Social media utilization in the communication process of small and medium-sized enterprises

Final seminar: 28th May 2012

Authors: Mohidin Abukar, 860726 (International Marketing)
         Dominik Bernhard, 850821 (Strategic Management & Leadership)

Supervisor: Navid Ghannad

Examiner: Gabriel Baffour Awuah
Abstract

This dissertation examines the role of social media in the communication process of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Based on communication and social media theories, this study examines how small and medium-sized enterprises incorporate social media in their marketing and communication strategy. As a result, this study concludes that social media has an important role in the communication process of SMEs. The study shows, that to increase a two-way communication via social media, SMEs must focus more on enabling interactions, to collect responses and feedback. A professional appearance on the platforms has been considered as crucial. The results additionally show that SMEs recognize space and need for improvement of their social media skills. The integration of social media into the overall concept differs among the cases. A major obstacle can be found regarding the detection of target groups on social media. Moreover, a lack of strategic orientation can be found in terms of social media goals and budgets, as well as performance measurement.

Keywords: Social media, marketing communications, communication process, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)
Preface

This study was carried out in the spring semester 2012 at the School of Business and Engineering (SBE) at Halmstad University. It has been conducted in line with the Master thesis of the two degree programmes: “International Marketing” and “Strategic Management and Leadership”.

We have chosen to further investigate the field of social media in marketing communications of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as we consider social media to be a vital upcoming trend in businesses. Especially for SMEs, this new type of media can be beneficial in their business – while at the same time, there are certain requirements and obstacles that have to be kept in mind when utilizing social media in a firm’s communication process. By further investigating this topic, it was possible to combine elements of both study programs – marketing as well as the strategic issue.

At this point, we would like to thank some people that have significantly contributed to the completion of this Master thesis; thank you very much to our supervisor, Navid Ghannad, from the School of Business and Economics at Halmstad University. You have guided us through the whole process of carrying out this thesis. For questions and information you have always been available and by your meaningful suggestions and recommendations you have supported us in mastering step-by-step the completion of this work.

We would also like to express our gratitude towards the fellow students from our seminar group. By acting as an opponent group during the seminars, you have provided us with crucial ideas for improvement and suggestions as to how to carry out this study. We would also like to thank our other fellow students for being willing to discuss the important issues of this thesis. While carrying out the study, your hints and your knowledge were very valuable in order to investigate this subject. Moreover, we want to say thank you to the companies, in particular their managers, for agreeing on taking part in interviews with us. We appreciate that you have spent your valuable time on answering our questions in the process of data collection.

A considerable thank-you is dedicated to our families and friends who have especially supported us in producing and carrying out this study.

Halmstad, 22nd May 2012

__________________________
Mohidin Abukar

__________________________
Dominik Bernhard
# Table of contents

## Abstract

## Preface

**Table of contents** ................................................................. IV

**List of tables** ........................................................................ VII

**List of figures** ......................................................................... VIII

1 **Introduction** ........................................................................ 1

1.1 Background ........................................................................ 1

1.2 Problem discussion .............................................................. 3

1.3 Purpose .............................................................................. 5

1.4 Delimitations ....................................................................... 5

1.5 Definitions ......................................................................... 5

1.6 Disposition ........................................................................ 6

2 **Literature review** ................................................................. 7

2.1 Marketing communications .................................................. 7

2.1.1 Traditional communication process .................................... 7

2.1.2 Challenges in Internet marketing ....................................... 9

2.1.3 Integrated marketing communications .............................. 9

2.1.4 Marketing communications in SMEs ............................... 11

2.2 Social media ....................................................................... 13

2.2.1 Characteristics of social media ......................................... 13

2.2.2 Honeycomb Model ......................................................... 14

2.3 Theoretical frame of references .......................................... 17
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Research approach</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Research method</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Research strategy</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.1</td>
<td>Choice of strategy</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.2</td>
<td>Case selection</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.1</td>
<td>Primary data</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.2</td>
<td>Secondary data</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Research quality</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6.1</td>
<td>Validity</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6.2</td>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Empirical findings</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>KeySeeker</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Apping</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Jobbolaget</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Success Education</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Implications of social media</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Within-case analysis</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1.1</td>
<td>KeySeeker</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1.2</td>
<td>Apping</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1.3</td>
<td>Jobbolaget</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1.4</td>
<td>Success Education</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Cross-case analysis</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.1</td>
<td>Social media utilization in the communication process</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2.2 Integration of social media into marketing communications .................. 53
5.2.3 Benefits of social media utilization in marketing communications .......... 55
5.3 Revised theoretical framework .................................................................. 57
6 Conclusion ..................................................................................................... 58
6.1 Findings ........................................................................................................ 58
6.1.1 Social media utilization in the communication process ......................... 58
6.1.2 Integration of social media into marketing communications .................. 59
6.1.3 Benefits of social media utilization in marketing communications .......... 59
6.2 Managerial implications .............................................................................. 60
6.3 Recommendation for future research ......................................................... 61

Reference list ..................................................................................................... 62
Appendix ............................................................................................................. 66
List of tables

Table 1: Definition of SMEs ................................................................. 22
Table 2: Matrix for social media utilization ........................................ 50
Table 3: Matrix for social media integration ....................................... 53
Table 4: Matrix for benefits of social media ....................................... 55
List of figures

Figure 1: Traditional communication process ............................................. 7
Figure 2: Honeycomb Model ......................................................................... 14
Figure 3: Theoretical framework ................................................................. 18
Figure 4: Revised theoretical framework ....................................................... 57
1 Introduction

In this chapter, the main focus of the research will be presented. At first, background information is provided to get a better understanding of the current status of the chosen area and the changes which have occurred in society. Moreover, the main problem will be discussed further to provide a basis for the conducted study and to highlight the need for further research and why this topic is worth deeper analysis. Before pointing out the research questions, the purpose of this paper, in the context of existing research, will be pointed out. Therein, the main focus of this research is highlighted. As to exactly define the chosen area of research, a delimitation is being provided and in order to ensure a general understanding, important issues are defined. Finally, a disposition will provide an overview of the main chapters of this thesis.

1.1 Background

The Internet as a marketing channel has become well-known in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Chaffey, 2004). More than one decade ago, scientists underlined the importance of building relationships between SMEs and their customers to be successful (Simpson, Padmore, Taylor, & Frecknall-Hughes, 2006). The utilization, especially of social media in businesses, can be interpreted as a shift in conventional marketing. Marketing communication, nowadays takes places on a relational level, which means companies have the chance to develop an interaction with their customers. For many SMEs, the basis for their marketing philosophy is based on developing customer relationships. With the help of social media, online communities with customers sharing the same needs, can be built (Sparkes & Thomas, 2001) and one-way communication is being replaced by a two-way or even a multi-way communication process (Grönroos, 2004).

Social media has brought a change in the way of how SMEs manage and create relationships with their customers and stakeholders (Jones, 2010). Companies as well as customers can benefit from it. An extended relationship between firms and consumers might give the buyers a greater feeling of security, control and trust from which also the company finally benefits. Moreover, consumers can feel that the company shows interest in them and especially in their needs and values. They also have the chance to experience that the firm appreciates feedback and comments on their messages (Grönroos, 2004). As a result, a company has the chance to adapt products and services in order to fit best to the needs of the market segments and changes in the market (Hill, 2001b). Additionally, companies can study lifestyles and behavioral patterns as well as motivations of their target groups in a better way (Beuker & Abbing, 2010).

Consumers ask for increasing control over their media consumption and therefore they are turning away from the traditional advertising sources (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). As illustrated by Foux, consumers perceive social media as a more trustworthy source of information in terms of product information compared to traditional communication ways (as cited in Mangold & Faulds, 2009, p. 360). They feel more engaged with certain goods, services or companies when they have the chance to submit feedback. By their comments, customers have the power to influence millions of others within a very short time (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).
“All business leaders need to be aware that social media technologies have the capacity to fundamentally reshape the way work gets done and sustainable advantage is obtained.”

Alan Matcham, London Business School (as cited in Jue, Marr, & Kassotakis, 2010, Preface)

Social media is the collective name for the communication channels that enable users to communicate with each other directly, via text, image or sound. Unlike the media's one-way communication, social media is characterized by the fact that many people can communicate with each other, rather than only to each other. Examples of platforms that are types of social media are blogs, Facebook and Twitter (Nationalencyklopedin, 2011). Today, most companies on the Internet, in the form of a homepage, are also in the social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. There are also an increasing number of companies that choose to tell about their activities in the form of a blog, where readers can follow the work of the company, through text and pictures that have been uploaded (Dijk, 2006). In line with increased globalization, communication has become increasingly important for organizations worldwide.

Social media is a relatively new and powerful communicative medium that came up in 2004 and has in many ways changed the way organizations conduct marketing (Carlsson, 2009). The advantages of using this medium at their marketing are several. Being close to its stakeholders, to exploit its unifying nature, having the opportunity for increased dialogue and to develop close relations of cooperation with its stakeholders (e.g. for valuable input), is attracting an increasing number of organizations to test on the current communication channel. Social media changes the organizations' communications processes and is now in vogue. To maximize its potential for positive effect, it might be appropriate to have clear instructions and guidelines how to use it. This is how the organization should work out on the digital social arena in order to try to avoid stepping diagonally, in a digital world where everything that has been done is visible and wrong information can have huge consequences within only seconds (Ibid).

The digital presence on the Internet has become a path to a successful communication and existing on Facebook today is like being in the telephone directory. Public relations theorist Grunig argues that society has undergone a paradigm shift toward PR 2.0, where the use of social media for PR players today is becoming increasingly important while making new demands for openness and transparency (as cited in Falkheimer & Heide, 2007, p. 66). This means new challenges for businesses when it comes to creating guidelines for their digital presence. The new form of transparency means that it has become harder to control messages and information to the same extent as before the public had increased opportunities to participate and influence. This transparency also places higher demands on ethical public relations. Today, there can be seen even greater fear and hesitation among businesses and organizations to venture into the digital world, which has resulted in an increased market for PR agencies. The agencies have taken on the role to help companies with their digital presence and how to handle this new type of strategic communication (Ibid).
1.2 Problem discussion

The change brought by social media, implies that the reputation of a SME is not only controlled by the organizations. The importance of social media has brought a change in the power balance between companies and consumers. The influence of the consumer has increased significantly. On one hand, value can be created and added, but on the other hand, it can be destroyed quickly as well. This requires organizations to be skilled in the utilization of social media as communication tools. Consumers have the opportunity to respond to firms with which they have interacted; they can create discussions and share experiences. Erroneous facts or mistakes can easily spread over the Internet and reach a wide range of people. As a result, social media provides a basis for consumers to be better informed and educated and they can form a powerful group which can put significant pressure on a company (Jones, 2010).

For businesses, the increasing use of social media in the context of the integrated marketing communication concept means that there is a need to implement these communication channels into their existing communication concept, so as to ensure a uniform message (Grönroos, 2004). Hill (2001a) pointed out that due to resource constraints, SMEs often do not have the chance to maintain activities around planning and Scase and Goffee argue that small firms have to struggle with day-to-day survival instead of being able to focus on a well-constructed marketing plan (as cited in Hill, 2001a, p. 182). Bhíde adds that in SMEs the undertaken actions tend to be based on intuition rather than planning (as cited in Hill, 2001a, p. 182). However the occurred change in the communication behavior of companies has shown there is a need for accurate planning in marketing – especially in terms of communication. Carter (2011) emphasizes this need when she underlines that SMEs cannot afford to rely on guesses in their business.

Amongst others, by competitive pressure, firms are driven to improve their communication channels to become or remain competitive. Managing current communication channels requires them to develop competencies in terms of tact, diplomacy or assertiveness as communication has become a process including both aspects – top-down way and bottom-up ways of communication (Jones, 2010). According to the IAB report (2008), organizations cannot afford to remain outside, but need to integrate social media into their business. Sometimes, the use of new tools can be a symbolic side of adoption when organizations want to be associated with progress and innovation. It can attract the attention of stakeholders for the reason that the organization is experiencing a positive trend, but it could also be to legitimize itself in the eyes of others, even if it is not beneficial to their organization. The fact that social media is a tool created by industries, competitors, customers, partners, media and society is something that can make a company's situation even more complex in a communicative world, and difficult for them to see the competitive advantage (Kaplan, Yurt, Guneri, & Kurtulus, 2010).

It often takes interest and time to keep up to date, which means that businesses need to be well versed in new technologies (Sandberg & Targama, 2007). Organizations often do not know how they should relate to social media and at present, there often occurs uncertainty about the implications of social media tools for a company (Kullin, 2011). Social media can be distributed among organizations with a clear definition, but it can also be unclear about how to handle it and how to benefit from it. It might be difficult to figure out the functionality and the issues behind the wide range of social network platforms (Newell, Robertson & Swan, 2001).
Fink, Zerfass and Linke (2011) confirm these aspects in their study where they point out that only a minority of managers evaluate their expertise in social media as high and there are still conclusive concepts in terms of an organization-wide social media strategy missing. Moreover, organizations question the value of using social media and say they do not see how it would improve their organization or way of working. This aspect is one of the most considerable ones in a company´s utilization of social media. Up to now, companies rarely used key performance indicators to measure the success as well as advantages and disadvantages of using social media. Also specific resources such as budgets, staff or training in order to successfully take advantage of social media is not developed sufficiently. Yet, another considerable fact is that in many organizations it is not clear which department is responsible for maintaining the platforms and more important, if there exists an organization-wide collective social media strategy. Sparkes and Thomas confirm this aspect as they identify that SMEs are known to be weak in terms of using Internet-based marketing methods (as cited in Simpson, Padmore, Taylor, & Frecknall-Hughes, 2006, p. 379).

Additionally, Mangold and Faulds (2009) identify a lack of guidance for SMEs when it comes to implement social media communication into the integrated marketing communications (IMC) strategies. This is a considerably problematical aspect though IMC strategies should reflect a firm’s values and contribute to the overall goals of it. Therefore, the elements of the communication strategy have to be carefully managed and coordinated so as to appear with a consistent message towards the company’s environment. Organizations must be aware of how the power of the social network platforms can be utilized to benefit from it – especially though social media is an increasingly appealing and cheap way for SMEs, in comparison with traditional marketing in order to communicate effectively (Carter, 2011).

By the given study, it is possible to build on existing research and contribute knowledge to this field of study. Ljungmark and Bernhardsson (2011) for example, analyzed Facebook as a marketing channel and discovered a lack of strategy in terms of social media marketing. Additionally, Kichatov and Mihajlovski (2010) investigated the issue of social media as a promotional tool and they found out that companies do not formulate promotion strategies in the context of social media platforms. They considered this relatively new field as worth deeper analysis regarding the promotion mix. Moreover, the study of Fink, Zerfass and Linke (2011) observed a weakly developed framework for the utilization of social media in companies. Based on these findings and research recommendations, it is worthwhile to deeply analyze social media utilization in the communication process in order to contribute knowledge to this area.

As pointed out above, the shift in conventional marketing towards social media utilization has led to a change in the power balance between businesses and consumers. SMEs can profit by social media utilization but besides the chances social media adoption offers firms, SMEs must be aware of the considerable challenges ahead, when it comes to social media integration and planning in terms of their marketing communications (Ibid). Therefore, the following purpose of this paper has been defined.
1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to get a better understanding of the role of social media in the communication process of small and medium-sized enterprises. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to describe the role of social media in the communication process of SMEs. To fulfill the purpose of this study, three research questions have been developed.

Q1: How can the utilization of social media in the communication process of SMEs be described?

Q2: How has social media been integrated into the marketing communications of SMEs?

Q3: What are the benefits of social media utilization in SMEs?

1.4 Delimitations

This study is conducted out of a company´s perspective and will therefore not include social media utilization form a consumer view. Additionally, it is not part of the study to focus on technical aspects of social media communication, such as the creation of social media pages. Moreover, this paper concentrates on the issue of communication (promotion) within the traditional marketing mix. Aspects such as “product”, “price” or “place” will therefore be excluded in this study as these issues, due to their complexity, should be investigated in a separate research project. Furthermore, discussions focusing on relationship marketing via social media/platforms will not be taken into consideration, due to the fact that the purpose of this study is to describe the role of social media and not to investigate how relationships are created through social media.

1.5 Definitions

To ensure a general understanding of important issues of this study, in the given chapter, definitions are provided.

**Social media:** The theme social media covers a wide range of platforms and therefore many different sources explain this topic. In the given paper, the following definition of social media has been chosen as it is considered to cover all important aspects in this context: “Social media encompasses a wide range of online, word-of-mouth forums including blogs, company-sponsored discussion boards and chat rooms, consumer-to-consumer e-mail, consumer product or service ratings websites and forums, Internet discussion boards and forums, moblogs (sites containing digital audio, images, movies, or photographs), and social networking websites, ...” (Mangold & Faulds, 2009, p. 358).

**Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs):** When it is about defining small and medium-sized enterprises, various definitions can be found. To ensure a generally valid definition of this item, the terminology set by the European Commission (2003) has been adapted. The definition of SMEs can be found in the explanation of the case selection in the methodology.
**Marketing communications:** There are many interpretations of this topic. The origin of this subject was to use communications in order to persuade people to buy a firm’s product or service (Fill, 2009). Egan’s view of marketing communications explains this issue as “the means by which a supplier of goods, services, values and/or ideas represent themselves to their target audience with the goal of stimulating dialogue leading to a better commercial or other relationships” (Egan, 2007, p. 1).

With the further development of tools and different media, the expression of marketing communications emerged. Additionally, there was a shift from the traditional one-way communication to the two-way communication which also takes into consideration the need to create an interactive relationship with target groups, including dialogues. Therefore, marketing communications can be viewed as a management process through which a firm contacts its various audiences – while enabling them to respond to their messages (Fill, 2009).

A related issue in the context of marketing communications is the approach of integrated marketing communications (IMC). As this topic is being described in various ways and in terms of social media as a part of marketing communications, the issue of IMC will be discussed later on in a separate chapter of the literature review.

1.6 Disposition

The first part of the thesis, the introduction chapter, provides background information regarding the topic and relates to the discussion of the problem area. Based on the purpose of this study, the three created research questions are explained. Moreover, the introduction contains delimitation and a chapter where crucial issues are defined. Also, this disposition is a part of the first main chapter.

The second part contains the literature review. Literature from the field of marketing communications and social media will be presented. This provides the basis for the theoretical framework.

In the third part of this study, the methodology, the adopted research approach, the utilized method and the applied research strategy will be highlighted. Additionally, the data collection as well as the data analysis is pointed out. Another aspect in this chapter is the quality of research.

After having described the methodology, the empirical findings regarding the cases are being presented in the next main chapter of this research study.

The fifth chapter contains the analysis. The findings are analyzed in this part of the study. Therein, it is distinguished between a within-case analysis and a cross-case analysis. After having conducted the analysis, an adjusted theoretical framework is being presented in this chapter.

The last section contains the conclusion of the research project. Therein, the main findings are being summarized to answer the established research questions. Moreover, the implications of the findings regarding the managerial practice – applicable on the studied firms – are being discussed. The last part contains recommendations for future research projects.
2 Literature review

The second chapter is the literature review that is used to provide a background to study the social media utilization in the marketing communications of SMEs. The first part highlights the issue of marketing communications to exemplify the traditional communication process. Furthermore, challenges, brought by Internet marketing – with a focus on social media – are exemplified. Additionally, the concept of integrated marketing communications (IMC) will be explained and its importance – especially in the context of new marketing channels such as social media – is underlined. Moreover, specifics of marketing communications in SMEs are presented.

The second part focuses on the issue of social media and its crucial characteristics as well as its importance to organizations, currently. Moreover, the most common social media platforms are briefly mentioned. A detailed description of these platforms can be found in appendix 1. The literature review also includes the presentation of a model whose elements can be applied to analyze social media utilization in an organizational context.

2.1 Marketing communications

2.1.1 Traditional communication process

Companies do not only communicate with their customers, but also with intermediaries and the public. The most important communication – or so called promotion tools, are advertising, personal selling, sales promotion and public relations. Advertising includes paid forms of the non-personal presentation or promotion of a company’s goods or services. By personal selling it is meant that a presentation is being held in a conversation to generate sales or to build relationships with the customer. The issue of sales promotion deals with incentives in order to encourage the target group to buy certain goods or services. Finally, the topic of public relations is to build relations with the firm’s environment by achieving positive publicity or by establishing a nameable corporate image and dealing with negative rumors and stories (Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders, & Wong, 1999).

At present, companies must not only ask how they can reach the customers, but also what a firm can do to let customers reach them. Effective communication requires one to understand how the process works (Ibid). From the illustration below, the traditional process – from the sender to the receiver – can be seen.

![Figure 1: Traditional communication process](Source: Adapted from Kotler et al., 1999, p. 759)
Thereby, the sender puts the intended message into a symbolic form and uses a communication channel to transfer it to the receiver. The receiver finally has to decode the meaning of the symbols that have been encoded by the sender and responds to it – also by a feedback. The aspect of noise in the communication process can be interpreted as the unplanned static or falsification that occurred in the whole process. The result is that the receiver gets a message that differs from the intention of the sender. To avoid noise, the sender must be familiar with the receiver’s experience, which especially requires them to know how receivers are going to encode their messages. Moreover, companies are called to create feedback channels in order to assess the respondent message (Kotler et al., 1999).

As a result, it can be said, an effective communication program consists of the following aspects (Kotler et al., 1999):

- Identification of the target audience
- Determination of the communication objectives
- Designing a message
- Choosing the appropriate media source
- Collecting feedback to measure the results

By analyzing the target audience, it can be said that the company must carefully point out whom they want to reach. There can be potential buyers as well as current ones – existing of individuals, groups or the general public. Identifying the target group is very important as it affects the further steps, especially in terms of what will be said and how (Ibid).

When it comes to determine the communication objectives, the firm needs to know whether or not their target group is ready to buy. In this step, the main task is to determine the buyer-readiness (Ibid).

After having set the communication objectives, the message has to be designed. The communicator must be aware of what he wants to say (message content) and how it should be said (message structure/format). When planning the content, the communicator needs to determine which appeal fits best, to generate the desired response. There can be used a rational, emotional or a moral appeal. When creating the structure, the communicator has to decide whether he draws a conclusion or not, whether he comes up with a one-sided argument or a two-sided one and finally, whether to show the strongest arguments in the beginning or at the end. Companies, moreover have to choose an appropriate message format and a message source that fits in order to create interest among the target group and to communicate their message in a highly credible and persuasive way (Ibid).

Additionally, one has to select the media source that fits best. Two broad types of channel exist, as there are personal and non-personal. In the given study, where the focus is on social media utilization in the communication process, non-personal communication channels are the relevant ones. In this type of channel, the message is being communicated without any personal contact between the communicator and the receiver of the message (Ibid).

Finally, after having sent the message, the communicator should ensure to collect feedback from the target group (Ibid). By using social media, collecting feedback is simplified, though the audience is able to react on the content directly, for example, by posting comments on Facebook pages or YouTube videos.
2.1.2 Challenges in Internet marketing

There are also common challenges when the Internet – in the form of social media platforms – is utilized for marketing reasons in businesses. As pointed out by Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick, Mayer and Johnston (2009), in businesses often responsibilities are not clearly defined. Moreover, specific objectives for social media marketing are missing and the budget is not sufficient or it is wasted. Another mischief can occur when firms are not capable of recognizing the value brought by the new type of media. In addition to these aspects, there is a lack of measuring the results of social media marketing and the firms’ approach can be interpreted as an experimental one rather than a planned one, though there is an absence of an integration process between offline and online marketing tools (Ibid). The study of Fink, Zerfass and Linke (2011) complements these aspects, as it also points out a lack of social media skills and trained staff in companies.

To effectively utilize e-marketing, it has also been suggested that a distinct marketing plan for those electronically media platforms should be created (Chaffey et al., 2009). This issue is especially vital in the context of small and medium businesses, though there is likely to be no plan for the firm’s e-marketing activities. However, such a plan provides a solid basis for the definition of strategies. In addition to that, businesses must ensure to integrate e-marketing communications in their overall communication strategy (Chaffey, 2004).

Various problems can occur for businesses if they do not seriously take into consideration the above illustrated issues. Amongst others, there is the risk of underestimating customers’ demands, duplication of resources can appear or there will be an inadequate resource utilization (Chaffey, 2004). Negative messages from dissatisfied and angry customers might spread rapidly (Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2009). Moreover, by disregarding the challenges, companies might not be able to benefit from sufficiency through lower costs when applying online communication strategies (Chaffey, 2004).

2.1.3 Integrated marketing communications

As pointed out by Holm (2006), the main purpose of marketing communications is to affect the buyers’ perception of value and of the relation between his benefits and costs. The idea of integrated marketing communications (IMC) can be defined according to Smith et al. in three ways as there are: managing and controlling of all marketing communications, ensuring a holistic delivery of messages across all a firm’s communication elements – based on a consistent strategy (as cited in Holm 2006, p. 24). Moreover, he defines IMC as implementing and controlling all marketing communication elements which efficiently, economically and effectively have an influence on transactions between the firm and its target group (Ibid).

Semenik explains integrated marketing communications as the process of utilizing promotional tools in a combined way to create synergy by having a holistic view (as cited in Egan, 2007, p. 338). Egan (2007) adds to this view that IMC can be interpreted as enabling various communication messages to work together in order to come up with a unified message. Kliatchko complements the definition as he views integrated marketing communications not only in the context of external communications, but also in terms of the internal one (as cited in Egan, 2007, p. 340). Kitchen et al. emphasize the need to not only keep in mind uniform messages but also the complex coordination and management of various channels to effectively maintain a consistent image of the firm (as cited in Gurau,
Marketing approaches need to keep in mind the shift in communications, from one-way to two-way communication approaches. This implies an interactive connection between organizations and their target groups which, amongst others, allows feedback (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998). It can be seen that senders became receivers and receivers became senders. An interactive process takes place on the market where communication flows in both directions (Schultz, 1996).

The rise of information technology has led to a fundamental change in the media landscape – especially in terms of individualized patterns of consumption and consumers’ preferences (Eagle & Kitchen; Kitchen; as cited in Holm, 2006, p. 24). Therefore, objectives and strategies need to be adapted to the changing marketing and communication environment (Holm, 2006). New communication channels require new approaches in marketing communications to ensure consistency of corporate messages (Gurau, 2008). Eventually, social media platforms need to be included in the communication mix and in the concept of IMC (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

The following three characteristics can be named in terms of the Internet as a communication channel (Gurau, 2008):

**Interactivity:** The Internet provides several options of interactive communication, acting not only as an interface, but also as a communication agent (allowing direct interactions between individuals and applications).

**Transparency:** The information published online can be accessed, read and spread by any Internet user, unless this information is specifically protected.

**Memory:** The web is a channel not only for transferring different types of information, but also for storing them – in other words, the information published on a web platform, remains in the memory of the network until it is erased.

The need for adopting the idea of IMC, moreover, is based on changes in the following three areas. Firstly, there are the market-based drivers, which mean that highly competitive marketplaces require companies to work harder in order to get their messages recognized. Second, the media and communication environment has changed. In addition to that, the third change has occurred in the organizational context. Firms are more conscious of improving their efficiency (Egan, 2007).

Gurau (2008) illustrates that organizations must adapt to the new realities of how target groups receive and use information. At first, one should keep in mind that at this time, the audience is more connected to the organization. Therefore, the channel can be seen as a network. Second, the audience members are connected to each other. Moreover, consumers can easily collect further information through multiple sources over the Internet. Companies’ statements therefore, can be critically reviewed and discussed (Ibid.)

Despite the advantages imposed by integrating communication activities to reach a holistic message, this approach is not fully adopted by companies though it is a difficult task (Egan,
2007). The most crucial obstacles for the implementation of the integrated marketing communications concept have been pointed out by Gurau (2008, p. 172):

- Lack of horizontal communication
- Functional specialization
- Decentralization
- Lack of IMC planning and expertise
- Lack of budget
- Lack of database technology
- Corporate culture
- Fear of change

As pointed out above, amongst other issues, a crucial aspect is to be aware of the budget, which is also vital in terms of the topic, i.e. social media communications. This means being aware of how much should be used for the communication via social media. In general, Kotler et al. (1999) exemplify four common methods that can be used to determine the budget for advertising. The first method is the Affordable Method where the management sets the budget at the level where it believes the firm might afford it. Another way is to utilize the percentage-of-Sales Method. By applying this type, the budget is being determined as a certain percentage of sales. Companies using the Competitive-Parity Method analyze the promotion behavior of their competitors or of the industry to determine their own. When applying the Objective-and-Task Method, the firm at first has to define specific goals and the required tasks in order to reach these goals. Additionally, they need to estimate the costs of these tasks. Even though it is seen as the most difficult method, the advantage is that managers in firms have to be aware of their planned objectives and the required effort (Ibid).

Eventually, adopting integrated marketing communications means having a powerful tool in order to reach target groups with persuasive messages (Pitta, Weisgal, & Lynagh, 2006). But in terms of Duncan who interprets communication as the basis of all relations between humans, it has to be presumed that only communications with a strategic orientation can lead to a sustainable competitive position (as cited in Holm, 2006, p. 24).

The transparency brought by the web enables information to be available to a wide range of audiences and therefore requires being consistent from planning to control of online marketing communications (Hart et al.; as cited in Gurau, 2008, p. 177). At the same time, organizations have to find the right balance between proactivity, reactivity, continuity and flexibility (Gurau, 2008) – or as highlighted by Porter (2001) the key question is not whether companies should utilize Internet technology – they do not have other choices if they want to remain competitive – but how to utilize it.

2.1.4 Marketing communications in SMEs

Having in mind the resource constraints in small businesses, marketing – including communication activities – often is interpreted as a waste of money and as a result, firms tend to rely on word-of-mouth communications (Hogarth-Scott, Watson, & Wilson, 1996) or personal contact networks (Hill & Wright; as cited in Simpson, Padmore, Taylor, & Frecknall-Hughes, 2006, p. 368). Work is often being prioritized and other activities are considered more important than, for example, developing e-marketing (Winkhoffer & Houghton; as cited in Gilmore, Gallagher, & Henry, 2007, p. 237). However, it is also
possible that in SMEs there is a lack of understanding of communication concepts and required skills (Huang & Brown, 1999).

Marketing communication strategies – where they exist – often have been developed within constraint resources in the pressure imposed by the day-to-day business. They tend to be more of an informal and spontaneous character and moreover, they are not documented (Carson & Gilmore, 2000). Actions often seem to be based on intuition rather than on formal strategic planning (Bhide; as cited in Hill, 2001a, p. 182; Gabrielli & Balboni, 2010). It can be interpreted that some SMEs may lack a strategic orientation in terms of marketing (Weinrauch, Mann, Robinson, & Pharr, 1991). Hill (2001a) complements this aspect when he points out that SMEs are prevented from maintaining planning activity, as they often face increased uncertainty. Additionally, managers of newly-established SMEs tend to be more generalist rather than specialists in various areas, which affects the firm’s marketing (Carson & Gilmore, 2000).

In the context of the upcoming social media utilization, a small business must be innovative in how they accomplish their marketing (Gilmore, 2011), as it is crucial to adapt to changes in the environment and the customers’ behavior (Carson; as cited in Hogarth-Scott, Watson, & Wilson, 1996, p. 6). Competitive pressure forces them to adapt to the new communication channels (Jones, 2010).

E-technology, such as social media, therefore can be a helpful way for SMEs to expand their marketing activities in a relatively cost-effective way. Moreover, awareness of communication activities can be increased and information about target groups can be collected (Gilmore, 2011). Social media can also support small firms in improving their reputation, building on their brand or responding to customers and further stakeholder feedback (Jones, 2010). By observing conversations or inviting feedback, they can recognize negative comments about their company or offered products and set improvements to meet the customers’ needs (Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2009). In the case of newly-established small and medium-sized enterprises, social media offers them the opportunity to gain information that is crucial for their survival and further growth. It can be agreed that SMEs therefore are no longer dependent on the traditional ways of communication in the context of a changing communication environment (Jones, 2010).
2.2 Social media

2.2.1 Characteristics of social media

“offers leaders clarity on using a powerful toolbox to better attract, retain, and develop business talent.”

Gordon, E. E. (as cited in Jue et al., 2010, Preface)

The term social media refers to many relatively inexpensive and widely accessible electronic tools that enable anyone to publish and access information, collaborate on a common effort, or build relationships (Jue et al., 2010). The most common characteristics or traits of what social media is, primarily is its scope, i.e. the ability to spread messages in a short period of time. A second characteristic of social media is its availability, which means in principle anyone could access the medium through a negligible cost. Ease of use is also a critical factor in social media. It is easier to start up a blog that can attract a large audience than to start up a TV channel or newspaper, for example. Finally, the freshness of media is significant in terms of the speed to update. A blog or website can be updated in a few moments, compared to a newspaper or book (Holmström & Wikberg, 2010).

Mangold and Faulds (2009) describe social media as a set of online word-of-mouth medium that includes blogs, discussion boards, forums or social networks, to name a few. With all mobile and web-based technologies, social media generates vastly interactive platforms by bringing together individuals and by creating communities. People and organizations use social media to share, co-create, and discuss user-generated content (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011).

A general definition of what social media is was provided by Holmström and Wikberg (2010). They consider it, amongst other activities, as a combination of technology and social interaction in joint value creation, where the user is creating the content. According to the National Encyclopedia (2011), social media and mass media differs in the sense that the media is the one (the sender) who sends the message to a larger group of individuals who are unable to communicate back via the same channel. It is a form of one-way communication. The difference through social media is that anyone can basically comment and share their views.

Organizations of all kinds want to engage employees, clients, customers, suppliers and partners in building brand loyalty to their products and services. In today’s world, firms are confronting an increasingly challenging environment in which they have to accomplish these goals. Ever accelerating rates of changes are a symbol of our postmodern society. Economic uncertainty, shorter development cycles, flatter organizational structures, and transforming social institutions are all coevolving at a pace never before experienced. Performing with speed and excellence has become a sacred mantra of corporation survival if organizations are to keep stride with increasingly fierce global competition (Jue et al., 2010).

Social media is also acknowledged as the new sources of online information where the information in itself is created, initiated, distributed and used by consumers to educate each other about products, brands, services, personalities, and issues (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Currently, the Internet has a different ecosystem of social media sites. These sites vary in scope and functionality. Some social media sites address the general masses (i.e. MySpace,
Facebook) while others (such as LinkedIn, Xing) are focused on professional networking. Media sharing sites (e.g. YouTube, Picassa and Flickr), or blogging platforms (e.g. blogspot, wordpress) are also members of this ecosystem that is called social media (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Recently, micro-blogging and site-specific micro-blogging social media was the family (i.e. Twitter, Foursquare), by offering real-time updates on people and organizations within a limited space of 140 characters per message.

Social media also proved to be an effective marketing tool for organizations. With the help of social media, organizations can now communicate directly with their consumers and participate in one-to-one conversations. According to research, Internet users do keep a more positive view of companies engaged in social media (Universal McCann, 2008). Although it is up to companies to integrate social media in their marketing, communication continues to take place about brands on social media, with or without the permission of the firms in the focus (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

Social media is represented in various forms and functions, for example discussion forums, blogs, wikis and podcasts. A detailed description of the most common social media platforms can be found in the appendix 1 of this thesis.

2.2.2 Honeycomb Model

Under Honeycomb Model (see figure 2) by Smith (2007) social media is built on seven functional blocks: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation and groups. By adopting some of these blocks in extracts, this study attempts to clarify the different uses and functions of social media sites and consequences of these functions for organizations. It helps to point out how organizations should engage with social media (Kietzmann, Silvestre, McCarthy, & Pitt, 2012). It is important to emphasize that these building blocks are neither mutually exclusive nor can all elements be found in every social media site. These building blocks are to facilitate the understanding of how social media is used and functions can be utilized and manipulated in order to build sustainable business relationships both internally and externally (Ibid).

![Honeycomb Model](image)

*Figure 2: Honeycomb Model (Source: Adapted from Kietzmann et al., 2012, p. 110)*
Identity

The identity dimension (see figure 2) is about the extent to which individuals or organizations make their identity public, by revealing personal or corporate information (e.g. name, age, gender, occupation, location) in a social media environment. Individuals also tend to reveal other information – consciously or unconsciously, about themselves that make them portrayed in some way by “self-disclosure” of subjective information as thoughts, feelings, likes and dislikes (Smith, 2007; Kietzmann et al., 2012).

Conversations

The conversation dimension in the Honeycomb Model discusses the extent to which each individual communicates with each other in a social media environment. Most social media networks are primarily intended to facilitate conversations between individuals and interest groups (Ibid).

In social media, people engage in conversation for all sorts of reasons. While tweets, blogs, status updates and media sharing content can be just individual attempts to meet new like-minded people, find information, build self-esteem or to establish one as an opinion leader, others start or participate in conversations in social media as a way to ensure that their message is heard. The subjects might range from humanitarian reasons to discuss politics (Ibid).

The basic meaning of the conversations dimension for organizations is about the power of being a part of the conversation in terms of their brand or organization. By starting and/or manipulation of the call, organizations can show their audience that they care and are seen as positive contributions to the conversation. Calls are like pieces in a fast paced puzzle that, when aggregated together, produce an overall picture or a message (Ibid).

Sharing

Sharing dimension reasons are the extent to which an individual exchanges, distributes and receives the contents of a social media setting. Therefore, the exchange between individuals is a crucial functionality on social media sites. Ultimately, social media is about people sharing their identities and lives by sharing relevant content (i.e., groups, text, video, images, sounds, and links) (Ibid).

All shared content has the potential to lead to additional shares at an exponential rate. Fuelled by user conversations, any content that is shared by an organization may translate into good or bad word-of-mouth. Organizations must realize that by sharing the content, they make a statement, communicating their values and creating or adding an image that has the potential to leave a long-term impression in people's minds. (Ibid).

Presence

The presence dimension is about the level to which an individual can know whether his/her peers are available online. Presence dimension contains information about where each individual-in-one's-net is in the virtual world and/or in the real world. In one sense the presence dimension acts as a bridge between the real and the virtual realities. Organizations must recognize that a high level of social media presence is likely to create stronger bonds with their audiences - and in this way - make dialogue initiated by the organizations themselves more influential (Ibid).
**Relationships**

The relationship dimension is about how each individual can be related to other individuals in a social media setting. The word “relate” is used to specify the type of association between individuals (i.e. supporting, join groups, co-presence on a social media site), which in turn may lead to dialogue and shares. According to research, the more frequent and larger individual portfolios of relationships are, the more likely the individual is an “influencer” in its network of relationships. In this sense, organizations that want to engage in social media, must understand how to build and/or maintain relationships and then to increase their influence (Ibid).

**Reputation**

The reputation dimension examines how each individual is able to identify his relative position (including one’s own position) in the community in a social media setting. In social media, reputation is not something that is given to people by their identities, but it is something that can be earned through shared content, expressed thoughts, likes and dislikes. The same is true for organizations that want to build or enhance their reputation by implementing social media strategies (Ibid).

**Groups**

Groups’ dimension focuses on the issue of how each individual can form groups and subgroups communities in a social media environment. The more “social” a network is, the more groups, communities, supporters and contacts can be found on it. Two main types of groups that can be found in the social media environment are, groups consisting of an individual's contacts, friends, family, followers, or fans and groups corresponding to the organizations, clubs and/or interest groups in the real world. Furthermore, organizations on social media in general have fans or supporters who are interested in news from a particular brand or organization. Sometimes, these fans may be those that like to define themselves over the brands they use or the organizations they are affiliated with (Ibid).
2.3 Theoretical frame of references

In the second chapter, the literature review, the theoretical background for the analysis has been pointed out. The given section provides a summary of crucial elements of the literature which will be adopted in order to analyze the utilization of social media in the marketing communications of small and medium-sized enterprises.

As initially pointed out, effective communication includes the following aspects (Kotler et al., 1999):
- Identification of the target audience
- Determination of the communication objectives
- Designing a message
- Choosing the appropriate media source
- Collecting feedback as to measure the results

These elements are vital to analyze social media utilization in marketing communications. These areas, based on traditional communications, can be applied to the social media issue as well. Companies need to be aware of who they want to reach by their social media utilization, moreover, they need to define goals for the utilization of those platforms and they need to find an appropriate message that has to be communicated through these channels – which also have to be carefully selected. The aspect of feedback is very important in terms of social media, as this is one of the main ideas of its utilization.

The literature has shown that firms have to face crucial challenges when it comes to the utilization of social media in their communications. Responsibilities often might be unclear and specific objectives for social media marketing are missing. In addition to these issues, in companies often social media skills and trained staff are missing (Fink, Zerfass, & Linke, 2011). Moreover, budgets might be insufficient or completely missing for this type of media. Additionally, there can be the problem that organizations do not realize the value brought by social media marketing – which can be linked to the fact that there is a lack of measuring the results of social media utilization as there is an absence of integration of social media into other communication activities (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick, Mayer, & Johnston, 2009).

The need of integrating social media into a firm’s overall communication strategy has been emphasized (Chaffey, 2004). The literature has shown that despite the advantages of IMC in order to reach a holistic appearance in a firm’s communication, this approach is not fully adopted by organizations because it is a difficult issue (Egan, 2007). Communication activities – also in terms of social media – tend to be more of an informal and spontaneous character and moreover, they often are not documented (Carson & Gilmore, 2000).

The literature has shown that especially in small and medium-sized businesses, communication strategies often have been developed within resource constraints and the pressures of the daily business (Carson & Gilmore, 2000). Actions, therefore can be considered being more based on intuition rather than on formal strategic planning (Bhide; as cited in Hill, 2001, p. 182; Gabrielli & Balboni, 2010). For small businesses, this means being innovative in conducting marketing communication (Gilmore, 2011).

In terms of social media, the literature review has pointed out the main characteristics of social media as they are enabling communication and especially participation of the target group – in the form of simply reviewing content, communicating back, collaborating and
connecting with other people. Contents can easily be spread among a wide range of audiences (Jue et al., 2010; Smith, 2007). Therefore, it can be said, a shift from one-way to two-way communications has occurred. Elements of the presented Honeycomb Model will be applied to deeply study crucial issues of the social media utilization in an organizational context. The model’s building blocks will attempt to clarify the different uses and functions of social media sites and consequences of these functions for organizations. These building blocks are to simplify the understanding of how social media is applied and functions can be utilized and manipulated in order to build sustainable business relationships, both internally and externally (Kietzmann et al., 2012).

The illustration on the following page highlights the most important aspects – taken from the literature – which will be applied to analyze the social media utilization in small and medium-sized enterprises.

The illustration points out that social media platforms need to be integrated into a firm’s existing marketing communications concept. The goal is to enable a two-way communication with the organization’s target audience. To successfully fulfill this task, there are specific issues (the requirements) that have to be kept in mind. At the same time, obstacles also exist in terms of marketing communications in SMEs. These obstacles may constrain an accurate implementation and utilization of social media in SME’s communications.

As already initially pointed out, the purpose of this research is to get a better understanding of the role of social media utilization in the communication process of small and medium-sized
enterprises. Therefore, three research questions have been developed to categorize the analysis according to similar issues in terms of the role of social media utilization.

In order to answer the first research questions, the study will focus on the social media platforms that are utilized by SMEs in their marketing communications. Moreover, the goal is to investigate the responsibilities in terms of managing these platforms. Additionally, the issues of social media skills of the staff, as well as preparations for social media utilization will be investigated.

The second research question concentrates on the issues of integration, which refers to social media goals, by keeping in mind the aspect of the two-way-communication with the target audience. Also, the overall adjustment with the organizational strategy as well as other marketing communication activities, has to be analyzed by this research question. The second research question finally includes the matter of social media budgets.

In the third research question, the topic of recognizing the value brought by social media utilization in SMEs marketing communications will be analyzed and how performance measurement takes place.
3 Methodology

In the methodology chapter, different possible research approaches will be mentioned and the utilized approach will be justified. Moreover, the adopted research method is being pointed out in this part of the study. Additionally, it will be explained which strategy has been used to conduct the research and how the case selection took place. This chapter also points out how data collection – primary as well as secondary – took place. Finally, the data analysis process will be highlighted. Furthermore, this part deals with the issues of the research quality.

3.1 Research approach

When conducting research, there is an opportunity to apply an inductive or a deductive approach. In utilizing an inductive way, theory is the outcome of the conducted research (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In the process of induction, generalizable inferences are drawn out of observations. Often, a grounded theory approach is used by researchers to analyze the data and to generate theory. It can be said that the goal of an inductive approach is to build theory rather than to test it. After having analyzed the data, one would be confronted with going back to the theoretical area in order to determine how his findings can complement the existing theoretical background (Bryman & Bell, 2011). A critical aspect in terms of this approach has been pointed out by Jacobsen (2002). He emphasizes that due to the openness of this approach and the lack of limitations made beforehand, the researcher might be forced to collect a huge amount of data out of a wide area.

A contrary approach to the inductive one is the deductive style. Based on existing theory in a specific research area, the initiator of a study can conclude hypotheses and test them – particularly the research questions – by analyzing the data. By doing so, the hypotheses or research questions can either be confirmed or rejected when comparing the findings with the existing theoretical background. This approach is seen as more suitable to create a link between theory and research. The deductive approach allows the researcher to define and to delimit the research area in a more specific way (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

In the given study, a deductive research approach has been applied. As the paper focuses on social media in the communication process of SMEs, it could be seen that there are existing theories around the relevant issues. Social media theories could have been applied, as well as theories explaining marketing communications and obstacles of marketing in SMEs. Therefore, it was meaningful to utilize the existing theoretical background and to use it as a basis for the analysis of the research question. This provided the basis for comparing the findings with the theoretical framework in order to point out analogies or divergences.

3.2 Research method

When carrying out a research project, it can be distinguished between quantitative and qualitative research. A quantitative method is often applied to highlight the quantification in collecting and analyzing data. To measure the data for example, the answers in a questionnaire, indicators have to be found. The establishment of reliability and validity of the created measures is crucial, to interpret the quality. Answers in a questionnaire are mainly given on a fixed scale, one can only chose from a fixed range of given statements. Critique on quantitative research has been made. It is said that a natural science model is not sufficient in
order to study more deeply the social world. Moreover, the quantitative style does not enable individual interpretations of the social world. Further critique refers to the assumed static aspect in the social world. It is not clear, if the respondents can connect the context of the questions with their everyday individual world (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

In contrast to the quantitative method, adopting a qualitative research method focuses more on words rather than on quantification in data collection and analysis. Moreover, this method is more helpful to understand how individuals interpret a certain topic, though the point of orientation is based on the perspective of the persons or objects being studied. The researcher is in close involvement with the studied issue, which enables him to genuinely perceive the world through his eyes. Contrary to the quantitative research, the adoption of a qualitative research method allows one to better study connections between the participants’ actions and social settings. Yet another benefit of qualitative research is that instead of the generalization which can be found in quantitative research, the focus is on deeper understanding behavior, values or beliefs in the context of the conducted research. In addition to that, this approach offers the opportunity to collect rich data, compared to a quantitative method (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

For the present study, the qualitative research method has been considered appropriate. The goal was to get insights into how SMEs utilize social media in their communications. The qualitative method offered the chance to get a better understanding of this research area, though answers are not limited by providing only a fixed scale of choices. As pointed out above, for studying the social science, it was crucial to get insights into behavior as well as approaches and to interpret them. This was possible by adopting the qualitative way. Moreover, a close involvement with the respondents was vital to enable a deeper study of the given topic (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

3.3 Research strategy

In this chapter, it will be pointed out how the strategy for the given study has been chosen and how the case selection took place.

3.3.1 Choice of strategy

When carrying out a research project, the initiators of a study must be aware of the strategy they choose. There is the choice available to use experiments, surveys, archival analysis, histories or case studies (Yin, 2003). For this project, a case study as the research strategy has been chosen. The case study approach is a quite famous and commonly used research design in business research projects (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Especially when the goal is to answer “how” questions, this type of strategy is preferable, as it allows the initiator of a study to get the required holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events (Yin, 2003).

Another possible strategy to conduct this study would have been to use histories. Though this method focuses on dealing with the past – preferable when no crucial persons are alive to report – this strategy has not been taken into further consideration (Yin, 2003). There were people available that could have been contacted, and moreover, social media is a relatively new issue. Therefore, histories have been considered inappropriate for the study.
Also, an experiment could have been utilized to analyze the “how” questions. However, the case study was preferred, because it implies the unique strength of being able to comprise a wider range of evidence, including for example, documents, observations and interviews (Yin, 2003).

In the given research, a multiple-case study – consisting of four cases – has been adopted to be able to compare the cases. Such a multiple-case study allows one to consider similarities and contrast results among the cases (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Compared to single-case designs, they offer the advantage that their evidence is considered more compelling and the overall study can be interpreted as more solid (Herriott & Firestone; as cited in Yin, 2003, p. 46).

A common critical aspect in terms of case studies is that they only provide a small basis for generalizing the results in a scientific way. At this point, the initiators of this study want to emphasize that their case studies are to generalize to theoretical propositions, which means the goal is to generalize theories rather than statistical generalizations in terms of enumerating frequencies as highlighted by Yin (2003).

3.3.2 Case selection

In the given research, the initiators have chosen to utilize four cases in their multiple-case study. As pointed out above, the benefits of using multiple-case studies is their greater evidence and a more solid appearance. That means analytic conclusions, coming from several cases, can be interpreted as more powerful (Yin, 2003).

Since the purpose of this study is to get a better understanding of the role of social media in the communication process of SMEs, the selection criteria are already inherent in the purpose. At first, it had to be made sure that the selected companies could be considered as small and medium-sized enterprises. Second, the initiators of the study had to ensure that these SMEs are using social media platforms. Therein, the optimum idea was to pick firms that are using several various platforms to avoid presetting the outcomes.

In order to fulfill the criteria of an SME, the initiators of the study paid attention to ensure that the chosen companies meet with the criteria below:

“Enterprises qualify as micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) if they fulfill the criteria laid down in the Recommendation which are summarized in the table below. In addition to the staff headcount ceiling, an enterprise qualifies as an SME if it meets either the turnover ceiling or the balance sheet ceiling, but not necessarily both” (European Commission, 2003).

Table 1: Definition of SMEs (Source: European Commission, 2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enterprise category</th>
<th>Headcount</th>
<th>Turnover</th>
<th>or</th>
<th>Balance sheet total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>medium-sized</td>
<td>&lt; 250</td>
<td>≤ € 50 million</td>
<td>≤ € 43 million</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>small</td>
<td>&lt; 50</td>
<td>≤ € 10 million</td>
<td>≤ € 10 million</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>micro</td>
<td>&lt; 10</td>
<td>≤ € 2 million</td>
<td>≤ € 2 million</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For the cases, therefore, the following companies have been chosen: KeySeeker, Apping, Jobbolaget and Success Education. These firms are located at the Science Park Halmstad and are acting in different industries. They have all been established within the last two years. KeySeeker provides a product to search for keys. They are delivering to gadget shops, alarm shops and retailers. Apping is a firm which programmes applications for Iphones and Android operation systems. Jobbolaget recruits staff for other firms and provides coaching as well as workshops and seminars for companies. The fourth company, Success Education, is considered to be in the health industry. They provide mental training and coaching to businesses and private persons.

The selected companies fulfill the criteria of SMEs in terms of the number of employees. In these firms, only between one and four people are employed. Also, the annual turnover meets the criteria of SMEs. Some interview partners preferred not to mention the exact figure during the interview, nevertheless it could be ensured that the turnover does not exceed the limit which is valid to be considered an SME. The group of respondents within the company consisted of owners and co-owners of the firms.

3.4 Data collection

The data in qualitative studies can be collected through primary and secondary sources (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The chapter regarding data collection will describe how the collection of the data took place. Therein, it will be distinguished between primary and secondary data.

3.4.1 Primary data

For collecting primary data, researchers have to be aware of the different existing opportunities to conduct this process. It is possible to use documentation, archival records, interviews or direct observations as well as participant observations (Yin, 2003). For the data collection in the current study, face-to-face interviews on a semi-structured basis have been used to deeper understand social media utilization in SMEs’ communications.

In accordance with Bryman and Bell (2007), qualitative interviews have either to be structured, semi-structured or unstructured. A structured interview means using an interview based on a questionnaire with predetermined questions that he or she follows in a specific order. A semi-structured interview usually contains initially defined questions, but gives respondents the opportunity to develop more of their opinions. The unstructured interview may not have any specific questions and might begin with a story from the respondent, respectively he answers on a very broad question. An interview is the most widely adopted strategy in the field of qualitative research. Nevertheless, one should keep in mind that interviewing, transcription and the analysis of the material is time consuming (Ibid).

Applying semi-structured interviews offered the advantage to stick to an initially defined set of questions, while at the same time, being flexible, so as to respond to comments and statements by the interviewees. This means the interviewer could ask additional questions that follow up the respondents’ replies. Applying a semi-structured interview therefore could generate rich and detailed answers as pointed out by Bryman and Bell (2007). Additionally, interviewing a respondent with insights into the studied topic provides deeper information in
terms of the specific situation that has to be studied (Yin, 2003). Yin (2003) also emphasized the need to be a good listener when collecting data for a case study, which means being adaptive and flexible, since new upcoming contents can be noticed as well.

Contrary to personal interviews, there exists the chance to conduct group interviews. According to Bryman and Bell (2007), this means many respondents are interviewed simultaneously, which may be appropriate when the researcher wants to find out the respondents’ experiences and in order to generate ideas. A negative aspect of group interviews is the fact that there might occur some ethical obstacles in terms of difficulties when it comes to sensitive questions. Therefore, an individual interview was to be preferred. As the initiators of the given study intended to examine a manageable amount of cases, individual interviews have been preferred, as also recommended by Bryman and Bell (2007).

As previously mentioned, there are alternative ways of collecting primary data which have been considered inappropriate to get a better understanding of the role of social media in the communication process of small and medium-sized enterprises. Documentation would not have brought the required insights and the preferred understanding of how these firms are using social media in their communications. Nor would it have been appropriate to describe how it has been integrated into the concept of integrated marketing communications. Also, the benefits of social media utilization in their communications could not have been investigated by referring to documentations. The other data collection method – archival records – could have been neglected as the goal was to understand a certain situation, and moreover social media is a relatively new topic for companies. Also observations – in a direct way or in terms of participants – would not have brought the crucial insights to provide answers to the research questions. Additionally, they would have been time-consuming and observers were necessary. In observing, several ethical issues needed to be considered when the researcher enters the respondent’s private area, and may even be forced to omit information which the respondent considers to be private (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

For conducting the interview, an interview guide (see appendix 2) was necessary. An interview guide is a list of areas that have to be covered when talking to the respondents. It was recommended to create different categories with sub-items. Moreover, it was crucial to formulate questions in a way that they relate to and provide answers to the constructed research questions. Also the language that was used had to be comprehensible and understandable for the respondents (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

For the interviewer during the preparation it was vital to ensure that questions were exactly formulated so that they could not be misunderstood or misinterpreted by the respondents. Therefore, it was important that the initiators of the study asked themselves if they were able to understand and respectively answer, the given questions. For the question design it was recommended to avoid ambiguity as well as over long questions or double-barrelled ones. Additionally, they had to be formulated in a neutral way to avoid leading interviewees towards a specific direction as recommended by Bryman and Bell (2011).

To get potential respondents involved, it was crucial to emphasize how they could benefit from participating in the study, moreover sufficient background information had to be provided (see appendix 4). It was also important to ensure confidentially in interviews when it came to sensitive questions. It was recommended to audio-record the conversation and to transcribe it afterwards (Bryman & Bell, 2011).
Primary data has been collected in the form of face-to-face interviews with four SMEs as pointed out in the chapter dealing with case selection. The group of respondents consisted of owners and co-owners. The interviews were conducted between 11th April and 26th April, including the initial interviews, as well as a follow-up interview.

To increase the validity of the gathered data and in order to ensure correct understanding, in the case of Success Education it was crucial to conduct a follow-up interview with the respondent. The aim was to ensure the correct understanding of a specific question. The follow-up interview was carried out via telephone and e-mail (see appendix 3).

3.4.2 Secondary data

Secondary data on the one hand has been collected to complement the primary data concerning the studied companies. Therefore, web-pages and social media platforms of the selected organizations have been used. On the other hand, secondary data collection was necessary to create the theoretical frame of references. In doing so, databases have been used in order to find previous research in the area of interest to determine a research field, relevant to deeper analysis. Moreover, literature, including books and articles of journals, which were recommended for university courses, has been studied to gain a deeper knowledge in the field of marketing communications and obstacles, as well as specifics in SMEs. Amongst others, the Honeycomb Model has been integrated into the literature review for the simple reason that this model can be considered solid. It was developed by social media software engineer, Peter Morville and further developed by Smith. Therefore, single blocks could have been adopted to study the role of social media in the communication process of SMEs.

Additionally, literature which has been utilized in previous studies, was deeper investigated to find relevant theory. Finally, databases have been used to search for literature in the research area. While collecting secondary data, the initiators of this study took care to only use high quality data from reliable sources. Therefore, it was important to focus on international studies which as far as possible, have been published in nameable journals or books that are considered trustworthy by universities or nameable scientists.

Moreover, to avoid bias, in terms of specific assumptions of the study’s initiators or the data taken from third researchers, it was crucial to be selective while gathering the data. Opinions and conclusions of different researchers have been compared, as it was important to be open minded and without any leading preconceptions regarding the outcomes as emphasized by Miles and Huberman (1994).

Databases that have been utilized to investigate the secondary data are: diplomarbeiten.de, diplom.de, DiVA, Google scholar, LIBRIS, ProQuest and uppsatser.se. The keywords for the search were social media, marketing communications, communication process as well as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).
3.5 Data analysis

As already pointed out in the chapter of the research strategy, a multiple-case study has been used in order to analyze the social media utilization in the communication process of small and medium-sized enterprises. The beneficial issue in adopting multiple-case studies is the fact that certain phenomena can be deeper analyzed when results are compared, in relation to several cases. Thus, a deeper understanding of the topic could be ensured (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Moreover, analyzing multiple cases enabled the researchers to achieve a preferable position in terms of comparing their findings with the theoretical construct (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

The first step in analyzing data was that conducted interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed as a basis for deeper investigating the data. As there was a large amount of collected data, it was crucial to review the transcriptions and to dissect them in a meaningful way, while also focusing on the relations, as was recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994). This implied in the data that the words have been investigated to find units of meaning in them. By following this suggestion, it was possible to detect categories within the data, which was crucial for drawing conclusions (Ibid).

By having defined a theoretical framework, which acts as the basis for the analysis, there was already an orientation about how to deeper investigate the data in the context of the theoretical background. The framework was crucial to be able to set the attention on the important data and to ignore irrelevant information (Yin, 2003). At this point it is mentioned, that as far as it was necessary, also theoretical aspects from the literature review that are beyond the created theoretical framework have been utilized to ensure a detailed and thorough analysis. Therefore, at first the cases have been analyzed in the context of the theory. Moreover, by having devised three research questions based on the purpose of this study, there was already a structure for analyzing the data.

In the second step, the cases have been compared with each other in a cross-case analysis as deeper investigated by Miles and Huberman (1994). To get a better overview of the collected data, in the given study, a matrix has been created in order to place the evidence within defined categories, as recommended by Yin (2003). By this approach, the initiators could compare the cases with each other and recognize significant results, pattern and similarities, as well as contrasts among the findings. Moreover, the matrix has been used in analyzing data to which it was crucial to only address the most significant issues of the study, while avoiding getting lost in a large amount of data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Additionally, to ensure a structure in the cross-case analysis, the patterns have been analyzed in accordance with the three research questions.
3.6 Research quality

As the goal of a research design is to represent a logical set of statements, it is crucial to test its quality (Yin, 2003). In order to ensure a high quality in qualitative research, criteria such as validity and reliability have to be kept in mind (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Therefore, at this point the validity and reliability of the current research project will be highlighted.

3.6.1 Validity

Within the topic of validity distinctions have to be made between construct validity, internal validity and external validity.

Construct validity means that the initiators of a study had to establish correct operational measures for the concept that has to be studied (Yin, 2003). Regarding this issue, the initiators of the study paid attention, as they have chosen to focus on three research questions, based on the purpose of this study. By doing this, the purpose can be fulfilled in a more precise way than would have been possible with only one broad research question. Moreover, the researchers developed the questions for the semi-structured interview in a way that they were precise enough in order to answer the respective research questions. Additionally, it was ensured that the interview contains clearly understood questions, according to the recommendations of how to create them (Bryman & Bell, 2011). As pointed out in the chapter dealing with data collection, the semi-structured interview brought the advantage of being flexible and open to upcoming new issues that are related to the research questions. This issue additionally increased the construct validity. Moreover, the initiators of the study carefully selected the theoretical material to establish a solid framework for the analysis. As already pointed out, it was crucial to ensure the utilization of high quality literature. Therefore, the selection of theoretical material carefully took place with regard to its sources. Also, different views of a theoretical issue have been compared in collecting data.

The issue of internal validity does not need to be taken into further consideration as it refers to explanatory or causal studies only (Yin, 2003) and the goal of this study was to describe the role of social media in the communication process of SMEs.

The aspect of external validity has already been briefly mentioned in the chapter relating to research strategy. It is about generalizing the study’s findings (Yin, 2003). To the topic of generalizing results, Bryman and Bell (2011) add that if only a single case study had been applied, it must have been pointed out that it is difficult to consider the findings as representative and to apply them on other cases. In the given project, four cases have been carried out which means the generalizability can be seen as higher, compared to a single case (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Yet, the initiators of the study want to emphasize that the focus is on generalizing to theoretical propositions, which means analytic generalization, compared to statistical generalization, as pointed out by Yin (2003). The aim is to generalize a specific set of results to a broader set of theories (Ibid). Regarding this intention, it is also considered appropriate that companies from different industries have been chosen in this study.
3.6.2 Reliability

The reliability of a study can be described to ensure the same findings and conclusions when the study is being repeated in the same way by a later investigator over and over again. Therein, errors and biases in a study have to be minimized. A crucial aspect is the documentation of the procedure in order to being able to repeat a study (Yin, 2003).

In the given study, the initiators paid attention to this issue and ensured the maintenance of the so-called chain of evidence in order that external observers are able to follow the undertaken steps (Yin, 2003). It has carefully been described how the theoretical framework has been built – based on the previously selected literature review. Moreover, external observers are able to follow the further steps, as the study includes a detailed description of which research approach, method and strategy have been chosen and considered appropriate for this study. Additionally, the data collection has been pointed out carefully and the data analysis process has been explained.

While the theories used in this study have been applied and verified throughout the years, social media research is quite new and more research is necessary. In addition, social media is a rapidly changing and evolving phenomenon. As engineers and businessmen all over the world develop new tools that create value for the user, social media features are likely to change in a short time. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that company-specific functions listed for example in the Honeycomb Model, will remain the same – even though the general framework has been proved to be reliable as the current year 2012 represents the fourth year since its creation and therefore the model is still relevant in such a fast paced industry.
4 Empirical findings

In the given chapter, the empirical findings will be presented. Each company – KeySeeker, Apping, Jobbolaget as well as Success Education – is exemplified individually. Eventually, this chapter points out the implications of social media in terms of the future plans of the particular companies.¹

4.1 KeySeeker

The company KeySeeker was established in the year 2010 by Johannes Nilsson. The product Keyseeker is a device which finds your keys and is marketed mainly for the consumer market. Keyseeker is a gadget to find your keys, which is controlled by a remote control you have in your wallet or pocket. Keyseeker is mainly sold through wholesalers such as gadget shops, smartasaker, key shops, alarm shops and retailers such as teknikmagasinet etc. Johannes Nilsson is responsible for everything from designing to marketing, product development, construction, sales etc. and has held this position since the formation of the company.

SOCIAL MEDIA UTILIZATION IN THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

In terms of utilizing social media Nilsson explains “I have been using Facebook for a while for this particular product, but I prefer marketing through websites, banners and some blogs”. (J. Nilsson, personal communication, April 11, 2012). According to Nilsson (2012), using different social media platforms enables him to learn what brings the attention of his target audience.

According to Nilsson (2012), understanding these differences affects how these companies operate in their communication and their work towards optimizing the use of social media. “Social media actively tries to be two-way communications. Social media is used, usually when you are actively searching for something or communicating with friends or people” (Nilsson, 2012).

Confirming that the company and its communication operate towards an interactive communication, there are various ways to improve this through social media. Nilsson (2012) discusses this issue and explains, by existing in the search results of your target audience you become active, since they are already actively searching for you and your solution. Thus, to be at the top of Google’s search results and forums, the firm must try to actively work to understand important key phrases.

In terms of elements that should be included in a communication via social media, Nilsson (2012) claims that, it is not a question of elements in becoming trustworthy or serious on social media platforms, “it’s more important to spread the information correctly than having some specific elements which transform a company into trustworthiness”.

After having described these elements as a part of the competence of the user/employee, Nilsson points out the social media skills and the responsibilities in the firm. Nilsson (2012)

¹ According to the guidelines in terms of referencing, personal communication is not to include to the reference list. Instead, parenthetically, the respondent’s name as well as the specific date has to be included in the text. As to simplify the reading, these aspects will only be mentioned when the respondent is cited for the first time. Further on, only the respondents name and the year will be used in the text.
believes that his skills are quite good and considers them as good enough at this stage ever since he has had workshops, read books and other similar training. Since Nilsson (2012) is the only owner, all responsibilities therefore rest on him.

**INTEGRATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA INTO MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS**

In terms of social media utilization, and its integration into the overall marketing strategy, Nilsson (2012) explains that he has always been working towards integrating his communication with social media. “Everything I do in other channels, I use social media to promote the product”. Nilsson (2012) further describes that social media has always been part of the communication for this particular product (KeySeeker) and the target audience usually searches a solution for their problem through social media networks/platforms such as discussion forums, blogs, gadget forums etc.. Therefore, integrating social media into the process of communication has not been a problem. A reason therefore is also that up to now, the business structure is not so complex as there are only a few products (Ibid).

Integrating social media into the process of communication is a continuous process as pointed out above. On the other hand, Nilsson (2012) admits “I do not believe that I will find the right target group through social media, especially Facebook, but I have not abandoned it for all my products”. According to Nilsson (2012), being aware of where the target audience exists is crucial in all marketing activities, therefore understanding where the search for the product is generated, enables the company to optimize the use of the social media network. Moreover, he claims that he will certainly use the social media for his upcoming products and believes that the social media will be a natural part of the company’s future communication as well (Nilsson, 2012).

According to Nilsson (2012), specific goals are not set at this stage of the company but he is conscious of the goals which are needed to be set in order to see the efficiency of the media. A defined budget on the other hand, is not believed to be more of significance. “Regarding specific budget for social media, I do include social media in my budget of marketing, for example Google AdWords and Facebook, but since this is online budget so I don’t believe it of such importance at this stage” (Nilsson, 2012).

**BENEFITS OF SOCIAL MEDIA UTILIZATION IN MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS**

Regarding the benefits of social media and its measurement, Nilsson (2012) emphasizes social media might not always fulfill the purpose which it is meant to accomplish, nonetheless social media does contribute some beneficial value in the business. In addition, the level of benefits created by social media differs in different industries and products. Measuring the value added by social media and indicators in order to track its contribution are believed rather simple by Nilsson (2012). The owner claims that there are good ways to measure, for example, Facebook. "You can measure exactly how many clicks and how many visitors which are watching your stuff/company” (Nilsson, 2012). Even though measuring performance of the Facebook appearance is considered as simple, Nilsson (2012) interprets it as taking too much time and effort in terms of the current product, to achieve the required results.
4.2 Apping

Apping was established in the fall of 2010 by Martin Öhman and Mathias Amnell. Apping develops iPhone and Android applications mostly for companies who need mobile applications in their business for their customers. In the discussion of industries and sectors, Öhman (M. Öhman, personal communication, April 11, 2012) explains that they work with all industries and have not yet chosen to become a niche company. The company has one external employee and is owned by Martin Öhman and Mathias Amnell. In the question of responsibilities Öhman (2012) responds as follows: “I pretty much do everything. When it comes to development I’m responsible for advanced programming. But as a co-owner I do marketing, customer relations and practically everything and have held this position for one and a half years.”

SOCIAL MEDIA UTILIZATION IN THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

According to Öhman (2012), in Apping mainly Facebook is being utilized, but also Twitter and blogs. Also the accounts of the company-owner are used to communicate in terms of the company. The firm tries to be more active on Twitter and blogs in order to inform people about the firm, which should contribute to the expansion plans (Ibid).

Öhman (2012) believes that using social media as a part of the communication generates the ability to let the target audience retain their attention on different products developed by Apping. “The main purpose for using social media is basically to make people notice Apping and see what we can offer and make people see that we can develop good stuff” (Öhman, 2012).

In addition, understanding the alteration between traditional communication and social media is equally described as crucial by Öhman as well. He describes the difference as “more personal since you talk to the audience with an interaction, in a personal sense it is less formal and more direct” (Öhman, 2012). This leads to an ongoing effort of ensuring that the company and its communication functions towards an interactive communication. To do this, there are various ways to improve this using social media. Öhman (2012) for example, believes that interactive communication is not obtained by their social media communication even though they try, but the efforts are on encouraging people to visit web-pages and to check out products. Furthermore, he believes that “you have to be professional. But still be personal at the same time so you do not offend people, It is easy to slip if you screw up on social platforms”, therefore one has to preserve a professional attitude in the communication through social media platforms (Öhman, 2012).

Regarding knowledge of how to optimize the effectiveness of social media and the required skills, Öhman (2012) clarifies. “We are better than the average on social media...so we believe that we have fair knowledge about the concept of how business should communicate but of course, we can always improve our knowledge”. The knowledge has been acquired by frequently using Twitter and Facebook, as well as by reading about social media communications. Moreover, Apping acquired the skills by listening to experts and their recommendations. The workshops and lectures that have been used to increase the social media skills are considered to be of poor quality (Ibid).

The responsibility is divided between the owners and this is believed to be a problem at the moment for Apping. “The reason is that we don’t have a specific person who handles it daily. It kind of falls off, we kind of lost track of social media at present, because we have so many
clients and companies who shouts and want to have their applications done in time. Therefore, our social platforms suffer, since no one is specifically responsible we lose track of it” since both owners have the responsibility to continue and develop these platforms (Öhman, 2012). Furthermore, it has been underlined that he understands why experts see the utilization of social media as important. “People spend a lot of time on Facebook and you can meet potential clients through social media network and it is a way to reach possible clients for us” (Öhman, 2012).

Öhman (2012) claims that social media training is not just important for the present work in the company, but also for the future potential of the company. The respondent further argues that learning from practical examples is crucial, since there are important lessons which can be adapted regarding different steps in improving and creating value. “I think it will be important for us to improve the use and the knowledge of social media. Learning from businesses which have managed to successfully use social media would have a great value for us, to see how someone else practically uses it in daily businesses” (Öhman, 2012).

INTEGRATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA INTO MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

“Social media...is an important part of the future communication” (Öhman, 2012). In their attempt to integrate social media, Apping spends the majority of their marketing time improving their knowledge in order to integrate with their traditional communication. Currently, social media is considered to be a single issue and therefore it is not really integrated. Öhman (2012) claims the company is used to social media because they spend their (limited) time in terms of communication activities mainly on social media, while classical ways, such as press releases, are rarely used.

Integrating social media into the process of communication is an unceasing development as pointed out above. In the discussion Öhman (2012) points out that awareness from the perspective of Apping as well from possible clients through social media can be problematic, since larger corporations might not notice the existence of Apping. “Basically, we want to have so many people as possible to know what we are doing or have done” (Öhman, 2012). Öhman (2012), further explains that Apping is aware that they might at this stage not reach the perfect audience, such as CEOs. Yet, they hope that they reach them through word-of-mouth and Facebook as there are only a few firms developing these kind of applications and therefore the word spreads quickly among networks such as friends, colleagues, companies and families. To achieve their goal to reach CEOs, it might be crucial to use other platforms as well (Ibid).

Regarding social media goals and budgets, in Apping the situation is being described as follows. According to Öhman (2012), specific goals are not set at this stage of the company, nevertheless they are aware of the goals which are desirable to be set in order to see the productivity of the media. “There are no specific budgets defined only for social media and therefore, it is part of the main budget” (Öhman, 2012).

BENEFITS OF SOCIAL MEDIA UTILIZATION IN MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

In the case of Apping, Öhman (2012) believes that benefits of social media can be found in the fact that they (the owners and employees) use social media in their private life and therefore they do not need an expert to help them to start social media networks. He adds to his explanation “it’s cheap, which is in line with application development” (Ibid). Öhman (2012) further exemplifies “obviously we would like to be able to measure the performance of
social media, but are not able at this moment”. The explanation is that there is no time for the owners to do such thing at the moment.

4.3 Jobbolaget

Jobbolaget was founded in February 2010 according to Mats J Gustafsson, one of the co-owners of Jobbolaget. Jobbolaget works with recruiting staff for companies. They have an important collaboration with employment service department of Halmstad (Arbetsförmedlingen Halmstad). Furthermore, Jobbolaget does other services such as coaching, workshops and seminars for companies about leadership, communication, self-confidence, goal setting in order to drive efficiency improvement.

In the near future, the plan for Jobbolaget is according to Gustafsson (2012), to be broader in their range of services. Jobbolaget wants to become a full partners of the companies “if you want help with unionized employees; we have range from the CEO to production workers” (M. J. Gustafsson, personal communication, April 13, 2012). Thus, a niche in the future is not planned.

Today, the company consists of three partners and a set. The company's annual turnover is around 4-5 million kronors. Gustafsson (2012) is responsible for the human resource department of the company and he is also a member of the board of Jobbolaget and has held the position since the initiation of the company.

SOCIAL MEDIA UTILIZATION IN THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

In the case of Jobbolaget, social media platforms are used for many different reasons, both as part of communication, as well as to do quick market researches. “On our website we have a Facebook list, where we put incredible amount of news, thus, we have the Facebook page, where we put out ads, a quick inquiry if there is someone who knows someone...who works with something or is looking for similar work” (Gustafsson, 2012). He further stresses the importance for companies to understand how today’s society uses Internet and in particular social media. “We know that many people use Facebook in today's society, and this method is very successful in spreading news via links on the website where we post ads...therefore, we feel that we reach out accurately” (Gustafsson, 2012).

The purpose of social media utilization for Jobbolaget is part of its effort towards adapting and interacting with its social media target audience as explained by Gustafsson (2012). “The purpose of social media is mainly to reach out. Today, the speed of spreading information is the main strength of our company, we are good at identifying what is happening and it is important to get things out quickly on Facebook, where information is accessible to many”. Moreover, Gustafsson (2012) argues that people nowadays want to have information as quickly as possible and it is equally important to understand that the company is aware of this development in the society and the desire of its audience as to deliver this need.

Understanding the difference between traditional communication and social media has been described by Gustafsson (2012) as follows. “The difference between traditional media and social media, I would say, is speed. Many believe in the good old days when informing the recipient was not complicated. Today, everyone knows before it even becomes public”.

33
Regarding elements of a successful communication via social media Gustafsson (2012) says “I personally can see advantages of using this type of media and think it’s fun to work with social media”. Moreover, the respondent states that being professional is one of the absolute most important elements in social media, since this can “catch up to you” if you do not act professionally towards the audience and the potential customers (Gustafsson, 2012).

Ensuring that the company and its communication are driven towards an interactive communication, there are many ways to progress this with the help of social media. Gustafsson (2012) argues that, on the one hand, this is an ongoing discussion in their company and they still try to improve the status of their interactive communication, on the other hand, the response on their social media page has been frequent and therefore satisfying. Furthermore, Gustafsson (2012) believes more focused action would improve even more in becoming more interactive with their audience.

“With regard to practical training, we had a guy who has lectured on it for us, furthermore we are also self-taught” (Gustafsson, 2012). The responsibility of running and maintaining the overall responsibility of the platforms has been given to the CEO of Jobbolaget. Gustafsson (2012) explains that even though the responsibility is given to a certain person, they still have responsibilities in the rest of the company to update and add certain things.

INTEGRATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA INTO MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

Jobbolaget on one hand is working to improve their integration in a different context, “We have also linked in all the marketing we do with our Facebook page” (Gustafsson, 2012). Even though it is agreed that the use of social media in the future will be crucial, no further discussion has been planned for future plans in integrating social media with the traditional communication (Ibid).

In terms of the target audience, Jobbolaget believes, there are areas to be improved. “We believe that we have received the feedback that the recipient of our social media has really understood what we are doing and are aware that we are on Facebook” (Gustafsson, 2012). According to Gustafsson (2012), Jobbolaget has a good interactive communication through the Facebook page where they have received a good response in their process of work.

Regarding social media goals, Gustafsson (2012) points out “we have some small goals, for example reaching certain number fans/followers, we believe it is an important part to appear in the right way and the right place”. Even though Jobbolaget does not have specific goals at the moment, specifically designed for social media, defining small goals and embracing Jobbolaget reminds the company to keep improving their work (Ibid).

BENEFITS OF SOCIAL MEDIA UTILIZATION IN MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

A noticeable benefit of using social media has been the response received and the feedback they have conventionally when something is appreciated by the target audience. Gustafsson (2012) further explains that using social media has created value for their business. “Sure, it has helped to create value in the company by existing there on social media. Amongst other things, this has contributed to candidates, the interest etc”.

According to Gustafsson (2012), there has been no specific effort conducted to measure how much the use of social media contributes to an added value, nonetheless he emphasizes “sometimes we have received answers that the client found us via other friends on Facebook. These responses justify, as they show that it is the right direction in using social media”.

34
4.4 Success Education

Success Education was established on 2nd February of 2011 by Madeleine Magnusson. Success Education works with coaching – both for private and corporate clients. The service basically uses the “power of thinking” to live and sustain good health at work. The use in this coaching service is based on a technique called EFT which is the “Emotional Freedom Technique. With this technique you can reduce physical stress, mental stress, emotional stress, pain. The method is used to transform negative situations” (M. Magnusson, personal communication, April 18, 2012).

Regarding the question of specific industries, Magnusson (2012) responds that she has not gained enough knowledge in this business, and therefore has not chosen to niche yet. “This company is still developing in terms of this question. Therefore, I would say right now I work in the health. So companies who see the importance of the employees’ health and well-being, as well as private people who want to overcome stress in order to live their dream and have good relationships, are provided with the service I offer”

Since the company is relatively new, responsibilities are carried out by Magnusson who is responsible for everything herself, including marketing. The annual turnover is approximately 100,000 Swedish kroners. Madeleine Magnusson has been working in this particular sector for quite a long time and has 10 years of experience of hospital work, as well as 10 years of experience as a therapist.

SOCIAL MEDIA UTILIZATION IN THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

Success Education uses mainly Facebook but also Twitter to interact with its target audience. “Even though I do not yet understand Twitter, I still use it anyway” (Magnusson, 2012). Additionally, the reason for using social media, according to Magnusson (2012), is because everything interacts: “If you want to provide service for other people, they have to know about your product or service and your existence. Social media is a good way of referring between people who know each other. It’s not that easy nowadays to just say I’m this or that good in coaching, therefore, reliability is important, both in the person performing/providing the service, as well as well as for the service itself”.

Regarding differences between traditional communications and social media communications, Magnusson (2012) claims there are of course differences between social media and the traditional communication. Social media is in a sense a bit shorter, by that Magnusson means that shorter sentences are used and one can interact more in social media platforms with the target audience. “Furthermore, it is easy in a sense that you do not have the time gap between the two parts. In comparison with a regular communication, you have to perhaps travel or use other more physical communication in order to provide the same objectives” (Ibid).

Elements which are considered important by Magnusson (2012) are for example to give the impression of being serious. Additionally, reliability is considered crucial since the firm is dealing with people. “Reliability is important in my profession, since that’s what I’m judged on” (Magnusson, 2012). For example giving free services so the persons feel they can get something and see if it has any value for the person in question, because then they will for sure come back. Ensuring that the communication between Success Education and the target group is a two-way communication, Magnusson (2012) organizes different activities to keep up the awareness of the company´s target audience. Such examples are the weekly newsletters sent out with some inspiration, in the meantime “I ensure that I’m always thankful for
feedback or comments”. The feedback gathered here is used to learn how Success Education can improve towards its clients, as well as how to interact with the target audience. Nonetheless, “I believe that there is a lot to improve in this area, because I would like to have more feedback and interactions with my audience” (Magnusson, 2012).

As mentioned above in accordance with Magnusson (2012), she believes that there is a lot which can be improved in Success Education in terms of knowledge. Regarding skills of social media, Magnusson stresses that she has been learning about social media and has been taking some training with a social media coach who helped her to learn more about this phenomenon together with other friends who work with it in their businesses. According to Magnusson (2012) “I do not believe that I have gained all the necessary knowledge regarding social media. There is so much to learn about social media and I maybe have focused only on the surface of its potential, therefore I can do much more about social media”.

INTEGRATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA INTO MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

In the case of Magnusson she is sending a weekly newsletter through a special mailing system enabling Success Education to maintain a consistent interaction with its target audience (M. Magnusson, personal communication, April 26, 2012). Additionally, the followers on Facebook are being informed (Magnusson, 2012).

“Awareness of my target audience is not completely developed, thus focused interactions are not yet defined. Defining my target on social media is an unfinished product yet, so therefore is not 100% of where I want it to be” (Magnusson, 2012). Nonetheless, Magnusson (2012) points out that some of the target audience is aware of the company. However, at the moment, the target audience consists more or less of companies and private people, who are interested in this service.

Moreover, Magnusson (2012) has confidence in that small social media goals motivate her in terms of putting efforts into social media interaction: “The short term goal of Facebook is first of all to double my list of fans/followers. So at the end of this year I would like to reach 1,000 followers/fans in my Facebook page. The reason I would like to double my list is, it enables me to connect with more people which, as a result of that, creates bigger opportunities” Additionally, Magnusson (2012) mentions that there are no specific budgets for social media, thus it is part of the overall budget.

BENEFITS OF SOCIAL MEDIA UTILIZATION IN MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

In the case of Success Education, there have been noticeable specific benefits of using social media. For example, clients received through the communication between the company and the audience and it is fast and this enabled more personal contacts with clients. “So in that sense, social media has increased and added a value in my business” (Magnusson, 2012)

When asked if Success Education has used any type of performance indicators, Magnusson (2012) responded “I have not used any performance indicators but I’m aware of the existence of these tools on social media networks”.
4.5 Implications of social media

In this chapter, crucial statements, as well as results by the respondents regarding the implications of social media, are presented. The goal is to point out what is important for the respondents regarding future social media utilization in their organizations.

The overall opinion of Nilsson (2012) from KeySeeker is that “social media has been hyped very much in the last two years and it is said that all companies should use social media. Personally, I don’t believe it is necessary for all types of products or companies to market through social media. But it’s definitely a good way of marketing and everyone should give it a try in order to discover the possibilities. The success of it is depending much on the type of product/services or industry. Therefore, I don’t believe it’s the best marketing channel for my product.”

Additionally, he determines that “every type of promotion through word-of-mouth through social media is very good and, of course, it is very important. Of course, I would like to have people recommending my products through word-of-mouth. Facebook would not in my case improve anything just by creating a Facebook page. But if the product does not receive the attention or the webpage does not fulfill its purpose, then it is not useful at all. I have already plans for the future, and for my upcoming products. I will attempt to strategically create a bigger budget for marketing and social media in order to improve the use of our channels” (Nilsson, 2012).

Gustafsson (2012) from Jobbolaget reasons “I think that in the future, how well we utilize social media will be determined by the level of knowledge of this particular area. I think everyone should be aware of it. It is an important way to perform, bringing new information, to communicate externally with customers, companies, etc.”

Jobbolaget, moreover holds the view that social media will play an important role in the company’s future. “It will probably continue to be an important discussion on how to deal with these parts. How much budget, how we should measure, will certainly be important. Use social media properly and focused, something we try to do on Jobbolaget. I think it is an incredibly important tool as it is a quick and effective method to reach out to many. One must also remember that not everyone uses it, and that is important to note also” (Gustafsson, 2012).

For Apping it is crucial “that there will be training/staff or specific budgets for social media in the future. And we believe it will be a very important part of the future communication. And we are trying to be more active on Twitter and blogs in order to let people know about our company, since this will be crucial if we are to expand in the future” (Öhman, 2012).

Regarding the future social media utilization in Success Education, Magnusson (2012) asserts “I believe that social media training on employees and budgets are parts of the future plans in this company. The reason for that is, because I can see the potential of this media as well as the market which exists through social media”.
5 Analysis

After having presented the empirical data in the previous chapter, in the given unit the analysis is carried out. In the first part, the analysis will begin with a within-case analysis, this means the empirical findings of each case/company will be matched with the theoretical background. In the second part of the analysis, a cross-case analysis will be carried out which implies a comparison of the data between the cases. After having analyzed the cases, an adjustment of the theoretical framework will be done.

5.1 Within-case analysis

In this chapter, which forms the first part of the analysis, the data of the four companies, KeySeeker, Apping, Jobbolaget and Success Education are being matched with the theoretical background. To structure the large amount of data, the within-case analysis is accomplished in three segments in accordance with the different research questions.

5.1.1 KeySeeker

SOCIAL MEDIA UTILIZATION IN THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS
As pointed out in the empirical chapter, KeySeeker uses some of the most commonly utilized social media platforms, such as Facebook and blogs, but at the moment, the main focus is on Google AdWords (Nilsson, 2012), a way of advertising on the Internet, where customers can create their ads, which further on appear on Google (Google, 2012).

The reason for utilizing these platforms is to market themselves in an environment where the company can achieve greater attention (Nilsson, 2012). This matches with the component “Presence” of the Honeycomb Model, which emphasizes that firms should keep in mind that a high level of social media presence can lead to a stronger relationship with their target audience (Smith, 2007; Kietzmann et al., 2012). Moreover, as pointed out by Holmström and Wikberg (2010), a common characteristic of social media is its scope. Additionally, as pointed out by Kotler et al. (1999), nowadays for businesses it is crucial to ask what firms can do to let customers reach them. This fits with the description of Nilsson of KeySeeker (2012) as he explains the purpose of using social media is to attract as much attention as possible via the platforms and to be where the customer is searching. Even though the mentioned Google Adwords cannot be considered as a social media platform, KeySeeker has recognized this aspect, as they are seeking for high attention by using various platforms (Ibid).

Moreover, KeySeeker is aware of the advantage of social media communications, as they mention the two-way communication as the distinguishing factor. “Social media actively tries to be two-way communications. Social media is used, usually when you are actively searching for something or communicating with friends or people”, as explained by the owner Nilsson (2012). This issue has been highlighted by Kotler et al. (1999) when they point out the necessity to collect feedback in an effective communication. Also Duncan and Moriarty (1998) have mentioned this issue, as they state social media implies an interactive connection between organizations and their target groups, which amongst others, enables feedback. Schultz (1996) complements the issue as he summarizes that through social media, senders became receivers and receivers became senders. The company KeySeeker aims at this by
working towards an interactive communication, where social media helps to achieve this. According to KeySeeker, they try to respond as much as possible to the messages and comments of their target audience (Nilsson, 2012).

As pointed out by Smith (2007) and Kietzmann et al. (2012) in the Honeycomb Model, a good reputation is something that has to be earned by a company. Therefore, as a firm it is crucial to appear trustworthy and serious towards a target group. Jones (2010) shares this view as he claims that social media can support small firms in improving their reputation. The issue of trustworthiness is not seen as a problem for KeySeeker. They set their focus on the crucial issue of spreading the message correctly (Nilsson, 2012).

The study of Fink, Zerfass and Linke (2011) highlighted some obstacles and shortcomings in terms of SME marketing. According to their findings, responsibilities are often unclear. This aspect is not relevant for KeySeeker, as the respondent of the interview, the owner Johannes Nilsson, runs the company on his own (Nilsson, 2012).

Another issue mentioned in the findings of Fink, Zerfass and Linke (2011) are the often insufficient social media skills and inadequate training on social media utilization. Huang and Brown (1999) add that in SMEs there is often a lack of understanding of communication concepts in terms of the required skills. The situation in KeySeeker differs in that context. Nilsson considers his social media skills as sufficient and he also took part in workshops, as well as reading literature on how to utilize these platforms correctly (2012).

INTEGRATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA INTO MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

A topic that has to be mentioned in the context of the IMC is the identification of the target group to achieve effective communication. This task is crucial, because it affects the future steps, especially in terms of what will be said and how (Kotler et al., 1999). Key Seeker concedes they are not able to find their target group through social media, as social media is assessed as not appropriate for the current products. Nilsson (2012) describes “I do not believe that I will find the right target group through social media, especially Facebook, but I have not abandoned it for all my products”. But for the future, KeySeeker plans to utilize social media in a more creative way for their other products (Ibid).

Chaffey (2004) has exemplified the necessity of integrating social media into the concept of integrated marketing communications (IMC). This means all marketing communication elements should be implemented and controlled, as these elements have an influence on the relationship between the corporation and its target groups (Smith et al.; as cited in Holm, 2006, p. 24). The goal is to create synergy by having a holistic view (Semenik; as cited in Egan, 2007, p. 338). Egan (2007) found out that due to its difficulty, this idea has not been fully adapted by firms. The approach of how marketing communications with social media platforms is being carried out, often is based on an informal and spontaneous character. As an influencing aspect, additionally, resource constraints in SMEs are mentioned (Carson & Gilmore, 2000). Nilsson (2012) from KeySeeker admits that they are already working on the integration. He describes the progress in terms of the integration that he is aiming at, integrating the activities that are carried out on different platforms to promote a product. At the same time he assesses the situation as not too complex at the moment, as the business structure is still simple due to producing only a few products. On the other hand, his situation fits with the description in terms of constrained resources as for example he assesses performance measurement of social media platforms as consuming too much time and effort (Ibid).
In addition to the mentioned aspects, clearly defined goals (Fink, Zerfass, & Linke, 2011), as well as budgets for social media in marketing communications, have been considered as crucial (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick, Mayer, & Johnston, 2009). It has been found that SMEs may lack a strategic orientation in terms of marketing (Weinrauch, Mann, Robinson, & Pharr, 1991). Nilsson (2012) points out that in KeySeeker he puts little effort into strategic aspects in terms of social media, as he considers social media as inappropriate for the marketing communications of the current products.

The necessity to have a budget has also been emphasized by Gurau (2008). In terms of KeySeeker, Nilsson (2012) states that he has a specific budget for social media which is part of the marketing budget. He illustrates “regarding specific budgets for social media, I do include social media in my budget of marketing, for example Google AdWords and Facebook, but since this is online budget, I don’t believe it of such importance at this stage”.

**Benefits of Social Media Utilization in Marketing Communications**

Being aware of the benefits brought by social media in marketing communications is another vital topic. Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick, Mayer and Johnston (2009) highlight the importance of realizing the value of social media platforms and therefore, they hold the opinion that a firm should be able to measure the value, particularly the benefits. Fink, Zerfass and Linke (2011) share that view as they underline the need for being able to measure the performance of social media platforms. Nilsson (2012) from KeySeeker does not share this view as he does not believe that the firm benefits by social media, but rather by its products. He believes that the issue of taking advantage of social media in marketing communications depends on the products, services and the specific industry a firm is in. Nevertheless, he recommends trying out the social media utilization for firms in marketing communications.

As already mentioned above, Nilsson (2012) believes that social media currently is inappropriate for his existing products. Yet, he plans to improve social media utilization for further products of KeySeeker – this includes working on strategic aspects, as well as on increasing the budget. In terms of measuring the performance of these platforms, Nilsson is aware of analyzing clicks and visitors for example on Facebook. Regarding his current products, this platform, however, is considered as inappropriate.

5.1.2 Apping

**Social Media Utilization in the Communication Process**

According to Kotler et al. (1999), when communicating with a company’s target audience, it is important to identify the elements which enable a more effective communication. Kotler et al. (1999) further stress that in all communication, including social media, the company must define a communication platform which captures the audience’s attention and communicates appropriate messages. In the case of Apping, the main platform used to interact is Facebook, however, other platforms such as Twitter and blogs are becoming more common in the company towards using different platforms (Öhman, 2012). In accordance with Kotler et al. (1999), the message communicated in these platforms attempts to interact with the target audience, even if there are specific efforts made to increase this interaction.

According to Öhman (2012), the purpose Apping “uses social media is in order to make people notice the firm and what products/service the firms offers. Moreover, social media is used mainly to promote new products through addressing the quality of the products and the
services provided by Apping”. This confirms with the characteristics discussed by Blackshaw and Nazzaro (2006) that social media is also acknowledged as the new source of online information, where the information in itself is created, initiated, distributed and used by consumers to educate each other about products, brands, services, personalities, and issues.

“The difference between traditional communication and social media” according to Öhman (2012) is the fact “that social media is more personal when interacting with the audience, less formal, in a sense that the communication does not necessarily need to be a formal communication. Moreover, the communication is perceived more direct between the sender and the receiver.” In similar discussions, Jue et al. (2010) as well as Holmström and Wikberg (2010) and Carson and Gilmore (2000) confirm these characteristics of social media as they consider that the distinguishing factor of social media primarily is its scope, i.e. the ability to spread messages in a short period of time. A second characteristic of social media is its availability, which in principle anyone could gain access to the medium through a negligible cost. Ease of use is also a critical factor in social media. It is easier to start up a blog that can get a large audience than to start up a TV channel or newspaper, for example. Finally, the freshness of media is significant in terms of the speed to update. A blog or website can be updated in a few moments, compared to a newspaper or book (Holmström & Wikberg, 2010).

According to Kietzmann et al. (2011), social media generates vastly interactive platforms by bringing together individuals and by creating communities. People and organizations use social media to share, co-create, and discuss user-generated content. In the case of Apping, Öhman (2012) underlines, at the moment social media is not used as an interactive platform. Social media platforms are used for encouraging people to visit webpages or checking out the products/services. Therefore, the communication is perceived mainly as a one-way communication.

In their effort towards improving, Öhman (2012) believes that when using social media, it is vital to be professional. At the same time, he recommends a personal approach so that one does not offend people. “It is easy to slip if you screw up on social platforms” (Öhman, 2012). A similar recommendation was found in Carter (2011). Therein it is argued that the elements of the communication strategy have to be carefully managed and coordinated to appear with a consistent message towards the company’s environment. Therefore, one has to preserve a professional attitude in the communication through social media platforms (Öhman, 2012).

There are common challenges when the Internet – in the form of social media platforms – is utilized for marketing reasons in businesses. These businesses often have to face, at first, as pointed out by Chaffey et al. (2009), responsibilities which are not clearly defined. A similar situation was also found in Apping, where responsibility was considered to be an important problem. As Öhman (2012) described, this is a problem which is also perceived to have an impact in the overall result of using social media. The responsibility of social media is not addressed to any specific person, thus there is a loss of presence in social media due to pressure from customers wanting their products finished as quickly as possible.

As pointed out by Fink, Zerfass, & Linke (2011), work is often being prioritized and other activities are considered more important than for example developing e-marketing (Winkholfer & Houghton; as cited in Gilmore, Gallagher, & Henry, 2007, p. 237). However, it is also possible that in SMEs there is a lack of understanding of communication concepts and required skills (Huang & Brown, 1999). Even though the use of social media might not be optimum, nonetheless, Apping considers their skills above average and has acquired these
skills by listening to experts and their recommendations. The workshops and lectures that have been used to increase the social media skills are considered to be of poor quality (Öhman, 2012). Additionally, Öhman (2012) highlights that social media training is not just important for the present work in the company, but also for the future potential of the firm. Improving social media knowledge and skills is crucial for future growth and therefore practical experiences will have great value for Apping and its success (Ibid).

INTEGRATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA INTO MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

Regarding integrated marketing communication (IMC), Mangold and Faulds (2009) identify a lack of guidance for SMEs when it comes to implementing social media communication into the integrated marketing communications (IMC) strategies. Holm (2006) defines IMC as implementing and controlling all marketing communication elements which efficiently and economically have an influence on transactions between the firm and its target group.

Semenik explains integrated marketing communications as the process of utilizing promotional tools in a combined way as to create synergy by having a holistic view (as cited in Egan, 2007, p. 338). Egan (2007) adds to this view that IMC can be interpreted as enabling various communication messages to work together in order to come up with a unified message. Currently, social media is considered to be a single issue in the case of Apping, therefore it is not integrated in the overall marketing communication (Öhman, 2012). Apping furthermore claims, the company is used to social media because they spend their (limited) time in terms of communication activities mainly on social media while classical ways, such as press releases, are rarely used (Ibid).

Integrating social media into the process of communication is in continuous progress as pointed out above. In contrast, the company must be aware of the potential clients, or the particular target audiences’ presence on social media networks/platforms and if the target audiences actually are responsive of the company’s existence on social networks. Organizations must be aware of how the power of the social network platforms can be utilized to benefit from it. E-technology, such as social media, therefore, can be a helpful way for SMEs to expand their marketing activities in a relatively cost-effective way (Carter, 2011).

Moreover, the awareness of communication activities can be increased and information about target groups can be collected (Gilmore, 2011). Social media can also support small firms in improving their reputation, building on their brand or responding to customers and further stakeholder feedback (Jones, 2010). Awareness from the perspective of Apping as well from possible clients through social media can be problematic, since larger corporations might not notice the existence of Apping (Öhman, 2012). The particular target audience in the case of Apping (CEOs) is not yet reached, but they hope that they can be reached through word-of-mouth and Facebook, as there are only a few companies developing these kinds of applications. The word spreads quickly among networks such as friends, colleagues, companies and families. To achieve the goal to reach CEOs, it might be crucial to use other platforms as well (Ibid).

In the unceasing process of developing a solid IMC with the target audience, distinctive goals and budgets have a crucial role towards improving the company’s communication on social media. Also specific resources, such as staff or training, in order to successfully take advantage of social media, might not have been developed sufficiently as mentioned by Sparkes and Thomas (as cited in Simpson, Padmore, Taylor, & Frecknall-Hughes, 2006, p. 379; Kotler et al., 1999; Chaffey et al., 2009; Fink, Zerfass, & Linke, 2011). All pointed
towards a repetitive pattern where they emphasize that SMEs often lack a clearly defined budget. Moreover, the authors stress that a social media budget is not sufficient or it is wasted. Öhman (2012) confirms this issue, that this is an aspect which needs a proper solution in the future.

In similar discussions, there are no defined goals for social media. Öhman (2012) on the other hand believes this is desirable in the future as well. Kotler et al. (1999) confirm this issue and highlight it as important. Companies need to be aware of whom they want to reach by their social media utilization and moreover, they need to define goals for the utilization of those platforms.

**BENEFITS OF SOCIAL MEDIA UTILIZATION IN MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS**

Organizations must be aware of how the power of the social network platforms can be utilized to benefit from it – especially social media is an increasingly appealing and cheap way for SMEs in comparison with traditional marketing in order to communicate effectively (Carter, 2011). Fink, Zerfass and Linke (2011) confirm these aspects in their study where they point out that only a minority of managers evaluate their expertise in social media as high and there are still conclusive concepts in terms of an organization wide social media strategy missing.

Moreover, organizations question the value of using social media and say they do not see how it would improve their organization or way of working. This aspect is one of the most considerable ones in a company’s utilization of social media. Up to now, companies rarely use key performance indicators to measure the success, as well as advantages and disadvantages of using social media (Fink, Zerfass, & Linke, 2011). These aspects are also recognizable in Apping, due to the fact that Öhman (2012) perceives social media as a cheap way of communicating since there is no need for experts, when for example initiating a Facebook or Twitter account. Öhman (2012) believes that this fits the requirements of developing applications in a cheaper way, which applies to the current and future situation.

In addition, it can be a problem if organizations do not realize the value brought by social media marketing – which can be linked to the fact that there is a lack of measuring the results of social media utilization, as there is an absence of integration of social media into other communication activities (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick, Mayer, & Johnston, 2009). Measuring the actual value contributed by social media is not yet possible (Öhman, 2012). Nevertheless, Öhman (2012) believes this will be improved in the future.
SOCIAL MEDIA UTILIZATION IN THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS

It is important to identify the elements which enable a more effective communication when communicating with a company’s target audience (Kotler et al., 1999). Kotler et al. (1999) additionally point out that in all communication, including social media, the company must outline a communication platform which captures the audiences’ responsiveness and communicate suitable messages. Jobbolaget uses mainly Facebook to interact with its audience. Facebook is used for many different purposes in the case of Jobbolaget, including news of different kinds of offers, jobs, services etc.. According to Gustafsson (2012): “It is important to face that many people use Facebook in today’s society, and communicating through social media is very successful in spreading news via links on the website where we post ads...therefore, we feel that we reach out accurately”.

Furthermore, the purpose of utilizing social media for Jobbolaget is part of the effort to adapt and interact with the social media audience, as described by Gustafsson (2012). He further explains that for Jobbolaget, the purpose of social media is primarily to reach out. Today, spreading information quickly is a strength of Jobbolaget, since they are able to identify what is happening and it is important to get things done quickly on Facebook, where information is available for many people. In addition, Gustafsson (2012) argues that people today want information as quickly as possible and it is equally important to understand that the company understands that development in the community and wishes of the audience to supply that need. Similar discussion can be found in Holm (2006) who stresses that purposes and strategies need to be adapted to the changing marketing and communication environment (Holm, 2006). New communication channels require new approaches in marketing communications to ensure consistency of corporate messages (Gurau, 2008). Eventually, also social media platforms need to be included in the communication mix and in the concept of IMC (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

To understand how IMC can improve the business and its approach towards the target audience, there is a need to understand the differences between the new communication platforms and the traditional communication channels. Jue et al. (2010) and Holmström and Wikberg (2010) as well as Carson and Gilmore (2000) confirm these characteristics of social media as they consider social media as following; primarily it is its scope, i.e. the ability to spread messages in a short period of time. A second characteristic of social media is its availability, which in principle means that anyone could access the medium through a negligible cost. Ease of use is also a critical factor in social media. It is easier to start up a blog that can get a large audience than to start up a TV channel or newspaper, for example. Finally, the freshness of media is significant in terms of the speed to update. A blog or website can be updated in a few moments, compared to a newspaper or book (Holmström & Wikberg, 2010). Kietzmann et al. (2011) point out in the same discussion, social media creates enormously interactive platforms by bringing together individuals and creating communities. People and firms use social media to share, co-create, and debate user-generated content. Gustafsson (2012) agrees on the aspect of speed, as he describes this issue that “the difference between traditional media and social media, I would say, is speed. Many believe in the good old days when informing the recipient was not complicated. Today, everyone knows before it even becomes public. Today, people know before it even becomes public, therefore, communication today is not as single minded as it was in the “golden days”, most communication nowadays are more or less an interactive form of communication. Thus, you have to be quick in providing the right information to the target audience.” Additionally,
Gustafsson (2012) explains, understanding the differences between these platforms can be problematic if the knowledge of social media use is missing.

When clarifying the differences between the traditional communication and social media, it is suggested that the firm must define certain elements when utilizing social media. Carter (2011) argues that the elements of the communication approach have to be carefully managed and organized, to appear with a consistent message towards the company’s environment. Gustafsson from Jobbolaget (2012) states that being professional is one of the absolute most important elements in social media since this can “catch up to you” if you do not act professionally towards the audience and the potential customers.

In Jobbolaget’s efforts, aiming towards interactive communications, there are many ways to progress this through social media. Gustafsson (2012) argues that on the one hand, this is an ongoing discussion in their company and they are still trying to improve the situation of their interactive communications. On the other hand, the answers on their social media page are dense and therefore meet the terms, which are also confirmed by Kietzmann et al. (2011). The authors argue that social media generates vastly interactive platforms by bringing together individuals and creating communities. People and organizations use social media to share, co-create, and discuss user-generated content. Moreover, Gurau (2008) described the social media characteristics as vastly interactive.

As already described in the previous analysis of Apping, there are common challenges when the Internet – in the form of social media platforms – is utilized for marketing reasons in businesses. Businesses have to face, at first responsibilities, which are not clearly defined (Chaffey et al., 2009). According to Gustafsson (2012), the responsibility of running and maintaining the overall responsibility of the platforms has been given to the CEO of Jobbolaget. Nonetheless, responsibility is also given to everyone else in the firm. Therefore, everyone has the responsibility to update and add certain things on the company’s social media platform.

Additionally, Fink, Zerfass and Linke (2011) emphasize that work is often being prioritized and other activities are considered more important, than for example developing e-marketing (Winkholfer & Houghton; as cited in Gilmore, Gallagher, & Henry, 2007, p. 237). However, it is also possible that in SMEs there is a lack of understanding of communication concepts and required skills (Huang & Brown, 1999). “Even though the use of social media might not be optimum, nonetheless, with regard to practical training, we had a guy who has lectured on it for us, furthermore we are also self-taught” as stated by Gustafsson (2012).

**INTEGRATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA INTO MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS**

In order to utilize social media in the communication process, one must implement and integrate social media as a part of the overall communication strategy, as further emphasized by the literature (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). The authors further identify a lack of guidance for SMEs when it comes to implement social media communication into the integrated marketing communications (IMC) strategies.

Jobbolaget works towards integrating social media into their overall communication at all times. For example, linking their Facebook page with all marketing, since social media is considered as a crucial platform in future communication, even if no further discussion has been planned for future plans in integrating social media with the traditional communication (Gustafsson, 2012). Egan (2007) adds to this view that IMC can be interpreted as enabling
various communication messages to work together in order to come up with a unified message. Semenik on the other hand, describes integrated marketing communications as the process of utilizing promotional tools in a combined way to create synergy by having a holistic view (as cited in Egan, 2007, p. 338). Moreover, Holm (2006) defines IMC as implementing and controlling all marketing communication elements, which efficiently and economically have an influence on transactions between the firm and its target group.

Integrating social media into the progression of communication is in constant progress as pointed out above. In contrast, organizations must be aware of how the power of the social network platforms can be utilized to benefit from it. E-technology, such as social media, therefore can be a helpful way for SMEs to expand their marketing activities in a relatively cost-effective way (Carter, 2011). Awareness of the social media audience is believed to be confirmed according to Gustafsson (2012), based on the interaction and feedback received by the target audience, to being aware of the company’s existence as well as what is being offered. As pointed out in the discussion, awareness of communication activities can be increased and information about target groups can be collected (Gilmore, 2011). Social media can also support small firms in improving their reputation, building on their brand or responding to customers and further stakeholder feedback (Jones, 2010).

In the unceasing process of developing a solid IMC with the target audience, it suggested by Sparkes and Thomas that it is crucial to have individual goals and budgets in order to improve the company’s communication on social media (as cited in Simpson, Padmore, Taylor, & Frecknall-Hughes, 2006, p. 379; Kotler et al. 1999; Chaffey et al., 2009; Fink, Zerfass, & Linke, 2011). A view is being shared as they emphasize that SMEs often lack clearly defined budgets. Moreover, the authors stress, the social media budget is not sufficient or it is wasted (Ibid). According to Gustafsson (2012), Jobbolaget has formed some small goals, addressing for example certain fans and followers. Jobbolaget believes it is important to appear in the right way and the right place. They hold this view, even though Jobbolaget does not have specific goals at the moment specifically designed for social media. Nevertheless, defining small goals and embracing Jobbolaget reminds the company to keep improving their work (Ibid).

**Benefits of Social Media Utilization in Marketing Communications**

Organizations need to be conscious of how the power of the social network platforms can be exploited to benefit from it – especially since social media is an increasingly appealing and cheap way for SMEs, in comparison with traditional marketing, in order to communicate effectively (Carter, 2011). Fink, Linke and Zerfass (2011) confirm these aspects in their study where they point out that only a minority of managers evaluates their expertise in social media as high and there are still conclusive concepts in terms of an organization wide social media strategy missing. A noticeable benefit for Jobbolaget of using social media has been the reply received and the feedback they have, of what is good or not and when something is communicated by the target audience. Gustafsson (2012) further underlines, it has added some value in the company in a sense that it has added clients.

In addition to that, it can be a problem if the organization does not realize the value brought by social media marketing – which can be linked to the fact that there is a lack of measuring the results of social media utilization as there is an absence of integration of social media into other communication activities (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick, Mayer, & Johnston, 2009). According to Gustafsson (2012) from Jobbolaget, there are no specific efforts conducted to
measure how much the use of social media adds value in the firm. Nonetheless, they believe it has contributed somehow.

5.1.4 Success Education

SOCIAL MEDIA UTILIZATION IN THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS
For firms it is crucial to choose an appropriate media source to achieve a successful communication (Kotler et al., 1999). In the case of Success Education with its owner Madeleine Magnusson, these platforms are Facebook and Twitter – while the main focus is on Facebook in the company’s marketing communications. Magnusson (2012) admits that for Twitter her full understanding is inadequate.

The literature mentions enabling communication, with a special focus on participation of the target audience, as an example for the main purpose for implementing social media in a firm’s marketing communications. This amongst others, includes communicating back and connecting with other people (Jue et al., 2010; Smith, 2007). Gurau (2008) adds that the topic of interactivity has become crucial, as also through social media, several opportunities for interactive communication have been provided. Moreover, Gilmore (2011) explains that social media enables firms to increase their communication activities. The goal of Success Education matches with the theoretical thought. The firm’s intention is to create an interaction and to refer between people that know each other. Additionally, the target group should be informed about the products and services of Success Education, as exemplified by the owner Magnusson (2012).

The literature moreover recommends being aware of the message that has to be communicated to the target audience, in order to achieve an effective communication. This is a crucial aspect, as it also influences the message format (Kotler et al., 1999). Magnusson (2012) takes this issue into consideration, as she points out that social media implies a shorter communication, for examples by using shorter sentences. Additionally, social media messages do not inherit a time gap, compared to the communication via other sources.

Firms, as pointed out by Smith (2007) and Kietzmann et al. (2012), must also seek to earn a good reputation when they are participating in marketing communications via social media platforms. The importance of the reputation has also been investigated by Palmer and Koenig-Lewis (2009), as they mention that negative messages might spread rapidly over the social media platforms. The transparency of these platforms, finally imply that published information can be accessed, read and spread quickly to a large audience (Gurau, 2008). Success Education is aware of this topic, as they consider acting serious as a crucial issue. Magnusson (2012) explains that one should keep reliability in mind, as this has become important – in terms of the person, as well as for the offered service. “Reliability is important in my profession since that’s what I’m judged on” (Magnusson, 2012). The reputation of Success Education for example is also increased by giving free services to the customers in order to create value for them.

Through interactive communication via social media platforms, feedback can be collected, as pointed out by Duncan and Moriarty (1998). Kotler et al. (1999) mention collecting feedback as a vital aspect in effective communication. Schultz (1996) recognized that due to the interactive communication, senders became receivers and receivers became senders. Finally, the information flows in both directions. Particularly through social media, this two-way
communication can be enabled. Success Education pays attention to this, as they publish a weekly newsletter. Magnusson (2012) explains that they are thanking people for comments and feedback – which is helpful for the company to improve the work towards the clients and maintain interaction. She explains “I ensure that I’m always thankful for feedback or comments”. This corresponds with the findings of Palmer and Koenig-Lewis (2009). They explain that by inviting feedback, firms can recognize negative comments about their company, respectively regarding their offered products. Finally, they can set improvements to meet the customers’ needs.

The idea of defining responsibilities for maintaining the social media platforms (Fink, Zerfass, & Linke, 2011) can overlooked in the case of Success Education, as Madeleine Magnusson, the owner of the firm, is the only person in the organization. Therefore, she is responsible for all activities in the organization. This fits with the explanation of Carson and Gilmore (2000) as they explain, managers of newly-established SMEs tend to be more like generalists in various areas.

The study of Fink, Zerfass and Linke (2011) moreover states that social media skills are often insufficient and training on how to utilize these platforms are inadequate. Huang and Brown (1999) state that in SMEs there is often a lack of understanding of communication concepts. Magnusson (2012) fits with the first part of the study’s findings, as she admits “I do not believe that I have gained all the necessary knowledge regarding social media. There is so much to learn about social media and I maybe have focused only on the surface of its potential. Therefore, I can do much more about social media”. On the other hand, her situation regarding training on social media does not fit with the theory, as she took part in training by coaches and friends. As social media offers a great potential, for the future of Success Education, it is planned to train employees in social media (Ibid).

For an effective communication, Kotler et al. (1999), emphasize the need to identify the target group because this affects the content, as well as the structure of the message. The target group of Success Education consists of companies that consider investments into the health of their employees as crucial. Additionally, private clients are part of the target audience. Success Education is aware of the need to identify the audience, as Magnusson (2012), explains, some of the firm’s target group is not on Facebook.

**INTEGRATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA INTO MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS**

Marketing communication activities should be integrated into the overall communication strategy, as pointed out in the literature (Chaffey, 2004). Firms should seek a holistic view by utilizing promotion tools in a combined, synergetic way (Semenik; as cited in Egan, 2007, p. 338). A unified message should be achieved, as various communication messages work together (Egan, 2007). Success Education believes they meet this requirement, as they send out 500 mails through a mailing system on a weekly basis, while also the followers on Facebook are being informed (Magnusson, 2012).

The literature strongly recommends defining clear goals for the marketing communications via social media (Fink, Zerfass, & Linke, 2011). In addition to that, firms should use specific budgets for these platforms as well (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick, Mayer, & Johnston, 2009). Weinrauch, Mann, Robinson and Pharr (1991) hold the view that some SMEs may lack a strategic orientation in terms of marketing. As pointed out by Magnusson of Success Education (2012), a goal has been defined for social media utilization (2012), as she seeks to double the firm’s followers on Facebook in order to be able to connect to more people. This is
in accordance with Jones (2010). He explains that by social media, awareness of communication activities can be increased and information about target groups can be collected.

Regarding the budget, the owner Magnusson (2012), admits that Success Education has not defined one, but considers this topic as crucial for the future. This aspect in the company is oppositional to the recommendations by the literature (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick, Mayer, & Johnston, 2009). Also Gurau (2008) has pointed out that budgets are sufficient in communication activities.

**Benefits of Social Media Utilization in Marketing Communications**

That a firm ought to recognize the benefits brought by marketing communications via social media has also been identified by Chaffey, Ellis, Chadwick, Mayer and Johnston (2009). They furthermore suggest being able to measure the performance on social media platforms and the comprised benefits. Also Fink, Zerfass and Linke (2011) share this view as their study highlights the need to measure the advantages of social media platforms. Magnusson (2012) could recognize a value for Success Education, brought by social media in marketing communications. She explains that she could receive clients through social media and another benefit is that the communication can be conducted faster. Additionally, it is possible to increase the contact with the clients. She summarizes that “in that sense, social media has increased and added a value in my business” (Magnusson, 2012).

Regarding clearly defined budgets for social media communications, she argues that she is aware of the existence of them, but they are not applied in Success Education: “I have not used any performance indicators but I’m aware of the existence of these tools on social media networks” (Magnusson, 2012).

5.2 Cross-case analysis

After having matched the empirical findings with the theoretical framework, in this chapter, the four cases will be compared with each other to increase the understanding in terms of the purpose of this study. By following this approach, significant results, as for example patterns, similarities and contrasts between the cases can be discovered, as pointed out by Miles and Huberman (1994) and further explained initially in the methodology chapter.

The accomplishment of the cross-case analysis is carried out in accordance with the three research questions, which have been established to get a deeper understanding of the role of social media in the communication process of SMEs. As described, different elements of the theoretical framework have been taken to further investigate the research questions. In order to being able to compare the cases, these elements have been transferred into three matrices that are utilized in the following chapter to further facilitate the comparison of the cases. The first part focuses on describing the utilization of social media in the communication process of SMEs, while the second part investigates the integration of social media into the concept of integrated marketing communications. In the third segment, the benefits of social utilization in marketing communications of SMEs are being studied.
5.2.1 Social media utilization in the communication process

To get a better overview in order to analyze the cases in terms of the first research question, "How can the utilization of social media in the communication process of SMEs be described?", a matrix has been created. This is sufficient in order to be able to recognize patterns, similarities or contrasts among the four cases as recommended (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Table 2: Matrix for social media utilization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platforms</th>
<th>KeySeeker</th>
<th>Apping</th>
<th>Jobb:lenat</th>
<th>Success Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose for utilization</td>
<td>Advertising company where people search for problems, getting great attention by using various platforms, helps optimizing social media use</td>
<td>Advertising company, promoting products and offers, convincing audience about quality, meeting potential clients, networking, client can reach firm</td>
<td>Communication, research, understanding social media use of society, adapting with audience, interacting, quick information acquisition, spread information to large audience</td>
<td>Interacting, advertising company and products/services, referring between people, increasing reliability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences (traditional commun./social media)</td>
<td>Social media enables two-way communication, catches attention better</td>
<td>Social media more personal through interaction, less formal, more direct</td>
<td>Social media knowledge needs to exist, social media is faster (people have to be informed more quickly)</td>
<td>Social media is shorter, more interaction, no time gap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elements for trustworthiness/seriousness</td>
<td>Trustworthiness not a problem. Spread information correctly more important</td>
<td>Acting professional and personal to respect people (try not to offend them by wrong responses)</td>
<td>Acting professional</td>
<td>Acting serious, reliability (service and personal level), giving freebies to create value for customer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring two-way communication</td>
<td>Working towards interactive communication, social media helps to improve this, responding as much as possible, working to understand key phrases to increase search results</td>
<td>Not much interactive communication through social media, encouraging people to visit webpages and checking out products, mainly one-way communication</td>
<td>Ongoing discussion in company; still improving, satisfied with the responses via Facebook, more focused action could improve interactivity</td>
<td>Weekly newsletter with inspiration, thanking for comments and feedback, feedback helps to improve work towards clients and how to interact, a lot to improve, likes to have more feedback and interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibilities for social media</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Currently a problem; no specific persons, falls off due to loss of track in terms of social media presence (because of work and pressure by customers)</td>
<td>Mainly CEO, others have responsibilities as well</td>
<td>Owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media skills</td>
<td>For current requirements skills are seen as enough</td>
<td>Skills are considered above average, but recognizing space for improvements (essential for future growth), plans training on staff, plans future training on staff (crucial for market)</td>
<td>Sufficient enough</td>
<td>Recognize need for improvement, does not have all the required knowledge, still learning about social media (only basic skills), plans future training on staff (crucial for market)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge acquisition</td>
<td>Workshops, reading books</td>
<td>Recommendation by experts, learning by fans and followers, workshops + lectures (of poor quality)</td>
<td>Trainings, self-taught</td>
<td>Training, coaches, friends</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As can be seen in the matrix, the social media platform that is most commonly used by the studied SMEs, is Facebook. A significant result in terms of the platforms is the findings concerning KeySeeker. Compared to the other cases, they hold the view that they are currently not able to find their target group through social media. Even though they put limited attention of Facebook in their marketing communications, they prefer Google AdWords in order to be where the people are searching for answers to their problems (Nilsson, 2012). Google AdWords cannot be considered as social media, as it does not match with the characteristics of a social media platforms. Kietzmann et al. (2011) described that through social media, content can be shared, created or discussed. Moreover, it does not meet with the description of Holmström and Wikberg (2010), who define social media as enabling social interaction. Google AdWords can be categorized as a special form of Internet-based advertising, with a major focus on keyword-advertising (Google, 2012).

Regarding the purpose for social media utilization, Blackshaw and Nazzaro (2006) mention that these platforms enable a firm to inform and educate their consumers about its products and services. This issue has been confirmed by the study, as the firms predominantly have described that they want to advertise their company, to present their products and services or to meet potential clients.

New insights into the reason for adapting social media in marketing communications could be gained though KeySeeker and Jobbolaget have exemplified that they aim to optimize their social media practice by using various platforms (Nilsson, 2012), by getting familiar with how society uses these platforms (Gustafsson, 2012).

The analysis moreover shows that the firms hold the view that social media has led to a less formal, more direct, shorter and faster communication. This is in accordance with the explanation of Holmström and Wikberg (2010). They emphasize the scope of social media as the most common characteristic. By this, they mean the ability to spread a message in a short period of time. Additionally, they highlight the speed as a significant issue (Ibid).

Additionally, the results show that the SMEs are aware of the issue of interaction as a main distinguishing factor in regard to traditional communication, compared with communication that includes social media platforms. That complies with Duncan and Moriarty (1998). They have mentioned this issue, as they state social media implies an interactive connection between organizations and their target groups, which amongst others, enables feedback. Also Schultz (1996) investigated that issue and stated that through social media, senders became receivers and receivers became senders.

Noticeable, however, is that despite the awareness regarding the issue of interaction brought by social media, the firms have not yet completely ensured a two-way communication. Moreover, during the interviews, a high level of uncertainty was recognizable. Apping states, they do not have much interactive communication (Öhman, 2012), while in Jobbolaget there is still an ongoing discussion regarding this aspect and they see a need for improvement (Gustafsson, 2012). Also Magnusson (2012) of Success Education recognizes that there is a lot to improve, especially in terms of collecting more feedback and having more interaction. In KeySeeker the situation is similar. Nilsson (2012) explains that they are currently working towards an interactive communication.
Another meaningful result that can be found when comparing the cases, is the respondents’ perception in terms of seriousness and trustworthiness. Even though Nilsson from KeySeeker (2012) considers that trustworthiness is not a problem, he mentions the importance to spread information correctly as a vital point. In spite of his view regarding trustworthiness, his statement that correctly spread information is crucial, can be referred back to trustworthiness, as these issues are strongly related with each other. All the other firms also hold the view that a professional and a serious appearance are the most important elements to act in a trustworthy way. The findings are in accordance with the literature that holds the view that a good reputation is something that needs to be earned by a firm (Smith, 2007). The same thought is held by Jones (2010) who described that social media can support firms in improving their reputation.

Öhman (2012) from Apping and Magnusson (2012) from Success Education have defined the issue of professionalism further. Öhman for example describes that one should take care to respect people so as not to offend them by inaccurate responses. Magnusson believes, that in terms of professionalism, reliability is a vital matter, because this is the basis for being judged.

The literature has highlighted the lack of social media skills in firms, as well as missing training on how to utilize social media (Fink, Zerfass, & Linke, 2011). Also Gurau (2008) has emphasized the need of having functional specialization. This thought is being shared by Huang and Brown (1999), as they hold the view, in SMEs there is a lack of understanding communication concepts and acquiring the required skills. When having analyzed the cases, it is recognizable that the firms are aware of the space and need for improvement in terms of social media skills. This can be derived from KeySeeker, as Nilsson (2012) considers the “current requirements” as enough. Also Öhman (2012) from Apping knows that in order to grow in the future, improvements have to be made – especially in terms of training of staff or learning from practical experiences of other firms. In Success Education, the skills are considered as “basis skills” (Magnusson, 2012), while it was admitted that not all the required knowledge has been acquired. Future training of staff is also intended (Ibid).

These results in terms of the social media skills can be related to the findings of the literature. Carson and Gilmore (2000) have pointed out that especially managers of newly-established SMEs tend be more generalists, rather than specialists in various areas. This description meets with the cases, as the firms can be considered quite new.

The fact that training is missing, cannot be confirmed. All the firms have put efforts into acquiring social media knowledge, as they took park in workshops, training or coaching. Moreover, knowledge has been self-taught through reading specific literature.

A significant result is that all studied cases are in an ongoing learning process regarding social media. KeySeeker is aiming at optimizing social media use by utilizing various platforms (Nilsson, 2012), while Apping learns by observing fans and followers (Öhman, 2012). In Jobbolaget, Gustafsson (2012) has explained that the platforms have been implemented to understand the social media use of society and in order to adapt with the audience. Also Success Education is constantly learning by practicing marketing communications via social media. Magnusson (2012) uses feedback to improve the work towards a better interaction with the clients.
5.2.2 Integration of social media into marketing communications

In this chapter, the studied cases are being matched in order to analyze them regarding the second research question “**How has social media been integrated into the marketing communications of SMEs?**” Like for the analysis of the first research question, a matrix has been designed to enhance the detection of patterns, similarities as well as contrasting issues in the findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

**Table 3: Matrix for social media integration**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Integration into IMC</th>
<th>Target groups</th>
<th>Goals for social media</th>
<th>SME budget</th>
<th>No specific budget, but considered important for future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Small goals; crucial to appear in the right way and the right place, but no detailed specific goals, but these are areas to improve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No specific budget</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Applicability</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Double listing of followers on Facebook until the end of the year as to connect to more people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No specific budget</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job/Position</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Found target group because they got feedback, target group is aware of the presence, (good responses)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No specific budget</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Education</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Part of the target group cannot be found via social media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No specific budget</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name/Address</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Linking in Facebook marketing activities, even social media is crucial, no plans for integration into traditional communications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No specific budget</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Note/Need</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Social media is a single issue (therefore no integration), used to social media despite little available time, rarely using classical press release</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No specific budget</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marketing Budget</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Problematic, unsure if actual target group can be reached via social media, trying to connect to clients via friends, networks, families, may not be used at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No specific budget</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marketing Alpha</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Cannot find target group via social media (because of product characteristic, not different for future products of firm)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No specific budget</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Marketing Budget    |               |                        |            | Not much strategic value, social media inappropriate for current products | Using specific budget for social media in marketing, yet online budget considered unimportant for current stage |
|---------------------|--------------|------------------------|------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
|                     |              |                        |            | No specific budget                                     |

| Marketing Budget    |               |                        |            | Not much strategic value, social media inappropriate for current products | Using specific budget for social media in marketing, yet online budget considered unimportant for current stage |
|---------------------|--------------|------------------------|------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
|                     |              |                        |            | No specific budget                                     |
The literature has emphasized the need to work towards an integrated communications concept, which means combining promotional tools to create synergy (Semenik; as cited in Egan, 2007, p. 338). Smith et al. have described this process as managing and controlling all marketing communications in order to ensure a consistent message (as cited in Holm, 2006, p. 24). Schultz (1996) has also emphasized this issue, as he points out the necessity of being able to manage the wide range of information sources and resources of an organization. Finally, as described by the literature, social media platforms have to be included in the communication mix and in the concept of IMC (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

When analyzing and comparing the four cases, it can be seen that the results vary among the firms. While two organizations, Apping and Jobbolaget, have not integrated social media, KeySeeker and Success Education are working to achieve consistency. Öhman (2012) from Apping, even considers social media as a single issue, which supersedes its integration.

In order to ensure a consistent communication, as highlighted by the literature (Smith et al.; as cited in Holm, 2006, p. 24; Kotler et al., 1999), firms moreover have to be aware of their target group, as this influences the structure and the content of a message (Kotler et al., 1999). It is perceivable that this issue is an obstacle for three of the studied firms. Keyseeker explains that they cannot find their target group and they relate this fact to the specific characteristics of their current product (Nilsson, 2012). Also Apping is unsure, if their actual target group can be reached via social media (Öhman, 2012). Magnusson (2012) from Success Education also admits that parts of her target group cannot be found on social media platforms. Only Jobbolaget believes that they have reached and determined their audience, as they were able to collect valuable responses (Gustafsson, 2012).

The literature additionally has emphasized the need to set goals in communications (Kotler et al., 1999) and that SMEs may lack a strategic orientation in terms of marketing (Weinrauch, Mann, Robinson, & Pharr, 1991). In the analysis, it is noticeable that the majority of the cases – three out of four – fits with the theoretical description in terms of a lack of strategic orientation. Nilsson (2012) from KeySeeker admitted that there is not much strategic work done. This can be referred back to the fact that he considers social media inappropriate for the current products. Öhman (2012) has exemplified that currently, no goals are existing, however they are desirable for Apping’s future. Gustafsson (2012) points out that even though in Jobbolaget small goals have been set, detailed and specific goals are desirable and he recognizes space for improvements. Success Education has set goals for their Facebook page and described them in a measurable way (Magnusson, 2012).

As an obstacle in terms of achieving the concept of integrated marketing communications, in the literature, a lack of budget has been determined (Gurau, 2008). The study of Fink, Zerfass and Linke (2011) has discovered a lack of specific budgets for social media in marketing communications. Three of the analyzed cases are in accordance with these theoretical findings. Only KeySeeker has defined a budget, even though social media is interpreted as unimportant for the current stage of the company (Nilsson, 2012). By Apping and Success Education, a budget is seen as crucial for the future (Öhman, 2012; Magnusson, 2012).
5.2.3 Benefits of social media utilization in marketing communications

The last subchapter of the cross-case analysis focuses on the question “**What are the benefits of social media utilization in SMEs?**” – which is the third research question in this study. Also in order to analyze this part, a matrix has been created as to compare the findings regarding particularly crucial results (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

*Table 4: Matrix for benefits of social media*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits of social media in marketing communications</th>
<th>Measuring performance/benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social media inappropriate for current products (prior to product development)</td>
<td>Facebook, clicks and views considered as a good way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media inappropriate for current products (after product development)</td>
<td>Not able to measure it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value gain by customer acquisition faster and more personal contact</td>
<td>No specific measurements, sometimes informed by customers about how they noticed the firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value creation through responses, feedback and customer acquisition</td>
<td>No measurement, but aware of existence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook and Twitter cheap way to communicate (no special words needed), fits with firm’s requirements, important issue for the future</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits by attaining social media for future products (more strategically work on it)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As pointed out in the literature review, scientists have asserted that a careful planning of marketing communications is vital to avoid insufficient resource utilization (Chaffey, 2004). This includes also being aware of the benefits brought by social media use in the communication process and also being capable of measuring the results. The study of Fink, Zerfass and Linke (2011) pointed out that there is a lack in terms of performance measurement. Moreover, the literature describes that there might be the problem that firms do not realize the value brought by social media marketing (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick, Mayer, & Johnston, 2009).

Gilmore (2011) has highlighted that for SMEs a benefit of social media utilization can be that there are opportunities to expand their business in a relatively cost-effective way. Additionally, these platforms allow the firm to increase their awareness regarding communication activities and information about their target groups can be collected (Ibid). Jones (2010) shares this view, as he further explains, social media can help small firms in improving their reputation or responding to customers and other stakeholders. By allowing and using conversations and feedback, companies are able to set improvements for the future (Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2009).

The findings of the conducted study meet with the literature’s described benefits of social media utilization, but are not in accordance with the aspect that firms are not aware of the advantages brought by social media utilization in marketing communications. The majority of the analyzed cases describe their benefits in accordance with the literature’s description. They have pointed out that their realized benefits of social media utilization in marketing communications are the cheap ways to communicate, the value creation through responses and feedback, as well as customer acquisition. Also a faster and more personal contact has been described as a benefit (Magnusson, 2012).

Only KeySeeker – contrary to the other cases – does not benefit by social media so far, as these platforms are considered inappropriate for the current products. Achieved results could not be gained. Contrary to the other cases, they see social media as consuming too much time and effort. However, Nilsson (2012) recognizes the possibility that the firm might benefit by social media in the communication process in promoting future products.

Yet, the findings match with the literature, as the results show that firms are not really able to measure the benefits brought by social media in the communication process. Even though the companies are aware of the benefits, the measurement can be interpreted as an obstacle. The study shows that for firms it is difficult to relate success back to social media, as could be seen at Apping and Jobbolaget (Öhman, 2012; Gustafsson, 2012). KeySeeker mentioned the inappropriateness of social media for the current products (Nilsson, 2012), but on the other hand, considers clicks and visitors on the Facebook page as a good way to measure social media performance.
5.3 Revised theoretical framework

After having analyzed the cases in the context of the theory and after having compared them with each other as to identify crucial patterns, similarities or contrasting issues, it was possible to adjust the initially established theoretical framework:

![Revised theoretical framework](image)

*Figure 4: Revised theoretical framework*

The requirements have to be expanded, it could be seen that the aspect of professionalism, which includes seriousness and a respectful appearance and communication, has been considered to be a crucial factor, influencing a successful two-way communication via social media in marketing communications.

Moreover, the analysis highlighted the role of Facebook within the different social media platforms. It is the most commonly utilized platform in marketing communications of the studied cases. Besides, Twitter and blogs can be mentioned as well, while the other aforementioned platforms, are not used by the studied SMEs.

Additionally, as the analysis of KeySeeker has shown, it is worth taking the firm’s specific industry into consideration, to describe the social media utilization in marketing communications. As explained by its owner Nilsson (2012), the absence of success in social media utilization can be referred back to the product characteristics. To what extent this statement can be generalized, would be worth investigating further, as will be recommended in the conclusion of this study.
6 Conclusion

After having analyzed the cases, it is possible to provide an answer on the research questions, and in doing so, the purpose of this study will be fulfilled. The first part of the conclusion focuses on answering the research questions to describe the role of social media in the communication process of SMEs, while the second part outlines the implications of the study’s findings in terms of the managerial perspective in view of the analyzed firms. The last part of this chapter recommends areas for future research, which have been considered interesting, based on the study’s results.

6.1 Findings

In the beginning of this study it has been described that social media has led to a change in the power balance between firms and their target groups. Therefore, the influence of the consumers has increased significantly. Through social media, value can be created and added, but it can also be destroyed quickly (Jones, 2010). For businesses, this means, social media in marketing communications need to be integrated into the existing concept, to present a consistent message (Grönroos, 2004).

The theory, moreover, has shown that firms, especially SMEs, must be aware of the requirements of a fruitful two-way communication via social media with their target group. At the same time, there are several obstacles that have to be taken seriously by the organizations in their process of communicating via social media platforms.

Therefore, the initiators of the study have set the purpose of their research on gaining a better understanding of the role of social media in the communication process of SMEs. To make this complex issue understandable, three research questions have been developed – they will be answered in the following three subchapters. In doing so, a description of the role of social media in SMEs’ communication process is provided.

6.1.1 Social media utilization in the communication process

The study has shown that Facebook is the most commonly used social media platform by the examined SMEs. Other than informing and educating customers and other target groups about their firm, its products and services, SMEs utilize social media in their marketing communications to learn about social media usage. The SMEs want to optimize their social media utilization and they aim to study social media practice.

The analyzed firms are aware of the differences of social media in marketing communications, compared with traditional ways of communicating. They characterize social media marketing as less formal, more direct, shorter and faster. Additionally, SMEs perceive social media as more interactive.

Despite the awareness of interaction, it is recognizable that the studied SMEs have not yet fully ensured a two-way communication with their target groups. However, they recognize a need for improvement in this area, to be able to create more interactions, which include responses and feedback.
The SMEs know that they have to act professionally and seriously on the social media platforms in their communications with regard to their reputation. Correctly spread messages and a respectful treatment of the audience are seen as vital. Moreover, reliability is a crucial issue for firms communicating via social media platforms.

Regarding social media skills, it is significant that SMEs see space and need for improvement, however, for the current utilization, the knowledge is interpreted as basic and enough. It is noticeable that all SMEs are in an ongoing learning process. The study has further shown that SMEs have put efforts into their knowledge acquisition in terms of social media. They took part in training, workshops, or coaching, while knowledge has also been self-taught.

6.1.2 Integration of social media into marketing communications

In terms of the integration of social media into the marketing communications of SMEs, the results differ. While some SMEs are currently working as to achieve consistency, others have not integrated social media in their overall concepts and moreover, the studied SMEs view social media as a single issue with no further need of integration.

A vital issue regarding the integration are target groups, as they influence the message structure and content (Kotler et al., 1999). For the majority of the studied SMEs, this issue is an obstacle. One SME could not find its target group via social media, while another is unsure if the right target audience can be reached with these platforms. A third SME could only find a part of its audience.

Integrating social media also requires setting goals for the utilization of these platforms in marketing communications. A lack of strategic orientation could be determined with this study. Even though small goals might have been set, SMEs still lack detailed and specific targets. Besides, budgets for social media are missing, but are considered crucial for the firms´ future.

6.1.3 Benefits of social media utilization in marketing communications

Amongst others, to avoid an insufficient resource utilization, careful planning is important (Chaffey, 2004). For firms, this means they have to be aware of the benefits brought by social media use in marketing communications. Additionally, it is crucial to be able to measure the benefits brought by social media platforms (Chaffey et al., 2009).

With the exception of one SME, who holds the view that they are not able to reach their target group through social media, which finally implies they cannot benefit by its utilization, SMEs are aware of the value. Firms have described social media in their communications to become cheaper, and by responses and feedback, value could be gained. Moreover, customers could be acquired and the platforms enable a faster communication and a more personal contact.

Even though the study has shown that SMEs are aware of the benefits of social media utilization in marketing communications, the analysis has shown that currently, it is difficult for the firms to relate success back to social media, despite the utilization of indicators such as visitors and fans.
6.2 Managerial implications

Based on the study’s findings, implications for the managerial area can be derived. As has been mentioned in the methodology, that due to the limited number of analyzed cases, a statistical generalization is neither possible nor intended, the presented implications below address the managerial practice of the studied SMEs.

One practical implication that arises from the study’s findings is that the investigated SMEs are called upon constantly to work on improving their social media utilization and skills. Therefore, the suggestion of Keyseeker should be kept in mind. Its owner Nilsson (2012) recommends firms to try out various platforms, to determine how to get the biggest attention. By this, for the explored organizations, it is possible to understand how society uses social media, so as to adapt with them. Furthermore, the interaction with the target group, which is a vital issue, can be increased and a two-way communication can be created (Gustafsson, 2012). Additionally, acquiring the necessary knowledge can contribute to the requirement that SMEs have to act professionally and respectfully in their marketing communications via social media.

The literature has pointed out that in SMEs’ marketing communication strategies, which also includes the concept of IMC, often has been developed within constrained resources and the normal pressure imposed by the daily business (Carson & Gilmore, 2000). The study has shown that some SMEs fit within this particular description, as the integration of social media into the overall communication concept is missing. Therefore, the interviewed SME managers should – also having the resource constraints and the daily pressure in mind – be aware of the need to create synergy among their messages, to promote a uniform message towards their target groups.

This is also crucial in terms of the target group. Even though the studied SMEs currently are struggling in finding all of their target groups via social media, it is crucial for them to recognize the essential knowledge, which is being able to successfully utilize social media in their communications. As social media is a relatively new type of communication media, for the managers of the investigated SMEs, it is crucial to be up-to-date regarding the changing communication environment.

In order to avoid an insufficient allocation of resources in the explored SME, their mangers, moreover, should put more efforts into defining budgets for their social media utilization in marketing communications, as this area has only been poorly developed so far. Specific goals for social media communications can help them in creating these budgets.

Even though the respondents of the studied SMEs are capable of recognizing the value brought by social media use in their communications, they have to try to relate this value back to social platforms. This could be realized for example by developing the two-way communication and its interaction further. Customers, by way of example, could be asked how they have been alerted to the company when they have bought a product or called upon the SME’s service.
6.3 Recommendation for future research

Due to circumstances such as limited time and the defined purpose of this study, the given research project has not been able to include all possible areas and implications in terms of social media utilization. Thus, in the following section, the authors of this study will suggest possible future research areas.

Studies could be carried out in the field of measuring the performance and the benefits of social media platforms in marketing communications. In doing so, it would be imaginable to define specific performance indicators that fit for social media. Then these indicators could be empirically tested on their applicability. Moreover, existing performance indicators from other areas could be taken and their practical application on social media could be empirically tested.

In the study, KeySeeker has clearly outlined that for their current products, social media in marketing communications is not appropriate. Nilsson (2012), the owner, holds the view that the success of social media utilization in marketing communications is dependent on the characteristics of the products and services. Moreover, according to him, the industry also has an influence on a successful social media use in a firm’s communication. A future research project could focus on analyzing the success of social media utilization and its variation in terms of different industries and their products and services. It would be interesting to see if and how a successful social media utilization differs among different types of industries and product or service characteristics.

As this study has been conducted with a focus on the role of social media in the communication process of SMEs, future researchers could decide to focus on the role of social media in other areas of marketing. One possible project could be carried out to examine the relevance of social media in the product policy of SMEs. Research could for example study the role of social media in terms of product innovation management or product modifications and improvements. This is considered to be an important field of future research because through social media and its interaction, firms have an opportunity to recognize fields of improvement by analyzing the responses and feedback.

Moreover, the authors of this study consider it as interesting to recommend research which allows a statistical generalization of the role of social media in the communication process of SMEs, to match the results with the given study.
References


**Appendix**

- **Appendix 1:** Most common social media platforms ................................. 67
- **Appendix 2:** Interview questions................................................................. 69
- **Appendix 3:** Interview questions – follow-up interview ....................... 70
- **Appendix 4:** Information letter about project ............................................... 71
Appendix 1: Most common social media platforms

**Wikipedia**
Wikipedia was founded in 2001 and is an online encyclopedia that is free and accessible to all. The information is created and developed by its users through writing on Wikipedia (2012). RSS is a service, designed to link the information/content in several different places and combine them. This means that the user does not have to look for new information; the information will be compiled to the user instead. This is a common and popular service in the blogs, even websites can also be a social medium. ‘Linked in’ is primarily used for networking, both among individuals and by companies. The field lies in the use of users' social networks to make contacts (Holmström & Wikberg, 2010).

**Blogs**
One of the main channels of social media and which are strongly associated with the concept are blogs. Blogs are a shortened form of the word weblog, which resembles a diary in which the text is often characterized by short dialogues. It is common for a blog to contain pictures and videos and so on. Blogging has also become an increasingly used tool in business writing (Holmström & Wikberg, 2010).

Source: Bloggs, http://www.blogger.com

**Facebook**
Facebook is a social networking service or public network, where users can communicate with each other, through creating interest groups, sharing photos, privacy, broadcasting and more. Facebook is not just for individuals, but can also be used by businesses and organizations. When a business chooses to participate, it can provide information regarding job descriptions and what kind of services/products the company produces/offer. The company can also send information about planned or upcoming events or activities. The firm may additionally have lectures, inviting consumers to attend, in order to create a long-term tie with them (Jue et al., 2010). According to Holmström and Wikberg (2010), relationships can be created when, for example, an employee has his Facebook page linked to the company and so has the customer.


**Flickr**
Flickr provides a web service, whose basic idea is that its members should be able to upload and share digital photos, movies or sounds on the Flickr website (2012). They can either be made available to everyone (public) or to a few (private). Flickr is also a public network like Facebook where members can create and join discussion forums, comment on each other’s pictures and "tag", that is, linking a person to a particular image and movie (Ibid). "Tagging" facilitates when searching and works in a way similar to RSS.

Source: Flickr, http://www.flickr.com
**Twitter**

Twitter is a form of blogging fixed in miniature also known as "micro blogging". Each message can contain up to 140 characters, they can be linked together with several other posts/discussion groups so that the re-use of micro blogging is not limited (Holmström & Wikberg, 2010). Users can share pictures, video, information and communicate with each other in real time. Twitter wrote on its website (2012) that its service is not restricted to only individuals, but it can also be used by companies, organizations, artists whose desire is to make new/strengthen relationships with their customers. Peppers and Rogers (1999) stress that it may be crucial for companies to have direct contact with customers. By removing intermediaries from the communicative message to the client, this enables a direct contact, which can strengthen and develop the relationship.

Source: Twitter, http://www.twitter.com

---

**YouTube**

YouTube is a social medium that provides a web-based meeting for distribution and organization of video-based material. Its users can upload self-produced materials as well as others; although this basically violates YouTube's policy not to post material for which the user does not hold copyright (Holmström & Wikberg, 2010). Users can also comment on any posting and may thus interact with other individuals or companies that provide material. Ekblom and Möller (2010) argue that the use of YouTube can be effective in the sense that the combination of moving images and sounds creates a potential for having a higher impact than the simple use of texts or images. It may also be useful for companies to outsource various videos featuring the company's products/services.

Source: YouTube, http://www.youtube.com
Appendix 2: Interview questions

Interview questions for the study “Social media in marketing communications”

General information
1. Is it ok for you if we use your company’s name in our study or do you prefer to stay anonymous?
2. Can you please briefly inform us about the products/services of your company?
3. Based on your offered products/services; in which industry sector are you?
4. How many people are working in your company (inclusive you)?
5. If you want to share this information; how much is your annual turnover?
6. When has the company been established?
7. What is your responsibility in the company?
8. How long have you been holding this position?

Social media utilization in the communication process
9. Which social media platforms are you using in your marketing communications?
10. What is the main purpose for using social media?
11. What differences are there between the traditional communications and social media communications?
12. What elements should be included in the content of the communication to be perceived as serious and trustworthy by the target groups?
13. How do you ensure a two-way-communication with the audience (e.g. collecting and dealing with feedback)?
14. Who is responsible for managing these platforms?
15. How would you describe your social media skills/the social media skills of the responsible employees?
16. Did you/your staff take part in trainings on social media utilization?

Integration of social media into marketing communications
17. How have you ensured the integration of social media into the overall communication strategy/in accordance with the overall firm strategy?
18. Are you aware of the audience you want to reach by social media utilization?
19. How have you defined goals for social media utilization?
20. How do you define the budget for social media in marketing communications?

Benefits of social media utilization in marketing communications
21. How do you benefit by utilizing social media in marketing communications?
22. How do you measure the performance/benefits of social media utilization?
Appendix 3: Interview questions – follow-up interview

Follow-up interview with Success Education

Regarding our first interview, there was one phrase where we would like to know if we have understood you correctly.

When we asked you how you ensure the integration of social media into the overall marketing communications concept, you said you are using Facebook and a special mailing system for weekly newsletters. Would you please be so kind to describe this mailing system further! Did you mean a mailing system for e-mails or letters via post?
Hello, kära respondent,

Our names are Mohidin Abukar (Swedish) and Dominik Bernhard (German) and we are students of the Master program „International Marketing“ and „Strategic Management and Leadership“ at Halmstad University. In the current semester (January-May), we are working on our Master thesis which is about to investigate the role of social media in the communication process of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Therein we want to get a better understanding of the following issues:

- How can the utilization of social media in the communication process of SMEs be described?
- How has social media been integrated into the marketing communications of SMEs?
- What are the benefits of social media utilization in SMEs?

In order to analyze these aspects, we would like to conduct interviews with managers/employees of small and medium-sized companies. Therefore, we have chosen to contact SMEs, located at the Science Park Halmstad.

We would appreciate, if we were allowed to conduct an interview with you, as this would contribute to the completion of our research project in a meaningful way. The interview can be held in English or Swedish – as you prefer. If you have any questions about our study or the planned interview, of course you can contact us at anytime. You could benefit by the results of the study in a way that you would have the possibility to compare your social media marketing approach with other companies and benefit in terms of suggestions regarding the development of social media in your company and how to measure its influence in your overall business.

At this point we would like to thank you for spending your valuable time on reading our letter – and as far as we can say that up to now, also for your decision to participate in our study.

____________________  ____________________
Mohidin Abukar                  Dominik Bernhard