Social media use in B2B
A study on how social media is used in the initial phase of building relationships.

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Abstract

There has been scarce research into the topic of B2B in the context of social media. Due to this, the aim of this study was to explore how social media is used within B2B in the initial phase of building relationships. The research questions regarded: attracting new customers, which channels that were used and potential drawbacks of using social media. An analytical framework was presented with the factors reputation, familiarity, similarity and knowledge of alternatives from literature within attraction. In order to collect the empirical data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with consultancy agencies.

The results showed that social media was used to increase familiarity through third party sources, which was enabled by companies networks. Channels used for this were LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook. Regarding similarity, companies used social media to promote its personality that could attract customers both in a business and personal manner. The channels used for this were LinkedIn and Facebook. Furthermore, it was important that the type of information that was shared represented the company, and companies worked to improve this type of information. Further on, companies encouraged people in their network to share content in order to enhance reputation by third party sources. Channels used for this were LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook. Concerning knowledge of alternatives, social media were used as search-friendly channels, which enabled companies to remain on top in the search list, and make them a potential choice for customers. Channels used for this were LinkedIn and blogs. Furthermore, the major social media drawbacks for B2B companies were lack of resources in terms of time and lack of control over the information once it was posted online.

Key words: B2B, relationships, relationship building, attraction, social media
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Definitions

**Business to Business (B2B):** Are companies that provide products and services to other companies.

**Business to Consumer (B2C):** Are companies that provide products and services to consumer markets.

**User Generated Content (UGC):** Is the sum of all ways in which people make use of social media, for instance to share information, pictures and blog-posts

**White Papers:** Is a report used as marketing or sales tools in business. Designed to inform and persuade potential customers by promoting the products or services of a specific company.

**Social media channels:**

**Blog:** A blog or a weblog, is an interactive webpage in which regular updates are posted by the blog owner, or author. The blog can regard a topic, current events, or personal thoughts and can be compared to the use of a personal journal. The latest information that is added by the author appears at the top of the blog. Except for the space where information is updated, there are often place for readers to post comments about the entries as well as possibilities to email the blog author.

**Facebook:** Is the biggest Social Networking Site (SNS) with over one billion active users as of December, 2012. Facebook explains that their mission is "to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected." (Facebook, 2013) Companies can create a corporate profile and when users “like” the company profile they become fans of the page and can interact with the company and other consumers. The company profile is similar to the personal profile of individuals. On the site it can create a network, share content such as pictures, text and links to
the followers on the timeline. Each post can be “liked”, commented on and shared. Companies can also keep albums with movies and pictures.

**LinkedIn:** Is known as the world's largest professional network with around 200 million members in 200 countries and territories around the globe. The network’s mission is to connect professionals around the world in order to make them more productive and successful. Through LinkedIn people gain access to other people, jobs, news, updates, and insights of interest. (LinkedIn, 2013) Also, firms can create a company profile and present its services, keep a network and update content, such as pictures and links on “business updates”, which is where updates are continuously posted and distributed to people in the network.

**Twitter:** Is a real-time network of information that connects people to news, stories and ideas that they find interesting. The heart of Twitter lies in the small messages called “tweets”, which contains of a maximum of 140 characters, these can be forwarded by so called “retweets” by other users. Anyone with a Twitter account can choose to follow people, and get access to their tweets. (Twitter, 2013)
1 Introduction

There has been a clear trend in marketing and companies are realizing that one of their most valuable assets are relationships with customers and other key stakeholders. Thus, the establishment of stable business relationships are becoming key of marketing efforts. An ongoing relationship can be considered as one of the most important assets of a company because the longer a customer stays with a specific company, the more willing they are to pay premium prices, make referrals and spend more money which increases the business value. (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998) This perception, of relationships as an ongoing process, has led to the notion of the relationship development process. The process regards the initiation of a relationship, its development, its maintenance and finally, in some cases, its dissolution. (Ford, 1980; Dwyer, Schurr & Oh, 1987)

In Business to Business (B2B), which is the process of providing products and services between companies, there has been a significant trend over the last few decades towards holding fewer and closer relationships. In B2B, the buying process is considerably longer than in Business to Consumer (B2C) markets and the products and services that are being sold are often more complex, requiring several people to engage in the buying decision. It is important to care to the parties’ needs in each step of the long buying process. The buyer must feel confident that the supplier validates the soundness of their judgement due to the big investments in resources that usually go along with a B2B purchase. (Gillin & Schwartzman, 2011, p. 7) A tool for doing this is the building of relationships (Venetis & Ghauri, 2004).

In the mid 1990s, the Internet was presented to the world. It changed the marketing environment and brought a new element to communication and potential for building relationships. (Morgan, 1996; Angelides, 1997) More recently social media, enabled by the emergence of the Internet, has become a reality both for individuals and companies. It can be used as a favourable tool for building relationships since it provides direct access to customers and opinion formers and facilitates dialogues and interaction. (Michaelidou, Simagka and Christodoulides, 2011)
1.1 Problem discussion

There has been scarce research to this date within the topic of B2B in social media. As argued by Kho, (2008) most of the literature has mainly discussed the opportunities of social media from a B2C perspective. However, some research has been conducted within the B2B field, e.g. by Järvinen, Tollinen, Karjaluoto and Jayawardhana (2012), on digital tools and social media use in B2B. They found that social media tools are used for various B2B marketing objectives. One of these objectives is for instance to attract new customers and to keep an active relationship with existing customers. Järvinen et al (2012) found that, undisputed the role of digital channels such as social media has increased over the years to support the traditional offline marketing objectives. However, B2B marketers still have problems of integrating the new tools of social media into their marketing efforts. Furthermore, Michaelidou et al (2011), in their study on social media marketing in B2B, highlight the importance of social media for B2B companies. That is, B2B companies can make use of social media through channels, for instance Facebook and LinkedIn, in order to communicate with their customers and suppliers and build relationships. They also find empirical support that attracting new customers and cultivating relationships are considered to be the most important goals for B2B organizations when using social media. But they, in accordance to Järvinen et al (2012), state that the academic research is limited in social media's use in the B2B area.

What can be found is that both studies highlight social media’s usage by B2B companies to increase attraction of the company and use it in relation to create and cultivate relationships. Therefore, this is an interesting starting point for a study on B2B in social media. Given that the studies by Järvinen et al (2012) and Michaelidou et al (2011) found that social media is used to attract new customers it is clearly used in what can be described as the initial phase of the relationship development process and would therefore further be a valid starting point for this paper.
As for attraction, the concept has been studied in relation to business relationships. For instance, Dwyer et al (1987) argue that attraction is key in the development of relationships since it is important in the initial phase of the relationships and the following phases for testing and evaluating each of the parties. Mortensen (2012), who has focused a study on the understanding of attraction in business relationships, found that attraction could help explain the initiation or motivation for further development of business relationships. The topic is important within B2B and to attract attention from customers and suppliers, and make them prioritize the company instead of competitors, has appeared in related literature (e.g. literature on buyer-supplier relationships (Dwyer et al, 1987; Hald, Cordón & Vollmann, 2008) and within professional relationships (Halinen, 1997; Harris et al, 2003)

1.2 Purpose

The studies on social media has so far mainly focused on research in the B2C area, which is a clear indication that more knowledge needs to be contributed to the field of B2B. Given that the development of relationships is argued to be important in B2B, and empirical evidence is found to support the role of social media for this purpose, this will constitute as the frame of this paper. Furthermore, focus will lie on gaining an understanding of how to use social media in the initial stage of the relationship building process and attraction, given the fact that previous studies support this role for social media in B2B.

However while previous studies, e.g. by Järvinen et al (2008), are mainly performed to form a general understanding of social media usage in B2B, based on quantitative data. This study will contribute with a qualitative study on the topic and expanding the literature on relationship building in social media and provide insights to how B2B companies actually use their social media channels in relation to the initial stages of relationship building. Therefore, the aim of this paper is, from the selling company's perspective to address the gap of how B2B companies use social media in this perspective.
By answering this, managerial guidance for the use of social media for initiating relationships with potential buyers will be provided. This study will also decrease the theoretical gap between the potential and actual use of social media by B2B companies by adding a qualitative study on the topic. In order to explore this topic the following research questions will be answered;

*How is social media used by B2B companies to attract new customers?*
*Which channels are most suitable for this purpose?*
*What drawbacks are there to using social media in this aspect?*

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Relationship development process and attraction

The dynamic nature of relationships is explained in a number of process models (e.g. Ford, 1980; Dwyer et al, 1987). This notion that relationships evolve over time has brought on the concept of the relationship life cycle. Ford (1980) for instance argues that buyer-supplier relationships in B2B evolve over time, and must be carefully managed throughout the process. He suggests five phases of the relationship; the *pre-relational* stage, the *early* stage, the *development* stage, the *long-term* stage and the *final* stage. Similar to this, Dwyer et al (1987), in their study on developing buyer-seller relationships, argue that there are five general phases which are: *awareness, exploration, expansion, commitment, and dissolution*. Regarding the initial phase of the relationship, which is within this study to investigate, Dwyer et al (1987) describe that interaction between the parties has not yet occurred and it is up to the parties to enhance one’s attractiveness to a specific or general other.

One important difference between the authors above is that Dwyer et al (1987) incorporates attraction as an important factor influencing each phase and argues that attraction is a prerequisite for the relationship to take place and develop. Studies have been following the steps of Dwyer et al (1987) and integrated the concept of attraction in relationship building. One of
these are Halinen (1997), who conducted a study on attractiveness in company-client relationships, the author argued that attractiveness is strongly influenced by future expectations rather than past experiences. This is due to the fact that the concerned parties in this stage lack knowledge about one another. It is up to the company to improve the basis for the potential customers expectations for a future relationship to take place.

2.2 Attraction in business relationships

In an extent literature review into the concept of attraction, Mortensen (2012) found several roles, and purposes of attraction. One of these were “Attraction as the initial spark at the start of a business relationship” (Mortensen, 2012, p. 1215), which is within the frame of this paper to investigate. Authors researching this role of attraction are for instance Dwyer et al (1987), Halinen (1997) and Harris, O’Malley and Patterson (2003).

It is argued by Harris et al (2003), in their study on attraction in professional relationships, that attraction explains why relationships are initiated and developed and define that attraction is a necessary precondition for parties to begin interacting with each other. Their study is based on a case of legal professions and their interactions within the field. They found empirical evidence for determinants of attraction in business relationships that we will apply in the sections below. Even though their findings concern relationships between business professionals rather than seller and its buyers, Harris et al (2003) argue that the study's foundation in literature on attraction makes it applicable in other settings and contexts as well. Therefore, their findings will be used, but also complemented with other research in the area of buyer-seller attraction, to provide a comprehensive understanding of attraction.

As stated, Harris et al (2003) found empirical evidence for determinants of attraction in business relationships. The authors found that familiarity, similarity, reputation and knowledge of alternatives, can impact on a prospective party’s attractiveness.
2.3 Familiarity

According to Harris et al (2003), attraction cannot be developed if there is no interaction between the parties. Therefore familiarity emerges as an important condition. Familiarity, they argue, refers to the degree to which the parties have the opportunity to interact. This basically means that attraction is most likely to occur between individuals within proximity and/or with repeated exposure to one another. Regarding proximity, the authors argue that familiarity can depend on factors such as physical location, also referred to as geographical proximity. (Harris et al, 2003)

The concept of proximity is further argued for by Caballero and Resnik (1986) in their research on dyadic exchange between buyers and sellers. They identify that working or living in a geographical location close to another individual promotes attraction between two parties. A similar argument to this is proposed by Dwyer et al (1987), they describe that situational proximity facilitates awareness between parties. Awareness is described as the recognition by one partner that the other is a feasible exchange partner and;

“Just as a family is more likely to be acquainted with adjacent neighbours than with those down the street, buyers are apt to become aware of local merchants and brands advertised in frequently viewed media.” (Dwyer et al 1987, p 15)

What is more, proximity is seen as a frequency of exposure where two people who get together often tend to be attracted to each other. This exemplifies how familiarity is linked to the repeated exposure of the concerned parties, which can for instance be discussed based on the quotation by Dwyer et al (1987) above, where the frequency of exposure is enabled through the media. It is further described by Harris et al (2003) that if a contact is unfrequented or sporadic, the development of familiarity between the parties is not likely to take place. On the contrary, repeated exposure enables familiarity.
2.3.1 Similarity

On a different note, Harris et al (2003) argue that similarity impacts upon perceptions of attraction because individuals prefer to work with others who have similar backgrounds, attitudes personalities and styles of working. This factor, similarity, can be drawn to the foundation of research within the concept of attraction, which comes from social psychology. In this field, it is viewed as a force that brings parties together (Mortensen, 2012). Research within this area e.g. Byrne, Clore and Worchel (1966) argue that common backgrounds and experiences can promote a feeling of connection between the two parties. Individuals are attracted to each other based on the similarity of abilities, opinions and emotional state. This field of research often lie as a foundation of researching attraction in for instance business relationships.

In relation to similarity Caballero and Resnik (1986), also state that similarity in personality and similarity in attitude, as well as common backgrounds and experiences can promote a sense of attraction between the buyer and the seller. These perspectives are supported by Ford (1980), who propose that people are more likely to prefer to conduct business with those they feel psychologically or socially close to. In addition, Ford (1980) explains that the reason for this is because interaction is less challenging with others who have similar personality, attitudes such as work attitudes, values, activities and experience. One way for a party to attract another, is as argued by Byrne et al (1966), to express statements and opinions through which similarity can be recognized and thereby attraction increased.

2.3.2 Reputation

Further on reputation is mentioned by Harris et al (2003) as a factor that can influence attraction, both positively and negatively. And attraction, they argue, is dependent on the state of the reputation. Halinen (1997) further describes that in the initial stage, there is limited actual insights into performance, therefore potential clients, given the fact that they lack experience of the other party, are forced to base their judgement of an agency’s attractiveness on reputation, referrals, credentials and discussions with representatives of the firm.
As proposed by MacMillan, Money, Downing and Hillenbrand (2005), in their research on reputation in the context of relationships between B2B firms, there are different perspectives to the concept of reputation. It was recognized by MacMillan et al (2005) that companies could have many different reputations since there are different social groups who take interest in a company. Therefore, it is up to the company to work on its reputation in the related fields of the audience it is targeting. Davies, Chun, DaSilva and Roper (2003) as cited in MacMillan et al (2005), for instance argue that reputation can be seen in personality-like attributes, such as whether businesses are sincere, exciting and competent. Furthermore, reputation can, as proposed by Fombrun and Gardberg (2000), as cited in MacMillan et al (2005), relate to characteristics such as emotional appeal and performance by the firm. Similar to this, Harris et al (2003) argue that reputation is related to the area of expertise and knowledge within a firm. In extension expertise is related to training, knowledge and experience. It is therefore up to the company to, on the one hand hold this within the company to provide a good product or service-experience in the first place, on the other hand it can promote these characteristics to improve its reputation. According to MacMillan et al (2005) a company can, in order to manage its reputation communicate to its audience. It involves informing customers as well as listening to their changing needs.

2.3.3 Knowledge of alternatives

Another factor that impacts on the attractiveness of a party is other potential alternatives. Harris et al (2003) found that, even though a party may be similar to another, withhold suitable personal characteristics and generally fit very well, knowledge of more attractive alternatives influences the relationship formation and maintenance. They therefore argue that relationship is related to the knowledge of alternative actors within the business field.

Harris et al (2003) further discussed that these findings, that attraction is based on knowledge of available alternatives, goes in line with the theories of Anderson and Narus (1984; 1990). These authors describe that one party’s desire to enter and maintain a relationship is a function of expectations of a relationship versus the comparison level of alternatives. The notion of
comparison levels of alternatives is further discussed by Dwyer et al (1987) who describe that when one party has access to more favourable alternatives it also has the power to choose between these, as well as Hald et al (2008), in their study on attraction in buyer-supplier relationships, who describe the impact on attractiveness is dependent on;

“the actor's perception as to how many competitive alternatives it has to the working with this particular dyadic associate.". (Hald et al, 2008, p. 962)

That is, the attraction of one party is dependent on its alternatives, and as argued by Dwyer et al (2003) it is up to the company to demonstrate its attraction compared to other alternatives.

### 2.4 Social media

#### 2.4.1 What is social media?

Technology is today one of the major drivers of environmental change, especially the evolution of IT. As argued by Zolkiewski and Littler (2004) in their study on business relationships and technology, the Internet changes the nature in which relationships are managed. They suggest that within B2B markets, technology is strengthening existing relationships and base it on the revolution in new tools such as email and websites.

Nowadays countless media has arisen due to the evolution of the Internet and companies are incorporating more channels, for example social media (Fill & McKee, 2011, p. 273). Social media can be described as the collected name of communication channels that allows users to communicate directly with each other through text, pictures or sound (Constantinides and Fountain, 2007). Mangold and Faulds (2009, p. 377) further describe that it is;

“a variety of new sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated and used by consumers intent on educating each other about products, brands, services, personalities and issues.”
Social media can be used in relation to traditional digital tools, as argued by Järvinen et al (2012) B2B companies utilize social media for instance as search engine optimized tools to drive traffic to their official websites. Furthermore they argue that social media has started a trend where focus lie on developing customer relationships by engaging customers in interactive discussions. This is in contrast to traditional attempts of driving sales. They further found that B2B companies in fact use social media for several purposes, and it includes novel ways of attracting new customers. (See Table 1 below)

**Table 1. Social media use**

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<tr>
<td><strong>Social media tool</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Blog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
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<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
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</tbody>
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*Source: Järvinen, Tollinen, Karjaluoto and Jayawardhena (2012)*

In fact, social media provides platforms that are free of charge and demands little technological knowledge from the user. Therefore, one of the benefits of social media in a business perspective is, from a resource perspective, low investments given the fact that it does not require special training of staff. (Kiryakova, Yordanova & Angelova, 2011) In contrast to this however, Järvinen et al (2012) argues that companies must have the adequate resources in order to exploit social media. If employees have limited capabilities to use social media then overload of work and stress increases. Therefore, investments in human resources is required, as well as updating their knowledge in order to perform effectively in social media. The lack of resources in the form of time and workforce are found by Järvinen et al (2012) to be major barriers in the use and exploitation of this technology. This is further confirmed by the findings of Michaelidou et al (2011), that costs in terms of time is a barrier to B2B usage of social media.
Related to the definitions of social media by Constantinides and Fountain (2007) and Mangold and Faulds (2009) above, is the concept of User Generated Content (UGC). It is the sum of all ways in which people make use of social media, for instance share information, pictures and blog-posts (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009). Further argued by Kaplan and Haenlein (2009), firms can actively manage their social media platforms by creating and sharing UGC, and they argue that it should fulfil three requirements. Firstly, it should be published on a public site, such as a website or a social media channel, which is accessible to others. Furthermore, it needs to show a creative effort, for example writing a blog-post about an interesting article in contrast to copying the article as a blog-post. Finally, it should be created outside of professional routines and practices. It should therefore be made interesting to read even though it is within a business context. The first condition rules out e-mails or instant messages as forms of UGC, the second rules out copying existing content without modifying it to your own version, and the third rules out content with the sole purpose to sell, rather it should provide information of some kind.

Furthermore, according to Mangold and Faulds (2009) one of the greatest characteristics of social media is that, instead of simply companies generating content for their customers, social media has enabled the generation and spread of content among themselves. This can be referred to as Word of Mouth (WOM). Consequently, one person is no longer in control over the content. Once it is published online it is public to all. The positive side of this is that through its channels, there are possibilities to reach millions of people in an instant. (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009) Social media, in this aspect, increases the possibility of WOM.
2.4.3 Word of Mouth

According to Michaelidou et al (2011) social media enables WOM to a higher degree than traditional marketing vehicles, since it can reach a broad audience in real time. This type of communication through social networking sites is a critical factor for firms seeking to acquire new customers. Trusov, Bucklin and Pauwels (2009), supported by their research on WOM in Social Networking Sites (SNS), argue that it can have a large and long-lasting effect. Given that the information is received by third party sources, it has a bigger impact than information simply provided by the company itself. It is further discussed by Aral, Dellarocas and Godes (2013) that by optimizing its social media usage companies can achieve peer referrals and improve its reputation. In relation to this, Michaelidou et al (2011), found that B2B firms can increase awareness by using social media, and their existing business networks to achieve WOM and make knowledge about the company better known.

2.4.4 Communication

Except for the fact that customers can talk to each other, as is the case in WOM, social media also enables for customers and companies to talk to each other. Traditionally, communication between a company and its customers has been unidirectional, however social media brings in new opportunities for companies and customers to communicate. According to Fill and McKee (2011, p. 287), social media provides a medium for interactivity and electronic communication, which allows a two-way and fast communication in a different way than traditional communication practices. In accordance to this, Berthon, Lane, Pitt and Watson (1998) argue that one of the most special characteristics of social media is that it facilitates two-way communication since interaction between individuals as well as individuals and units, such as organizations is facilitated. Michaelidou et al (2011) in relation, argues that B2B companies use social media to initiate two-way communications and by that develop relationships. However it was found by Järvinen et al (2012) that B2B still to a large extent use one-directional channels such as e-mail marketing and White Papers. They argue that even though two-way dialogues to
create a presence and relationships with customers is ideal, the B2B sector still have improvements to make in this area.

2.4.5 Networks

Communication in social media is usually connected to the network of the company, since it enables the company to communicate directly to its followers (Harris & Rae, 2009). Networking is enabled by for example Social Networking Sites (SNS), which enable users to connect to each other. People store personal information by creating profiles, which they can invite friends and colleagues to access. It can also be used to send messages and instant messages. The main advantage identified by Thew (2008) is the possibility of obtaining a large network of contacts, by actively updating one’s profile and actively looking for new contacts. The larger network, the more links to other users, and a display of contacts allows for users to see how they are linked to other people. A corporate page with a network allows the sharing of information and post updates, photos and more to the members or fans of the page (Lin and Lu, 2011). Moreover, it is argued by Michaelidou et al (2011) that since social networks are in an online environment the problems of time and geographical location become less significant. That is, members of a network can be from different destinations in the world, but in the online network have the possibility to exchange information in real-time.

2.5 Summary and analytical framework

It was found in the literature review that the relationship development process consists of several phases. In the initial phase, the parties are unfamiliar with each other’s way of working and it is up to the parties to enhance the attractiveness to one another. There are several authors who touch upon the subject of attraction in the initial phase of the relationship e.g. Dwyer et al (1987); Halinen (1997) and Harris et al (2003). On the basis of this literature, several antecedents of attraction could be found. These were;
Reputation, given that the parties are unfamiliar with each other’s way of working, other sources are relied upon as judges of a company’s knowledge and expertise. Companies can manage their reputations by communication.

Familiarity, where it is argued that there must be a level of familiarity in order for attraction to occur. This can depend on factors such as geographical proximity as well as repeated exposure.

Similarity, which is based on the notion that people are attracted to those similar to oneself, in for instance attitudes, values and personality. In a business perspective it is argued that companies prefer to conduct business with those they can relate to.

Knowledge of alternatives, which states even if a company is attractive in itself, other choices might be more attractive.

Furthermore, it was found by Järvinen et al (2012) that B2B companies use social media in several novel ways of attracting new customers, examples of these are showing expertise, increasing awareness and engaging customers. In addition, it was found that social media hold certain unique characteristics, which can be used to gain an understanding into the topic. These were;

User Generated Content; which refers to the fact that content is produced and shared by the users themselves in social media. It is the content created by the users, which can be either a company or its followers.

Word of Mouth; is the spread of this content, more specifically by others than those who produced it. Social media enables a fast spread by content and facilitates WOM by being a fast, real-time domain that reaches millions of users.

Communication; relates to the fact that social media enables two-way communication between users. Also by having a presence in social media, interactions between individuals and companies are facilitated.

Networks; is a big part of the whole concept of social media. Individuals as well as companies can create networks of friends, colleagues and acquaintances. Once a network is created it can easily be reached and communicated to.
In the following sections the factors of reputation, similarity, familiarity and knowledge of alternatives will be analyzed. This will be done in the light of how companies are using social media to increase their attractiveness to new potential customers in relation to these factors.

3 Method

3.1 Choice of topic

During the past decades technological developments has led to a reality where social media is present (Fill & McKee 2011, p. 287) and it is becoming a topic of interest, also in the realm of academic research. However, as stated by Järvinen et al (2012) and Michaelidou et al (2010) the literature to this date has mainly discussed the opportunities of social media from a B2C perspective. This leads to existing, but scarce academic research of social media usage in B2B.

After a literature review to get a better insight to the topic of B2B it was found that relationships with customers are important for B2B companies (Gillin & Schwartzman, 2011). Therefore, this study started with this as a guideline to further explore the topic. Moreover, it was found that relationships can be considered to have several phases including; initiation, development and maintenance in the so-called relationship development process (Dwyer et al, 1987).

After exploring the scarce literature on social media in B2B; for instance Michaelidou et al (2011) and Järvinen et al (2012), it was revealed that empirical evidence state that one main reason for B2B companies to use social media is to attract new customers. Regarding the relationship development process it relates to the initial phase of the relationship. Furthermore, the concept of attraction was considered as a valid factor, given that attracting new customers is of importance for B2B in social media. This concept was further described by Dwyer et al (1987) as an important factor in the relationship development process, and therefore became the topic of investigation for this paper.
Even though there is empirical evidence, which state that B2B companies are in fact using social media in the initial stages of the relationship, one question that still remains unanswered is how these companies actually use their social media channels to accomplish this?

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to, from the selling company's perspective, address the gap of how this is actually done. This leads to an exploratory study, which is supported by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009, p. 139) who states that the approach is appropriate when one is trying to find out what is happening and trying to expand new and relatively scarce knowledge.

### 3.2 Contribution

This study will contribute with a qualitative study into the scarce academic research within B2B and social media. It will provide insights into how companies use social media regarding building relationships in relation to attraction, and will therefore contribute to this field of research. Further on it will provide guidelines for B2B companies in the utilization of social media. Given that potential drawbacks are considered it will also help companies to be better aware of the downsides of social media usage.

### 3.3 Choice of industry

The topic chosen derives from the B2B sector, where companies make their offerings to other companies rather than to end-consumers. The industry chosen for this study was the consultancy industry where the service is to offer its knowledge and expertise to customers. The main reason for this choice derived from a Research Report by The Bloom Group, BlissPR and the Association of Management Consulting Firms (AMCF). It was found in this report that consulting firms are quickly expanding their budgets for social media use (Bloomgroup.com). This indicates an increasing interest from consultants into social media, which makes it a motivating industry for further investigation.
The industry is however rather broad and can span from everything between for example IT, finance to PR. In order to be more specific the choice was further limited to consultants that act somehow within the field of social media. More specifically, companies that help other companies utilise social media in their marketing or communication. The reason for this was based on an assumption that their consultancy role within social media makes them particularly knowledgeable within the field, which provided an interesting additional level of knowledge to the research.

3.4 Choice of companies

Out of convenience the companies were limited to those operating in Stockholm. This provided an opportunity for face-to-face interviews. A limitation of this method was that the results might not be representative for a larger population. These limitations however should not affect the results to a high degree since the approach in this study is exploratory where the emphasis is not on generalizing to a population (Jensen, 1995, p. 60). Furthermore, the interviewees all worked with the external social media communication of four selected firms. The drawback of using four firms was, as mentioned above as well, that they do not represent the complete picture of the market, (Saunders et al, 2009, p. 241) with the same argument as stated above however, this should still provide sufficient data for this study. For a presentation of the companies see Table 2 further below.

3.5 Choice of respondents

The companies were themselves asked to select participants who were actively working with social media within the organization. A positive outcome of this sampling method was that the respondents, who chose to take part, did this due to their interest, experience and knowledge in the field (Bengtsson, Hjort, Sandberg & Thelander, 1998, p. 20). Given this, they could provide relevant insights on how the companies actively use their social media channels and enrich the study with knowledge of central importance, which is an important factor when choosing candidates for the study. This initially led to one interviewee from each company.
Considering the sizes of Prat PR, Informedia Communications and Element, which all have between 15 to 23 employees in their firms (Prat PR, 2013; Informedia, 2013 and Element, 2013) one employee was considered enough to provide a good picture on the social media usage. JG Communication however have as many as 90 employees (JG Communication, 2013), therefore an additional interview was made to complement the data on the social media use within the company. For this reason, the total respondents resulted in five people. The respondents all worked daily with social media and had the experience of the social media use in their respective company and therefore were key sources of information for the study.

**Table 2.** Companies and respondents for data collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of company</th>
<th>Type of company</th>
<th>Name of respondent</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Role in relation to social media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Element</td>
<td>PR-agency</td>
<td>Jon Dahlgren</td>
<td>B2B-Marketer</td>
<td>Work with social media both for Elements own use and helping clients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informedia Communications</td>
<td>Marketing-agency</td>
<td>Helen Crowe Blomgren</td>
<td>Communication Strategist</td>
<td>Responsible for the companies social media use, and use them on a daily basis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JG Communication</td>
<td>Content Marketing-agency</td>
<td>Pontus Staunstrup</td>
<td>Senior Communication Strategist</td>
<td>Responsible for the companies social media use, and use them on a daily basis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JG Communication</td>
<td>Content Marketing-agency</td>
<td>Caitriona O’Connor</td>
<td>Social Media Specialist</td>
<td>Work with social media both for JG and helping clients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prat PR</td>
<td>PR-agency</td>
<td>Karl Nyberg</td>
<td>Key Account Manager</td>
<td>Work with social media both for Prat PR and helping clients</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Authors own table

### 3.6 Data Collection

The data was collected through a qualitative technique based on semi-structured interviews, which was an appropriate method for this exploratory research since it allowed the interviewees to speak freely about their perspectives in relation to the topic (Saunders et al 2009, p. 320). Taken this approach, the study was provided with information and aspects that were not previously considered, but were of significance for a deeper understanding of the topic. For this, the interviewees were addressed with open questions in order to encourage them to provide extensive and developed answers. According to Saunders et al (2009, p. 337) this approach of collecting data is suitable for obtaining facts which answer the question *how*, as was the case of this study.

Furthermore, the open questions related to topics for instance, “Use of social media in B2B”, “Use of social media for attracting new customers”, “Social media channels used”, “Benefits and drawbacks with social media use” (For a more comprehensive description see appendix A). The open questions were suitable for obtaining data that answered the research questions, and the respondents could provide more elaborated answers.
The interviews were performed one-to-one. Face-to-face interviews were performed with Informedia and JG Communication and interviews via telephone with Element and Prat PR (See Appendix B for dates of the interviews). Given the fact that the interviews were performed in two ways, the interaction with the interviewees could have impacted on the collected data. This is because two of the interviews were carried out at the workplace and two from a distance, which meant lack of non-verbal expressions over the telephone. In order to reduce risks of this sort, the interviewers made sure to ask follow-up questions in order to avoid that some information was unclear during the interviews conducted over the telephone. This allowed for the interviewees to answer and provide the necessary information in order to have the correct perspective of information.

Also, when conducting interviews, it is possible that different interviewers take different approaches, or use their own language or interpretations. This can impact on the reliability of the study as argued by Saunders et al (2009, p. 157). In order to reduce the risk of the data being affected by this, the same person conducted all the interviews.

The time of all the interviews ranged between 40 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes. (For a more detailed time frame see Appendix B) The interviewers did not end the interviews until enough data was collected. Therefore, the range in length of the interviews was not perceived to affect the quality of the collected data.

Moreover, in order to avoid missing any valuable information the interviews were recorded. This was done for gaining control over bias, and to produce reliable data for the analysis, which is supported by Saunders et al (2009, p. 341). When recording however, there is a risk that the answers are being inhibited because the interviewees know that they are being recorded. In order to reduce this risk, which can impact on the reliability of the answers, the purpose with the audio recording was explained at the beginning of the interviews. It was made clear that the recordings were only used for the purpose of the interviewers to review the data. They were also given the possibility to be anonymous to further reduce the risk. These approaches are supported by

Furthermore, the interviews were conducted in Swedish, summarised in Swedish and afterwards translated into English. The benefit of such an approach was that it was the native tongue of the interviewees, as well as the interviewers. Therefore, it reduced the risk of miscommunication, which could impact on the quality of the data. However, there was an apparent risk that data were lost in translation. In order to reduce this risk both authors of this paper translated all the interviews and later compared the results. This way any misconceptions could more easily be detected.

Afterwards, a summary was written in order to help the interviewers become familiar with the main themes that emerged from the interviews. This is supported by Saunders et al (2009, p. 491) since it is a suitable method for analysing the findings of qualitative data collections. In order to reduce the risk of missing out on important data, both interviewers conducted the summaries. The results were compared and structured into a cohesive summary.

3.7 Method of Analysis

The empirical findings will be presented under each company and their respective answers. The data collected will then be analyzed according to the factors that influence attraction from the analytical framework; reputation, familiarity, similarity and knowledge of alternatives. In order to answer the question how they are using social media, their operational approach will be the level of analysis. Furthermore the potential drawbacks of using social media will be analyzed separately in order to see what potential problems companies encounter in their social media use.
4 Empirical findings

4.1 Element

4.1.1 Description of the company

Element is a marketing agency located in Stockholm, with 21 employees. Their aim is to help B2B customers by innovative strategies and marketing programs by using systems and platforms. Their vision is to “create the sales of the future” (Element, 2013). The goal is for instance to convert leads into customers, and one tool for doing this is social media. They argue that today buyers find the sellers instead of the opposite and help companies become attractive in the eyes of buyers. They use social media channels such as Facebook, LinkedIn and their corporate blog. (Element, 2013)

The respondent from Element, Jon Dahlgren, is a B2B marketer. He has earlier worked several years in B2B marketing. For Element, he is actively blogging on the importance of social media use in B2B.

4.1.2 Empirical data

On the one hand the company have an active approach in their social media use, they themselves find prospective customers and make the first contact. The company uses a so-called “reason to speak” approach. If one has contacts in their network, or have worked within similar businesses they can use these to start talking. “It is a way to open up a dialogue and we interact through social media”. Because they do this, they are aware that others might do the same. Therefore, it is important to have a social media strategy. To be present and be there if someone wishes to make contact with the company. They also use helpful tools to be able to track people who visit their social media sites and then target them with information they are interested in. They use
social media, and constant updates of information, to stay “top of mind”. This way, when a company decides to buy, they will more likely buy from them.

The other reason for using social media is to create a presence. The company updates the same information in all their social media channels. They also let their employees carry on their posts and share them on their sites or link to them to increase the spread. “It is important to distribute the content widely”. In Element, they for instance have internal blog-competitions to make sure that interesting content is produced and attract potential customers. It makes it fun, yet at the same time it helps the company to be innovative and interesting.

Through LinkedIn they distribute information, invite people to seminars and target potential customers, which is easy because one can find business people in the channel. Element measures their success in social media, and has noticed that LinkedIn is the best channel for B2B to distribute information, targeted ads and blog-posts. They believe that it is a good fit given the fact that it is a business site to begin with. They use LinkedIn as a tool to hopefully establish a real-life contact, which is the most important. Using social media channels, such as LinkedIn, are good ways of establishing this initial contact, which can later lead to meetings in real life. Element uses it for, and believe it is a good tool for, the initial contact in the buying process. One way is to get people to be a part of their network, that way they get access to the updates on the social media sites.

Furthermore, they see their website as a living pamphlet of information which should continuously be updated, with White Papers and blog-posts. The same goes for their social media sites, which constantly demands updates. Not just any updates, but interesting updates, and the way to enable this is as described above through internal contests, but also by keeping updated by what is going on in their business field to provide updated information. Furthermore they share blog-posts and White Papers in their social media sites to create an interest, increase the possibility of these being read by as many people as possible, as well as hopefully lead people back to the website. Furthermore, the nature of the blog-posts and White Papers, being
descriptive, allows for the company to describe topics within its business field to show that Element is knowledgeable, updated and competent.

They further describe that a usage for blogs are that they are highly search engine-optimized tools. They state a real life example when a person found them through a blog and then later became one of their customers. Below follows a more detailed description of the social media use in Element to provide a better overview.

Table 3. Overview of social media usage in Element divided by channels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social media channel</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>How?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>Present the company</td>
<td>Present its services on their LinkedIn profile. Share company's offers and spread news on what they do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Show its expertise</td>
<td>Share blog-posts on previous successful work, and information when they have acquired new well-known customers. Also they show the competence that the company holds, by its network of employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engage customers</td>
<td>Create- and invite to groups in content strategy, where interested parties can discuss the topic among themselves and with JG.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increase awareness</td>
<td>Simply by having an account, given that LinkedIn ends up high in search engines such as Google. Encouraging people to comment on and share their posts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Twitter</strong></td>
<td><strong>Increase awareness</strong></td>
<td>By having a network of followers and distributing information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Uphold awareness</strong></td>
<td>Try to update its account daily, or several times a day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professional interaction</strong></td>
<td>Reach people by following them on Twitter, more natural approach to interact. Engage in discussions and promote own discussions in the channel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Show its expertise</strong></td>
<td>By sharing news on successful work for clients, and uphold a view that the company is knowledgeable by sharing content related to their business field.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>To learn</strong></td>
<td>They use twitter a lot to follow competent people in their business field, and see what they are writing about content marketing to keep updated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Facebook</strong></td>
<td><strong>Present personality</strong></td>
<td>Show through pictures, for instance on celebrations on holidays, to project a positive and friendly image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blog</strong></td>
<td><strong>Show its expertise</strong></td>
<td>Blog-posts regarding current business trends, about the topic of content and thereby describing its knowledge in the field, and information on newly acquired customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Increasing awareness</strong></td>
<td>Writing blogs about topics that can end up in searchengines. They for example use statistics as a tool to optimise the blog content.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Authors own table*
4.2 Informedia Communications

4.2.1 Description of the company

Informedia Communications (Informedia) is a PR-agency, located in Stockholm with 15 employees. They describe themselves that they “work with communication on a strategic and operative level, always towards concrete business goals” (Informedia, 2013). Their customers range in several sectors and some of their services are strategic counselling, media relations and strategies and campaigns within digital PR and social media. Informedia use social media channels such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. (Informedia, 2013)

The respondent from Informedia, Helen Crowe Blomgren, is a Communication Consultant and co-funder of the company. She has 25 years of experience of strategic and operational communication. She is responsible for the company’s own social media platforms and also helps customers with their social media use.

4.2.2 Empirical data

Primarily, Informedia use its channels to reach customers and other interested parties, such as the media and other consultants. “[...] if for instance colleagues in related fields believe that we are good at what we do they might recommend us to prospective customers” They use social media to give a face and personality to the company. However, there is a big difference between the different channels as exemplified; “Facebook is more personal while Twitter is more business and professional.”

The company uses its Twitter-account about once a day. They believe it is important to inform rather than “spam” their followers. It is also about what they have time for. One issue with their social media use is the lack in resources. “Unfortunately there isn't enough time [...] we work for our clients and don’t have time with ourselves”. The company is however aware of this issue and are working to improve it. At the time of the interview they were planning to have a meeting to
improve their social media strategies for Twitter and LinkedIn because it is a bit neglected. Also in order to improve their performance, the employees who are working with the social media sites continuously try to keep updated in the field, by external seminars and meetings among each other in the firm.

One interesting fact regarding their Twitter account is that it is in English, and the tweets are consequently written in English. This is to a large extent because their field of work, marketing research, is a great topic abroad. Therefore, they see Twitter as a channel to reach foreign markets and to reach more followers outside of the Swedish market as well.

By using social media, Informedia is trying to show that they are good at what they do and competent in their business field. For instance, a big part of their work is market research and media analysis, and they use social media to show that they are up-to-date and can keep up with current trends in their business field. They also use their social media channels to promote previous successful work with customers and to lead users to their website where more detailed information is to be found. The company is aware of the fact that they cannot control the information once it is online. Therefore they try to approach this proactively by producing content that reflects the company. Informedia use it as a way to share information that can show what the company values and finds it important.

In addition they want to present that the company is up to speed on other important topics in society by sharing articles and following top performers in the business field on their social media sites. Also, the company has a list of interesting topics to use in their tweets, as well as magazines where material for tweets can be found. It is important to give customers and readers what they want, and it is important that whoever in the company that is for example tweeting, are using the same foundation. This way the company is represented properly and with the correct information. The company considers Twitter as a good channel to perform this goal. "We use Twitter a lot to learn, but also to show that we are knowledgeable and nice".
Below follows a more detailed description of the social media use in Informedia to provide a better overview.

**Table 4. Overview of social media usage in Informedia, divided by channels.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social media channel</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>How?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>Present the company</td>
<td>Present its services on their LinkedIn profile. Share company's offers and spread news on what they do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Show its expertise</td>
<td>Present information on previous successful work with clients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>Increase awareness</td>
<td>Both domestically and internationally by its network of followers and actors they follow themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uphold awareness</td>
<td>Update its account at least once a day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional interaction</td>
<td>Engage in discussions with others in their business field on Twitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Show its expertise</td>
<td>By sharing news on successful work for clients, and uphold a view that the company is knowledgeable by sharing content related to their business field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>Present personality</td>
<td>Show through pictures, for instance on celebrations on holidays, to project a positive and friendly image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>Not active</td>
<td>Not active</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Authors own table*
4.3 JG Communication

4.3.1 Description of the company

JG Communication (JG) is a content agency located in Stockholm with 90 employees. They describe themselves that they are “the content agency that creates strategic and engaging content for all channels” (JG Communication, 2013). They serve customers within various business fields with services such as creating marketing material, content strategies and social media use. They themselves use several social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and their corporate blog Buzz. (JG Communication, 2013)

One of the respondents from JG, Caitriona O’Connor, is a Social Media Specialist at JG that helps companies succeed in their communication. She has previous experience as a marketing executive and a social media strategist. At JG she is consulting B2B companies on their social media use in three areas; creation, strategy and training. She also is one of the people who update the Twitter account of JG.

The other respondent, Pontus Staunstrup, is a Senior Communication Strategist at JG that provides strategic communication services for clients. He has previous experience as Head of Communications, Communication strategist and of consultancy. At JG, he is responsible for the use of the company’s social media communication, both strategically and operationally.

4.3.2 Empirical data

It is argued that “Social media are great to create an interest, which lead to creating potential clients”. Social media provides a way to present a vivid and real picture of who the company is and what the company does. They want to show that JG is the number one content agency in the Nordic.
The most important channels according to themselves are LinkedIn and Twitter. LinkedIn is about putting forward the competence that lies within the company, for instance by displaying the employees and their resumes, and create new contacts as well as to engage interested parties in for example discussion groups on Content Marketing, which is JG’s field of work. They for instance create groups in content strategy and share information to show that they are leading in their field of Content Marketing. They do not use groups on Facebook the same way. Their Facebook page is mostly about having a presence, where they post what they do and post pictures on a personal level. LinkedIn is more professional, where they are able to provide more interesting insights. Furthermore they produce blog-posts on previous successful work, and newly acquired big customers, information that is distributed through their channels.

Twitter is used to interact and share information that can increase the company’s professionalism. They describe that Twitter is all about being direct and getting a discussion going. It is also a good way for JG to listen to what is going on around the world in their business field and bring it back to Sweden. They further describe that through Twitter they also have the possibility to have contacts with people abroad, which is important since their field of work is more evolved in other counties. They can get insights and become known outside of the Swedish borders.

JG uses Twitter and its other social media channels, to awaken an interest in the target group. Through social media the company plant a seed in the mind of the potential buyer, and thus use it in the beginning to reach new customers. The trend is moving towards getting potential customers to visit them rather than pushing out their message. Mentally customers might not be in the buying-phase yet and that’s when you can use social media, “to get the company into the process early on”. The company can contact people in their networks in social media, or simply provide these with information updates. In their network, they can provide information to people who have agreed to take part of it and are interested in the company. They also describe that social media is good for “interacting with people you could otherwise not reach. People are usually more generous to share in social media than in real life”. And if JG are in someone’s network on Twitter it is more natural to approach them than making a phone call out of the blue.
The channels that they use for these purposes are as mentioned Twitter, but also Facebook and LinkedIn since they both provide good ways of building up a network.

One aspect about sharing content through posts in social media is to continuously keep it updated. For JG it is worse having an inactive and boring profile online than not being there at all. Therefore they work to update it, and post something in their channels almost daily.

The website is described as the “centre of their communication” and it is where they wish to drive traffic. They use social media as a tool to accomplish this. JG are well aware that the buying process to a vast majority starts with a search and they use social media to end up in the search-process by potential customers. Blogs are, if they concern topics interesting by customers, likely to end up in the search-process and JG use them a lot for this purpose. Also, LinkedIn is a hit that ends up high on search engines such as Google. It is therefore important to keep the blogs up to date, which is important to JG. It is also important for them to have their employees in social media, e.g. LinkedIn, this way individual employees can end up in searches as well. In order to know what to write about and what is high “hits” they use statistics, but they also use the social media channels themselves to spot topics of interest to their followers.

One purpose of being in social media is to get a spread on their information. “You share something that will hopefully catch on and be carried on to maximize the effect.” In order to do this it is important to spread information of interest to others, to motivate them to share. JG has a clear strategy behind their use and what to share, it is written down and can shortly be summarized as social media in general to awake an interest. Social media is more than just “Like us on Facebook”. In order to know what potential and existing customers value and are interested in social media they use statistics, for existing customers they simply ask them. It is important to know your target group and talk about topics that they find interesting.
Since every engagement in social media has its costs in time and money, JG has budgeted for it. Despite this, sometimes they do not have time to follow up. Being that their business idea is to help their customers with their communication they end up neglecting their own social media presence a bit. However, they do have a clear strategy and try to keep it updated as much as possible. Below follows a more detailed description of the social media use in JG to provide a better overview.

Table 5. Overview of social media usage in JG, divided by channels.

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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increase awareness</td>
<td>Simply by having an account, given that LinkedIn ends up high in search engines such as Google. Encouraging people to comment on and share their posts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Platform</td>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>Increase awareness</td>
<td>By having a network of followers and distributing information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>Show its expertise</td>
<td>Blog-posts regarding current business trends, about the topic of content and thereby describing its knowledge in the field, and information on newly acquired customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increasing awareness</td>
<td>Writing blogs about topics that can end up in searchengines. They for example use statistics as a tool to optimise the blog content.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors own table
4.4 Prat PR

4.4.1 Description of the company

Prat PR (Prat) is a PR-agency, with offices in both Stockholm and Gothenburg with 23 employees (of which three are located in Gothenburg) that specialises in market-PR and strategic communication for their customers in several sectors. They describe that they offer qualified help, “everything from ideas to hands-on assistance – everything to create good communication.” (Prat PR, 2013). Among their services are media relations, media analysis and digital communication and social media. The company is active in several social media channels such as Twitter, Facebook and their corporate blog. (Prat PR, 2013)

The respondent from Prat, Karl Nyberg, is an Account Manager. He has previous experience as a PR manager and he works with their own social media channels as well as a consultant for customers.

4.4.2 Empirical data

The company use social media to build a personal relationship with their customers. For instance, they send out information to new customers. Furthermore they describe that they have a personal interest in using social media, to show potential customers who Prat is and what, the company does and what it can offer to its customers.

One tool they use a lot to do this is blogs, which they describe as a good channel to describe the company’s actions and produce content in its blog that can be interesting for potential customers. The customers can also find the information if they search on certain topics that the company has written about. Furthermore, they use their other channels such as Facebook and Twitter to promote the blog-posts. The company are not at present active in LinkedIn. They describe that
LinkedIn is a good channel for businesses to be in and they might be in the future. However right now they do not have the resources to be active there.

By using social media to spread information they wish to show that they are knowledgeable in what they do. They do not want to force information on people, but rather spread information that potential customers and other people in their network might find interesting. “It is important that the information is relevant and that it fits the company profile, we do not post information just for the sake of it”. It is one way to attract attention from potential clients, and they describe that it is a potential “foot through the door”. In order to attract attention they discuss topics, which can lead to a debate, and thereby they profile themselves and what the company stands for, at the same time that a debate or discussion can increase the spread and knowledge about the company.

The strategy for sharing content in social media is both structured and unstructured. There is no particular plan, rather everybody within the company has an individual responsibility. However there are specific roles and the respondent in this case, for example to a large extent works with the company’s communication on Facebook.

The company also use the employee’s personal networks to increase the spread for the company’s content. By using the employee’s personal networks it is also only indirectly linked to the company and can reach readers who are not particularly in contact with the company. For instance, most information that is posted on the company profile is further posted on the employee’s personal sites.

Below follows a more detailed description of the social media use in Prat to provide a better overview.
Table 6. Overview of social media usage in Prat, divided by channels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social media channel</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>How?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>Not active</td>
<td>Not active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>Increase awareness</td>
<td>By having a network of followers, as well as using the network of employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uphold awareness</td>
<td>Continuously sharing on Prat PRs official account, as well as encouraging employees within the firm to spread through their account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>Engage in discussions and share topics that engages people to discuss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>Present personality</td>
<td>Post pictures of its employees and the activities, which occur in the company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>Inform through status updates and comments about the current campaigns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>Present personality</td>
<td>Spread information about the company and attract potential customers through blog-posts that presents what the company does and who the company is.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors own table
5 Analysis

5.1 Familiarity

It was found in the empirical data that companies use social media to be present in the mind of the potential future clients. For instance, it was argued by JG that their social media channels were used to plant a seed in the mind of a potential buyer. They describe that the buying company might not be in the process of making a purchase just yet, however it is important “to get JG into the process early on”. To increase an interest for the company JG use the LinkedIn account to describe its services, share business information and create- and invite to discussion-forums online as well as to seminars offline. They describe that it is important to continuously update the information on the page to keep potential clients updated on what is going on with the company. Another channel that they use a lot for this purpose is Twitter, which is all about being active and interactive. The company tweets at least once every day and comment on other people’s tweets in order to interact and be an active part in discussions. This was also described by Informedia, which further argued that tweeting about one time a day is the perfect balance between updating and spamming. This way it increases the possibility of other parties to acknowledge and recognise them, which is important if a company starts looking for potential firms to engage with and in extension perhaps purchase from. This can be related to the argument by Harris et al (2003) that familiarity is increased through interaction, and the empirical findings suggest that companies use social media to interact, which thereby increases familiarity.

Furthermore, as described by Element social media is a way for their company to stay “top of mind” for potential buyers. This, in accordance to the description by JG, means that when a potential client decides to buy they will more likely buy from them. Similar to JG they mainly use their LinkedIn account to increase an interest for the company, however they also use their Facebook page to share newly published blog-posts and invite interested parties to offline seminars. The fact that the companies use social media to stay on top of potential clients mind
can be related to awareness and the argument by Dwyer et al (1987, p. 15) that “[…] buyers are apt to become aware of local merchants and brands advertised in frequently viewed media.”. In this study, the companies were using their social media channels to achieve this frequency.

One way of achieving this frequency was that companies use social media to share content that in turn can be spread by other parties. For instance, as described by JG, one purpose of being in social media is to increase the spread of information. “You share something that will hopefully catch on and be carried on to maximize the effect.” and by Element that “It is important to distribute the content widely”. Social media has many characteristics that enable the spread of information, both by the company itself as well as by third party sources.

In order to increase the possibility of people finding their information interesting enough to share, JG and Informedia for instance use the social media channels themselves to listen to what was being said by others online. This way they can stay updated and provide information on topics that are interesting for their target audience, for example potential customers, and also content that others find interesting to share. This is in accordance to Kaplan and Haenlein (2009) that argues that companies, in order to be interesting, should listen to the customers, get to know what they like to talk about and then develop and post content suitable for these expectations. This enhances the possibilities for companies to provide content, which is actually being required and needed to attract new clients. One channel that was perceived as suitable for this objective was Twitter. As stated by Informedia "We use Twitter a lot to learn […]" and JG stated that it used Twitter to listen to what is going on around the world in their field and bring it back to Sweden.

According to the empirical findings WOM in social media is to a large extent enabled by the network of the company, through which the company can share information and which in turn can share it further. JG’s network in LinkedIn for example enable for followers to take part of information that JG post on their "corporate updates". These followers are in turn provided with the opportunity to further distribute this information is their network. In order to get people to do this, JG actively recommends and invites their followers to share their posts with others. They
also invite and suggest that their followers comment on posts. If one of its followers comment on a post, this comment will appear on their personal profile, which in turn give people outside of JG’s network access. This is in accordance to literature on social media, e.g. Thew (2008), one of its great possibilities. By obtaining a large network of contacts, the more links to other users. It is further argued by Michaelidou et al (2011) that firms can increase awareness by using social media, and their existing business networks to achieve WOM and increase knowledge about the company.

One further interesting finding regarding this data was that for instance Prat and Element use the extended networks of employees to increase the possibility of the information being brought on by unrelated third party sources. They engage their employees to share the company’s content, for example a newly published blog-post, on their personal social media sites. That is, the network of the company becomes extended beyond its actual borders to the personal sites of employees.

Another interesting fact was that Informedia use social media to have contact with foreign markets, Informedia even use their Twitter account in English to enable this. They follow international tweeters as well as Swedish ones. An English account is therefore more reasonable if they wish to comment or engage in discussions, or if new potential clients from abroad should be able to follow them. Social media, being a global media, is clearly not concerned with geographical boundaries and enables usage across borders. This is in accordance to the description by Michaelidou et al (2011) that in an online environment the problems of geographical location become less significant. Regarding familiarity, Caballero et al (1986) argue that geographical proximity enables familiarity. According to them, working or living in a geographic location close to another promotes attraction between two parties. Given the empirical data in this study however, social media diminishes these boundaries and enables familiarity for parties even though they are not geographically close. Rather it is related to the fact that they are a part of the same network. This is in accordance to Michaelidou et al (2011) who argue that through the networks in social media there is the possibility to exchange information from vast locations across the world. A keyword in their argument is the network
and as mentioned by Informedia and JG the network in social media is an important factor to facilitate the distribution and updating of content. This is in agreement to literature, where communication in social media is usually connected to the network, since it enables communication directly to the followers (Harris & Rae, 2009).

By having a network of followers, these can easily be accessed and reminded of the presence of the company. Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn all were mentioned as good channels for this purpose. By keeping a network in LinkedIn, JG for example share and recommend newly updated blog-posts and White Papers, which are located on the company website. In extension, they therefore get interested parties to visit the website, which they describe as the centre of the company’s information. Therefore it is clear that the network in social media is important for companies to update their followers, and in extension increase frequency of contact and familiarity, as argued above.

5.2 Similarity

The empirical data argued for using social media to show “who” the company is. As described by JG, social media is used to present a vivid and real picture of the company. Furthermore, Informedia share information that can represent what the company values and finds important. It is also argued by Prat that “It is important that the information is relevant and that it fits the company profile, we do not post information just for the sake of it”. This can be related to the argument by Harris et al (2003), that people are attracted to those similar to oneself in personality. This means that there is potential in attracting new clients as they identify with the characteristics of the company related to the way they present themselves in social media.

In order to do this Informedia for instance has a list of interesting topics to use in tweets, as well as magazines where the employees can find material for tweets that represents the company. All their posts should also, even if they concern general matters, generate a sense of professionalism. It is important to maintain information, which describes and represents the company and thereby endorse potential clients to make an initial contact with them if they relate to the information.
This is further in line with Ford (1980), who argues that companies prefer to conduct business with those they can relate to. When companies demonstrate who they are, if it is in line with the values of potential clients, it is a way to increase its attractiveness.

Moreover, it was found that different channels were used to promote different sides of the company. For instance, JG uses its Facebook page to post what they do on a personal note whereas they use LinkedIn to promote a more professional picture. Similarly, Informedia use Facebook to promote the personality of the company, to demonstrate a friendly culture within the company and LinkedIn to show off their services and business personality. In addition, Informedia describes that they use Twitter as a combination to show that they are both knowledgeable and nice. For example, in order to maintain a personal tone the company share pictures of the employees and their activities, which provides a personal image to their existing- and potential clients on what they do in a non-business related context. However, when Informedia comments on current business trends and share links in LinkedIn, business is in mind and the comments are in a professional context and also finding new business partnerships.

Furthermore, the companies argue for the importance of their network to make new contacts. They describe that through their network they can make contact with people with whom they have mutual contacts in social media. Element for instance describe that this gives them a “reason to speak”. They describe that if one has similar contacts in a network, or have worked within the same company in the past it can be used “[...] to open up a dialogue [...]”. Consequently this works the other way around and potential customers can find the company through their mutual contacts. This can be related to the concept of similarity by the fact that the parties are more likely to prefer to conduct business with those they are socially close to (Ford, 1980), and to those with common backgrounds (Caballero & Resnik, 1986). One interesting finding was that JG promoted their employees and their resumes in LinkedIn. By doing this, it expands the possibilities of potential customers finding related contacts with JG, which in turn can increase its attractiveness.
5.3 Reputation

As discussed earlier, the fact that information is being shared by third party sources is according to Halinen (2003) a key factor in B2B relationships since potential customers take their first contact based on their judgement about a company's attractiveness, which rely on its reputation and referrals. Due to this, potential customers, given that they lack experience of the other party, have to base their judgement of an agency’s attractiveness on information from other sources than the company. In relation to Halinen (2003) the companies in this study make use of social media by providing information that can be spread by others through the different channels, and maximise exposure through other parties.

Important regarding this factor is that the content that is shared should represent the company. In this way, when other parties spread it further it projects a positive image of the company. This is considered important by all of the interviewed companies, and can be related to the argument by Harris et al (2003) that depending on its character, reputation can be either good or bad in relation to attractiveness, and they describe that your attraction is dependent on the state of your reputation. Given the special characteristics of social media, its speed and scope, the basis for a bad reputation as well as a good reputation can spread fast to a vast amount of interested parties (Michaelidou et al, 2011). There were different ways used by the companies to tackle this risk and increase the quality of the shared information. For instance internal competitions were exemplified by Element to produce interesting and innovative blogs, as well as formal guidelines for what information to be shared as exemplified by JG. In this way, companies are constantly creating and displaying content which is of great importance for demonstrating what they are good at.

The type of information that is shared by the companies can differ, however one common denominator that was found in all the interviews was that the information should somehow be related to showing off the company’s competence. As argued by MacMillan et al (2005) companies can have many different reputations given the fact that there are several groups who take interest in a company. Therefore, it is up to the company to work on its reputation in the
related fields of the audience it is targeting. Regarding competence and attraction, this concerns the company’s personality-like attributes as argued by Davis et al (2003). One way that the companies were achieving this was providing information such as White Papers that display the company’s competence. These White Papers are then distributed in social media channels and can be shared by other parties who find them interesting. Also blog-posts were used for the same purpose. One channel that was considered to be a good channel for distributing information, such as business cases and White Papers, was Twitter. As described by JG, Twitter is all about being direct and getting a discussion going. That is, to engage people to be willing to share information. Moreover Facebook is used in this aspect due to its vast amount of users. It is one channel, through which a company can reach a lot of users. Similarly, LinkedIn was also described as a good channel to reach others, however it was perceived as particularly effective to reach a business audience, whereas Facebook was considered on a more general note.

Furthermore Element and JG use social media to spread business cases, and information on successful previous work for customers. This was performed for instance through the distribution of business cases. This can be related to the argument by Harris et al (2003) that previous experience concerns a company’s expertise, which in turn is related to reputation. Fombrun and Gardberg (2000) further argue that reputation can regard characteristics such as performance, and according to the empirical findings companies are using social media channels to promote this. One channel that was described to achieve this is LinkedIn given its professional nature.

5.4 Knowledge of alternatives

The respondents describe that they use social media to end up in the search process once a customer engages in a search. JG is well aware that the buying process starts with a search and they use their channels to end up in the initial process. They describe that they write blog-posts for this purpose, as well as simply keeping a presence in LinkedIn. The fact is that LinkedIn in itself is a highly search-friendly channel. Furthermore, as exemplified by Element, an interested
potential customer found them through a blog-post and later became one of their actual long-term customers.

These aspects in relation to a company’s search-friendliness can be related to knowledge of alternatives as an important factor that impacts on a company’s attractiveness (Harris et al, 2003). Given that a potential customer is “on the search” it is important to be in the process. Even if he/she is considering another option, being present with a more interesting offer can make the customer choose your company instead. Further on, as described by Dwyer (1987) once the party has access to alternatives, which are favourable, it has the power to choose among them. Therefore, companies must actively remain as top searches through its content regarding their knowledge and competence; otherwise they lose the opportunity of being considered by potential clients.

Blogs are, if they concern topics interesting by customers likely to end up in the search-process and JG use them a lot for this purpose. This can be connected to the description by Järvinen et al (2011) that social media can be used as search optimized tools. One way that companies enable this is for example by producing blog-post on current topics. JG use statistics to generate content that they know is current and will likely end up as “hits”. By using social media to stay searchable as the empirical evidence states, they are enabling themselves as a potential choice.

5.5 Drawbacks of social media

One drawback of using social media is the loss of control, which is why the companies have guidelines for their usage. It was important for them that the content they share represents the company, because once it is online it is available to all. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) loss of control is actually one of the reasons why companies hesitate to engage in social media, and the perception of this drawback is confirmed by the empirical data in this study. The firms all had different approaches of coping with this, ranging from informal strategies where
employees can judge on what is considered appropriate, such as the use of Prat, as well as more formal with a written social media strategy as exemplified by JG.

Furthermore, the respondents describe lack of time to update content and be active in social media as a problematic factor. Also, given that they are working with their own tasks and have other priorities, Informedia states that "Unfortunately there isn't enough time [...] we work for our customers and don't have time with ourselves". The same is argued for by JG, the fact that their business idea is to help customers with their communication in social media they end up neglecting their own social media presence a bit. This is in line with Järvinen et al, (2012) that lack of resources such as time and workforce are major factors that affect the exploitation of the companies' social media use. Informedia however are working to improve their social media strategies for Twitter and LinkedIn. In accordance with Järvinen et al (2012), these findings contradict the assumption that social media, given that it is a free channel, therefore requires low investments in resources as argued by Kiryakova, Yordanova & Angelova (2011) Informedia for instance, described that they were going to set up a meeting where their social media usage could be discussed and improved, because as it was in the present it had been a bit neglected.

6 Concluding discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the use of social media in B2B in the initial phase of building relationships. Regarding the question on how social media is used by B2B companies to attract new customers, our research confirms that social media is used in several ways by B2B firms concerning attraction.

To begin with, social media enables companies to spread information by the company itself and through third party sources. This is key in B2B since it enables a frequency of exposure that enables familiarity. Furthermore, regarding familiarity, it was found that in order to attract customers, companies try to remain active, demonstrate its presence and hold frequent contact through the different social media channels. Given that social media has no geographical
boundaries, it therefore also enables familiarity to take place over country boarders and induce parties to come closer. Rather than geographical proximity, social media concerns familiarity through networks.

Moreover, regarding similarity, the findings show that companies by promoting its personality and demonstrating a friendly culture can attract customers both in a business and personal manner. Also the companies can, by displaying and enhancing its network expand the possibility of mutual contacts, which impacts on similarity given that the companies are more likely to conduct business with those they are socially close to. In order to expand their networks, companies for instance use the extended network of employees in addition to their official ones on their corporate sites.

In addition, regarding reputation, similar as in the case of familiarity it was important that the information was promoted by third party sources. However it was also important to consider what type of information that was shared. The companies worked actively to project a positive image of themselves. They used the social media channels to enhance its competence and expertise, which is related to reputation, for example by promoting previous successful work for clients.

Furthermore, B2B companies should remain highly searchable by updating material from the company and actively post in the social media channels. This will enable companies to become a potential choice in comparison to its competitors, which relates to knowledge of alternatives. In order to achieve this the companies distributed content, for instance in blogs, which was likely to be searched for and therefore lead to the company.

Concerning the question of social media channels, LinkedIn was described as a good channel to interact and engage through seminars, increasing awareness by spread of content, promoting the companies business personality, expertise and competence. For example it was used to share blog-posts and White Papers as well as displaying the network of employees. Given these findings, LinkedIn could be related to familiarity and reputation. Furthermore, given that it
displays the network of employees on the site, it can further relate to enhancing possible similarity. Also, LinkedIn was linked to knowledge of alternatives, given that it is a search-optimized channel.

Further on, Twitter was described as a good channel to increase spread by third party sources, as well as being active and engaging in discussions. Also it was described that companies, through Twitter, share content to show that they are knowledgeable. Given these different uses of Twitter, it was used as a suitable channel for increasing familiarity and reputation. Another interesting finding concerning Twitter was that it also provided opportunities to follow and learn from other top performers in the field, which could improve the company’s knowledge.

Regarding Facebook, it was used as a channel to enable a spread by third-party sources by sharing content at and keeping a network on a more personal level and to reach a more general audience. In addition it was used to display the personality and culture of the company in a non-business related manner. Concerning this, Facebook was found to relate to familiarity, similarity and reputation.

Finally blogs, were key in the use of social media in B2B. It was through blogs that most content was created that could later be shared in the more social networks. Also, blogs helped the company to end up in the search process, which in turn could lead possible customers to the company’s sources of knowledge, such as the website. In relation to this, blog-use by companies was related to knowledge of alternatives, since it is important for the firm to at least be considered as a potential option.

Regarding the final question of the potential drawbacks of social media use it was found that there was lack of resources in terms of time. Given that the companies consult their clients on social media use, their own channels become neglected. Further on, another issue was the lack of control, that once the content is online its available to all. The companies therefore tried to work in ways so that the content that was shared always represents the company.
6.1 Suggestions for future research

This study provided interesting insights to the field of social media in B2B and it was clear social media can be used in this industry. However, given that this study is exclusively from the consultancy industry, further studies can be performed in order to test or amplify the outcomes in a broader perspective. In addition, since this study was limited to social media use in the initial phase of business relationships, future research could investigate the social media use in maintaining and enhancing existing relationships, and thereby further build on the relationship literature.
7 References


Internet sources


7.1 APPENDIX A: Questions and topics for interviews

Introduction:
Description by the interviewers of the study
Information on the interviewee
What does your company do?
What is your role in the company?
Which are your main tasks?
What are your tasks in relation to social media?

Topics discussed:
Relationship building and its process in B2B
Usage of social media in B2B
Benefits and drawbacks with social media use in B2B
Main purposes for using social media
Social media to attract new customers
Social media towards existing customers
Purposes with the different channels
Drawbacks and benefits of social media use
Open questions in relation to topics:
What is your general approach towards the use of social media in B2B relationships?
Why did you start incorporating social media in the company?
Which social media channels do you consider suitable and why?
How are you using the different social media channels?
What do you post/do in the channels to attract new customers?
What do you obtain with the use of social media?
What are the drawbacks/issues you experience with the use of the channels?

7.2 APPENDIX B: Overview of interviews

Table 7. Overview of interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of company</th>
<th>Name of respondent</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
<th>Length</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Element</td>
<td>Jon Dahlgren</td>
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<td>Informedia Communications</td>
<td>Helen Crowe</td>
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<td>JG Communication</td>
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<td>Prat PR</td>
<td>Karl Nyberg</td>
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Source: Authors own table