 'leaders' (Von Hippel & Von Krogh, 2003) since they are capable to innovate (Von Hippel, 2005) and thus, constitute a valuable 'source of competence' for innovation (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000). Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2000) stress that companies who are engaging in open innovation need to interact with these customers and stimulate the leaders' willingness to make rich contributions to collaborative innovation projects, so that companies have the opportunity to profit from their knowledge on a continuous basis (Sawhney, Verona & Prandelli, 2005).

However, Sawhney, Verona and Prandelli (2005) remind that companies should not limit their interaction only to their best and current customers, but should also be open towards other users such as prospective customers or experts who have no ties to the company yet, considering that these users could provide additional insights and knowledge and could even be turned into customers later. Diverse user structures are highly desirable because community members not only give advice to each other where complementing skills can be helpful, but also share contacts with other community members and provide access to their networks (Nordlund, Lempiälä & Holopaninen, 2011). Thus, companies are advised to not only listen to a small selection of users, but rather to take full advantage of the opportunities provided by social media, and that is the ability to tap into 'unbiased customer knowledge' that would not have been accessible before (Sawhney, Verona & Prandelli, 2005).

Arguing that a high diversity of user profiles in an online community may be most effective to support innovation, a major problem refers to the establishment of such a diverse network. Companies may face difficulties to aggregate other users than their current customers or business partners (Sawhney, Verona & Prandelli, 2005). Therefore, third parties are often used as hosts for virtual communities because they more successfully manage to recruit experts and other users with no ties to a company due to their independent status (Sawhney, Verona & Prandelli, 2005).

Regarding the benefits of highly diverse users communities, another concept of user integration into innovation processes was introduced, namely 'Crowdsourcing', a term that was promoted by Howe (2006). It assumes that companies do not listen to a small entity of experts but rather use the collective knowledge that is developed by a large number of individuals through interactions, mainly on social media platforms (Simula, Töllinen & Karjaluoto, 2013). The idea behind crowdsourcing is that a company posts a challenge or a

problem in an online community, or specifically in an innovation network, and asks the crowd for assistance in getting the problem solved (Doan, Ramakrishnan & Halevy, 2011). Obviously, this concept is closely linked to open innovation since it highlights the importance of using ideas shared by a large variety of diverse users and customers.

2.3.3 Open Innovation to Support Product Development

The purpose of open innovation is mainly to support product development processes (Sawhney, Verona & Prandelli, 2005). Thus, online communities, and in particular, virtual co-creation networks have become most effective in supporting innovation, since "the Internet offers new simplified modes to virtually integrate large numbers of former anonymous consumers into a producer's innovation process" (Urban & Hauser 2004, in Füller, 2006, p.639). Thus, users have even empowered to actively influence the development of products through their contributions. Considering that in B2B environment needs can be highly different between companies, innovation communities enable customers to co-create products that fit their individual needs in the best way (Nordlund, Lempiälä & Holopainen, 2011; Prügl & Schreier, 2006). Vice versa, companies are able to use the user knowledge to adjust their products to their customers' needs and also to develop entirely new products (Sawhney, Verona & Prandelli, 2005; Urban & Hauser, 2004), leveraging discontinuous, radical innovation, which means that a product is not advanced but newly invented (McCarthy, Lawrence, Wixted & Gordon, 2010).

In their study, Sawhney, Verona and Prandelli (2005) found that users can support product innovation in all different stages of new product development (NPD) processes. Their study further found that companies use different social media tools to assist different stages of NPD. According to Sawhney, Verona and Prandelli (2005), individuals and collectives in online communities can be used for the generation of ideas in the early stages of NPD, for example, through applying a web-based conjoint analysis or listening-in modes. However, in later stages of NPD other Internet-based the authors found tools such as online polls or virtual product testing more suitable since they allow a larger number of users to assess the features and functionality of new products.

2.3.4 The Motivation of Users to Make Contributions to Virtual Co-Creation Projects

A major challenge for companies hosting Internet-based co-creation or innovation platforms is to incite members to participate and to make contributions (Chiu, Hsu & Wang, 2006; Nordlund, Lempiälä & Holopainen, 2011; Wirtz, Nitzsche & Ullrich, 2014). Only if a large number of skilled users contribute with their ideas and innovation-related information, virtual co-creation communities will be useful for companies to support their innovation processes (Füller, 2006; Sawhney, Verona & Prandelli, 2005). Considering that online networks unite various experts and skilled users (Füller, 2006; Nordlund, Lempiälä & Holopainen, 2011; Sawhney, Verona & Prandelli, 2005), the pooled expertise and know-how is extremely valuable for firms and other stakeholders. Thus, users may carefully select with whom to

share their knowledge and what to reveal (Nordlund, Lempiälä & Holopainen, 2011; Von Hippel & Von Krogh, 2003).

In general, it can be assumed that users are only participating if their contribution brings some kind of benefit to them (Füller, 2006; Nordlund, Lempiälä & Holopainen, 2011). Thus, "[a]n interaction is considered as being rewarding if the subjective derived benefit is greater than the experienced effort" (Füller, 2006, p.639). While individuals have different motives to contribute depending on their personal traits as well as their involvement with the community and task itself (Füller, Mühlbacher, Matzler & Jawecki, 2009), Deci and Ryan (2002) note that these motives can either be of intrinsic or extrinsic nature. While intrinsically motivated users derive personal rewards form the engagement activity itself (Füller, 2006), extrinsically motivated users see major benefits in the external outcomes such as a prize that follow their contribution activiy (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Thus, it is of crucial importance for providers or firms to "create the basic conditions here to arouse interest in participation" (Wirtz, Nitzsche & Ullrich, 2014, p.70).

The motives for users to contribute are highly diverse. The majority of users engage in innovation projects because they enjoy the activity (Franke & Shah, 2003; Füller, 2006; Von Hippel & Von Krogh, 2003*).* Users may also participate in collaborative innovation tasks to challenge themselves, develop their skills and further their knowledge in their interest area (Füller, 2006; Nordlund, Lempiälä & Holopainen, 2011; Wirtz, Nitzsche & Ullrich, 2014). They may also try to actively influence the design of a product, trying to adjust it to their or their organization's need (Nordlund, Lempiäla & Holopainen, 2011; Von Hippel & Von Krogh, 2003). Given that "there is a strong urge for networking and cooperative experience among internet users" (Wirtz, Nitzsche & Ullrich, 2014, p.69) meeting like-minded people in online communities can be another reason for their engagement (Kozinets, 2002).

Generally, "a certain affiliation to a specific group of persons in a community is indispensible, to become active within this group" (Wirtz, Nitzsche & Ullrich, 2014, p.69). Thus, users derive a feeling of belonging from their interaction with community members (Nordlund, Lempiälä & Holopainen, 2011). This feeling of membership cultivates positive feelings towards social media (Gangadharbatla, 2008) and makes their contributions appear more meaningful to them (Nordlund, Lempiälä & Holopainen, 2011). Füller et al. (2009) note that if users feel empowered, meaning that their contribution matters, the perceived enjoyment to co-create products with other users or companies increases and so does their willingness to participate. Sawhney, Verona and Prandelli (2005) add that close and personal relationships between companies and individual customers promote trust in the company and make users more willing to interact with the company or participate in value co-creation.

In contrast to intrinsically motivated users, extrinsically motivated users will only make contributions if they see a chance that their efforts will be compensated by external rewards, for example monetary compensations (Füller, 2006). External incentives have the chance to engage more users, activate formerly passive users and also increase the quality or frequency of contributions (Füller, 2006; Von Hippel, 2005). However, monetary incentives can also be detrimental to the task. There is a risk that not-involved consumers who only participate for the sake of obtaining the prize may make useless contributions (Füller, 2006) In addition, users who formerly were intrinsically motivated may now refrain from freely sharing their knowledge and ideas since they realize the economic value of it. Wirtz, Nitzsche

and Ullrich (2014) point out that the literature is still lacking concrete guidelines or methods for how to motivate user contribution.

2.3.5 The Challenges of Involving Users as Co-Creators

Free-Revealing of Innovation-Related Information in a B2B Context

In online communities where ideas and know-how could be used by other users or firms advantageously, the problem of intellectual authorship is prevalent (Nordlund, Lempiälä & Holopainen, 2011). This holds particularly true for the B2B sector where a strong rivalry between B2B companies competing for the best ideas, solutions and products exists (Nordlund, Lempiälä & Holopainen, 2011). Thus, users, especially those who see an economic benefit in their know-how, may be very careful with what they share and with whom. Moreover, usually, only a small number of lead users (Nordlund, Lempiälä & Holopainen, 2011; Von Hippel & Von Krogh, 2003), also referred to as 'insiders' or 'devotees' (Kozinets, 2002), make contributions while the large majority of community members are usually 'free riders' (Von Hippel & Von Krogh, 2003) or 'tourists' (Kozinets, 2002) as they solely consume the shared knowledge and information without actively engaging in or contributing to the network. Assumedly, these consumers-only may be members of the community because they have a general interest in the topic but may refrain from contributing, either because of their unwillingness to participate (Füller, 2006) or because of their lack of expertise that is often required to contribute to innovation-related problems, particularly in a B2B setting (Simula, Töllinen & Karjaluoto, 2013). Hence, these free riders prefer to listen to the lead users who are "at the leading edge of the market" (Nordlund, Lempiälä & Holopainen, 2011, p.286) and may have deeper knowledge of the specific instead of making own contributions. The question arises, why would users then want to freely reveal their ideas or know-how to a large audience that, in most parts, is not giving anything back to the community?

This phenomenon of making contributions by sharing know-how and ideas without making use of one's property rights is referred to as 'free-revealing' (Franke & Shah, 2003; Nordlund, Lempiälä & Holopanien, 2011). These users expend their private resources to innovate, but make it a public good available to anyone in the community (Von Hippel & Von Krogh, 2003). In an attempt to explain this surprising user behavior, Von Hippel and Von Krogh (2003) developed the 'private-collective' innovation model. This model assumes that users do not claim intellectual authorship through the use patents, but instead make their knowledge available for public use.

Several studies address the phenomenon of free-revealing in online communities. Nordlund, Lempiälä and Holopanien (2011) state that for many users the benefits and rewards of free-revealing may outweigh the perceived risks or opportunity costs related to it. Von Hippel and Von Krogh (2003) explain that free-revealing innovators may only need very small personal rewards to be motivated to make contributions. Interestingly, Von Hippel and Von Krogh's (2003) study also found that large communities with many free riders are not always considered threatening by active contributors since these passive users not only add to the importance of the project but also help distribute information by using their networks, which

can increase benefits such as networking, good reputation within the community (Von Hippel, 2006) or recognition by companies (Jeppesen & Frederiksen, 2006). Von Hippel and Von Krogh (2003) also report that particularly students contribute to virtual co-creation projects since they fear no economic threats that others could (mis)use their intellectual property.

Franke and Shah's (2003) study found that expected reciprocity is another important driver for users to free-reveal information. The authors argue that users are willing to freely share information if they can expect other users to contribute as well. Their study further found that users might also contribute to an innovation dialogue in order to incite others users to develop their ideas further by adding new ideas and know-how, which is also stated by Jeppesen and Frederiksen (2006). These users see a benefit in collectively co-creating knowledge as well as in collectively finding solutions to specific problems since it is not only fun but also offers the opportunity to learn (Franke & Shah, 2003; Von Hippel & Von Krogh, 2003). Additionally, many users do not plan or have no capabilities to actually turn their innovative ideas into commercial products. Thus, they decide to freely reveal it to others (Franke & Shah, 2003).

Organizational Culture as a Major Influencer of Users' Willingness to Free-Reveal

The willingness of users to freely share know-how and ideas is also assumed to be strongly influenced by the organizational culture of companies. Nordlund, Lempiälä and Holopainen (2011) state that at B2B companies "where time allocation is tightly linked to achieving specific organisational goals" (pp.290f) employees may have only little time to participate in virtual co-creation or innovation tasks. Further, many companies' cultures may not see major benefits in participating in social media. Thus, the uncertainty about the effectiveness and the benefits of social media activities may be an important reason why companies and employees do not invest time in engaging in online dialogues (Nordlund, Lempiälä & Holopainen, 2011; Simula, Töllinen & Karjaluoto, 2013).

Simula, Töllinen and Karjaluoto's (2013) survey of Finish industrial companies revealed that most of them had never engaged in crowdsourcing activities. As a major reason companies stated the lack of resources, either time, money, manpower or knowledge, that refrained them from using social media networks or virtual co-creation networks for innovation. Further, the authors uncovered that there was a shared belief among the surveyed companies that social media would be more suitable for marketing purposes. Some companies stated that their products would be too complex which is why involving external actors in the creation process would make little sense (Simula, Töllinen & Karjaluoto, 2013).

Intellectual property rights also concerned managers (Simula, Töllinen & Karjaluoto, 2013). As Nordlund, Lempiälä and Holopainen (2011) mention, many B2B companies still live an organizational culture that is dominated by "securing patenting rights and revealing new ideas only after the IPR process is initiated" (p.291) since B2B firms "are very much used to managing and capitalising on their IPR portfolio" (p.291). Hence, the authors conclude that the B2B firms' careful protection of their innovation processes may deter employees from contributing and sharing innovation-related information freely. However, Von Hippel (2006) argues that many studies have revealed that patenting is not considered very effective since

it is costly, timely, not always applicable and secrets can only be kept until the launch of the product.

It appears that a company's organizational culture is a major factor influencing and determining the employees' ability and willingness to make free contributions to online communities. Consequently, Nordlund, Lempiälä and Holopainen (2011) argue that companies need to change their organizational culture, thus need to adopt a new mindset that is open towards co-creational activities, collaborations with other companies, and that embraces the exchange of knowledge between different business actors. Firms also need to encourage their employees to participate in and contribute to those communities (Nordlund, Lempiälä & Holopainen, 2011). In other words, organizations must undertake "a fundamental redesign of marketing processes and the marketing organization to support continuous dialogue with customers, as well as to systematically share the knowledge generated through this dialogue within the firm in a way" (Sawhney, Verona & Prandelli, 2005, p.15). The authors stress that only if firms manage to establish close social ties to the users, these users will contribute on a continuous basis, which is a prerequisite for making collaborative online communities valuable sources for innovation. To manage increasing user contribution, firms also need to create positions that scan the vast information available in online communities and distribute it within the organization to respective departments (Sawhney, Verona & Prandelli, 2005).

2.3.6 The Challenges of Virtual Co-Creation in the B2B Sector

It can be concluded that there exists a general willingness of users to contribute and freely share their ideas and know-how. However, in a B2B context, as stated by Nordlund, Lempiälä and Holopainen (2011) employers may be heavily influenced by their companies' mind-set towards social media and thus, may be limited in following their personal motivations, but may rather act in the interest of their employers. Many of them have been found to still be generally skeptical towards social media as a tool for retrieving external input for innovations, product or business development (Simula, Töllinen and Karjaluoto, 2013). The scarcity of resources such as money, experience, know-how or time to engage in crowdsourcing activities also restrain companies from engaging in virtual co-creation communities (Simula, Töllinen and Karjaluoto, 2013). The strong rivalry between B2B companies is believed to be another obstacle for collaborative innovation in the B2B sector (Nordlund, Lempiälä & Holopainen, 2011). Therefore, it can be assumed that B2B employees may be more careful in sharing ideas and know-how in online networks than 'regular' users.

However, Von Hippel (2005) states that the fear of rivalry and losses is exaggerated. He explains that competitors are rarely interested in detailed technical information but only strive for general ideas. He reminds that users and companies operating in the same industries share very similar knowledge. Thus, he concludes that the risk of losing something to other users or competitors through freely revealing information is rather low. Nevertheless, Sawhney, Verona and Prandelli (2005) remind that it is indispensable for any initiator of innovation-related activities to disclose clear guidelines for the use of Intellectual property rights, so that users are motivated to make meaningful contributions and that companies can make use of these ideas and information. However, it sometimes may still be necessary to

offer monetary incentives to stimulate the contribution of ideas and information (Sawhney, Verona & Prandelli, 2005). Ideally, these incentives encourage lead users to compete against each other with their best ideas and knowledge contributions (Sawhney, Verona & Prandelli, 2005). Simula, Töllinen and Karjaluoto (2013) provide various examples of B2B innovation projects where large amounts of money are offered to the innovators in order to stimulate their contributions. Thus, it appears that user contribution in B2B is indeed a challenge

2.3.7 The Future of Co-Creation and User Innovation in B2B

Kärkkäinen, Jussila and Väisänen (2010) found that the potential of social media in regards to innovation is much higher than its actual usage today. Even though their study dates back some years and things may have changed, it is assumed that the incorporation of social media as a tool to innovate is still lacking behind its potential. Simula, Töllinen and Karjaluoto (2013) propose that the use of social media and virtual co-creation in a B2B environment will grow in the future, partly because of young employees pushing the social media use further. It is assumed that the companies who achieve to be the first to utilize virtual innovation to their benefits will gain a competitive advantage (Kärkkäinen, Jussila & Väisänen, 2010; Nordlund, Lempiälä & Holopainen, 2011).

However, today, the usage of social media as a tool to innovate is still extremely low, even though B2B companies who are engaging in virtual co-creation already report benefits such as an increase of customer-orientation as well as shorter development processes (Kärkkäinen, Jussila & Väisänen, 2010). The most prominent reasons for B2B companies not to utilize social media in innovation are the lack of understanding how to use this tool properly (which is partly due to the lack of good practice examples), low expectations on its utility, the difficulties in measuring its impact and the slow adaption of the organizational mindset towards new technologies (Kärkkäinen, Jussila & Väisänen, 2010). Obviously, still little is known about the role of virtual co-creation in regards to a B2B company's innovation processes (Kärkkäinen, Jussila & Väisänen, 2010; Nordlund, Lempiälä & Holopainen, 2011; Simula, Töllinen & Karjaluoto, 2013), which makes more research necessary, particularly because to date most studies focused on a B2C context (Nordlund, Lempiälä & Holopainen, 2011). Therefore, this study aims to provide more insights into the functionality and utility of Internet-based collaborative innovation in a B2B setting.

2.4 The Definition of Business Development

Business development is a term largely used in the business world, however not everybody understands what it really means (Djuric, 2005; Kind, 2007). Little information to explain the concept of business development was found in the academic literature, therefore, in this subchapter, the accent will fall on reviewing non-academic sources that touch upon the subject.

To begin with, Kind (2007) equates business development to enterprise development. Therefore, in her research, she relies on the definition provided by the Economic

Development Services, Inc., which looks at business / enterprise development from a holistic perspective as follows:

> *"…enterprise development; the activity that increases, or is intended to increase, the profit, production, or service potential of an enterprise; investment of capital and time that causes, or is intended to cause, the growth and expansion of an enterprise; the process of moving a business towards the point where it can provide its services and products to the entire outside group that wants them; the pro-motional side of business networking; persuading, or intending to persuade, prospects that appear to have the potential become customers, clients, or buyers; the process of promotion to build and sustain working relationships that relate to the business purpose"* (p.177).

This definition emphasizes the idea that all activities that help an enterprise to grow are considered to be business development activities, i.e. product development, financial investments, improvement of customer relationships etc. A more detailed definition of business development is given by Sørensen (2013) who argues that business development represents

> *"a number of tasks and processes aiming at preparing and supporting the implementation of growth opportunities within the constraints of a firm's strategic momentum […], but does not include decisions on strategy and implementation of growth opportunities" (p.1).*

According to him, business development is concerned primarily with the process of creating growth opportunities for enterprises. This idea is also supported by Pollack (2012) who defines business development as "the creation of long-term value for an organization from customers, markets, and relationships." More precisely, Pollack (2012) attributes the following activities to business development: the development of products that can be sold to more customers, the entering of new markets, the creation of brand value, the maintenance of relationships with customers, partners and other stakeholders such as the public or the press and also the identification of new, prospective customers.

Another source states that "business development is about bringing discontinuity into the normal operations of an organization; it's about bringing, doing or developing new things the organization didn't do before" (The Unlimited, 2007). This statement connects business development to any kind of innovation on product, commercial or corporate levels (The Unlimited, 2007).

Taking into consideration all of the above, business development can be anything from product development to investment activities. However, one thing that business development should not be interchanged with is sales because business development includes "brand placement, market expansion, new user acquisition, and awareness", while the sales' function is just about selling products to the end-user (Dumont, 2014).

2.5 The Main Theories Used in this Study

This study aims to explore how B2B companies can utilize social media tools effectively to enhance business development. However, one of the major barriers for organizations to engage in social media is the lack of understanding how to utilize social media tools properly considering the specific setting of the B2B environment (Järvinen et al., 2012; Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christodoulides, 2011).

The B2B environment has been found to highly differ from a B2C setting since products tend to be more complex and customers are usually fewer (Matties, 2012; Simula, Töllinen & Karjaluoto, 2013; Swani & Brown, 2011), which implicates that social media usage in a B2B context is different than in a B2C context. Even though B2B clients are indeed different in comparison to 'regular' consumers (Matties, 2012; Simula, Töllinen & Karjaluoto, 2013; Swani & Brown, 2011), Sood and Pattinson (2012) emphasize that both users still share similar traits since, for example, both B2B and B2C buyers base their buying decisions on the trust they have in a company (Leek & Christodoulides, 2011b).

Therefore, a strong brand is crucial for the success of a B2B company since it serves as an indicator of a company's performance capacity as well as a risk reducer since large amounts of money are usually involved (Backhaus, Steiner, Lügger, 2011; Persson, 2010). Brennan and Croft (2012) found that social media can be utilized in order to position a company as a market-driving brand and thus, take influence on the development of markets.

However, branding is often neglected in a B2B context, since close relationships are considered key for the success of businesses (Backhaus, Steiner & Lügger, 2011; Leek & Christodoulides, 2011b). In this regard, social media facilitates connections between partners and to customers on a more regular basis and thus has become an important supplement for maintaining relationships and in the support of sales processes (Inks, Schetzsle & Avila 2012; Rodriguez, Peterson & Krishnan, 2012). Rodriguez, Peterson and Krishnan (2012) even assume that social media will not only be a useful, but even become a necessary tool for salespeople to develop and strengthen relationships. It is stressed that B2B practitioners prefer direct communication channels to more impersonal communication tools in comparison to B2C firms (Lilien et al., 2010). The most popular social media platform is LinkedIn because it provides easier access to the 'right' people (Rodriguez, Peterson & Krishnan, 2012).

The identification of new customers has been found to be one of the major reasons for B2B companies to engage in social media (Järvinen et al., 2012; Michaelidou Siamagka & Christodoulides, 2011) because increasing the opportunities to sell is a major way to grow for a company. Social media has been found a useful tool for identifying leads (Agnihotri et al., 2012; Rodriguez, Peterson & Krishnan, 2012), especially if used with a long-term focus where the intention is *not* to push direct sales (Rodriguez, Peterson & Krishnan, 2012).

Another way to create growth is the development of products. Previous studies have highlighted the potential benefits of Internet-based innovation, which bases on the paradigm of open innovation (Chesbrough, 2003). Based on open innovation, the concept of crowdsourcing suggests that users post a problem or challenge that is collaboratively solved by a collective of people in an online community (Howe, 2006; Simula, Töllinen & Karjaluoto,

2013). Through involving external users in innovation processes, companies get access to new, innovative ideas and other innovation-related information (Chesbrough, 2006; Kärkkäinen, Jussila & Väisänen, 2010; Sawhney, Verona & Prandelli, 2005). Further, uncovering B2B customers' needs allows companies produce better or new products (Lilien et al., 2010; Urban & Hauser, 2004). However, virtual co-creation encounters many barriers in a B2B context, which leaves its role in relation to a company's aspiration to improve and develop new products rather unclear (Kärkkäinen, Jussila & Väisänen, 2010; Nordlund, Lempiälä & Holopainen, 2011; Sawhney, Verona & Prandelli, 2005; Simula, Töllinen & Karjaluoto, 2013).

All of these dimensions, namely identifying new customers, strengthening relationships with partners, customers and other stakeholders, leveraging the B2B brand or developing products are implied in the notion of business development, which refers to the creation of growth opportunities (Sørensen, 2013) and the creation of long-term value in any kind of way (Pollack, 2012). Thus, this study aims to explore how social media tools can be utilized to support a company's business development whereby the effective usage is considered a prerequisite.

3. Methodology

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The following chapter presents the methodology used in this qualitative research. In order to understand our preoccupations, we first elaborate on the ontological and epistemological stance we take. Second, we present the practiced research design and method together with their advantages and disadvantages. More precisely, we address how the entire research strategy impacts the reliability and validity of this study. Further, we disclose how the empirical data of this research were collected and we describe the sample and as well as the participant selection criteria applied in this study. Finally, we explain how the theoretical framework of this study was established and how we analyzed the empirical material.

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3.1 Methodological Reasoning

In order to keep consistency during the investigation process, we, as researchers, are obliged to adopt a unique philosophical approach to methodology, meaning that we have to take a clear ontological and epistemological position when formulating a feasible research strategy for our study (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2008). To begin with, the ontological standpoint addresses the object of investigation in terms of its relationship with the external world. That is, ontology questions whether social actors should be viewed as objective entities with an external reality around them or whether they should be treated as producers of this reality by means of their own perceptions and actions (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In this regard, since we believe that social media in B2B can be better understood through the eyes of actors directly engaged in its implementation, we look at the researched topic from the constructionist ontological stand point. In other words, we recognize the fact that the phenomena investigated are produced through social interaction and are constantly revised by individuals (Bryman & Bell, 2011) denoting the idea that the world is given meaning only by people participating in it and not the other way around (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2008). This makes the qualitative approach to be the most appropriate in the context of our topic, as it gives us the access to people's beliefs and ideas about how social media enhances business development in B2B by gathering their "stories, narratives and conversations" (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2008, p.5). All of the above leads us to the adoption of a reflexive approach to methodology, which is particularly relevant when researching organizations, their activity and the context in which they operate. (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2008)

Complementary to ontology, the epistemological stance deals with different "ways of inquiring into the nature of the physical and social worlds" (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2008, p.11) and describes how the researched object should be analyzed. Taking into consideration the explorative nature of our researched question (Webb, 1992), we take an interpretivist stance in epistemology (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Hence, we view our interviewees as individuals with unique experiences and interpret their verbal and non-verbal discourse

accordingly, i.e. we base our interpretation of reality on their experiences (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Therefore, we are not trying to judge, but rather explain social actions within the topic researched (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

To conclude, we are not aiming at creating universal laws (Bacharach, 1989), but rather intend to gain insights into the topic that can serve as a strong base for further more detailed investigation. In this regard, the interpretative stance in epistemology and social constructionist point of view in ontology give us the possibility to explore the topic in a holistic way, which is the most appropriate when investigating a rather untapped scientific area (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Thus, qualitative research enables us to learn about new phenomena in an exploratory way. This is in contrast to quantitative research that aims to test hypotheses and therefore collects data under strict boundaries – a goal that we do not pursue in this study and thus do not practice quantitative methods in this study (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

3.2 Frame of Mind

The biggest challenge in assuring the soundness of this research is to avoid our personal frame of mind when collecting and interpreting the data (Bryman & Bell, 2011). More specifically, in order to increase the reliability of this study, we need to investigate the reality in a detached way, which means evading our personal assumptions about the topic and relying only on the theoretical and empirical data received to draw conclusions. Staying open-minded increases the chances of contributing to the scientific and corporate worlds with unexpected findings (Bryman & Bell, 2011), which, in our case, would change the way social media is viewed in the B2B sector. Moreover, by leaving our prejudices behind, we are able to treat the subject of the thesis through the eyes of our interview respondents, as required by our previously described philosophical convictions.

Thinking out of the box can be achieved through self-reflection and self-awareness (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In this regard, we analyzed our past backgrounds to determine what professional, academic and personal experiences could in any way interfere with the research process. Thus, we detected to be influenced in our judgments by several types of knowledge i.e. theoretical and practical knowledge about social media in B2C; information obtained during our Bachelor and Master studies about the B2B environment; basic understanding of the research field received from the revision of several theoretical works. Since our study intends to explore a topic rather than prove a hypothesis, this pre-existing knowledge was used primarily in the construction of the theoretical framework rather than in the data collection process. Bryman and Bell (2011) argue that a certain level of pre-knowledge is required for any researcher to conduct a good investigation.

In order to further reduce the influence of the pre-existing knowledge in our acquisition and interpretation of the data, we adopted an inductive research approach (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Easterby-Smith et al., 2008, in Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). In our case, the inductive approach took on an iterative stance that implies that our study involved "tracking back and forth between theory and data" (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.573). In practice, this meant that theory served as an inspiration for our study, but not as a limitation to our data collection. On the over hand, the empirical material pointed out the necessary information

that should be included in our thesis so that all dimensions of the researched topic are fully covered. Together, these two parts of the iterative process helped us generate rich and diverse data necessary for the formulation of relevant findings. This approach allowed us to be responsive to the empirical insights gained in our fieldwork and therewith adapt the focus of our research continuously.

3.3 Research Design

In order to receive a larger overview of how social media contributes to the business development of B2B companies, we decided to analyze contrasting case studies (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Therefore, we employed a comparative design to our study, meaning that we took as examples companies with different backgrounds in terms of size, field of operation and country of origin. Besides giving us a general understanding of the reality in regards to our topic, this approach also showed us if experiences with social media differ from one company to another. In other words, it illustrated if there was only one reality across the B2B sector or each organization had its own experience that cannot be transferred to other business entities (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

By establishing similar or distinguishing characteristics, we were able to formulate findings that are valid on a larger scale in the B2B industry. "Dyer and Wilkins (1991), for example, argue that a multiple-case study approach tends to mean that the researcher pays less attention to the specific context and more to the ways in which the cases can be contrasted" (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.67). We disagree with this statement and believe that due the qualitative strategy applied we permitted ourselves to go in more detail into the subject when needed, therefore we managed to grasp the individuality of each corporate context and of social media practices used to a similar extent. However, we still admit that due to time and resource limitations this case study is not as ample as it should be, thus it becomes just a starting point for a more comprehensive further investigation.

3.4 Research Strategy

3.4.1 Qualitative Interviewing

Due to our epistemological / ontological stance and our exploratory approach, interviews were chosen to be the most suited method for the collection of data (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Since we intended to find out how B2B companies are using social media und how they benefit from it in regards to business development, interviews allowed us best to generate extensive amounts of data on the topic within a short period of time, given that time was a major constraint in our study (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In addition, interviews enabled us to gain rather holistic insights into the study area since respondents could be asked to recall past events, elaborate on their experiences and evaluate developments in a time context (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In particular the latter was extremely important since we were highly interested in the impact of social media activities on business development over time.

Due to the fact that we intended "to collect information that captures the meaning and interpretation of phenomenon in relation to the interviewee's worldview" (Kvale, 1996, cited in Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012, p.132), long interviews were desired since they would give us time to gather enough insights into the topic as seen and interpreted by the interviewee and also go beyond preset categories. However, since we intended to interview business practitioners with considerable experience in the use of social media in a B2B context, hence people in leading positions, we were aware that we needed to stay adaptive to each participant's disposability and adjust the length of the interview accordingly.

Qualitative research is often accused for believed insufficiencies such as the lack of generalizability, validity and reliability, which are typical evaluation criteria for quantitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Flyvbjerg, 2006). However, we agree with Guba and Lincoln's (1994, in Bryman & Bell, 2011) notion that qualitative research needs to be assessed on different principles than quantitative research. Considering the small samples that are selected in qualitative studies, generalizability is never possible to achieve (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Rather, qualitative research seeks to describe interesting and contrasting cases or case examples. Therefore, Guba and Lincoln's (1994, in Bryman & Bell, 2011) propose that assessment criteria such as transferability, credibility, dependability and conformability are more suited. In accordance with this, we tried to make our research process and the interpretation of data as transparent as possible to make our study applicable to as many other cases as possible (Bryman & Bell, 2011). We also provided descriptions of all participating companies to illustrate how our respondents' knowledge and experiences were established. This allows the reader to better assess the quality and transferability of the results of this study to other individual cases (Bryman & Bell, 2011). While qualitative research is often criticized for subjectivity, we do not see major limitations here since cultural bias is a prerequisite for any qualitative researcher to make sense of the collected data. Therefore, we approached the empirical material in the most critical way possible to promote credibility of our findings.

3.4.2 The Empirical Data of this Study

Since individuals primarily interact through the medium of language, our focus was to obtain exhaustive aggregations of words that richly describe the respondent's viewpoint (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). The subjectivity of the words was highly appreciated since qualitative research does not strive for quantifiable results but aims for allowing the researcher to participate in the mindset of the respondent (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

To ensure a thorough understanding of the respondent's answers, face-to-face interviews were preferred since they would enable us to not only listen to the respondent's words but also observe their body language (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). However, not all participants were within geographical reach, which forced us to stay adaptive. In one case, a Skype conversation was viewed as an acceptable alternative due to its closeness to a real face-to-face experience. In other cases, it was only possible to conduct the interview over the phone, depriving us from the opportunity to assess the respondent's nonverbal expressions.

All interviews were conducted in English because the researchers and the participants came from different national backgrounds. Since English was, except for one participant, nobody's mother tongue, language barriers may sometimes have been a challenge both for the respondent trying to clearly express his or her viewpoint and also for the researcher intending to make sense of the empirical data without causing any misconceptions.

3.5 The Sample and Selection Criteria for Participants

The major prerequisite for the selection of interviewees was that they needed to have worked with or worked in the B2B industry and second, they were also required to have experiences with the use of social media in a B2B context.

We decided that managers or employees holding higher positions in their organizations would be most appropriate as interview partners since they generally have several years of work experience and also tend to have a more holistic overview over their organization's business practices and activities. Thus, we expected these participants to be more knowledgeable about the different social media activities of their organizations and their impact on business development.

Throughout our study, we remained open to recruit interviewees whenever they were identified, which is typical for qualitative research and is strongly opposing the positivist notion, which requires the researcher to be clear about the 'unit of analysis' before the collection of empirical data in order to make results generalizable (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012).

Six interviewees participated in our study (see Table 1) and were found and selected in the following manner: For our first interview, our supervisor Magnus Lagnevik provided help and offered access to his network since it can be highly difficult in student projects to get connected to managers because young researchers usually lack a good reputation and a large network (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). Our initial idea to practice a 'snowball sampling' where the first contact helps to find other interesting respondents (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012) did not work out. Thus, we reached out to B2B companies via e-mail and the phone to ask for participation. Local companies were prioritized since face-to-face interviews were preferred and time and budget constraints did not allow us to travel. Since we intended to include good practice examples, it was worth accepting that not all participating managers were in geographical proximity. Our requests resulted in four more interviews. One of our respondents was recruited through personal networks.

Three face-to-face interviews, one Skype and two phone interviews were conducted. While we were aware of the difficulties in regards to interviewing unknown people over the phone (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012), the limitations were worth accepting since it enabled us to interview managers in leading positions.

Table 1: *Participant Profiles*

Name	Sex	Company	Position	Interview Location
Amanda Magnusson	F	Skåne Food Innovation Network, Malmö, Sweden	Project Assistant, Responsible for OpenUp	Juridicum, Lund University
Sean Duffy	M	The Duffy Agency, Malmö, Sweden	Founder & CEO	Company Office, Malmö
Dumitru Slonovschi	M	Magenta Consulting, Chisinau, Moldova	Founder & CEO	Skype
Lena Hedén	F	Axis Communications AB, Lund, Sweden	PR & Marketing Manager, Product & Technologies	Company Office, Lund
Tobias Engvall	M	Volvo Group Trucks, Gothenburg, Sweden	Strategic Online Communication Manager	Phone
Johan Åkesson	M	Axis Communications AB, Gothenburg, Sweden	Business Development Director, Retail	Phone

Our recruitment strategy was based on the idea of 'information-oriented selection', which implies that case examples are selected based on their expected utility (Flyvbjerg, 2006). In other words, we were particularly keen on finding interviewees who had good stories to tell, so that we would be able to uncover interesting, valuable, rich findings (Bryman & Bell, 2011) that would allow us to answer the research question in the best possible way. Hence, in each interview request we clearly displayed our research interest to allow managers to assess whether they would be able to support our study with interesting insights or not.

All participants were business practitioners with considerable experience in social media usage in a B2B environment. The interviewees came from very different B2B industries and had different but extensive experiences with the use of social media. While half of the respondents worked in service-providing companies, the other half worked in organizations that have their core business in the production of industrial goods. The diversity of respondents in regards to their backgrounds was intended since it enhanced the likelihood of generating unique and rich findings (Laverty, 2003).

During our recruitment phase we faced several difficulties. A major challenge was to find interviewees that met all the criteria of our distinct participant profile. Bearing in mind that social media is still a rather new platform for the majority of B2B companies, only few B2B companies were interesting for our study to be included since we did not intend to interview beginners.

Another challenge referred to the willingness of companies to participate. Since participation requires managers to invest time and money, motivation can be quite low if they have little to

no expectations that their efforts will be reimbursed (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). This holds particularly true for a relatively small project such as a Master thesis that may not be able to provide benefits to a company. However, the relevance of our research topic, the good reputation of Lund University, our efforts to make the interview as convenient as possible for the participant – which are all stated to be strong drivers for participant recruitments (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012) – helped us to succeed in recruiting participants. Our study includes a notable list of six high-profile business people from companies such as Volvo Trucks, Axis Communications, Magenta Consulting, The Duffy Agency and Skåne Food Innovation Network who were willing to invest their time and participate in our study, which we highly appreciated knowing that these managers receive a multitude of interview requests.

3.6 The Design of the Interviews

The interviews were conducted in locations that were most convenient for the respondents to reach in order to minimize their participation efforts (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). All respondents were asked to select the preferred interview location and time in order to increase participation rate and, more importantly, to create a relaxed environment that made the interviewee feel most comfortable to talk freely as we hoped for deep and honest answers (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). In each interview, both researchers participated to support each other in asking the questions and to have two people listening to maximize understanding of the respondents' answers and viewpoints and to minimize misconceptions.

Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2012) note that the purpose of the study determines how structured the interviews need to be. Given that we formulated a fairly specific research focus beforehand where our intention was to get our main questions answered while still allowing interviewees to expand on a topic, we followed Bryman and Bell's (2011) advice to do semi-structured interviewing. This technique suggests that the researcher prepares a catalog of general questions to ensure that all important, predefined topics are covered but still remains highly flexible in the order and the phrasing of these questions (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012).

We chose this interviewing style since it allowed us to remain adaptive to each individual interview's conversation flow without disrupting it. This required us to be sensitive and perceptive to the respondent's answers so that we were able to ask follow-up questions or to encourage the respondent to elaborate on his or her answers whenever interesting ideas or topics emerged (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). Retaining this flexibility was important to us since we did not know the interviewees beforehand and therefore had little ideas about what would be the most interesting topics in each interview.

The length of the interviews was dependent on each participant's disposability. Given that the weeks dedicated to data collection included three national holidays and given that managers have busy schedules, we adjusted the length of the interviews to each individual case to increase participation. While long interviews enabled us to minimize the structure and therefore became much like a loose, natural conversation rather than an artificial, scripted

'questioning' (Burgess, 1984, in Bryman & Bell, 2011; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012), shorter interviews required us to collect the data in a more structured, 'efficient' way to still get all topics covered.

Before each interview, respondents were informed in an "interview consent form" (see Appendix 1) about their rights and the terms and conditions of participation. All interviewees gave permission that their names and the company's name could be disclosed in this thesis.

3.7 The Design of the Interview Questions

Since we practiced semi-structured interviewing, we prepared an interview guide encompassing several general questions. Our goal of each interview was two-fold: we intended to cultivate data in relation to the underlying theories of our research, but also tried to touch upon topics and categories that had not been anticipated before (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In each interview, we assumed the role of the moderator, asking open-end questions that encouraged the interviewee to give copious answers. Respondents were considered to be the experts that enriched our fragmented theory-inspired knowledge with first-hand experiential knowledge.

We adopted the romantic viewpoint on interviewing, which suggests that trust and rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee are of vital importance for the generation of honest, personal answers (Alvesson, 2003). Since we did not know any of the interviewees, it was crucial for us to make the respondent feel most comfortable in sharing his or her insights and knowledge with us (Laverty, 2003). To arrive at this goal, we informed each participant about the modalities of the interview beforehand to promote trust through transparency (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Furthermore, each interview started with a familiarizing phase in which we asked the interviewee through 'introducing questions' to talk about the professional background and the job responsibilities (Bryman & Bell, 2011). These descriptive data allowed us to get to know the respondents better and assess their expertise in social media usage in a B2B context.

After the initial phase, we started asking our main questions that were designed in a way to touch upon all major topics and theories. The prepared interview guide proofed to be helpful for covering all topics, while 'follow-up questions' and 'specifying questions' incited the respondent to elaborate on his or her answers and viewpoints in order to create insightful, extensive and also unexpected data that would best allow us to answer our research question (Bryman & Bell, 2011). To ensure our correct understanding, 'probing' and 'interpreting questions' were asked (Bryman & Bell, 2011), which effectively prevented us from misinterpreting answers or over-emphasizing certain aspects.

Bryman and Bell (2011) note that the interviewer's role is more than merely listening, but also requires being responsive to the interviewee. Even though we recorded each interview, we were highly attentive to the respondent's answers throughout each interview and signaled our interest, surprise, excitement or agreement to promote a continuous dialogue (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Agreeing with Bryman and Bell (2011), the major challenge hereby was to balance our role as an active listener and questioner without being intrusive.

Usually, only few questions were necessary to stimulate a rich discourse since respondents generally appeared to be keen on presenting a holistic overview over their experiences and their company's activities. Thanks to the respondent's willingness to give detailed answers, we were able to collect large material data. However, Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2012) note that managers are highly experienced and trained in giving interviews, which may result in rather general or promotional answers that intend to present the organization in the best spot. What is more, questions referring to sensitive topics can decrease the respondent's willingness to give true answers or even may him make adopt a defensive position (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). Therefore, we did our best to avoid sensitive topics, which in our study were most likely to occur in regards to the imperfect usage of social media. To avoid any uneasiness, we stayed attentive throughout the interview to make the respondent feel comfortable at any time.

3.8 The Review of the Literature

To become familiar with our research topic of social media usage in a B2B context, we started off by reading press articles, blog posts and topic-related online discussions as well as several academic papers. This provided us with first insights into the current developments, practitioners' opinions and major concerns in the field of our research area. These sources not only provided a good start for our research, but also enabled us to stay updated about latest developments considering that social media is a constantly and rapidly changing field.

The literature was reviewed in an iterative and 'interactive process', which implies that the literature is consulted whenever new, interesting topics come up along the conduct of the study (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2012). Thus, the theoretical framework was edited and adapted throughout the entire project.

The theoretical framework of our study was created through a 'narrative review', a method that is commonly practiced by qualitative, interpretivist researchers (Bryman & Bell 2011). Hereby, the major purpose was to create understanding by presenting what has been researched and written about the topic before. This provided us with some initial ideas about the topic and also helped us identify research gaps that inspired the direction of our research. Bryman and Bell (2011) explain that "[n]arrative reviews therefore tend to be less focused and more wide-ranging in scope than systematic reviews" (p.101). Consequently, the narrative review was preferred to a 'systematic review' because the latter aims to compare other studies' findings and evaluate their metrics and is therefore mainly applied by quantitative researchers (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

For the creation of the theoretical framework, we utilized mainly primary sources such as peer-reviewed journal articles since they present the most recent findings in academic research and are considered highly reliable as they are validated by two or more experts (Fisher, 2007). Considering that social media is a highly dynamic field, recent publications were most interesting for us since they presented the most up-to-date findings. To manage and handle the vast amounts of information that we came across throughout this project, we

followed Bryman and Bell's (2011) advice to take notes during reading, which decisively helped us to organize our thoughts and find sources ad-hoc.

The journal articles were found through LUBsearch in various databases, for example, in Business Source Complete. Key words such as social media, B2B, social media in B2B, social-networking, B2B sales, B2B branding, or social media and open innovation were utilized in our search. Once important articles were identified, they often provided links to other relevant academic works. Hence, we dived into the topic in an iterative process.

A limitation may occur in regards to the completeness of our study's theoretical framework. Even though we tried to read as much as possible, this paper most definitely does not present a holistic overview over previous studies related to our research field. Hence, we did our best to depict the most relevant academic works that were identified in this project.

3.9 The Data Analysis

All interviews were recorded in order to be transcribed later and decoded for the analysis. Because errors in transcribing can happen even to experienced researchers (Bryman & Bell, 2011), we decided to stay on the safe side and use the (???) sign whenever a sequence from the recordings was not intelligible. This was believed to increase the confidence in our data collection process (Bryman & Bell, 2011) and therefore augment the reliability of our results. When done, the empirical data were discussed by both researchers in order to avoid any biased interpretations (Alvesson, 2003). During the analysis, the information was categorized in metaphors, differences, similarities etc. with the help of the thematic framework method (Bryman & Bell, 2011). By having all the data organized in themes, we were able to come up with findings without missing any relevant information. We analyzed each piece of information independently and in relation to the whole empirical material collected, which provided us with a hermeneutical understanding of the topic researched (Alvesson, 2003). It is worth mentioning that we also used in vivo coding in our data analysis. That is, we expressed the reality, where possible, through our respondents' words, which once again fortified the objectivity of our study from the philosophical point of view (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

4. Analysis

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In this chapter the empirical data of this study will be presented and analyzed in regards to the research question of how B2B companies can utilize social media effectively in order to enhance their business development. As a starting point, the interviewees' backgrounds and their organizations will be presented in order to make the analysis and findings of this study more assessable considering that real case examples are implied. In a second step, the empirical data will be analyzed in relation to the theoretical framework. Since the research question is two-fold, asking about the effectiveness of social media and its role in regards to business development, the analysis aims to respect both dimensions of the research question. Finally, the empirical findings will be discussed in order to answer the research question.

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4.1 Participant Profiles

This study aims to answer the research question by exploring real case examples. Therefore, the respondents' experiences and viewpoints in regards to the role of social media in a B2B context build the empirical material of this study. Thus, each interviewee and his or her employer organization will be presented before conducting the analysis because it is assumed that this adds to the understanding of the subsequent discussion of this study's empirical data and facilitates the assessment of the findings.

4.1.1 Sean Duffy – The Duffy Agency

In a dynamic world such as the Web 2.0, the challenge for digital consultancy firms is to find suitable strategies for their clients to navigate them successfully through this fast-changing environment. The Duffy Agency provides services to international brands to help them establish and leverage their online appearance, activities and strategies. The CEO and founder, Sean Duffy, draws on extensive experience in digital strategy and international brand development, which serves as the basis for him to consult both B2C and B2B companies in their online communications (The Duffy Agency, 2014a). According to him, the share of the two sectors is about "50/50" at The Duffy Agency.

The consultancy firm has offices in Malmö, Sweden and Boston, Massachusetts. Among its clients are Absolut Vodka, Saab, Alfa Laval, SAS, Volvo, Skanska, etc. (The Duffy Agency, 2014b). Since social media is the core business of The Duffy Agency, the company is present on numerous social media platforms and is also hosting different digital marketing blogs.

4.1.2 Lena Hedén – Axis Communications AB

Companies operating in the security industry not only build reliable and innovative technical products to stay competitive, but also need to deal with the sensitive topic of security and surveillance on an informative level to create trust into their business and products. Axis Communications is a global company producing network cameras, video encoders and surveillance systems, headquartered in Lund, Sweden. The company claims to be market leader in network video (Axis, 2014). Among their competitors are Bosch, Panasonic or Sony.

Lena Hedén joined Axis in 2010 and holds the position of the PR Marketing Manager of Axis. She was and still is responsible for the establishment and development of all corporate social media channels and the social media communication strategy of Axis. Today, Axis is present on various platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and is also engaging in guest-blogging on external blogs. Axis' social media strategy is "Join the party". The company's fan base on Facebook entails more than 10,000 people. On LinkedIn, more than 20,000 users follow Axis and their Twitter account is followed by more than 11,000 individuals.

4.1.3 Johan Åkesson – Axis Communications AB

Johan Åkesson holds the position of the Business Development Director for the retail segment at Axis Communications. His responsibility is to find partners that Axis could collaborate with in order to integrate their network cameras into a larger number of solutions that can be sold to different industries. Åkesson stresses that business development at Axis "is about building an ecosystem with partners that we [Axis] can use either regionally or globally, around the globe to address the needs of the end-users." Åkesson emphasizes that their product, the network camera, is only a part of an entire solution and thus, is rarely presented as a single product but as integrated into solutions.

4.1.4 Tobias Engvall – Volvo Trucks

A truck is not only a highly complex technical power machine, but also a lifestyle-intensive product considering that truck drivers spend a considerable time of their lives driving them. Therefore, truck manufacturers not only need to develop highly innovative products but also need to develop deep relationships to foster their customer's involvement with the brand in order to sustain a competitive advantage. Volvo Trucks is part of Volvo Group and headquartered in Gothenburg, Sweden. It is one of the leading heavy truck and engine manufacturers, present in more than 70 markets (Volvo Trucks, 2014b; LinkedIn Engvall, 2014). The company is active on numerous social media channels such as LinkedIn with 34,000 followers, Facebook with more than 363,000 subscribers, Twitter with more than 20,000 followers and YouTube with more than 92,000 subscribers. Volvo Trucks was awarded with seven gold prizes by the Art Directors Club Awards for their YouTube campaign for the launch of their new truck models (Volvo Trucks, 2014a). The campaign includes videos such as the "The Epic Split" or "The Ballerina Stunt", which were all together

watched more than 100 Million times. Volvo Trucks also hosts an online community named worldtrucker.com that unites more than 36,000 truck-loving members (Worldtrucker, 2014).

Tobias Engvall holds the position of the Strategic Online Communication Manager at Volvo Trucks. He is responsible for the social media presence of Volvo Trucks and the development of Volvo Trucks' digital strategy (LinkedIn Engvall, 2014).

4.1.5 Dumitru Slonovschi – Magenta Consulting

In times of fast evolving markets, a growing competition and sophisticated as well as quickly changing consumer demands, the challenge for market research companies is to identify the right metrics that allow other companies to make wise future-oriented decisions that are based on the facts from today. Magenta Consulting is a Chisinau, Moldova-based business consulting firm, which provides market analyses to its customers. It analyzes current market developments, particularly in the Moldovan market and makes informed predictions about the future development of consumer needs, consumer culture and the market as a whole (Magenta Consulting, 2014). Magenta Consulting started utilizing social media for business purpose several years ago, already before Facebook introduced its page function. The company counts 2,700 followers on Facebook but decreased its activities on external social media platforms and today, rather seeks to drive users to its own website. Here, Magenta Consulting is publishing a general research paper each Monday, which could basically be considered as blogging.

Dumitru Slonovschi is the founder and CEO of Magenta Consulting.

4.1.6 Amanda Magnusson – Skåne Food Innovation Network

Skåne Food Innovation Network builds on the idea of uniting diverging competencies in order to increase knowledge and innovation (Livsmedelsakademin, 2014). Numerous manufacturers and retailers from the food industry as well as universities, public actors and other interest groups are members of the network. In 2013, the organization launched the Internet-based platform letsopenup.se, which is based on the paradigm of open innovation (Chesbrough, 2003; Chesbrough, 2006) and which was designed to combine the competences of different industries, currently the food and the packaging industry in an online community (OpenUp, 2014). Its community members (more than 400 as of May 2014) are mainly people working in these industries, but also a multitude of students with an interest in the topic as Magnusson explains. All members are invited to either post challenges or provide solutions to other users' problems by contributing with their ideas and know-how. Thus, the online platform follows the logic of crowdsourcing (Howe, 2006; Simula, Töllinen & Karjaluoto, 2013).

Amanda Magnusson holds a degree in Biotechnology and Food and is a project assistant at Skåne Food Innovation Network. She helped with the establishment of this online community and is responsible for the maintenance and development of the OpenUp Innovation Network.

4.2 Analysis of the Empirical Material

The empirical data will be analyzed in two steps. Since this study considers only the effective usage of social media to have an impact on business development, the prerequisites for effective social media usage that were identified in the interviews will be examined first. In a second step, the empirical material will be assessed in relation to different dimensions of business development: (1) The acquisition of new customers, partners and other stakeholders; (2) the management of relationships; and (3) the development of products. Other elements of business development such as the entering of new markets or the creation of long-term value are considered to be implied in all of these three themes.

4.2.1 The Prerequisites for Effective Social Media Usage

The empirical data of this study indicate that an organization needs to treat social media as a relevant and useful tool and also needs to approach it openly, so that social media usage can actually bring value to a company. It became apparent in the interviews that most of our respondents approach social media with interest and also attach relevance to this medium.

In contrast to this, Slonovschi admitted that he does not view social media as a necessary and important tool for his business. Even though Magenta Consulting started very early to use social media (even before Facebook introduced its page function), today, it has almost entirely transferred its online activity to the company's website. In present time, Magenta publishes on its website research articles that contain useful information for both the target audience and other people simply interested in the subject. By sharing useful information with the masses, Slonovschi attracts people to the website and creates interest in the company's services. However, despite choosing the company's website as the main online communication channel with its current and potential customers, Slonovschi still admits that Facebook actually helped him built the audience for later blog posts. Magnusson also reports that the member companies of the OpenUp Nework "are not very much experimenting on it" because "they got a lack of time". She elaborates: "People understand that there is potential value to work with it [OpenUp] but it's not like they have to work with it. That's why it is not prioritized within their daily work. " Magnusson and Slonovschi's insights refer to the majority of B2B companies that do not really engage in social media or do not utilize the medium at all, mainly because good practice examples are missing, because experience and knowledge how to use it are low, because time is lacking or because of the uncertainty about the utility of social media for B2B businesses (Inks, Schetzsle & Avila, 2012; Kärkkäinen, Jussila & Väisänen, 2010; Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christodoulides, 2011; Simula, Töllinen & Karjaluoto, 2013).

While the utility of social media in a B2B environment is often questioned (Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christodoulides, 2011), the cases of our participating organizations indicate that social media brings great opportunities for any B2B company. Hedén emphasizes that "it was an exception" that social media was found an inappropriate tool to support the business objectives of a department within the company. Duffy also stresses that "the more we've been trying, the harder it is to find marketing problems that can't be really increased efficiency-wise with these techniques [online or social media marketing]". Magnusson

emphasizes that the member companies of the OpenUp Network acknowledge that there lies potential in social media usage. And also Slonovschi admits that Magenta Consulting is assumedly not exploiting the full potential of social media today as we go along in the interview. Thus, the empirical data and the case examples in this study made it become apparent that all respondents viewed social media as a tool that could be useful, however, their organization made use of this potential to different degrees. This is in line with Jussila, Kärkkäinen and Leino's (2011, in Simula, Töllinen & Karjaluoto, 2013) proposal that there lies much more potential in social media than what is exploited today.

The interviews of this study also indicate that a certain degree of curiosity and willingness to experiment is necessary to make full usage of social media. This is tightly linked with the organizational culture of a company, meaning that one of the success factors of an effective social media usage is the overall company's mindset. For example, Hedén reports that Axis encourages all of its employees to "consider social media in their daily work" and to assess whether it helps them achieve their business goals. Duffy emphasizes that companies need to dare to take a risk, since "most of the time when we do things on social it hasn't been done before." This curiosity about social media by some of our participants is however in contrast to many B2B companies who often still live a very traditional organizational culture that is rather skeptical towards the use of social media, for example, to support innovation (Kärkkäinen, Jussila & Väisänen, 2010; Nordlund, Lempiälä & Holopainen, 2011; Sawhney, Verona & Prandelli, 2005). This is supported by Magnusson who explains that currently most member companies of OpenUp network do not utilize social media in innovation, which she partly blames on the prevalent culture of the organization:

> *"Right now, like the heads of different companies are still males in their 60ies in grey suits and… that's… it's not their way of working. But I think that the heads of the companies are becoming younger… a younger generation and becoming more accustomed to working with digital."*

In this quote, Magnusson explains that many companies are still fairly hesitant to engaging in this "new way of working". However, she predicts that they will need to open up their mindset in the future due to young people entering these organizations, which will lead to the 'recycling' of the prevalent conservative mindset. This is also stated by Duffy who stresses that managers who do not want to engage in social media, "in five years (…) they will be replaced by people who do. Because there is no one coming into the job force now who has not had tablets since they were 2 years old." In regards to this, Hedén reports that the adoption of social media within the organization was partly facilitated by Axis' many young employees and its young organizational culture. Hedén, Duffy's and Magnusson's viewpoints all accord with several studies on Generation Y which suggest that social media usage will need to become a part of any organization due to young people entering the labor force (Bolton et al., 2013; Cho, Park & Ordonez, 2013; Sivertzen, Nilsen & Olafsen, 2013).

Even though none of our informants, except for Duffy whose company's core business is social media, considers social media a central part to their organizations' survival today, most of them agree that social media is of importance for their businesses. Duffy, Hedén and Engvall state that a refusal to utilize social media would lead to a loss of their leading position in the market since all competitors are using the medium as well. This supports Inks, Schetzsle and Avila's (2012) proposal that not utilizing social media would lead to a

competitive disadvantage. For none of the industrial companies in our study it was ever a question of *whether* to engage in social media, but more a question of *how*. For example, Hedén states that Axis is and strives to be perceived as an "innovative company", which called social media usage never into question. In particular Duffy shows misunderstanding for the resistance of some B2B companies to utilize social media as a strategic tool. He provides an illustrating example to support his viewpoint:

> *"I think an unspoken thing in this whole equation is, if you guys both have two companies and you are both in the ball-bearing market, let's say, and you're using sales guys, and you both have crappy websites and you both have no social presence and everything else is the same, you can survive like that and keep on fighting that game as long as no one comes into your category and adds that to the equation. Because then you're gonna be screwed. Because if it is gonna work, and they do start making more relationships, and they have a better awareness, and they start to engage your customers… you probably don't want that to happen."*

Duffy's argument is that social media may not important for the survival of a company unless its competitors are starting to utilize it. Thus, his viewpoint indicates that social media is not only a useful, but will even become a necessary tool in a B2B environment to allow companies to defend their competitive advantage and support their businesses in the long run.

In order to become successful on social media, the respondents have different advices. Some of our respondents stress that a company needs to formulate a social media strategy. Hedén emphasizes that a company needs to "act as one" across all countries and social media channels. She also highlights that markets and countries are not the same and the social media activities need to be adapted accordingly. For example, Slonovschi reports that LinkedIn is less utilized in Moldova than in other parts of the world. The empirical data from Engvall's interview also indicate that a social media strategy is necessary to have in order to gain success. Engvall reports that Volvo Trucks is pursuing "overall goals in our social media strategy". Both, Volvo Trucks and Axis Communications also follow the vision to be and remain number one on social media in comparison to their competitors. This competitive orientation as a benchmark is also highlighted by Duffy:

> *"(…) because let's face it, at the end of the day you don't have to be the biggest Internet genius in the world. You have to be a better Internet genius than your two competitors."*

Besides having a social media strategy, some of our informants also stress that companies need to acquire understanding how to utilize social media and distribute this knowledge within their organizations. Duffy stresses that B2B companies need to gain knowledge to understand "the Internet system" and "how it works". He supports Järvinen et al.'s (2012) proposal to get connected with or hire people with "a foundation and understanding of basic principles". He elaborates: "We all say it is unchartered territory, (…) so that's kind of scary for people." However, for people "a foundation in it", "it's not wildly stabbing in the dark." Duffy argues that then "you can actually succeed very well." Hedén adds that the success of Axis' social media activities is also based on clear "guidelines" for organizational social media usage. The organization offers "trainings" to all employees who intend to use social

media for business purposes. This accords with earlier studies that stress the importance of employee training in regards to social media usage (Moore, Hopkins & Raymond, 2013; Schultz, Schwepker & Good, 2012).

Some of our respondents also stress that once a company is on social media, it also needs to be active on it. Engvall argues that companies need to "actually be on [their] initiative and work with it, try to develop it and make it better". He experiences that "a lot of companies … just post things and don't take care of the feedback and the questions and the engagement that comes afterwards". Hedén also emphasizes the importance of being responsive, to "not leave it empty" but to "be there. And also to listen. And to see what people are saying about your products." This is also stressed by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010).

The literature states that many B2B companies do not measure the impact of social media, mainly because they lack appropriate measurement tools (Järvinen et al., 2012; Michaelidou, Siamagka & Christodoulides, 2011). The empirical data of this study indicate that the measurement of social media effectiveness is indeed challenging. Slonovschi admits that his organization barely measures the effectiveness of their social media performance. However, he does not see a major importance in measuring the effectiveness because he would engage in the activities he is currently doing anyway. In contrast to Slonovschi's statement, Duffy reports that he experiences that B2B business people are often too inclined to ask for the ROI of social media, which he thinks should not be the major criterion for a B2B company to engage in social media. This is because Duffy believes that social media should be treated as a long-term investment to become effective for a company:

> "I look at social like the glide of an airplane. You have to drag it up, you have a long runway, it takes a long time to glide it up, but once it's up, hey, it can kind of flow around by itself. And you don't need a lot of energy in it to make it flow in marketing terms. Campaigns were more like rockets. They are like a high concentration of really bow-taut fuel … if you touch it… pccchhh, overnight you can go from 0 perceptions to 50 million perceptions with a lot of money. The Problem is the money runs out and the fuel runs out and the thing plummets right back down. And so does your awareness come back down."

He argues that social media should not be treated like a campaign with a short-term focus, but managers need to have a long term-perspective to create long-term value just like the notion of business development is suggesting (Pollack, 2012).

Even though social media performance is difficult to assess, two of our other informants, Hedén and Engvall, provide insights into the metrics their organizations are using. Engvall reports that Volvo Trucks is using "KPIs" (key performance indicators). The company measures volumes, times of mentions, sentiments, advocacy and engagement. Hedén reports that Axis is engaging in similar measurement tactics. Both companies, Volvo Trucks and Axis, also track media coverage, the number of mentions in blogs, articles, etc. Hedén reminds that the Internet hosts a multitude of "hidden groups" that can only be tracked manually. In order to allow drawing linkages between social media activities and sales performances, Axis will utilize a "Marketing Automation System" in the future as Hedén explains. Today, she can only retell anecdotal stories from sales people who report that a social media interaction with a potential customer actually led to the closure of a deal.

Engvall also states that assessing whether social media activities impact sales is extremely difficult in a B2B context: "(…) we are so far away from the actual selling in our case because it's a dealer outside in the market."

4.2.2 Acquisition of New Customers, Partners and other Stakeholders

People to People: B2C and B2B are not that different

Even though there is evidence suggesting that social media in B2B industry should be approached in the same way as in the B2C field (Moore, Hopkins & Raymond, 2013), the majority of academic literature still supports the idea that B2B companies should use social media differently from their B2C counterparts in order to be able to fully benefit from it (Swani & Brown, 2011; Lilien et al., 2010).

The data collected in our study comes to support the idea that "the difference between B2B and B2C in general, in regards to social media, is really exaggerated" (Duffy, The Duffy Agency). Firstly, the reality today shows that, as stressed by Duffy, "people are people" regardless of the industry they are working in, thus revealing the idea that emotions lay at the basis of all types of business relationships. In this context, Sean Duffy states that:

> "*All business people have needs just like we have needs in our personal lives. And if you can find those and be receptive to them you can basically create stuff online and free distribution to get it up and help them professionally.*"

He underlines the idea that social media "taps into the same emotions" in both B2B and B2C fields, therefore the 'human-to-human' (Sood and Pattinson, 2012) approach, which involves emotional interaction, should no longer be considered to be an exclusive B2C communication tool, but it can also be successfully applied in the B2B industry through social media. This kind of approach, according to Duffy, helps salespeople "psychologically create trust through familiarity" and therefore win the sympathy of potential customers. His opinion reminds us about the "networked familiarity" concept (Rodriguez, Peterson & Krishnan, 2012), which says that buyers tend to privilege sales proposals coming from people with whom they previously interacted online. Duffy strengthens this statement by adding that:

> "*The real engine* [of social media] *is peer to peer. It's, why would I talk to an authority or to a company, when I can talk to a friend whom I trust. Because I don't trust the guy selling me this widget. And he's gonna tell me this widget is great. I wanna talk to my own people.*"

All of the above indicates that in order to be able to leverage its online activity, a B2B company should introduce an emotional value to its social media equation and treat its customers as being people with needs, desires and dreams, exactly as their B2C counterparts. The efficiency of such an approach is illustrated by Volvo Trucks' latest social media campaign "live tests" that aims at reaching decision makers and influencers by creating viral content, which is emotionally appealing to a large mass of people.

"Through the live tests of 'The Epic Split' or 'The Ballerina' and so on we are trying to reach a wider audience and that is our goal with that. Because we think that if we reach the general public and a general audience, they could also affect those who actually buy trucks and buy products and services (…). If you reach wide and you get a wide spread you get the media to take it up and pick it up. And that spreads it even further. And then you will also reach our smaller target groups, our niche target groups so to say."

(Engvall, Volvo Trucks)

This example contradicts the idea that B2B customers cannot be mass targeted (Basich, 2013) and demonstrates that B2B representatives are also members of the general consumption crowd outside of their B2B environment, which makes them susceptible to messages delivered in a B2C manner.

Access & Networking: Social Media is a huge Cocktail Party

Agnihotri et al (2012) suggest that social media can help B2B salespeople get access to the decision makers of their prospective clients as well as find new customers. According to Duffy, the only thing that a salesperson needs is access and if he gets it, "[he] can do the rest" (Duffy, the Duffy Agency). However, as Duffy points out, the sales objectives can be reached only by 'good' salespeople, namely those who know how to approach B2B customers online. In this regard Rodriguez, Peterson and Krishnan (2012) suggest that salespeople should adopt a "pull" strategy in dealing with their customers, meaning that they should not obviously sell when a random opportunity arises. This idea is also supported by Duffy that claims that:

"A lot of people kind of say that social media is like a cocktail party, right? So you gotta be careful. You can't sell too hard. I would say that it's true. But the difference is… Facebook and those kind of things are like your backyard barbecue social party. The other one [LinkedIn] is kind of like a business cocktail party. And you are gonna have very different of both of those. You know, you're gonna dress in your loudest Hawaiian shirt and your cut-off jeans in this one [on Facebook], and over here [on LinkedIn], you're gonna be in a suit. Here [on Facebook], you're gonna be getting really drunk and laughing with all your friends. Over here [on LinkedIn], you're not gonna be that drunk and you're just gonna be kind of polite and you sell a little bit more…, you're networking a little harder […] Well, while over here [on Facebook] you're basically just having fun. So I think that the party thing applies but not all parties are the same. In either event, you don't want someone coming up to you and selling you."

Therefore, Duffy suggests that even though salespeople should behave differently on professional and social networking websites, there is still one rule that applies to both platforms, and that is to build relationships rather than to "push" products and services. This is supported by Åkesson who reveals that this business model is really efficient in the case of Axis Communication. He states that Axis does not engage in direct sales on social media, but prefers to educate potential leads about the benefits of new technologies and entire

solutions where the products of Axis are only a part of. According to Åkesson, the company is thus trying to increase the demand for different solutions, practicing a very subtle "pull" strategy:

> *"We are also doing some kind of technology marketing, technology push. So in the social media we are creating some kind of, you can call it, a community. We have, for example, a group on LinkedIn called 'Greater Surveillance', with 1005 members, where we promote the use of network video. But they are neutral. Of course there is a kind of an Axis flavor in it, but the intention is to have it as a neutral playground to address the benefits of using network video compared to the analog system."*

What draws attention to the Axis case is that it tries to leverage its online presence by behaving like a trendsetter in the security field, rather than as a company that wants to sell. Further, Hedén informs that Axis is also "guest-blogging on various online publications" but always follows the principle to not advertise but rather to inform:

> *"So, in a way, it is marketing, but it needs to be written in a way that is more informative and in a different way than in an ad. So it's sales, in the pushy part, but it's more of an indirect sales."*

The desire to help instead of just pushing products adds value to the overall Axis corporate brand and, as Michaelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides (2011) state, this attitude helps the company win the attention of potential customers. This is also supported by Duffy who emphasizes that people prefer to get a problem solved rather than being contacted by someone who is visibly "pitching" them:

> *"Just help them. Basically, just help them. And a good salesperson is really trying to help you. They say "Ok, I understand where you are. WOW, what a horrible situation you are in. I think I have an answer for you." Well, who doesn't like that, I mean if they take the time to just handle your problem and if they have a solution for you."*

Åkesson also supports this view that a 'helping-approach' is very effective on social media:

> *"So what happens on the social media, for example, at the LinkedIn group is that there are discussions where partners and people who are in the group promoting solutions, or just posting articles that are relevant and then we have end-customers who are also members of the group and they will ask questions and also ask for solutions and then our partners will get in contact with them and sell the solutions in that way."*

While the previous examples can be described more as *reactive* networking, social media also can be a way for B2B companies to *proactively* network. For example, Duffy emphasizes that social media also allows people or companies to access people of higher status or in higher job positions in an easier way. He argues that making contacts has become easier because barriers have lowered:

> *"On the other hand you also got outreach. So it's proactive networking. And that is, in this industry you got five engineers who are the key opinion leaders. How else are you gonna reach out to them? I mean it is pretty easy to reach out to opinion leaders*

online, unless they're not movie stars or something. It's not so hard to reach out to these people."

Further, Duffy stresses that proactive networking should be based on a strategy, which however should not become visible: "You don't hope. You plan for it. You make it happen. In just the same way that a smart sales guy could go into that networking meeting and leave 25 business cards. It's not hope."

The OpenUp Network presents another example of how social media can help B2B practitioners to network and identify partners or customers. While the platform was established to support product innovation, it also constitutes a way for companies and individuals to get connected to each other. Magnusson explains that the platform was originally built on the idea to make it easier for small producers to get in touch with large corporations. She explains the network intends to bring business actors of the "food industry and food-related industries" and other individuals interested in the topic closer together, enhancing their collaboration. A web-based social media platform was therefore a good way for the implementation of the innovation network because "this way of is much more efficient, because you can contact anyone, anywhere at any time" as argued by Magnusson. She believes that a major advantage of OpenUp as opposed to other innovation networks is that OpenUp allows users to interact privately, a function that lacks in other networks according to her knowledge and therefore limits the networking effect decisively.

In addition, Magnusson explains that innovation networks could also be utilized by companies to network with students:

> *"I think that if companies are smart, they can like market themselves perhaps towards students and post a challenge in OpenUp that is only directed towards students and maybe, like, "yes, the best... the* [students with the] *best ideas can come to our company and pitch the ideas."*

Magnusson believes this kind of networking brings mutual benefit. It allows companies to present themselves to students and also identify talented potential employees. In return, students get the chance to see "what is happening within the industry that I will hopefully work in someday" and also to "share ideas and in that way also market myself, make myself noticed from the others". This online networking between employers and potential employees refers to Bolton et al.'s (2013) proposal that young people of Generation Y make it increasingly necessary for companies to interact with these entrants on social media. Magnusson's quote indicates that online networking also provides opportunities for companies to reach out to talented prospective employees.

Awareness: Social Media Helps Brands Expose Themselves

Even though branding has been and still is often considered less relevant in the B2B business as opposed to the B2C environment (Backhaus, Steiner & Lügger, 2011; Leek & Christodoulides, 2011b) the findings of our study come to demonstrate that branding is important for B2B brands. According to Duffy, what is different in B2C and B2B is the value-proposition that the company offers to its customers:

> *"In a B2C, it's typically "I'm gonna convince you to buy this". In a B2B it's not your money, it's someone else's money. And typically, what happens then, the number one issue on your mind isn't "Is this the best product?" It's risk-reduction for your job. What are the repercussions for my employment situation by buying your services opposed to your service? Seth Golden once said that every B2B purchase is basically… they are buying risk-reduction first."*

Therefore, as supported by Backhaus, Steiner and Lügger (2011) and Persson (2012) as well as confirmed by Duffy, a strong brand in B2B is considered to be the one that offers risk-reduction in many areas. What Duffy stresses out is that in the industrial sector, a powerful brand reduces the risk for the buyer in terms of employment, which once again demonstrates that, as stated in the people-to-people sub-chapter, B2B consumers are also humans that care about their personal state of being, exactly as their B2C counterparts.

However, despite the fact that strong brands are defined differently in both B2B and B2C, what Duffy emphasizes is that in the end, no matter the industry, brands can influence the purchasing decision of the buyer in the same way. Firstly, having a strong brand with a large audience can help a company stand out in the market and can become the decisive selection criteria in case everything else is equal on the competition landscape.

> *"I see two B2B brands. And I'm, again, I'm buying risk reduction first, and online this sort of widget has like a Million followers, and this sort of widget has 2,500 followers. Ahm, there's gonna be a bias there."*
>
> (Duffy, the Duffy Agency)

In his quote, Duffy illustrates how growing large audiences on social media can actually be beneficial for a B2B brand to leverage trust in the brand. Secondly, a strong brand homogenizes the activity of company's salespeople online. In other words, by investing in the corporate brand, the company brings all the salespeople under the same umbrella and, in case of critical situations, reduces their individual negative impact on the company's reputation.

> *"So I think what online does it allows the brand, the central brand, to have relationships with individuals. One person, one set of values, one personality, having a clear relationship with a bunch of people as opposed to 5,000 sales guys, power decentralized, each of them with a slightly different take on the brand, having their relationship with all of those people."*
>
> (Duffy, the Duffy Agency)

What is worth noting in this regard, is that Duffy, at some extant, agrees with Matties (2012) upon the importance of managing the brand on the centralized level in order to improve its positioning in the market.

All of the above can be achieved through social media, because as Duffy states, the company with the biggest audience online is considered to have a strong brand and therefore lead the category. His viewpoint strongly accords with Brennan and Croft's (2012) study, which finds that B2B organizations with the largest social media audiences can position themselves as market-leaders and thus take influence of the evolution of the market:

"And I would take that a step further, I would say looking forward even in B2B categories, the industry leader will be the person with the biggest audience. Counted on Facebook followers and all the rest of it. Whoever has the biggest audience is gonna have control of the market. I mean, will have control of their category. I think we are heading there. I don't know if we are there yet. It's something we need to do on a study."

<div align="right">(Duffy, the Duffy Agency)</div>

Duffy's quote can also be connected to the idea that trust and likeability by the public shows that the brand is reliable and this, in turn, reduces the risk for B2B buyers. In other words, "you never get fired for buying IBM" (Duffy, The Duffy Agency). He also picks up the Volvo Trucks example to support his argument:

"If I had to buy trucks, the whole world knows that Volvo trucks are like the most stable or safest or whatever thing in the world, who cares, I'm not gonna getting fired for buying that truck. (…) If I know that 40 Million people think that's a cool truck, and I'm gonna buy a fleet of trucks now and their price is close enough, what's safer for me?"

In order to stay in touch with the target audience, and therefore increase brand awareness, our respondents state that they are guest-blogging and are participating in discussions on LinkedIn (Axis Communications); are actively publishing pieces of research on their website which are later on shared on other social media platforms (Magenta Consulting). This presents a way for B2B organizations to expose their presents by highlighting the company's competences in a subtle, non-advertising, but interest- and awareness-creating way. Volvo Trucks, on the other hand, actively implements B2C social media campaigns that increase its recognition far beyond the B2B business environment. What is important to remember when enhancing brand awareness through social media is that the company has to choose only social media tools that fit the brand and the context in which it is in: "the structure of it all that is constant. How you do it depends on your brand though" (Duffy, The Duffy Agency).

Magnusson explains that innovation networks also provide opportunities for B2B companies to market themselves to others and expose their brand or competences. For example, companies can present creative solutions that could be interesting for others who would then be able to contact them based on this. She provides support for her argumentation by telling us that she even remembers "stories, like rumors, that people have seen challenges or ideas on OpenUp and then have phoned people".

4.2.3 Relationship Management

Ever since, the B2B business has been strongly based on close relationships, which is why relationships were and still often are prioritized over branding (Backhaus, Steiner & Lügger, 2011; Leek & Christodoulides, 2011b). While direct and personal selling is preferred in a B2B context (Swani & Brown, 2011, Lilien et al., 2010), social media has been found to be an important tool to support the building, maintaining and strengthening relationships (Inks, Schetzsle & Avila, 2012; Rodriguez, Peterson & Krishnan, 2012). Some of the respondents of this study support this view. Engvall states that one of the strategies Volvo Trucks is

pursuing on social media is "to develop and maintain long-term relationships". Hedén stresses that even though personal relationships are more important according to her experience at Axis, social media can really help to leverage the relationships the company maintains:

> *"But the partners are really… it really helped in the personal relationship if you are socializing with them on social media as well. They get really excited that we are tweeting each other tweets, and talking to each other. It's really helping when you meet them in person. So you really notice that's not just something you do that no one notices it, it's a boost."*

In this quote it becomes apparent that Hedén considers social media a strong push or "boost" for relationship management. She elaborates: "And you notice it, (…) when you are out and talking to the partners, you really notice that it means a lot to them that Axis is talking to you on social media." Duffy also believes that social media is an important tool to maintain relationships in a B2B environment. He argues that global B2B companies have a multitude of clients and partners, which makes it impossible for organizations or salespeople in particular to keep close connections to all of them. Thus, Duffy argues that social media is a useful and even necessary tool to enable a company or a salesperson to stay in the memory of the partner or client and also to stimulate trust:

> *"A lot of trust is familiarity; I mean if on the Internet I can put my brand in front of you every day for some reason whether it's Nike+ or whether it's you gave me a widget or app that I put on my phone that helps. I mean psychologically, you can create trust through familiarity. And the Internet is a way to do it, especially when dealing with sales guys. You can never equal it. The sales guy can't show up at your office every day. I mean like the client who just left, he's got a sales force; he's got a global sale. His sales guy is lucky if he can make it to the top, his top customers once every two years. So how is he gonna keep top of mind? And there are local distributors in all these countries who probably like his business, who gonna be, who will be there once a month."*

Duffy's quote is in line with the literature that suggests that the development of trust should be one of the major goals of social media usage (Brennan & Croft, 2012). According to Duffy, the competition for customers makes it even indispensable for B2B companies to support their relationships through regular social media interactions. This is in line with Rodriguez, Peterson and Krishnan (2012) who stress that B2B salespeople will be required to utilize social media more frequently and comprehensively in the future to build and maintain customer-relationships.

B2B practitioners have been found to generally prefer direct communication channels to impersonal communication tools (Lilien et al., 2010). This is supported by Slonovschi who believes that direct mailing is more effective than mass communication:

> *"(…) as I told you, every Monday every week, we are publishing an article. And at the end of the month what we are doing, we are sending a newsletter and I am very careful with my list. I have a very well designed list through the years where I have all my clients. (...) So we are trying to communicate directly, individually to people. And*

this is very, very, very efficient, because I am meeting my friends, my clients, and everyone says that I have received your information, it's very useful and we are reading it. So, probably it is more efficient than mass communication through social media."

Among the most used social media channels are LinkedIn or Facebook or Twitter (Brennan & Croft, 2012; Moore, Hopkins & Raymond, 2013). As shown in Figure 1 in chapter 2.2.2, the most popular mainstream platform to be utilized for business purposes in a B2B context is LinkedIn. Facebook and Twitter are second. However, Hedén reports that Axis is also using all of these three platforms for business purposes, but Facebook is the one to be used in managing relationships with partners:

"How we use Facebook, it's relationship–building. So, that's with partners. Before, we added in different type of content just to see what kind of response we get. But it's really the partner-related content that gets most responses. And that is events, showing that we are out on different places."

It becomes apparent that Axis is using Facebook to show its "soft side" as Duffy suggests what Facebook could be used for. Hedén further elaborates that Twitter is also used for relationship management with partners, as shown in an earlier quote, but also for the relationship management with the media:

"(…) On Twitter it's also partners, but it's also much more media and competitors. And others just interested in the branch. It's not a big hurdle to follow someone on Twitter, it's more if you say you are a fan or someone. (…) I think media is most on Twitter. That's where I get media questions."

The examples of this study provide further evidence that social media can be a tool to maintain business relationships. However, most of our respondents also stress that face-to-face relationships will remain very important for B2B businesses. Magnusson believes that "at least ten years from now it will still be important for this kind of face-to-face meetings". She stresses that face-to-face relationships will not be able to be replaced by online interactions completely: "there is certain aspects when meeting face-to-face (…) when everything is about relationships." Slonovschi also shares this viewpoint that face-to-face relationships are very important. He informs that whenever it is possible he tries to meet face-to-face with the client:

"I would say that with one third of my clients I meet face-to-face for a coffee, either in my office or in their office or we are going somewhere to a coffee shop. So, this would be like a client-relationship and how I try to maintain the relationship."

Magnusson concludes that social media is a supplementary tool for relationship management, but will not replace it:

"So what we are experiencing like the last half year is that this online activity is becoming more and more popular, and people understand that they need it, that they need to utilize it more, because there is a great potential. But you need to combine this method, the online with offline meetings as well."

4.2.4 Product Development through Open Innovation

Leveraging Product Development through Idea Scanning

Most of our informants agree that social media could provide easier access to ideas and knowledge that is located outside the borders of the company, which is also suggested by Kärkkäinen, Jussila and Väisänen (2010) or Sawhney, Verona and Prandelli (2005). However, Magnusson was the only participant in our study with deeper experience in the use of social media for product innovation as opposed to the other participants who had not worked with social media as a tool for open innovation yet.

According to Chesbrough (2003; 2006) the paradigm of open innovation suggests that companies should not limit themselves to their own competencies, but should go beyond their internal networks and invite external ideas and know-how into their innovation processes. The OpenUp Network, which is hosted by Skåne Food Innovation Network builds on this concept. The platform's major purpose is to facilitate collaborative product development. Magnusson explains that a major reason for the establishment of an Internet-based innovation network was that it allows any kind of user to contribute with ideas. She argues that great ideas are not limited to innovation managers or product developers only, but that also "someone that's standing on the floor at the machine might have a great idea" and therefore the OpenUp web-community provides a chance for any user to "make his voice heard". She continues with the idea that "OpenUp is for everyone to use. Everywhere." Magnusson reasons that this is why the innovation network brings "some kind of democratizing effect".

Magnusson explains that the major advantage of OpenUp is that companies are able to find innovative ideas that come from outside the company grounds or networks, as the paradigm of open innovation (Chesbrough, 2003; Chesbrough, 2006) suggests. In the quote below Magnusson explains why she believes that innovation platforms allow companies to find better solutions for their problems and also develop better, more innovative products:

> *"(…) Especially if you are aiming for like radical innovation, then most of the time it should come from something unexpected. Because when you are in your own world you're thinking about, 'ok this is my problem or my need' and to solve it, of course, you are thinking about the things you already know and you are asking the people that you already know. But when someone from outer space can come and have a look at the problem from a totally different angle… this is where it helps in most cases."*

Here, Magnusson emphasizes the great potential of the OpenUP network, which is to invite external users to approach a problem from a different viewpoint. This makes new, unforeseen ideas and "unexpected input from parts or actors that you haven't heard about before" more likely to arise than if "they had only been asking in their own network, their like standard contacts". This accords with Sawhney, Verona and Prandelli's (2005) study, which finds that Internet-based innovation networks allow companies to tap into 'unbiased knowledge' that they could not have accessed without the help of social media.

Magnusson believes that through open innovation, which is facilitated through OpenUp, B2B companies are more likely to develop radical innovations. Here, she refers to discontinuous

innovation, which suggests that products are not only gradually developed but completely new products are created (McCarthy et al., 2010). To emphasize this major advantage of open innovation, she recalls a success story that she experienced on OpenUp. The case was a challenge posted in order to improve the meals offered by the Health Care in the Southern Swedish region Skåne:

> *"(…) She posted it one day and the next day she got an answer from like an entrepreneur within Nano Technology and he had an idea of like tablets, where you can like display the food and the background to the food and the menu and so on. (…) She – this woman who posted the challenge – directly was, "wow, this was really clever". (…) She is like a dietician, so she had basically never heard about Nano Technology at all. And this was like a person that she would never had come in contact with if it wasn't for OpenUp. But suddenly they started to have a discussion and she e-mailed me like, "Amanda, this is really working." So that was exactly what she was looking for. But she didn't know it. (…) But he came up with this exciting idea."*
>
> (Magnusson, Skåne Food Innovation Network)

In support of the theory (Chesbrough, 2003; Chesbourgh, 2006; Kärkkäinen, Jussila & Väisänen, 2010) Magnusson emphasizes the great potential of open innovation for a company's development of products or services in this example. According to her, it is a way to aggregate innovative ideas and select the best and most exciting ones from them to take into further consideration. It becomes apparent in Magnusson's quote that innovation networks enable companies to access creative ideas from their customers, and even more importantly from users who had no links with the company previously, which is stated by Sawhney, Verona and Prandelli (2005) as a major benefit of Internet-based innovation communities. Magnusson hopes that this way of identifying innovative ideas will increase in the future and "perhaps even (…) create a totally new market within this area [of the food and packaging industry] because of OpenUp."

While the literature vastly highlights the opportunities that lie within open innovation, the buzz around this concept is critiqued by Trott and Hartmann (2009). The authors argue that the major challenge does not refer to finding creative ideas but to the conversion of these into real products and services that provide additional value to customers. Our study finds support for their critique. Magnusson explains that this case about improving meals, which was presented earlier, led to a face-to-face meeting between different decision-makers, but barriers such as financing appeared to inhibit the implementation of the idea. Magnusson presents another example where great ideas were generated on OpenUp but the project was never implemented:

> *"So that was… like triggered some new ideas. (…) it was like a success because they got something unexpected that inspired them to: "Yeah this is fun, this is interesting." But they haven't, and I don't think that they will, implement it".*

Except for Magnusson, none of our informants had made first-hand experiences with open innovation. Neither of their companies hosts or participates in virtual co-creation platforms today. However, Engvall and Hedén report that their organizations still utilize social media channels for the development and improvement of their products.

Engvall reports that Volvo Trucks is using its social media accounts in order to receive "input" that could be used for improving their products. He stresses that since Volvo Trucks grew large user communities on its social media accounts, "it's great to have that possibility" to listen to their opinions. He explains that Volvo Trucks, for example, utilizes its Facebook account to post "simple" "open questions" in order to listen to the users' opinions, for example, on "digital initiatives" or their "merchandise collection". Engvall also gives the example of a new "drivers gadget" that Volvo Trucks is creating. On Facebook they asked questions like "Is there some functionality that you miss today?" Engvall explains that these questions may trigger "20 or 30 answers" that sometimes display a trend of user needs that could be later incorporated in updated, more customer-oriented products. This is in line with Urban and Hauser (2004) who argue that the Internet provides great ways to listen to customer needs and thus, enhances new product combinations. In contrast to this, Åkesson reports that Axis is not using social media for the identification of user needs because the company maintains close relationships to its clients and partners that make additional 'listening in' (Urban & Hauser, 2004) unnecessary.

The examples given by Engvall indicate support that actors outside the organizational staff are sources of idea and thus, should be included in innovation processes as promoted by the idea of open innovation (Chesbrough, 2006). In addition, the examples also indicate that social media is a tool for companies to invite users into different stages of their product development processes, for example during initial phases where general ideas are asked for or in back-end stages where the functionality of products is evaluated by users (Sawhney, Verona & Prandelli, 2005).

Nevertheless, the initiative for collaboration in product development processes does not necessarily have to come from the company but can also be made by the customers. For example, Hedén reports that Axis sometimes receives reports from their customers about "bugs" of a certain product via social media. These comments are then forwarded to the product developers who work on eliminating these malfunctions. This example shows how customers try to take influence into the improvement of products. However, they do not assume the roles of 'co-creators' here but more the roles of 'quality-testers'. This finding indicates that companies not necessarily need to *pro-actively* ask their customers for ideas and improvement suggestions like Volvo Trucks does, but that there is also a way to *reactively* utilize social media for the improvement of products, namely being responsive to feedback that is directed towards a company on their social media channels.

User Structures in Online Communities: Diversity versus Specificity

The literature suggests that Internet-based innovation communities are particularly beneficial for co-creation tasks since usually a large number of people from all over the world with similar and complementary skills come together (Von Hippel, 2005). Among these members,

there usually find themselves some very skilled users with expert knowledge (Franke & Shah, 2003; Kozinets, 2002; Sawhney, Verona & Prandelli, 2005; Von Hippel 2005) that companies are advised to interact with in order to access and benefit from their knowledge (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000). As for OpenUp, it can be assumed that various experts meet in this network since all members of the Skåne Food Innvation Network that are operating in the "food industry and food-related industry" joined the online community. The examples from Magnusson that were presented earlier demonstrate how users with different competencies interact with each other to solve problems and leverage innovation. In addition, Magnusson notes that many students are members in the OpenUp network.

An example given by Duffy also indicates that companies can accumulate users with similar competences in theme-specific online communities. It is about a computer chip developer who runs his own blog:

> *"So he basically was responsible for a little little tiny bizzare part of their* [the company's] *chip and that's all what he did, work on this little thing. And so it happens that a lot of people find that super interesting what he does. All he needs to do is talk about "yeah today we created a new gateway for the logic flow of whatever". The only people who'd ever listen to that were people who are like seriously into that chip and that thing that he does. He ended up having a substantial following on this platform Twitter, that was like the big deal. A substantial following on Twitter. Basically the customers. And it was probably... you would never find this on a mailing list that you can ever buy. It was probably the purest list* [of customers with similar interests and know-how]. *(…) Nothing he talks about is of interest for me. I mean it's so… (…) it's so nerdy (…). The only people who could follow that are people who are really interested in that chip, the customers, (…) the people who buy his chips. How could it get any better than that? I mean, and they talk to him all the time. They're all interested in this product and they know how he's gonna do out the next thing. And giving it input."*

This little story highlights the opportunities that social media brings. It indicates that social media is a platform even for niche content since there may always be other people who will share an interest in this topic, in particular the "customers" as argued by Duffy. Moreover, the example illustrates how social media can be an effective tool to aggregate experts from all around the world in one network. As Duffy suggests, no other method would assumedly ever be able to achieve to compile such a pure list of similar-minded people with similar knowledge. It becomes obvious that online networks like these can provide large potential for companies since they can become a source of condensed knowledge and expertise. Thus, this example as well as the example of Volvo Trucks engaging its customers as well as the OpenUp example uniting experts from two industries indicate that online networks provide opportunities for companies to invite these users to become part of their product development processes.

The literature found that online communities with highly diverse user structures can bring benefits to co-creation tasks since different users usually assume different roles that complement each other (Von Hippel & Von Krogh, 2003). It has been reported that third parties are more successful in recruiting different users due to their independency (Sawhney, Verona & Prandelli, 2005). This coincides with the OpenUp network that is hosted by Skåne

Food Innovation Network and another organization, which act "like neutral players" as stated by Magnusson.

To increase the effectiveness of an innovation community in the support of product development, Magnusson proposes that a multitude of "related" industries would need to be represented in the network. She suggests that for OpenUp it would be useful if the "pharmaceutical industry" or "the digital industry" joined in as well "because both packaging and food industry need to become better in utilizing digital technology". Magnusson believes that this would increase the likelihood that unexpected ideas arise and that completing competencies meet in the innovation network. However, Magnusson emphasizes that for OpenUp "the focus should in some way [still] be food and packaging because that's what we are working with". Magnusson's reasoning indicates that a web-based innovation network may be more effective if it achieves to unite a multitude of diversely skilled users working in different industries, while the theme of the network should not be neglected in order to avoid inflating its usefulness and purpose.

Limitations of the Effectiveness of Virtual Co-Creation in a B2B Context

In chapter 2.3.4 it is highlighted that virtual co-creation platforms are more useful if a sufficient number of users is willing to make meaningful contributions to the innovation task (Füller, 2006; Nordlund, Lempiälä & Holopainen, 2011; Sawhney, Verona & Prandelli, 2005). Magnusson assumes that a major step to the success of this network would be "to make this kind of way of working to become part of all companies' strategies" because increasing participations rates are believed to have stronger impact on the companies' product development aspirations. She believes that "the companies that start actually implementing this [working with OpenUp] into their strategies, I think, they will become very successful". However, today the interaction on OpenUp is still relatively low according to Magnusson because many member companies still "are used to working in their closed processes" and are not yet "accustomed to working with digital". She further stresses that "it's not … something we have to do to survive right now. And that's one of the reasons that it's not prioritized". Magnusson also believes that many of the member organizations still live a very traditional culture where open innovation and virtual co-creation is not yet a part of it. The organizational culture was already highlighted in chapter 4.2.1 of the analysis as one of the barriers for a B2B company to take advantage of the potential that lies in social media.

Another challenge in regards to the effectiveness of virtual innovation refers to the users' motivation to share their ideas and other innovation-related information with the public, reported by Nordlund, Lempiälä and Holopainen (2011). Von Hippel and Von Krogh (2003) explain that in co-creation tasks, users need to give up their intellectual property rights and make their innovation a public good instead. Nordlund, Lempiälä and Holopainen (2011) assume that the willingness of freely-revealing decreases if the rivalry is high, which is often the case in a B2B setting. This challenge referring to Intellectual authorship (Franke & Shah, 2003; Nordlund, Lempiälä & Holopainen, 2011; Von Hippel & Von Krogh, 2003) is also reported by Magnusson who recalls a situation when a company that posted a challenge was asked by a user "who owns my idea if I share it?" Since the company did not think about issues in regards to intellectual property rights in the first place, they became "really scared"

according to Magnusson. Sawhney, Verona and Prandelli (2005) argue that the handling of Intellectual property rights needs to be clarified in any collaborative innovation task to increase its effectiveness. However, Magnusson proposes that this challenge can be minimized by the way in which ideas are presented:

> *"Not many dare to, and maybe shouldn't, share their very edgy ideas because then, as you say* [she is referring to our question here]*, someone can and might steal it. So the ideas that are shared are more general."*

Magnusson's statement refers to Von Hippel's (2005) proposal that companies are more interested in general ideas than detailed technical knowledge, which is usually fairly similar between competitors within one industry. Therefore, the authors conclude that there is not much to lose. However, to avoid free-riding (Franke & Shah, 2003) Magnusson proposes that users could present their ideas and know-how in a "smart" way, meaning that the details do not need to be openly disclosed. The idea would then hopefully create interest and lead to a private conversation to the exclusion of the public user community.

The literature argues that monetary incentives are often necessary to stimulate contributions, particularly in a B2B context (Sawhney, Verona and Prandelli, 2005). Magnusson reports a case from another Swedish innovation network where the initiator of a challenge offered "10,000 SEK" to be distributed among the best contributions. However, besides this example we could not find any further data in this study on what role monetary incentives play in co-creational tasks in a B2B context.

Another challenge refers to the complexity of B2B products. Simula, Töllinen and Karjaluoto's (2013) study found that it is believed that virtual co-creation tasks are not suitable for B2B product since many tasks require expert knowledge to allow co-creation. Interestingly, Engvall reports that Volvo Trucks is engaging in crowdsourcing only in order to receive feedback on their merchandise, their services or their digital initiatives, but does not utilize crowdsourcing for their core products that is trucks. However, our study could not find any data that would indicate how collaborative innovation in regards to the complexity of products is different in a B2B context as opposed to a B2C context. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that the abilities to invite users into innovation processes could indeed be different depending on the task and product considering that the product examples brought up in this study such as food, packaging, computer chips, or trucks are all highly differing in terms of complexity.

4.3 Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore how social media can be utilized effectively to enhance business development. Our findings strongly support the idea that effective social media usage in B2B can have an impact on a company's business development. More specifically, it underlines the fact that an effective implementation of social media tools can create opportunities for B2B companies to generate leads, strengthen relationships with already existing customers, achieve growth through innovation and create long-term value - elements that are implied in the notion of business development. In the following, the role of social media in regards to the various dimensions of business development will be discussed in detail.

The empirical data of our study indicate that social media can be utilized as a useful tool in a B2B context to identify new customers, new partners or other stakeholders that could be beneficial for a company's growth aspirations. The major benefit highlighted by some of our respondents is that online communities, blogs, or theme-specific groups on social media, where people with similar interests meet, provide easier access to people than it could ever be in the offline world.

In this study we find two different ways of how to utilize social media for getting access to these people: it is either *reactive* or *proactive* networking. Reactive networking implies that B2B salespeople reach out to potential customers on social media platforms whenever they express a need or a demand for products or solutions. This 'helping-the-customer-approach' is, for example, applied by Axis. The other tactic is to network proactively. This entails that B2B practitioners identify the relevant people through social media and reach out to them. These people can be also located in markets where a company is not even present yet. Thus, this can pave the way for a company to enter new markets. However, in both ways of networking, the "behavior" of the salesperson, or the 'networker', plays a crucial role for the effectiveness of networking. Our informants further suggest that a "pull" strategy is more effective in reaching networking goals than a "push" strategy as also argued by Rodriguez, Peterson and Krishnan (2012). This implies that a B2B company should rather create demand that emerges from the customer side than pushing sales.

However, networking is not limited to prospective customers only. This study reveals that social media also provides opportunities to get in contact with potential business partners, other stakeholders such as the press or future employees. OpenUp Network serves as a good example in this regard. It demonstrates how business actors can connect to partners with complementary skills or to brilliant young minds, who can later become employees of the company. This creates growth opportunities in terms of hiring better staff than the competitors or engaging in more profitable collaborations.

The empirical data of this study also indicate that social media should be utilized as a tool to increase brand awareness, as suggested by some of our respondents. Larger brand awareness entails brand familiarity, which refers to the concept of "networked familiarity" (Rodriguez, Peterson & Krishnan, 2012) and implies the promotion of trust in a brand. Increased awareness helps a B2B brand reach a larger audience, therefore increasing the pool of prospective customers. Volvo Trucks' "live tests" campaign serves as a great

example here. Further, we find that B2B companies should aspire to grow large audiences on social media and create brand likeability, since the probability that a B2B buyer purchases the brand will augment considerably. This is because B2B buyers are more likely to buy a familiar, known brand rather than an unknown niche brand, as they are often said to buy risk-reduction (for their jobs) first. In addition, large audiences on social media provide B2B brands with power and also certain control over the market or the category the company is operating in, since the firm can position itself as the opinion-leader in the industry and thus influence the evolvement of the market, as suggested by one of our respondents and also stated by Brennan and Croft (2012). This provides opportunities for B2B companies to generate more leads due to its increased attractiveness.

The empirical data of this study further indicate that social media is an important, effective and even necessary supplementary tool for B2B companies to sustain and develop their relationships. This is also stressed by previous studies conducted in the social media field (Inks, Schetzsle & Avila, 2012; Rodriguez, Peterson & Krishnan, 2012). The answers of our informants demonstrate different ways of how social media is used in their organizations to support relationship management with customers, partners, the media or other stakeholders. One of our respondents argues that B2B companies not only have the possibility, but even must use social media as a complementary tool to maintain relationships since companies cannot meet all their clients and partners face-to-face on a regular basis. In this regard, social media provides a great opportunity for B2B companies or their salespeople to stay "top of mind" of their customers or partners. However, in this study we also find that face-to-face relationships still remain of great importance. Therefore, the role of social media in relationship management is assumed to be important, however limited to some extent.

In our study, we also find evidence that social media provides ways for companies to create growth opportunities through the uncovering of new ideas, expert knowledge or customer feedback for the improvement and development of their products. The example of the OpenUp shows how innovation networks allow companies to access information from outside the company borders that could be translated into more innovative or more customer-oriented products. We find that open innovation networks become particularly beneficial for innovation if people from different industries meet. Through this, companies are more likely to identify "unexpected" solutions for their problems that they would not have been able to access without the help of social media, as stressed by Sawhney, Verona and Prandelli (2005). Through this, a B2B company may be able to produce more innovative products that create increasing sales opportunities.

However, ideas not necessarily need to be located in innovation networks. The example of Axis shows that social media is a way for B2B companies to reactively capture, for example, product bugs from their customers and use these for the improvement of products. On the other hand, social media can also be utilized to invite user communities, for example on Facebook or skilled people from a theme-specific blog, to share suggestions for product development or feedback for product improvement and thus allows a company to produce more customer-oriented products, which consequently creates further sale opportunities. This shows that collaborative product development processes are not limited to innovation networks only. Interestingly, while some respondents utilized social media to uncover their customers' needs in order to adjust products accordingly, this was not supported by one

respondent who claimed that social media does not play a crucial role for identifying customers' needs since the company entails close offline relationships with them.

However, in this study we also find that social media in innovation encounters various challenges as also suggested by previous literature (Kärkkäinen, Jussila & Väisänen, 2010; Nordlund, Lempiälä & Holopainen, 2011; Simula, Töllinen & Karjaluoto, 2013). In the example of OpenUp it is illustrated that intellectual authorship can be a problem. We also find that a low dependency of B2B companies on social media in innovation deters organizations from participating and thus, prevents the network from arriving at the state where it can have a real impact on a company's innovativeness. The conservative culture in many B2B organizations is also found to be a barrier for B2B organizations to engage in virtual co-creation, which is also outlined in previous studies (Nordlund, Holopainen, Lempiälä, 2011; Sawhney, Verona & Prandelli, 2005). This indicates that, even though social media provides potential for companies to innovate, a lot of opportunities in this regard remain still unexploited, which was also admitted by some of our respondents. Thus, as suggested by previous research, companies need to find ways how to incite users to contribute with their ideas and knowledge so that companies can make use of the full potential that lies in social media in regards to innovation and product development. Lastly, companies need to also find ways how to implement generated ideas and innovation-related information into their product development processes.

While this study finds various ways for how social media can be a useful and relevant tool for B2B companies to support the creation of growth opportunities, we also find several principles for companies to follow in order to achieve full potential of social media interactivity. The empirical data of this study indicate that B2B organizations need to reform their organizational culture, implying that they need to approach social media more openly in order to be able to benefit from it. Further, companies need to define goals and objectives for their social media engagement. It needs to be reminded that social media needs to be treated as a holistic tool where one outcome is not only caused by one activity, but the effects are highly intertwined. Next, some of our respondents stress that B2B companies need to acquire understanding of how social media works, hire skilled people, provide guidelines and train their employees to leverage effectiveness which is in line with Schultz, Schwepker and Good's (2012) or Moore, Hopkins and Raymond's (2013) suggestions. This also implies the allocation of a budget and time to social media usage, which are often constraining factors for the implementation of certain social media activities as stressed by some of our informants. Lastly, our study reveals that adequate measurement tools for the assessment of the effectiveness of social media activities need to be found, even though some of our respondents state this as challenging due to the peculiarities of the B2B context.

An important finding of our study refers to in which way social media should be approached by B2B companies. We find that a 'B2C approach' where users are treated as what they are, people, can be highly beneficial for a B2B company's success on social media. The example by Volvo Trucks demonstrates that a more emotional approach can generate great effects such as increased awareness and brand likeability. Overall, the empirical data of this study indicate that a more consumer-oriented approach to social media by B2B organizations may leverage the effectiveness of social media usage in a B2B context, since it may impact brand

awareness and likeability as well as position the company as a market leader and trend-setter.

While this study's empirical data indicate the great potential and opportunities that lie within social media for B2B companies, we also find that much of the potential remains unexploited. Most of our respondents reported that the lack of resources often refrained them from making full use of the potential, admitting that they could do more. This became particularly apparent in regards to utilizing social media in innovation and product development. Thus, our study finds support for that "there is a significant gap between the potential and the actual use of social media in B2B business" (Jussila, Kärkkäinen & Leino, 2011, in Simula, Töllinen & Karjaluoto, 2013, p.124).

5. Conclusion

In this study we have introduced the concept of business development and connected it to the use of social media. More precisely, we explored how social media could be utilized as a supportive tool by a B2B organization to achieve the goal of developing its business. To answer our research question, we selected good practice examples that would shed further light on the opportunities that lie within social media usage and its potential benefits for a B2B organization. Our findings were informed through interviews with six business practitioners who shared their insights and experiences. All respondents had interesting stories to tell since their organizations were generally ahead of their competitors in regards to social media performance.

The analysis of the empirical data generated strong evidence that social media tools provide large potential for B2B organizations to create growth opportunities. Firstly, we explored various ways of how social media helps B2B companies identify new customers, new partners or other prospective stakeholders that could be valuable for a B2B organization to collaborate with. It was shown that both, proactive and reactive networking, are ways for a company to arrive at this goal. An interesting finding occurred from the Volvo Trucks example. It was shown that a mass-marketing approach of a B2B company provides great opportunities to increase brand awareness and likeability, which can result in an increased attractiveness of the brand to B2B buyers. This study further revealed that social media is also an important and even necessary tool for developing and sustaining close business relationships, even though offline relationships still remain of great importance in the B2B environment. Our study also illustrated how social media could leverage the innovation aspirations and the product development processes of a B2B company. In accordance with previous literature, our study provided evidence that here a lot of potential is still missed. Lastly, we discussed how B2B companies could leverage the effectiveness of their social media interactivity, and thus could increase its impact on business development.

This study addressed a gap in the literature since most studies to date have explored the social media 'phenomenon' in a B2C context. While the adoption of social media as a strategic tool is still very low within the B2B sector, various studies found that social media usage in a B2B context is likely to increase in the future and will become increasingly important to a B2B organization's success. Thus, we saw a need from B2B companies to be provided with more insights into how social media could be utilized effectively in a B2B environment so that it positively affects the creation of growth opportunities. While we found that social media usage was not vital for any participating company's survival today, all respondents still considered social media to be an important business tool, particularly in regards to sustaining a competitive advantage in their online marketing performance. Thus, in this study we suggest that social media usage in a B2B setting should no longer be called into question, but rather be embraced through taking a business development perspective.

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

This research provides several theoretical contributions to the academic literature. Our first contribution is that we draw linkages between the concept of business development and social media in our study. We show how different activities on social media can create growth opportunities for a B2B company. Here, we refer to Pollack's (2012) notion, which suggests that business development has a long-term orientation and thus is concerned with long-term value. Our study illustrates different ways of how social media can support the creation of this long-term value. Up to date, no academic work has specifically explored the effective social media usage in relation to business development. Thus, we add to the literature by drawing a more nuanced picture of the peculiarities and the potential that lies in the utilization of social media in a B2B setting. Through this, we promote deeper understanding of the B2B social media phenomenon.

This study also adds some interesting practice examples to the literature. In particular the example of Volvo Trucks is worth highlighting. It revealed that it is possible for a B2B company to take a mass-marketing approach on social media where the content is presented in a way that it appeals not only to the B2B target audience, but also to the masses of consumers. Through this, it is possible for a B2B company to achieve a wider reach where a larger number of prospective customers and other stakeholders are implied. A mass-marketing approach is also likely to increase a B2B company's brand awareness. The literature has not yet discussed this mass-marketing approach of B2B companies and its impact on business development, since it is often argued that B2B businesses are more concerned about their niche target groups.

In this study, we also contribute to the open innovation and crowdsourcing theory. In our review of the literature we could find only few studies exploring the role and utility of virtual co-creation in a B2B context. Thus, our study adds to the theory by presenting a good example of a B2B online innovation network, namely the OpenUp Innovation Network that illustrates how Internet-based collaborative innovation can be designed in a B2B context. It unites the competencies of different users, either experts coming from different industries or aspiring talents such as students. This conglomerate of diverse and specific competencies is likely to leverage the fruitfulness of the network for B2B companies' innovation processes. OpenUp illustrates how the network provides opportunities to generate innovative ideas, but also serves as a hub for business networking.

5.2 Managerial Implications

Our research has allowed us to find some managerial and practical implications. Our research demonstrated that there is a great potential hidden in social media to create growth in B2B companies. As presented above, a B2B company can achieve business development through using social media by engaging effectively with current and potential customers, by increasing the awareness towards its brand among the target audience and beyond it and by innovating its processes and products through crowdsourcing. However, it is not enough to simply enter these activities in order to get maximum benefit for business development. Our findings show that due to low experience of B2B employees to use social media in business purposes, the company needs to firstly instruct them on how to apply social media tools in their daily working activity. It means that B2B employees need to be trained before starting using social media so that their online activities do not harm the company's reputation. Secondly, the company should not artificially push the usage of social media if its organizational culture is not ready for it. Therefore, the implementation of social media activity should be done step-by-step so that employees and clients could manage to adjust to it. Thirdly, the company should assess what social media tools are the most efficient to reach their targeted market, which means that the company has to understand the maturity level of B2B customers depending on the country and industry they operate in.

Another insight from our research shows that in order to understand how social media can help the company create growth opportunities, social media measurement tools should be applied along the process. By measuring how the company performs in different business areas with the help of social media, the company can learn what are the most efficient social media tools in its particular situation. Consequently the company will be able to distribute effectively the often limited budget to its social media activities, to understand what attracts potential customers, what motivates people to contribute to open-innovation inquiries, etc. Learning what stays behind the social media mechanism can help the company improve the mechanism itself.

In addition to the above, our study demonstrates that B2B companies should increasingly use typical B2C social media practices such as entertaining videos on YouTube, which have the possibility to achieve a viral reach, or result in informal interactions on Facebook. These kind of practices are more efficient in increasing the brand awareness on a larger scale and therefore offer more business possibilities that the company can take advantage of. For example, more brand exposure due to higher brand awareness is more likely to attract prospective customers. Also, viral videos can reach young people that are currently a part of the B2C community, but in the future can become employees of the B2B industry. By approaching them now, the company can bring itself onto their minds and therefore become their first brand choice once these young talents are entering the job force.

Following these ideas, together with a social media strategy and a 'pull approach' in regards to increasing sales through online interactions, the B2B company can accelerate its business development.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

In our research we uncovered rich and insightful data from business practitioners with first-hand experiences in social media usage in a B2B context. In the selection of our respondents we adopted a rather broad approach where we prioritized the respondent's amplitude of experience in relation to the topic over recruiting only participants from a single industry or even a single organization. Through this, we could gain interesting and complementary insights from different real practice examples, namely Volvo Trucks, Axis Communications, Magenta Consulting, The Duffy Agency and Skåne Food Innovation Network. However, since all organizations have different sizes and are operating in diverging industries, a limitation may occur in regards to the sampling of this study.

Thus, in order to gain more detailed findings, we propose for future research to explore what role social media plays for business development in a single industry. For example, it could be possible that the impact of social media usage on business development in the technology industry differs from an industry where technology is less part of the core business. Moreover, since Järvinen et al.'s (2012) study found that social media usage is believed to be more suitable and applicable for larger organizations, further research could take a quantitative approach in order to explore whether the impact of social media on business development differs according to the organization size.

A further limitation refers to the nature of the sampling of this study. Since we intended to recruit respondents with good stories to tell about social media usage in a B2B environment, the findings of our study are highly bound to the subjective viewpoints of this study's informants. Therefore, the recruitment of other respondents with less experience or a negative attitude towards social media usage in a B2B context probably would have generated different results. Further, a larger sampling could have been beneficial for uncovering even more detailed findings. However, in this rather small research project, we had to cope with the difficulties of recruiting relevant participants and our study shows that the sampling of this study still enabled us to uncover interesting, insightful data that resulted in new findings.

Another limitation refers to our broad research approach. While our findings are rather general, we suggest that more research is needed to provide deeper insights into the question of 'how' each dimension of business development can be achieved on social media. Since companies often lack experience and know-how, clearer guidelines are necessary.

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7. Appendix

Consent for interview participation

<u>Introduction</u>

Our names are Elena Bersadschi and Julius Westphal. We are graduate students at Lund University in the School of Economics and Management, currently completing our Master of Science degree in International Marketing & Brand Management. This interview is part of our Master thesis.

<u>Terms and Conditions</u>

Thank you very much for your willingness to contribute to this research project. We truly appreciate your time and effort. Please see your rights, terms and conditions of this interview below.

- Participation in this interview is completely voluntary. You, as a respondent, are one of approximately six interviewees participating in this study about social media usage in a B2B context.
- You have the right to decline to answer a question whenever you feel uncomfortable with it. You also have the right to stop the interview or your participation in this study at any time.
- The interview will last between 30 to 60 minutes, depending on your availability. The interview will be audiotaped and transcribed. The audiotapes and full transcriptions will only be available to members of the research team, the supervisor and the examiner of the thesis. However, some direct quotes from the interview will be presented in the Master thesis that is going to be published.
- In the Master thesis, the interviewee's full name and the company's name will be disclosed since this study aims to present real case examples.

If you have any further questions or concerns, do not hesitate to contact us at gib13jwe@student.lu.se or under +46 (0)76 781 9693.

I have read and understood the above information. I hereby agree to the terms and conditions. I also allow my name, the company name or other identifying information to be included in the final Master thesis that will be published.

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Name (print)

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Date, Signature