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MANAGING SOCIAL MEDIA CONVERSATIONS

- case study



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The purpose of this thesis was to explore how companies can manage (monitor and control) social media conversations. Regardless of the companies' presence in social media networks, they or their industry are constantly being discussed in social media. Therefore organisations should be present in social media, monitor and participate in conversations, in order to turn them into their benefit. There are software and services available to help in monitoring. Variety of tools and statistic deliver reports, but someone has to analyse and utilizes the information.

Most common reasons for organisations to be in social media are marketing products and services and engage customers. Companies should produce interesting content in their social media networks in order to engage social media users. If social media conversations are disregarded there is a risk of prolonged and negative discussion and even crises.

It is rather difficult to have a control over the conversations, but companies can affect to its own presence and take part in conversations. It is seen very important to purposefully get involved and follow the conversations. Information can be used for various functions such as for planning and producing content around the key themes. By participating, companies have the opportunity to be aware of what is being discussed, react accordingly and prevent possible crises or steer the conversations into favourable direction.

The research was implemented as a qualitative research and it was conducted as a case research. Research reviews four case companies and how they manage social media conversation. Empirical research data included personal, semi-controlled interviews and background information of related written sources. Empirical research is qualitative, utilizing findings from interviews carried out within the case companies. Conclusions are also compared to the theory of the thesis. The research shows that social media in general is widely recognised and integrated in the business within the case companies. They do monitor and manage the conversation in social media in a systematic way. Challenges for managing social media conversations arise from the lack of resources and the nature of the social media. Even though it is beyond the control, companies seem actively try to affect the conversations in their benefit.

KEYWORDS: Social media, social media conversations, social media strategy, social media monitoring, social media management, engagement, content, crisis communications, customer service.

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MITEN YRITYS VOI TUNNISTAA JA HALLITA SITÄ KOSKEVAA KESKUSTELUA SOSIAALISESSA MEDIASSA?

Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on kartoittaa miten yritykset tunnistavat ja hallitsevat heitä koskevaa keskustelua sosiaalisessa mediassa. Organisaatioiden kannattaa olla läsnä sosiaalisessa mediassa, monitoroida keskusteluja ja osallistua niihin kääntäen keskustelut eduksi. Monitorointia varten on tarjolla erilaisia sovelluksia ja työvälineitä. Huomattavaa on, että datan lisäksi tarvitaan sen analysointia, jotta tietoa voidaan hyödyntää liiketoiminnassa.

Yritykset toimivat sosiaalisessa mediassa markkinoidakseen tuotteita ja palveluita ja hyödyntääkseen tietoa. Yritysten tulisi tuottaa kuluttajaa kiinnostavaa ja sitouttavaa sisältöä sosiaaliseen mediaan. Sosiaalisessa mediassa toimiva yritys pystyy reagoimaan käytävään keskusteluun ja vaikuttamaan mahdollisten negatiivisten keskustelujen tai kriisien leviämisen hillitsemiseen.

Tutkimuksen case yritykset olivat samaa mieltä siitä, että on mahdotonta kontrolloida keskusteluja, mutta on tarpeellista tarkoituksenmukaisesti seurata keskusteluja ja osallistua niihin. Monitoroinnin tuottamana tieto auttaa myös sisällöntuotannon suunnittelussa ja kuluttajaa kiinnostavien aiheiden kartoittamisessa. Osallistumalla keskusteluihin ja niiden seuraamiseen yrityksellä on mahdollisuus olla tietoinen siitä mistä keskustellaan ja myös kerätä asiakaspalautetta.

Tutkimus tehtiin tapaustutkimuksena, jonka tavoitteena oli selvittää yritysten tapaa hallinnoida sosiaalisen median keskusteluja. Tarkastelussa oli myös yleisesti sosiaalisen median rooli yrityksen liiketoiminnassa. Empiirinen tutkimus on laadullinen ja pohjautuu neljän tapausyrityksen sisällä tehtyihin haastattelutuloksiin. Haastattelut olivat henkilökohtaisia ja puolistrukturoituja. Tuloksia peilattiin lopputyön teoreettiseen viitekehykseen, joka pohjautuu alan kirjallisuuteen ja muihin kirjoitettuihin lähteisiin. Tutkimustulokset osoittavat, että yritykset tunnistavat sosiaalisen median mahdollisuudet ja hyödyntävät sitä tehokkaasti eri toiminnoissaan. Erityisesti sen rooli nähdään tärkeänä asiakasviestinnässä ja vuorovaikutuskanavana. Yritykset monitoroivat ja hallinnoivat keskustelua sosiaalisessa mediassa systemaattisesti. Haasteita aiheutuu resurssipulasta ja sosiaalisen median luonteesta – vaikka sitä ei voi täysin hallita, yritykset pyrkivät hyödyntämään sosiaalista mediaa liiketoiminnassaan.

ASIASANAT: Sosiaalinen media, sosiaalisen median keskustelut, sosiaalisen median strategia, sosiaalisen median monitorointi, sosiaalisen median hallinta, sitouttaminen, sisältö, kriisiviestintä, asiakaspalvelu.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Digital Revolution, also called the Third Industrial Revolution, is the change from analogy, mechanical and electronic technology to digital technology. The term also refers to the sweeping changes brought about by digital computing and communication technology during the latter half of the 20th century. (Wikipedia 2014.) During the past decade, the rapid development of Internet has offered consumers many new opportunities. In addition to searching for information and communicating without boundaries, globally, it is nowadays possible to express thoughts and feelings through social media. (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis 2013.) Many consumers are using social media, for example over 40 year-old users segment is growing in Facebook. Moreover, social media is commonly used as a tool when searching for consumer products and services. (Ruuskanen 2014.) Showing explosive growth in just few years time, social media appears to be thought as the media of choice across the whole world (Dong-Hun, 2010). Indeed, it is difficult to even imagine modern business communication without strong role of social media and Internet. In particular, company's' management is paying more and more interest to social media as a channel for reaching customers and employees. (Forsgård & Frey 2010, 156.)

Not only has the consumers' behaviour changed, but also companies are exploiting the scope of social media platforms as a means for efficient customer targeting. Companies are appealed by the information exchange, as consumers are now able to actively engage with each other and also communicate more productively with companies. (Emerald 2014, 35.) Companies are expected to do business by the new rules of new age. This new thinking means that the customers are heard globally and markets are the conversation. As a result, the key skill in the organisation is no longer marketing, but conversation. (Isokangas & Vassinen 2010, 206.)

Communication in social media differs from traditional communication. This is because dialogue has placed one-way communication and it is now everyone's right to communicate. (Kortesuo, 2014,15.) By tradition, integrated marketing communication means placing the same message in different channels.

Whereas Isokangas & Vassinen (2010, 206) argue that in the future Internet is the hub and marketing communication and stories are brought to live in different channels. In comparison to traditional media, Internet makes communication and advertisement more lively and flexible. The futures' marketing will be split in half: tactic advertising operated by robots and delivering cool content that inspires people to share it and interact. In order to build visible digital footprint, company must manage both technology (robots) and story (people). (Isokangas & Vassinen 2010, 185-187.)

It appears that the digitalization is changing business models. Inevitably, companies are facing new challenges and opportunities because of the digitalization. It appears that utilisation of social media in business communication is still rather a new thing. Many companies use social media as a communication channel, out bounding messages, not for the real dialogue with consumers. The importance of the Internet and social media has tremendously risen above any means of communicating with the world. Social media has grown fast and companies don't yet know how to act upon. In this thesis we shall try to find out how companies could manage social media conversations and why it is important.

Companies might worry about the customer feedback in social media. Especially negative experiences and its feedback in public can be destructive. When company is participating social media, they should also participate on conversations in order to correct situations if needed. In addition, social media gives an opportunity for companies to be a public channel for positive feedback as well. Consumers' positive experiences and recommendations are the greatest arguments for buying decisions. (Ruuskanen, 2014.) Communities that are formed around brands inspire companies. Commitment of group members is priceless in terms of positive word-of-mouth recommendations and brand advocacy that are probable outcomes (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis 2014, 35). Consumers increasingly turn to the social web to share their passions about the brand and seek out recommendations (MLSGROUP 2014). Also according to Nielsen (2014) customer references are significantly more reliable than the marketing messages by companies.

It appears that on the company's point of view one of the biggest reasons for being in social media is marketing and selling products and engaging customers. However, a successful company is present in social media also when consumers are spending time there and not purchasing. More and more customers spend time in social media, also after work in the evenings. Many companies use social media as a marketing tool, but it could be used more comprehensively when managing customer relationships. (Kortesuo & Patjas 2011, 123.) According to Statistics Finland (2013) over one-third of Finnish companies use social media, mostly to market products or develop company's image. The utilisation of social media appears to be diversified in companies, since social media is also used for example for customer feedback, recruiting, customer engagement and sharing information. (Statistics Finland 2013.)

Social media has enabled the change of direction from business to consumer to other way around. Consumers expect transparent and real-time experience, where customer experience is built through a constant and active dialogue between consumers and companies (Kananen 2013, 11). According to Stratten (2013, 26) losing the control over the messages is one of the biggest fears. Representatives of companies are used to discussing with layers and having approvals before releasing anything to the public. Leino (2010, 288) suggests that companies should be open, honest and sharing, because those are the elements of social media. There are on going conversations about companies and brands in social media. Sernovitz (2012, 168) recommends companies should rather have dialogue with consumers than let them discuss about the companies. It is said that social media shoots holes in the walls of the companies. Companies cannot prevent public conversation in social media, but they can affect on it. It is possible to adapt to the new situation and take the advantage of it or let the social media just cause problems. (Isonkangas & Kankkunen, 2011, 12.)

According to many social media experts like Meltwater (2014) and AC Sanator (2013) managing social media conversations requires understanding concepts

functional social media customer support and crisis management. Accordingly, monitoring and controlling social media conversations might prevent crises rising. In social media crisis spread easily as it is easy to share emotional content. Company can be aware of the conversations and topics being talked about by systematically monitoring social media. As a result, company can notice the upcoming crises and act upon. In addition to the crises management, case companies in this thesis emphasized that company can deliver interesting and relevant content around the popular and current topics. Monitoring social media should be every day business these days, as companies' products and services are being talked about in social media networks regardless companies' own participation. (Luukkonen, AC Sanator, 2013.) There are few ways to monitor the social media conversations, by the company or as an outsourced service.

Inevitably, companies lack of resources in social media management. In small and middle-sized companies there might be just one person taking care of the social media, beside her other duties like managing marketing and communication. (Louhimies, Someco, 2014). However, social media is a cost-efficient channel and fast growing its popularity of the brand presences. Many wonder should company respond and reply to every argument on them in social media? How much effort and time should be allocated to comment and discuss on social media networks? (Isokangas & Kankkunen, 2011, 2, 21.) It is not enough just to have a presence in social media, but it is relevant to have insight and common goals what company wants to achieve in social media. It is necessary to have a social media strategy that gives methods and means to achieve these goals. According to Seppälä (2011) the key thing to succeed in implementing social media strategy is to get the whole organisation involved and learn as you follow and analyse your own action in the social media. The best way to learn to control social media seems to be trying, learning, trying and developing. The firm-error method is a good way to find out the optimized way and efficient means achieving success.

To sum the introduction up in a nutshell, this thesis focuses on revealing reasons and practises for companies how they could manage social media conver-

sations. Companies and their brands are being talked about in social media and in order to be aware of the discussions and if necessary, take actions for example prevent crises spreading, it is important that the companies manage social media conversations.

1.1 Research objectives and questions

It is hardly at all yet researched how companies can manage social media conversations. According to Social media consultant from Someco (PL) social media is still rather a new phenomenon to most companies and practices vary a lot in companies, depending for example on the industry, size of the company and the corporate attitude towards social media. The purpose of this research is therefore to bring empirical insights on how companies can manage social media conversations. At first, does social media have an important role and how it is integrated into the business activities? How companies can monitor the conversation and is it possible to have a control over the conversations?

Thesis is organized as follows: First, the concept social media is introduced. Second, the theory for the framework of managing social media conversation is presented. Then, the methodology of the field study is presented, followed by the presentation of the findings. Moreover, in the end the results are being discussed and related to the theory and in addition, limitations of the research and suggestions for the future research.

Research objectives and questions are as follows:

- Why is the management of social media conversations important?
- How should the management be done?
 - o What are the means for monitoring social media conversations?
 - o What are the means for controlling social media conversations?
 - o What are the roles, by which the management should be done?

As a result this research aims to gain and describe findings that can be related to the theory concerning managing social media conversations.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

What does "managing social media conversations," mean? Probably most of us are familiar with the term "social media". "Managing the conversation" refers to getting awareness of relevant discussions by monitoring social media and taking actions upon. Aware company is able to effect on the conversations, lead the discussions in the desired direction. For example, company might prevent crises spreading or boost sales. By revealing what it takes for a company to manage social media conversations, the information is wished to give more insight and be related to the research results as well.

Concept "managing social media conversations" is split in three parts: first of all, why should companies participate in social media? Then, how they can monitor social media conversations and is it possible to control conversations? Moreover, there will be some discussion about the role of social media and social media strategy. This thesis aims to describe why social media and social media strategy are important for companies. It needs to be understood why it is not enough for companies to just sign in different social media communities, but what is needed to utilize their presence in the optimal way? For companies the final goal of the presence in social media is often the sales, but at first consumers should be engaged to the company. Kortesoja (2014, 156) strongly feels that it is not anymore relevant for companies to think whether to participate in social media or not. Most companies are involved already. Instead, objective is more relevant, what organisation should do in social media? According to Kortesoja, operating in social media should concern building and developing relationships that support company's business.

2.1 Concept of social media

There appears to be plenty of different kinds of definitions for social media. Some emphasise networking, where some look at social media from the technical point of view. In journal “Attitudes toward Product messages on social media” (2012) social media is described by various definitions:

- “the media that is published, created and shared by individuals on the Internet” (Stokes, 2008, p.350)
- “online tools and platforms that allow internet users to collaborate on content, share insights and experiences, and connect for business or pleasure” (Strauss and Frost, 2009, 326)
- “Social media can be called a strategy and an outlet for broadcasting, while social networking is a tool and a utility for connecting with others” (Cohen, 2011).

Social media and web 2.0 are often thought as the same. Constantinides and Fountain (2008, p. 232-233, Bowen Gordon 2015) use the term Web 2.0 as an umbrella term for web applications, stating that:

“Web 2.0 applications support the creation of informal users’ networks facilitating the flow of ideas and knowledge by allowing efficient generation, dissemination, sharing and editing/refining of informational content.”

Web 2.0 gives businesses new opportunities for communicating with the markets, finding out the customer needs and opinions, and interacting with consumers in a direct and personalized way. Apparently companies have noticed these opportunities and are increasingly involving social media into their marketing strategies.

There is no definitive typology of the various types of social media, but it is common to differentiate among social networking (e.g. Facebook), professional

networking (e.g. LinkedIn), video-sharing (e.g. YouTube), picture sharing (e.g. Flickr), social bookmarking (e.g. Delicious), social sharing of knowledge (e.g. Wikipedia), microblogging (e.g. Twitter), blogs (e.g. Blogger), and user forums. The common feature is that these social media allow individuals and entrepreneurs to engage in social interactions, in a way and on a scale that were not possible before. (Fischer and Reuber, 2011.) Social media can be used for many functions such as for corporate PR, marketing, customer service, sales and HR.

Indeed, social media is often defined by technologies and services, but Isokangas & Vassinen (2010, 153-155) suggest it is more constructive to define phenomenon by what is done in social media. Some users are active and some are followers. People have a need to share interesting experiences, for example previously jokes were distributed by e-mail and nowadays they are shared in social media networks. (Isokangas & Vassinen 2010.) Social media is internally used to foster communication and team working. Externally it can be used for example to create new markets, build relationships with customers and recruitment. In order to get the best out of social networking, organizations should strategically plan how it will be utilised and effectively managed. (Mandelli & Fuduric 2014).

Because this thesis studies the management of social media conversations between the company and the consumers, it is relevant to differ and define internal and external social media. By external social media is often referred to social media forums outside the company, such as Facebook and Twitter. On the contrary, internal social media refers to internal social media forum that is managed by the company and is usually open only for the employees of the company.

2.1.1 Why social media?

According to Kortesoja & Patjas (2011, 38) the most important attribute of the social media is interaction. Interaction is based on the company's wish to net-

work. It appears that social media is superior as a communication tool.

By communicating in social media it is possible to both sell products and services and engage customers. Most importantly, the company aims to deliver emotional experience with the consumer.

Interaction differs social media from traditional media. Social media is based on conversation, dialogue, not on one-way communication. In social media feedback is immediate. To be able to network, company must be present in social media. It should deliver content or/and share it. Kortesoja & Patjas (2011, 39) argue that social media should not be thought just as a marketing channel, because delivering emotional contact to consumer requires real dialogue and interesting content. Moreover, it appears that by generating continual dialogue, companies raise the profiles of their brands (Emerald 2014, 37).

Technological developments have obviously facilitated the growth of social media. It appears that companies have embraced the social media phenomenon because consumers prefer online media at the expense of traditional media channels. Social media campaigns are considerably cheaper than TV advertising and engaging to broader audience is easier. In addition, customer trust towards other social media users is significant. (Emerald 2014, 35.) Furthermore, astute operators in social media have noticed that Web 2.0 significantly enhances marketing activities. By using different applications companies can increase knowledge of market developments and customer opinions and needs. It is possible to personalize communication with consumers and engage with them more directly. (Emerald 2014, 35-36.) Because companies are now able to interact with customer via social networks, the importance of online word of mouth (eWOM) has risen.

Recent research shows that the marketing budgets directed toward social media are increasingly growing. This suggests that companies are more and more interested in establishing a presence in social media, interacting with their customers and even leveraging consumers' voices for a greater marketing impact. (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis 2013, 330-331.) Given these trends and the high potential for marketing use of social media, the key question for marketing managers

became how to take full advantage of social media and find ways in which social media can contribute to marketing objectives and support marketing strategies.

Internet and social media have overcome geographical boundaries and thus it is easier for companies to reach a wider range of consumers via social media. It is evident, that social media can boost sales and therefore the company presence in social media is desirable. Companies' websites are often the next step after visiting the company brand pages on social media platforms, such as Twitter or Facebook. As a result while visiting the homepages, the likelihood to purchase grows.

The soaring popularity of social media is illustrated by the fact that 87 per cent of the Fortune 100 Best Companies uses at least one social media platform. The list consists the world's top 100 companies (2012) across Europe, USA, Asia-Pacific, and Latin America. Most significant reasons for success of social media are cost-effectiveness and increasing popularity of social media. In addition, competitors' presence and the headquarters' strategy make companies to join in social media. (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis 2013.) Social media is much used also by the Finnish companies. According to the survey data by Statistics Finland (2013) 38 per cent of the companies use social media, social networks being most commonly used social media. The most common purpose of use for social media is to develop company's image or market products. In addition, responding to customer opinions, questions or reviews in social media are also very common. The utilisation of social media appears to be diversified in companies, because over one-third of the companies using social media are also using it for recruiting employees, cooperation with business partners or other organisation, engaging customers and within the company to innovation or development, sharing insights, opinions or knowledge (Statistics Finland 2013). In particular in company's social media brand pages the main actions of the company are making prize competitions, announcing new products/ services, interacting with fans, providing advice and useful information, and handling custom-

er service issues (Tsimonis and Dimitriadis 2013).

2.1.2 Social media forms

Company does not have to be present in every social media forum, but in those specific where their customer segments spend time. Thanks to social media, it is possible for companies to monitor and join in the conversations concerning them and their industry. (Kortesuo & Patjas 2011, 79-80.)

Facebook fan pages are popular and used by companies of variety of sectors. In addition, Twitter accounts, YouTube channels and other platforms can be used too. People are using increasingly social media with their mobile phones. For example, over one billion people use Facebook on a mobile device monthly. Of the total number of users of Facebook (1.32 billion) 30% log in only via mobile phones. (Hamburger 2014.)

There are many ways of classifying social media forms. Kortesuo (2014, 63) lists most relevant social media application based on her own professional experience:

1. Blogs – enable versatile communications such as news, idea development, entertainment, marketing, networking, self-development and information sharing (Kortesuo, 2011, 63). Companies could use a year clock plan to publish bloggings. Clock includes the biggest events of the industry, statistical releases, publication of the annual report, publications and launches of the organisation, public holidays and other topics. (Kortesuo 2014, 46.)
2. Facebook is the biggest of all social media channels, active users being over billion, in Finland almost 2 million (Statistics Finland 2013. In Facebook it is possible to share any content. Companies can have their own brand pages to promote their products and communicate in different actions. Kortesuo & Patjas (2011, 81) feel that more companies could use Facebook to manage their customer service because it is a suitable

channel to have a dialogue with customer. In addition, social media suits well for sharing customer experiences. It is recommended to have rules for conversation, so company is able to do post-moderation (Kortesuo 2014, 38).

3. Twitter is a public blog, where it is possible to write short messages, tweets. Twitter is the most used social media after Facebook, globally active users 100 million and accounts being 200 million. Also in Finland the number of users is growing. (Kortesuo & Patjas 2011, 82.)
4. LinkedIn – professionals should be present in this social media. It is a community for networking and recruiting. LinkedIn offers a contact surface for professionals. It is also possible to publish blogs in the forum. (Kortesuo, 2014, 38 and 78.)
5. Wiki – Wiki means together produced, constantly up-dating encyclopedia. Most known wikiservice is Wikipedia. It is worthwhile for professionals to have an up-dated Wikipedia profile.
6. Google Plus (Google +) – if company uses Google products, it is worthwhile to be active in Google plus. In addition, Google plus profile increases visibility in search engines. In the service it is possible to allow people see updates by adding them to “circles”. (Kortesuo 2014, 81.)
7. Foresquare – Foresquare is based on the information of the location. Consumers tell their location and discuss the products and offerings. Companies that run a place such as restaurant or gym, should follow Foresquare. As a result they find out is the company recommended and who are the loyal customers. (Kortesuo 2014, 44.) In addition to Foresquare, Instagram lets the place to be tagged with the location.
8. Viral campaigns – enables a marketing message to spread like a virus by users sharing it. Company delivers material including video or photos to be shared.
 - a. Video: channels for sharing video are YouTube and Vimeo.

- b. Photos: channels for sharing photos are for example Instagram, Flickr and Twitpic.
- c. Presentations: Slideshare is used for sharing professional slide presentations such as powerpoint. Prezi is an internet-based application that offers various functions that lack from Powerpoint and Keynote. (Kortesuo 2014, 79-81.). Search engines lift presentations up. Therefore it is wise to produce presentations on the core knowledge and as a result, the visibility in search engines is most probably better. (Kortesuo, 2014b, 44).

2.1.3 Social media strategy

Company's strategy should include social media because without planning and goals nothing will be reached with digital marketing (Kananen 2013, 17). It appears to be more important for companies to make themselves found on social media, rather than to try reaching all the potential customers. Choice of appropriate social media application depends on the target audience and the business type, but the best strategy could be established by a simultaneous presence in different platforms. Creating synergies with online and offline motions might maximize the impact of social media. Key performance indicators and monitoring action of competitors on platforms can be helpful when evaluating the overall strategy. (Emerald 2014, 37.)

Guy Clapperton (2009, 3) also emphasizes the importance of desired outcome, an objective for social media presence. Business plan looks at the best desired outcome and means how to best get there. Companies should ask what they want to achieve for their business through new technology? Some companies log on to social media communities such as Facebook just for the sake of it. (Clapperton 2009). However, signing in is insufficient. Companies are expected to take part in the conversation and to interact with consumers. Stratten (2013, 25-28) recommends that companies should find time to have conversations with customers, also in social media.

There should always be goals when building the community, according to Kananen (2013, 117) for a company it's ultimately sales. Sales in social media are based on the networks and the personalities. Kortesoja & Patjas (2011, 102-103) suggest companies should change into more human way of being present in social media, which means acting in a polite, but relaxed way. Some companies participate in social media, but lack strategy. Companies tend to utilize social media in marketing and communications and forget customer service. It is necessary to participate and practise the behaviour in social media. It is wiser to have practice how to deal with social media conversations and presence before possible sensations and crises arise. (Kortesoja and Patjas 2010, 9-10.) However, social media is not suitable for communication that is of private nature. Many companies state in their social media network sites such as Facebook what kind of conversation they wish. Customers can be directed to continue their conversation with the company from the public channel to more secure private channel such as e-mail. (Kortesoja & Patjas 2011, 22-24.) Customer care in social media is a good way of taking care of general questions. In evidently there is also a risk of negative communication that also has to be paid attention to. (Kortesoja & Patjas 2011, 25.)

2.1.4 Engaging consumers

It is challenging to succeed in social media, but Leino (2010, 290) recommends the best way is to start by listening. If there is positive conversation going on in social media about the company in question, it could be encouraged by the company. For example, companies could contact bloggers. Companies can also learn from the negative conversations and attitudes towards them. Information can be used for example to improve products and services. Also, dialogue often aims to make the customer relationship better. According to Leino (2010, 290) companies should worry if there is no conversation about them, since the brands are not created of invisibility.

Consumers use social media to share things that interest them, to boost or criticize brands, to deal and search for recommendations. Companies should not only listen to general conversation, but also participate and create it.

(MSLGROUP Finland 2014.) Also Ruuskanen (2014) agrees with the importance of dialogue in social media. At its best, public discussion can affect on consumers' decision making process. In contrast, at worst the discussion in social media is just shouting and negative hate speech behind the screen name. There has been a shift from broadcasting to discussion with consumers and customers. Possibility to give feedback in social media makes it superior. Success of the consumer brands is more and more dependent on customer experiences and increasingly, the purchasing decision is preceded by other consumers' opinions. Also Vassinen (2011, 28) shares the similar opinion that by participating in conversations, companies often wish that customers would recommend it for each other.

Admittedly, it is important to consider how to use social media effectively. It is easier to make more money out of existing customers than acquiring new customers, so it would be useful to plan how to manage social media. Companies wish to make existing customers spend more or even become an advocate of the brand in question. Evidently, by encouraging customers to somehow participate in social media, makes them to engage also with other potential customers. (Clapperton Guy 2009, 3 - 11.) When the brand is known, engagement with the users would benefit companies more than informing of discounts or asking someone to become a fan of company Facebook site. Engaged consumer will become a fan without asking. (Stratten 2013, 28.)

Louhimies (2014) argues that engagement is yet often thought as a technical thing. Many see engagement as a response, an action to companies' messages. For example in Facebook consumers are wished to like and share companies' campaigns and messages. In addition to those key figures, engagement should be seen as a wider concept, relating to the company branding issues. There can be found few basic tips for building engagement. Most importantly, company should build relationship to the members and between them. It takes

time to build the trust and relationship, whether it is a blog, Facebook or any other social media channel. Trust itself is not enough but the community has to produce value to its members. In social media sharing information is often the reason for being part of the community in question. (Kananen 2013, 115-116.) Also Stratten (2013, 29) sees investing in social currency of the company requests time and knowledge. In social networks consumers share and tell each other knowledge, not advertisements. Therefore companies should plan content and the way to communicate in social networks. In time by discussing and commenting conversations, company might gain consumers' trust. Companies should participate more in conversations with interesting content rather than delivering news and newsletters (Isokangas & Vassinen 2010, 147).

Kananen (2013, 116) lists few basic points to take in account when building trust and relationships in social media community:

- Transparency: Company should state who is hosting the community. At its best, also members of the community discuss on behalf of the company.
- Consistency: Company's external communication should be consistent despite of chosen media. (Ydinviestin sisäistäminen)
- Diplomatic influencing (Vaikuttamisen hienovaraisuus): Community marketing needs to be done in a diplomatic way. Despite the ultimate goal is the sales, operating in social media must be based on sharing information and problem solving. Sharing experiences efficiently promotes sales.
- Value the member of the community: Feedback in community has taken its' members time and that should be valued by the company. Even when the feedback is negative, company should react, since it could even add customer loyalty. (Kananen 2013, 117.)

As already discussed, companies should aim to take own initiative and engage consumers by creating interesting content. Communication in social media is

usually public. Thus, often also other consumers than fans notice a good service and interaction in company social media channel. Servicing one consumer well, makes also others in the network experience good customer experience. Writing a blog is an efficient channel for interactive customer communication. (Kortesuo & Patjas 2011, 40.) Several tactics for content creation is described by Isokangas & Vassinen (2010, 86-87):

1. Company itself creates interesting content.
2. Company encourages consumers to create content. Encouraging can be done for example offering rewards. It is easier to invoke consumers who are already engaged with the company brand. Fashion blogs are a good example of co-created content.
3. Company exchanges news streams with existing medias. This way it is possible to make the content of the company sites more interesting and gain more traffic.

It is useful for the writer to use her own and company name, because company is not sympathized whereas people are (Isokangas & Vassinen 2010, 147). In addition, writing with your own name, grows the professional reputation because nowadays Google is a good referrer. It is the professionals who present their employer company, regardless of disclaimers. Therefore employees should be loyal and not put their employer down. (Kortesuo, 2014b, 19-20.) It is relevant to think the style of writing in social media. Interaction and two-way communication are the key elements in social media and therefore, content should be communicative, short and easy to read. Content should leave pace for readers to comment and fulfil. In addition, it is good to use humour because social media channels are more relaxed compared to many others such as press release and official documents. (Kortesuo 2014b, 16-17.)

2.2 Monitoring social media conversations

Social media offers an interactive platform for dialogue between users, both individuals and companies. Companies have diverse objectives for being active in social media, which serves not only early identification of issues but also interaction with stakeholders. Attention has shifted from passive one-way communication on the company web site to more vivid two-way corporate communication. The increasing activity in social media also calls for methods to follow online consumer interaction regarding the brands. Consequently, researchers have shown increasing interest in what is measured and how, when monitoring and tracking interaction in social media.

Monitoring includes listening, interpreting and taking action on what consumers are saying. Monitoring can be defined as finding out what is expressed online in social media. Monitoring social media interaction has apparent advantages, but it also incurs significant costs. Good data of monitoring is required in order to companies be able to use the data to decide how to intervene in social media. (Zhang & Vos 2013, 372.)

The viral nature of social media makes it typical for the publications to spread instantly without upfront control. Evidently, this is a challenge for companies because news, especially negative, can spread without any warning. (Kananen 2013, 14.) Social media affects the company's commercial value. In order to maintain profitable relationships, companies have to identify issues early, monitor and predict their growth. Issues are social constructions that are perceived differently by consumers. Early prognosis of issue interaction might prevent financial or reputational losses. Therefore, today, monitoring social media interaction has become very important for international companies. (Zan & Vos 2013, 371.) Moreover, by monitoring and taking part in the relevant conversations, companies can improve their customer satisfaction. As a result companies can react effectively to the issues and limit the possible damage. In fact, it is argued that negative word-of-mouth (WOM) should be seen as an opportunity. The way that company responds is often perceived as the more critical per-

spective. (Emerald 2014.) According to social media agency Meltwater (2014), by utilizing the monitoring of social media, companies can also improve their customer care and add customer satisfaction. This is because companies are able to handle the problems and complaints of the social customer care before conversations become prolonged negative discussions in social media. In the event of the crises, companies that participate in social media conversations have the change to steer the conversation about them. By managing social customer care it is possible to turn negative conversations into positive publicity. (Meltwater 2014.)

2.2.1 Objectives of monitoring

Companies collect and interpret feedback from social media conversations. This creates the basis for the interaction that might benefit the brand image. By monitoring companies are able to evaluate online interaction that affects their brands and see how these results relate to their values and mission. Additionally, the effects of communication strategies can be followed. In general, it is considered important to listen, interact, influence and reflect on social media interaction from a stakeholder perspective. (Zhang & Vos 2013, 374).

Zhang & Vos (2013, 373-374) present four aims at monitoring:

1) Listen and interact via social media

Companies are active in monitoring social media to gather information from customer and co-operate through networks. Discussion in social media offers more personalized information on services and products. Consumers can post positive or negative experiences on the brand's home page. Expanded discussions caused by not resolved problems calls for social media monitoring.

2) Brand protection

It is common that companies open official brand home pages in social media. In addition, there are also unauthorized fan sites. This suggests, that influencers

are eager to express their opinions. Crises in social media cause significant threats to normal business activities and corporate reputation. In the process of social media monitoring, analyses of the online environment and the competition are necessary. Therefore, monitoring management framework is imperative to protecting brand by following how it is mentioned.

3) Brand values

There is a need to track current conversation on the brand and predict future buzz. By observing blog data company might forecast the spread patterns of bloggers. Companies would like to identify influencers in order to reinforce them or at least gain the benefit of early warning for the brand management. Companies seek to promote the attention given to the brand and its values in social media and transfer interested consumers to their linked product or service web sites.

4) Scholarly aims

Identifying issues early and monitoring their development might help predicting the growth of a relevant issue. For example, the subsequent citation of tweets has been researched to see if this can predict behaviour in social media. By monitoring interpersonal conversation more effective communication interventions can be developed.

There are tools and services for the management of the conversations, which will be discussed in the following sections.

2.2.2 Monitoring tools

There is a diversity in social media measurement methods. There are various solutions to monitor social media, including search engines and media-monitoring offerings, text-analytics software companies that use semantic analysis, full-service listening-platform vendors and private branded communities (Zhang & Vos 2013, 375).

There are also agency services available. These new integral services have sprung from a variety of businesses, from creative and media agencies to customer relationship agencies, consultancies and technology vendors, combining various skills, including data analytics, planning and creative work in collaboration with support agencies. Full-service social media agencies may add much value to companies, but the costs can be high, especially for small or medium size entrepreneurs. Since social media form a dynamic environment, monitoring methods also need to develop fast. (Zan & Von 2013, 377.)

Companies should follow what is discussed in the Internet. As presented at a previous section, there are software to be used for monitoring, but an overall picture can be made free in ten minutes a day. Isokangas and Vassinen (2010, 144) suggest company should at first check search engines by self googling. If company's websites is not mentioned in the top of the search engine results, its' websites are not produced in an optimal way. It is recommended to follow conversations about the company, competitors, industry, customers and general discussions. For example Google Alerts -service is a usable tool, which delivers data on chosen conversations.

There are few ways how company can look for themselves in social media, since social networks are searchable:

- For example, in Twitter a hashtag makes interesting words easier to pick up in searches and users can have discussion around the topics that include a certain keyword, a hashtag. By searching company name with a help of hashtag tells whether there is anything being said about the company. Hashtag in discussions is often related to some event, topic or company (Kortesuo & Patjas 2011, 34).
- Companies can search for their company on Google or other search engines.
- Companies can investigate whether they are being blogged about.

In keyword search companies can set the topics to be monitored in a way that is suitable for their products, brand image and management features. Search includes general search engines, certain social media tools and also real-time dashboard overviews of social media. (Zan & Von 2013, 375.) Moreover, a regular search by using search engines to track a brand name is useful and can be outsourced.

In addition to keyword search, monitoring can include thematic and sentiment analysis, analysis of spread patterns and combinations of methods. In order to make thorough inquiries in social media, it seems that next to knowledge of these methods a spirit of inquiry that will lead to their further development is also needed. Monitoring is also used to analyse how messages spread in social media.

2.2.3 Who manages social media conversations?

It request resources to manage social media efficiently. It appears that it is commonly thought that communication in social media is best managed by the companies' own employees instead of PR agencies. This is because interaction is one of the most important features of social media. Customers expect that the conversations with companies are communicated with their own employees in the name of the company and feel disappointed if contrarily. Companies' own employee is able to communicate on their products and services faster, more credible and truthful way than an outsider. (Kortesuo & Patjas 2011, 15.)

In a centralized model there is a department or a person in a company who is signed to take care of social media. In bigger companies marketing and communications division is often responsible for tasks related to social media. (Kananen 2013, 20.) In contrast, in decentralized model social media is everyone's responsibility, which requires skills to be able to operate in social media. Employees are often encouraged to take part in social media, but it is recommended that personal opinions are not published in the name of the company. Rules

for employee using company e-mail is similar to use of social media. (Kananen 2013, 20-21.)

According to the research “Reputation: With or without” about the decentralizing corporate communications responsibilities, most of the directors of communications believe that employees should be encouraged to communicate. It is recommended to have guidelines for steering external communications. Education, clear instructions and support of communication officer enable efficient expert communication. (MLSGROUP 2014.)

Therefore it is worthwhile to engage employees, prompt them to be active in communication and become business advocates. They should be equipped with the right skills and stories and feel that communication is part of their work and supported by the management. Who else would know the organisation better? (Marttinen Meri, MLS Group 2014.) It might be challenging for companies to recruit employees who are good at writing in social media. But they can be trained to blog. Kortesoja & Patjas (2011, 124) suggest customer care should be involved in social media and employees should be allowed to use social media in their work.

2.3 Controlling social media conversations

It might be generally thought that conversations about the companies in social media are above their control. Social media consultant (PL) from Someco argues it is impossible for companies to literally have a control, but instead companies have an opportunity to be present in social media networks, affect and steer the conversations. With relation to social media communication, companies are able to control their own presence, but otherwise content and reactions are above the control. A display advertisement can be bought in the media, but it is not possible in the forehand to define the news about the company. (Isokangas & Vassinen, 2010, 86.)

According to Sernovitz (2012, 164) there are two risks companies face if they ignore social media conversations: word of mouth dying or going negative. In the

contrary, when the company participates, enthusiastic conversation might bring a lot of free business. Thus, it seems that controlling or actually steering social media conversation requires company's participation. Many social media experts seem to agree with Sernovitz. For example Meltwater (2014) discusses about turning negative social media conversations into positive publicity by managing the social customer care . This means early response and dialogue with social media users. Previously companies were out bounding messages, nowadays they are expected to listen to consumers and react quickly (inbound) in social media. Operating in social media is often related to a traditional customer service. (Kananen 2013, 23.)

Social media can be thought as a simple, straightforward business, fundamentally about the dialogue between people. It is not about the technological revolution, but revolution between people. This is why Isokangas and Vassinen (2010, 26) argue employees should first be committed to this change and just then company should choose the necessary technologies. It is predicted that in the future corporate marketing and communication will be split in two: some actions are automatized, made by robots such as advertisements in media and other part includes interactive communication between company and the customers. (Isokangas and Vassinen, 2010, 26-27.)

2.3.1 Guidelines for managing conversations

The way to react to different social media conversations should be defined in the social media guidelines of the company (Isokangas & Vassinen 2010, 146). The expected response time to messages is short as social media is open and used all the time. Conversation is no longer interactive if it takes days to reply. It is impossible for companies to hide behind the rush hours since operations in social media are public. (Kortesuo & Patjas 2011, 123.) Social media strategy should define who manages the social media conversation and who replies to the postings (Kananen 2013, 134).

When the company has its own blog or another social media forum such as Facebook site, it acts as the chairman of the forum. Thus, the companies activate conversation by producing content with interesting topics. The one that updates the channel, is responsible for the content as a monitoring officer. Inevitably, illegal content must be deleted and conversation should be equalized. Representatives of the company act as an example. (Kortesuo & Patjas 2011, 30)

2.3.2 Responding to conversations

Social customer support improves company's customer service. Just a decade ago disappointment for the product was handled between the customer and the customer service. Nowadays a customer might tweet about his dissatisfaction to the whole world and produce a storm of negative publicity. There are software that help companies to recognize problems by following social media conversations concerning relevant brands and dissatisfaction on them. As a result companies can take action and deal with the arising problems before letting them get bigger. (Meltwater 2014.) Early participation seems to be an efficient mean for managing social media conversations, since the company can turn negative social media conversations into success stories. When there is social customer support crises bursting, participating company can react to it quickly and comprehensively. At first the problem in the bottom should be dealt in order to let the customer feel valued and relieved. The next step is to reply publicly in the original conversation. In conclusion, company should turn the tone of the social media conversation into positive by encouraging customers to share their customer support experiences.

Negative feedback is challenging to handle because of the situation's uniqueness. According to Kananen (2013, 134) it is wise to admit the obvious mistakes and strive to develop. In some cases it might be difficult to choose the right tactic. For example, by replying to some negative feedback might lead to endless dispute. Some might think that company disregards consumers when not replying at all. (Kananen 2013, 134.) Moreover, Clapperton (2009, 22) adds that

sometimes the critic becomes the advocate. Clapperton among many others sees that companies should respond quickly, almost immediately. This is because complainers on public social networks might do a lot of damage and therefore companies should deal with complaints. Customer Care could add social media to their strategy. For example according to Clapperton (2009, 25) company's customer care is able to reply to complaints and as a result, could turn the situation around in public.

2.3.3 Social media usage policy

Over one third of the companies using social media have an official usage policy of social media (Statistics Finland, 2013). Ministry of Finance (2010) offers information security instructions for social media, which outlines the main information security threats connected with social media. In addition, instructions guide organisations in planning their social media usage policy. A key issue presented is the organisation's approach to the use of social media services during working time. In addition, there are reputation issues to be considered. Companies should think about an appropriate behaviour in social media. If the organisation itself offers or uses social media services, instructions based on the approved usage policy must be given to employees how they are expected to act as representatives.

Companies should have a crises communication guideline ready in case scandals that spread in the Internet (Isokangas and Vassinen, 2010, 136). Moreover, the policy should reinforce the fact that if an employee is bringing the company into disrepute in social media, as in any medium, even in his own time, gives a reason to take action against (Clapperton 2009, 167). Social media is often thought as public communication tool, even if the consumer writes something in her own personal profile. This is because of the attributes of the media such as "share button". (Koivumäki 2014.) Internet is a public place. Leino (2010, 324) agrees that social media users must keep in mind that they represent their employers in social media networks and should act accordingly.

3 METHODOLOGY

In this chapter the chosen approach to research study is introduced. Qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews was applied, where the case companies were wished to give more insight on the role of social media and in particular on managing social media conversations.

After presenting the case companies and data collection, the research methodology used to gather empirical data is presented and the validity and reliability are being estimated.

3.1 Case selection criteria and data collection

For the background information and outlining the theory, material from the literature and other written sources, primarily digital information from the webpages of social media agencies, was collected (as presented in chapters 1 and 2). In addition, an interview with Social media consultant from Someco, a social media agency, gave insight to the selection criteria of the interviewees. According to them, experience and social media utilisation varies a lot between companies, depending for example of the size of the company and the industry (Louhimies, Someco 2014). Therefore, the chosen four empirical organisations of this research were selected by the size of the company. They ought to be big and well-known Finnish companies and brands that operate in business to consumers sector. B-to-c sector was chosen because it seems to be more active in social media compared to b-to-b. Also, the case companies had to have an employee, who works as a social media specialist. They must be active in social media, in order to take part and be able to answer to the interview. The researcher stated their activeness by previewing their social media presence beforehand. These cases suit well in this research, because digital communication obviously has an important role in these companies and they are actively involved with social media.

Interviewees were contacted by the researcher, who at first took contact to the switchboards of these corporations, which lead her to the ones responsible for managing social media. Despite the hectic business times, fortunately four of several contacted social media specialists were happy to meet up and share their experiences.

The questionnaires were sent beforehand to the interviewees, specialists who are responsible of social media accordingly. Case companies were interviewed in Finnish in their premises in Helsinki and Turku during April and May 2015. Interviews were recorded and each lasted approximately an hour.

3.2 Research methods

Qualitative research methodology is used to this research, because it strives to explain the meanings for the behaviour and its' context (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2004, 27). The aim is to gain more insight on questions "why" and "how" related to social media.

In order to control if conclusions found in the theoretical part can be verified in the reality, semi-structured interviews were chosen to be conducted by the qualitative method. This was thought to be the most relevant method to add value to the research.

3.2.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi- structured interviews were chosen to support the interview. The theoretical background information became the inspiration and guideline for the structure of the interview. The questions were built on the same structure as the literature review (see questionnaire as an appendix 1). The themes and questions arose from the literature review, but semi-structured interview gave freedom to discuss on the issues. As a researcher I wanted to be able to have flexibility for

the conversation and be able to ask more about the issues arising during the interview.

Questions were divided into three categories. At first, there was a general discussion about the role of social media in companies' business and strategy. Then, the questions were about monitoring social media conversations, such as "Why is it important to monitor what is being discussed in social media"? "How companies monitor the conversation, what are the tools and how it is done in practice"? At the end of the interview, the questions concerned about controlling social media conversation. "How can companies affect on discussions"? In addition, it was researched how employees are engaged and guided with the use of social media.

According to Sanders (et al, 2009, 320) one typology that is commonly used is related to the level of formality and structure, where semi-structured interviews are positioned intermediate. They are "non- standardized" and are often referred to as "qualitative research interviews". Interview had a list of themes and questions to be covered, but as characterized to a semi-structured interview some questions could have been be omitted and the order of questions may also vary depending on the flow of the conversation. On the other hand, additional questions may be required to explore the research question and objectives depending on particular organization (Sanders et al 2009, 320).

In this research, the data of the interviews was audio recorded and notes were taken. The purpose of the research could be classified as exploratory and explanatory studies. In an exploratory study, in-depth interviews help in finding out what is happening and seeking new insights. Whereas in an explanatory study, semi-structured interviews may be used in order to understand the relationships between variables (Sanders et al 2009, 322). Semi-structured interviews have been used in this research to both explore and explain themes related to social media.

3.2.2 Qualitative approach

Qualitative interview is often conducted if the purpose is to understand the reasons for the decisions that research participants have taken or the reasons for their opinions and attitudes. As already stated, semi-structured interviews gave the opportunity to probe answers, as it was wished that the interviewees would explain their responses. With this approach, it is possible to collect a rich and detailed set of data. According to Sanders (et al 2009, 324) it has been found that managers are more willing to be interviewed, rather than complete a questionnaire. In this research, social media specialists were interviewed in person, where the interview topic was seen interesting and relevant to their work.

The nature of the questions also influences whether to choose a qualitative or quantitative approach. A semi-structured interview is the most advantageous approach to collect data when the questions are either complex or open-ended (Sanders et al 2009, 355), as this was the case.

Four communications professionals, responsible for social media, were interviewed with semi-structured interview, where a researcher gives the questions and interviewees could reply with her own words. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2004, 47). Efficiency of this thematic interview is based on the fact, that the researcher can steer the interview without fully controlling it. (Koskinen et al 2005, 104-105). As noted before, the purpose of these interviews was to gain more insight how the companies in practice manage the social media conversations. Also, the aim was to find out the context – what kind of role social media has in the business and how is it utilized?

3.3 Data quality issues - reliability and validity

The lack of standardisation in a qualitative semi-structured interview might lead to concerns on reliability. By this Sanders (et al, 2009, 357) mean the relation of reliability to be concerned with alternative researchers would reveal similar information. There are various types of bias to be taken into account: interviewer

bias, where she creates bias in the way interviewees respond to the questions. The other type is related to interviewee or response bias, where she chooses whether or not to reveal and discuss on certain issues.

Validity refers to the extent to which the researcher accesses to the interviewee's knowledge and experience. The high level of validity can be obtained by carefully conducted interviews, where questions can be clarified and replies probed and discussed from different angles. Nevertheless, qualitative research using a semi-structured interview cannot be used to make statistical generalisations about the entire population, where the number of cases is small. (Sanders et al 2009, 358). However, the findings in a case study using a nonstandardised research methods, is not necessarily intended to be repeatable. This is because the findings reflect reality at the time they were collected, where the circumstances to be explored are dynamic and complex (Sanders et al 2009, 328).

In this thesis, the topic social media develops quickly and therefore situations might be subject to change. It is possible to relate the research to existing theory and establish the relationship to theory in order to be able to demonstrate the broader significance of the case study findings. According to Sanders (et al 2009, 366) relationship makes it possible to test the applicability of existing theory to the examined settings. In addition, theoretical propositions can be advanced and tested in another context.

4 FINDINGS OF EMPIRICAL DATA

The findings of the interviews are being compared to each other. Moreover, the interviews also aimed to get more insight of the role of social media in the business. Do the interviewed companies agree on the fundamental factors with the theory presented in chapters 1 and 2?

In order to analyse the collected data, the data is compared in a comparative case analysis through a table. Under the table the findings are presented. There are quotes used to make responses more vivid, but they are not exactly word-by-word because the interviews were conducted in Finnish and then translated into English.

In the following chapter 5, the findings will also be reflected to the theoretical findings.

4.1 The role of social media

The interviews began by discussing on the role of social media in the case companies. In addition, it was studied who in these organisations is responsible for social media and do companies have social media strategies?

Table 1: Comparative case analysis of the interviews led for the research. Introduction and background information for the topic: the role of social media in business and responsibilities.

Question	Company A	Company B (VALIO)	Company C (CLOETTA)	Company D (SOK)
Role of social media	Big role: both business and the brand - how seen by consumers. One communication channel.	Important, a versatile tool in a daily business - serving customers. Ideas for the product development. One and the fastest channel of marketing communication.	Very important, for the consumer communications, sales, customer care and intra social media.	Very important, communication is mainly digital and connected to social media.
Customer service in social media	Not yet through social media. Consumers' direct messages in social media are responded.	Most messages go through traditional channels (however, customer service replies to consumers also in social media).	No, traditional channels (but consumers also responded in social media).	No, traditional channels (also responded in social media).
Social media strategy	Action plan	Digital marketing strategy	Brand specific strategies, in line with the company strategy.	Marketing strategy, including communications and social media
Responsible for social media	One communication officer administers (follows and consults) social media.	Team of digital marketing specialists. Controlled decentralization, well-defined operations. Tasks and responsibilities of social media are expanded to organisation.	One community manager coordinates brand specific.	Two communications specialists in the business unit. Many employees also participate.
Expert services	Yes, brands have outsourced content production and follow-up.	No. (except optimization of advertising)	No. (except photo services are for the most outsourced. Advertising and media agencies are involved in bigger campaigns.)	No.

The first point that all interviewed agreed is, that social media has a very important role, for the daily business and for the brands. Communication these days seem to be mainly digital and social media is part of it. Most of the interviewed emphasized that like communication in general, also social media, is about how to communicate about things to customers.

Communications Manager from company A emphasised the importance of various social media channels and segments. It is important to consider what kind of consumers use the channel in question and whom company aims to reach. The interviewed communication manager clarifies:

“ For us, social media is about how we are seen as a company and brands. We want to be there where the consumers are - in social media. Eventually, in social media like in a traditional communication channels, it is about communicating the company core message”.

Actually, this perspective came up with other interviewed as well. For example SOK's Communications Manager (OH) discussed that they see one way of managing social media conversation, is to stay calm and toot the company's core message. For them the interactive communication with consumers is mostly digital and in social media.

Valio's Community Manager (PR) and Cloetta's Community Manager (TH) pointed out the versatility of social media. However, eventually the main function is seen in consumer communication.

“ Social media serves consumers and customers, where the target is to solve their problems and offer inspiration for their lives. In addition, social media can be used to bring ideas to product develop-

ment and be used in consumer service” Valio’s Community Manager explains.

In addition, intra social media among employees is used at least in Cloetta. Other key points that came up while discussing the role of social media is the difference of various social media channels and their user base. In particular, as already referred, company A emphasized that it is very decisive to think what kind of consumers use certain social media channels, as their user bases varies considerably. Planning the content and the intended target group is essential. Also SOK’s Communications Manager (OH) mentioned that for example the usage and users of Facebook and Twitter are like a night and a day. Facebook is usually for more private and social usage and Twitter for sharing expertise and information.

4.1.1 Customer service in social media

As stated in the table 1, customer service in the case companies is still merely operated by the traditional channels, meaning mainly through forms in the company webpages, e-mail and phone service. However, all interviewed state that direct customer messages in the company social media pages are responded.

According to other interviewed (than company A) consumers increasingly take contact and give feedback through their social media pages (especially Facebook). According to Valio’s Community Manager (PR) by replying to messages in social media, company has a chance to communicate the issues and serve many at the same time. However, sometimes one reply is not covering the target.

“ We often receive a lot of similar messages and questions in Facebook. But you have to behave and answer to same questions as

many pairs of eyes are watching", SOK's Communications Manager (OH) explains.

On the contrary, one company (A) clarified that customer service does not play one of the key roles for the company. It is yet relatively small as their most significant direct customers are retail and other companies and do not yet use social media as a channel for customer service.

"Conversation company" defines our target. We want to be approachable", Cloetta's Community Manager (TH) explains and continues, "We wish the threshold to take contact and communicate with consumers in social media to be low and easy. Social media gives a change to participate in the coffee table discussions with consumers and gain insight how they feel about the product launches, for instance."

4.1.2 Expert services

Most of the interviewed strongly felt they would not outsource social media, for example content production, because the amount and the scale of consumer communication. As an exception, company A has a communication officer, who follows and consults social media, but social media of the brands (monitoring and producing content in Facebook and Instagram) is outsourced. According to her, the key thing in managing social media is to comprehend that it is one of the communication channels. It is important to distinguish the various social media channels and their profiles. Thus, the messages should be differentiated and not be posted as such to all channels.

SOK has two communication specialists responsible for social media within the business. Although according to SOK's Communications Manager (OH) some-

times there are challenges to keep threads in the own hands because of the limited resources. Luckily they have many employees as their ambassadors. She says their employees do a major work with their daily presences in social media. They want to be in direct connection with consumers and manage social media inside the house. However, the nature of social media is fast and irregular, which causes hectic pressure at times.

Valio has controlled decentralization where digital marketing specialists are together with the consumer service team. Social media related tasks are well coordinated and defined in the organisation. Valio's Community Manager (PR) argues that it is important to understand the business and the relevant issues to be monitored in social media. Therefore he doubts the competence of an outsider to be able to distinguish these relevant issues. Furthermore, the dialogue and questions to be answered in social media are wide and diverse.

“ We are moving in a direction where social media is just not a responsibility for marketing team, but it is expanded, which means in practise that many employees have a role in social media”, Valio's Community Manager (PR) explains.

However, in some cases, they might ask the opinion of the communication or advertising agency. Also, the digital advertising optimization is done by the company's media agency.

Likewise, Cloetta's Community Manager (TH) agrees Cloetta wants to have a direct dialogue with consumers in social media. They also consider it is easier themselves to reply to customer feedback, since questions might sometimes be rather tricky. Halsvaha is a community manager and responsible for social media, for brand specific coordination. Photo services related to social media are outsourced.

4.1.3 Social media strategy

All interviewed have some kind of social media strategy; call it a strategy or action plan. To one, social media strategy is a part of the marketing strategy, which includes communication including social media. For one, a digital marketing strategy includes social media. All agree that social media plans should be in line with the company strategy.

4.2. Monitoring social media

After finding out background information about the role of social media in the companies, topic monitoring social media conversations was studied (Table 2). Why monitoring social media is concerned to be important and how it could be done in practise?

Table 2. Monitoring social media conversations. Why to monitor and how is it done?

Question	Company A	Company B (VALIO)	Company C (CLOETTA)	Company D (SOK)
Why it is important to monitor social media conversation?	Follow the trends and current themes related to the company, brand and products (knowledge can be used in product development, reputation and crisis management).	Follow what is being discussed. To assess the impact of the company's own actions on consumers. Dialogue with consumers per channels.	Access to the coffee table discussions, product development and predictability of situations, crisis prevention.	Prevent sensations and crises, chains-effects. To react quickly in situations per channels.
How to monitor conversations?	Monitoring systems deliver reports from social media, blogs and other discussion forums, using certain key word sources. Analytics of company social media channels.	A variety of tools, automated reports (relevant keyword phrases). Analytics of social media per channels.	Systems, keywords. Own analytics of social media channels. Different indicators such as word clouds, scales, categorization. Bloggers advocates.	Monitoring systems, tools, through personal brands as well.
Customer engagement	Deliver interesting content and get reactions. Follow engagement rate (retweets, likes, clicks, shares, etc.). Develop content and postings by the analysis.	Operations in social media: 1. Increase and steer traffic between homepage and social media 2. Engaging content (questionnaires, dialogue etc.)	Deliver interesting content. Develop it on the basis of analysing, reach and engagement rate (like/comment/share)	Deliver interesting content. Metrics aid in analysing the data.

4.2.1 Importance of the monitoring conversations

The interviewed gave many reasons for why they think it is important to monitor conversation on them in social media. For the first one, all agreed that by monitoring they are able to follow the trends and what themes (related to the business) are being currently discussed. Companies are thus able to participate conversations and produce postings about the current interests. Cloetta's Community Manager (TH) sums it up:

“ We are able to flexibly join into consumers' coffee table conversations in social media... and can in an agile way react and respond them accordingly”.

In addition to receiving feedback on companies product launches and other actions, following discussions and upraising themes give also ideas to product development.

In fact, by monitoring conversations, finding out what is being discussed on the business and the products, is part of managing brand and reputation, company A pointed out. Also, all mentioned that by being aware about the discussions might help in preventing possible sensations and crises. SOK's Communications Manager (OH) has experienced that nowadays customers are increasingly posting messages to their own social media pages, where things might cumulate very fast and get easily out of hand. She argues, it is more difficult afterwards to analyse sensations and crises, the chain-effects, if you have not been earlier involved with monitoring and social media.

What is notable, all interviewed agreed on the value: organisations join into conversations just if it brings added value. This means, for example, companies do not automatically join in every discussion in blogs, where they or brands are mentioned. It is worthwhile replying when for example correcting some false facts, not opinions. Direct questions or messages addressed to the company in their own social media pages are of course responded.

Furthermore, Valio's Community Manager (PR) mentioned that by monitoring (social media conversations), they are able to evaluate their own operations and the influences among the consumers and orbit.

4.2.2 The means to monitor

All interviewed use some tools and software for monitoring conversation in social media. Reports are automated and delivered into the e-mail in a regular basis. In addition, Valio's Community Manager (PR) highlighted the importance of the analysing results and understanding the relevant big picture. It is not enough to just monitor and look at the reports, but in order to understand and utilize the data, you must have the knowledge and competence to analyse it.

Most interviewed (all apart from company A) discussed about the challenges in combining data from various sources of information. Moreover, sometimes for certain software and keyword searches Finnish language might be too problematic to submit to. It is also challenging to decide the relevant key words for searches, as the scale of the business and conversations is wide. In addition, social media channels differ, for example Twitter is a very fast-paced channel, which affects also for the following. Although consumers are increasingly communicating and giving feedback through social media, interviewed reminded social media is just a one tool, channel to have a conversation with consumers.

4.2.3 Engagement

All specialists agreed that the engagement rate is an important indicator when monitoring and analysing social media. In order to get engagement rates high, they advice delivering interesting content is the key issue. Monitoring and analysing the postings afterwards help in content development. Metrics such as "reach" and "engagement" are good indicators when analysing the reports. Hal-savaha in Cloetta sees it is rather simple to decide what kind of postings to do: if the content engages and gains attention (many likings, sharings or comments

on posting), the engagement rate is high. As a result, it is wise to make more similar postings and other content. She has discovered that the fans are more engaged, compared to other visitors in the company's' social media pages.

According to Valio's Community Manager (PR) they aim to make consumers active and engaged also by linking the contents in in their webpages and social media. It is often being wished that for example a posting in a company homepage generates traffic to social media pages as well, and vice versa. In addition, consumers are activated in their social media pages for instance by discussions, chats and questionnaires. As already mentioned, metrics such as re-tweet, clicks, reach and engagement percentages, help in analysing what kind of topics and themes interests readers.

4.3 Controlling social media conversation

The third section of the interview was about controlling social media conversations (Table 3). Few key elements arose in answers, while asking, "how companies can control the social media conversation"? All agreed it is not possible to wholly control it, but you can steer the conversation. Companies and brands should make own perspectives clear and have active dialogue with consumers. Communications Manager in company A and SOK's Communications Manager (OH) discussed about communicating the core message also in social media and Cloetta's Community Manager (TH) used almost the same words as they think social media enables them to get actively into discussions and spotlight their perspectives.

Indeed, Valio's Community Manager (PR) talked about purposeful façade building. They boost themes and postings that are meaningful for them and consumers, which stimulate discussions as a result. Likewise company A is actively importing interesting themes and other content in social media. When publishing specific content to company's homepages, it is often hoped to generate discussion among consumers, also in social media. Also, it is possible to steer dis-

cussions going to certain direction. Valio's Community Manager (PR) gave an example where Valio had to finish a certain product, which was communicated to consumers in forehand through a company blog. Consequently, the reactions of the consumers were relieved.

Table 3. How to control social media conversations?

Question	Company A	Company B (VALIO)	Company C (CLOETTA)	Company D (SOK)
Can company control conversation?	No	No	No	No
Means for "controlling" conversation	Steer and make own points of views clear. Respond quickly to the direct inquiries and prevent possible crisis situations.	Purposeful facade building. Highlight themes, important to the company and consumers (create discussions).	Active involvements in discussions, through dialogue communicate company/brand perspectives.	Identify and communicate the core message. Get involved in discussions.
	Actively produce themes and content to social media (create discussions). The core message matters. Be genuine and honest, also in social media.	Brands are special for consumers and create feelings and discussions. Communicate key issues in advance (e.g. changes in product line) and relieve the reactions.	Conversation is free, only foul language (for example, swearing) is deleted in the company social media pages.	Produce content with interesting themes (arising in discussions).
Social media policy, guidelines	Yes. Duty of secrecy concerns also social media.	Yes. Employees are encouraged to be active.	Yes, employees encouraged to use social media.	Yes, employees encouraged to use social media.
	Few key speakers (employee advocacy).	Keep in mind that audience is wider than own circle of friends.	Employees can participate as a consumer; keep in mind the dual role. Few speakers.	Follow social media; be awake what is happening around.

In addition to communicating issues in advance, also honesty is appreciated. Company A brought up that it is important to be open and honest, since one gets caught even faster for actions in social media. All agreed that it might be possible to avoid sensations or crises accelerating by reacting and replying fast to consumers in social media.

However, sometimes it is impossible to prevent sensations arising.

“ Once we saw the warning signs in the air, when our TV-campaign started to have critical comments in social media. Even though, we responded immediately, consumers did not listen or believe us.”

SOK's Communications Manager (OH) sighs.

She and company A thought that by monitoring social media, it is possible to notice what themes and trends are arising and it is wise to react accordingly, for example make an article or another posting around the issue.

4.3.1 Social media policy, guidelines

All interviewed have a guideline for social media policy. It concerns usage of social media as a private person and an employee. Duty of secrecy concerns social media as well, but employees are encouraged to be active in social media. Valio's Community Manager (PR) reminds that in social media the audience of messages is wider than the own circle of friends. Cloetta's Community Manager (TH) states that employees are urged to take part in discussions. However, they must remember the dual role and participate as a consumer, not speak for the company. There are just few key persons, who communicate in the name of the company. According to SOK's Communications Manager (OH) employees nowadays follow social media and are awake for what is happening around. She receives a lot of messages and observations about the company related issues in social media.

4.4 Summary of empirical results

According to the case companies, nowadays the main focus in communications and marketing is in digitalization. Social media is a very important, versatile tool and communication channel for them. While interviewing the specialists, all brought it up that social media is just a one channel for communication. One of the interviewees outlined the thought:

“What applies to managing communication in general suits to social media as well. In the end, it is about the core message: how does the company and brands want to be seen and whom they want to reach? There are various channels and user base in social media, which has to be taken in consideration in the management”.

Companies want to be there, where the consumers are – in social media. Interviewed consider it is important to be active and get involved with discussions. However, it is notable, that participation should add value. Thus, companies have to constantly weight balance with their involvement. Correcting false information and replying to direct questions in social media, for example, is usually done by the companies. Principally nothing should be deleted in social media, as conversation is free. People can have their opinions, but very rude language for example cursing, can be removed. The rules for communication are good to be described in their own social media pages. Social media is a fast channel, where companies are often expected to react and reply within few hours. This is one of the challenges mentioned in the interviews. Discussions are irregular and sometimes there can be plenty of messages for company in social media, which inevitably causes pressure. Discussions should be reacted quickly also in order to let possible negative chain-effects and crises rising. In addition to crises management and prevention, companies are managing brand and building the façade in social media. In particular in social media, things evolve fast and can get out of the hands. Thus, it is crucial to be open and honest in communication.

In addition to dialogue with consumers, customers and media, social media has other functions as well. For some, it is serving consumers by dialogue and delivering other interesting content that gives inspiration for their daily lives. Still, customer service is mainly operated through traditional channels such as forms in webpages, telephone and e-mail. However, consumers are increasingly giving feedback and comments on social media. In the future, it might be expected that customer service will be run more through social media channels.

By following social media conversations you gain more insight and feedback on company's actions, for example product launches and other campaigns. Product development and ideas might form from these experiences and with the help of arising trends and themes. Some engage consumers on development work for instance asking comments or answers to questionnaires. Moreover, social media can be used as an intra communication system for employees.

There are tools and systems for monitoring social media. Specialists of the case companies receive reports daily into their e-mails and analyse the data. According to many, it is challenging to combine information from different sources. In a way it is constant development to fine-tune the right key word phrases and other relevant issues that should be monitored. Analysing the data, for example reach and engagement rate of the postings, help in developing the optimal content. One of the interviewed summed it up:

" It is simple: the higher the engagement rate, the more interesting the content is found. Thus, we make more that, what interests consumers. "

Producing interesting content is the key for getting readers engaged. Various actions are often wished to get traffic and reactions in and between social media and company home page.

The majority of the interviewed strongly though they want to be responsible for their social media and in direct dialogue with the consumers. In their opinion, since they have the big picture, vision and knowledge of the business, it is easier for them to operate with social media, consumer dialogue and in specific

wide scale of consumer questions. However, there are expert services available. Like one of the interviewed does, it is possible to outsource social media or part of the related operations. There are agencies to help out in a wide scale of tasks, from consulting to content production.

To put this all in a nutshell, it is evident, that social media has an important role in organisations. The main function is seen to be in communication and dialogue with consumers. Managing social media conversation requires systematic approach. There are systems available for monitoring and as a result, data analysis can be utilized in various ways, for example for the development work, concerning products, services, content production, brand and crises management and so on. It is impossible to wholly control social media, but with active involvement it is possible to create, generate and steer the conversations. Spot-lighting the meaningful themes for the company and consumers can stimulate dialogue. According to the case companies, operating in social media has to be customer serving, quick, honest and open. The interviewed companies have social media specialists and they are developing functions further. It appears that social media is going to the direction, where the responsibilities and tasks are expanded from the marketing teams for more divisions in organisations such as customer service.

5 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY (RESEARCH AND THEORY)

In this chapter the results are being analysed and compared to the theory. Based on the answers from the interviewees, researcher was able to identify similar findings to reflect the theoretical propositions formulated prior to the interviews. It seems, in the light of the research results and the theoretical findings that social media in general has an increasingly important role in the businesses and there is an awareness of the research theme “managing social media conversation”.

In theory many similar key concepts and issues were mentioned than was found out with the empirical findings. On the basis of the theory and the empirical re-

search results the research objectives are being answered. The purpose of the research was to bring empirical insights on how companies are managing social media conversations? In addition, it was investigated why is it important to manage these conversations and how it should be done? How companies can monitor social media and is it possible to have a control over these conversations? Results of this study indicate that the case companies manage social media quite a similar way to each other and as advised in the theoretical sources of this thesis. Most findings of the research are corresponding with the ones described in the theory. Accordingly, it is justified to state that many findings of the study are reflecting the reality. The conclusion could be that the companies have understood the important and versatile role of social media and managing the conversation. Case companies seem to put the advices in practise. However, it can be also seen that social media is rather a new phenomenon and it is looking for the best practise. Many experts suggest that the best way to get going with managing social media and conversation, is by being trying and learning; being at present in social media and trying how different channels and ways work. Findings revealed that the management, analysing and optimising social media requires a lot of work.

5.1. Role of social media in business

Over one third of the companies using social media have an official usage policy of social media (Statistics Finland 2013). Ministry of Finance (2010) offers information security instructions for social media and instructions for guiding organisations in planning their social media. Many social media experts urge that the policy should be defined and employees be guided how to react to different social media conversations (Isokangas & Vassinen 2010, 146). All case companies have a guideline for social media policy. They are being encouraged to be active in social media. These findings indicate that social media is being taken seriously in the Finnish companies and its' role in everyday work is growing.

Case companies thought that social media has an important role in their business and in specific in marketing communication. Social media is most of all seen as a channel to communicate with consumers. Therefore managing conversation is important. It is also found in the written sources as well that social media is based on conversation, where the feedback is immediate. For that reason organisations should be present in social media and have thus the ability to network and communicate. (See for example Kortesoja & Patjas (2011, 39.)

According to the findings, social media has been adopted well in the practise in the case companies. They are utilizing the versatile functions of social media, for example brand management, consumer service and product development. Indeed, Social media can be used in a very diverse ways, as described in Chapter 2, for example by Statistics Finland (2013). Customer care in the case companies was still merely taken care by the traditional channels. Nonetheless, consumers are being answered in social media channels, but they could be directed to continue their conversation from the public social media channel to more secure private channel such as e-mail. According to the interviewed customer care in social media is a good way of taking care of general questions. Servicing one consumer well might also make others in the network experience good customer experience. It will be seen whether social customer care will be developed in the future.

Study aimed to reveal what is thought as the best way for managing social media? Most of those interviewed agreed that content production and other management should not be outsourced. It was thought that own employees are able to communicate on their business faster and more credible compared to an outsourced expert. This might also reflect to the employee advocacy, where employees are wished to operate in social media and communicate about the company related issues. According to the research (MLS 2014) most communication directors encourage corporate communications responsibilities to be decentralized. Then, employees would be offered an education and guidelines for steering external communication. Efficient external communication requires en-

gaging employees and prompting them to be active also in social media communication. Findings suggest that these case companies seem to be in the right way of urging employees to be active and take part in social media. However, employee advocacy seem to be its early stages in the most case companies, but the concept came up in few interviews. Two companies are encouraging employees to be ambassadors and communicate on behalf of the company. All experts of the research were interested to further develop the concept.

5.2. Monitoring conversations

There are several reasons found out why monitoring social media conversation is important. For the first one, all agreed they are able to follow trends and what themes (related to the business) are being currently discussed. Companies are thus able to participate conversations and produce postings about the current interests. Similar findings are found in the written sources. Zhang & Vos (2013, 373-374) also present that by monitoring, company is able to collect information from customers and co-operate through networks. By being aware what is currently discussed helps in protecting and reinforcing the company brand. This fact also came up with the case companies. Identifying issues early and monitoring their development might help in predicting the growth of the issues. Based on the findings, companies are then able to produce content that interests consumers and affect on their behaviour for example by building traffic from social media communities to their websites, where specific content could also be found. It was seen more difficult afterwards to analyse sensations and crises, the chain-effects, if you have not been earlier involved with monitoring social media. Therefore, today, monitoring social media interaction has become very important for companies. (See for example, Zan & Vos 2013, 371.) Also Meltwater (2014) suggested that problems of consumers in social media could be handled with customer care before conversations become prolonged negative discussions in social media. In the event of the crises, companies that participate in the conversations have the change to steer the conversations. As a result negative conversations could be turned into positive publicity.

There are various solutions for monitoring social media, including search engines and media-monitoring offerings, text-analytics software companies and other agencies. (Zhang & Vos 2013, 375). All interviewed use some tools and software for monitoring conversation in social media. In addition to have statistics, it is important to analyse the results and understand the big picture. It was found challenging to combine data from various sources of information. Optimizing monitoring solution including the chosen tools and chosen target what to search and which keywords to use, is seen as on going process.

Findings indicate that monitoring social media is crucial for being efficiently able to take part, affect and modify conversation. In addition, collecting relevant information on the trends and how the consumers experience the company help in developing the social media communication. In fact, when monitoring and analysing social media, engagement rate was seen as an important indicator for finding out what kind of content interest consumers. Delivering interesting content is also supported by theory. In order to get consumers engaged, they need to be addressed with interesting topics and themes that interest readers (for example Kananen 2013, 116. Isonkagas & Vassinen 2010, 147.)

5.3 Controlling conversations

It was strongly thought by the interviewed and the theory also indicates that social media can not be fully controlled. However, it was emphasised in the findings and in theory that the companies have a change to affect and steer conversations in social media (for example Isokangas & Vassinen 2010, 86, Sernovitz 2012,164). Companies are required to be present in social media in order to be able to participate in conversations.

A certain type of dialogue and the way companies operate in social media were highlighted concerning the management of the conversations. Interviewed though that the company communication in social media should be consistent, systematic and honest. Because issues spread and build up quickly in social media, openness and honesty are appreciated. It was agreed that it might be

possible to avoid sensations accelerating by reacting and replying fast to consumers in social media. Also according to Leino (2010, 288) companies should be open, honest and sharing, because those are also the elements of social media.

Findings on the challenges in managing social media conversation were parallel to the theory. For example, it was found out that despite it is usually wise to reply to feedback, sometimes it can lead to prolonged dispute in social media. Companies should respond quickly, almost immediately. This challenge of the response times also came up with the case companies. Customers expect that they are being replied within hours. (Kananen 2013, 134. Clapperton 2009, 22).

One of the main reasons why case companies monitor social media is to follow trends and the rising themes that need to be responded. So, in order to be able to manage conversations, they must be monitored as described in the previous chapter. There is a change to steer the conversation towards wanted direction. The information could be utilized in a way where for example, companies produce certain content of the rising themes to their websites and steer traffic from other channels to their websites. It was also supported by the theory, for example Zhang & Vos (2013, 373-374) sees monitoring as a possibility to track the current conversations on the brand and predicting the future buzz. Companies seek to identify influencers and reinforce them and collect brand management related information. The aim is to promote the attention given to the brand and its values in social media.

6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter the findings are shortly being described and analysed in addition to the presentations in the previous chapters. Based on the answers from the interviewees, researcher was able to identify similar findings to reflect the theoretical propositions formulated prior to the interviews. On the basis of the theory and the empirical research results, the research objectives were answered. How does companies manage social media conversations and why it is important? Furthermore, limitations of the research are stated now and the ideas for the future research are suggested.

6.1. Research summary

During this thesis process and getting familiar with the topic social media, it became clear to the researcher that the field is constantly developing in a fast space. It seems in the light of the research results and the theoretical findings that social media in general has an increasingly important role in the businesses and there is an awareness of the research theme “managing social media conversation”. It was eyes opening to find out that managing social media conversations serves many functions, not only corporate communication, but for example facade building for the company, development work and content production on the basis of the feedback on current trends and themes that interest consumers.

It was interesting to reveal what is thought as the best way for managing social media conversations? Most of those interviewed agreed that content production and other management should not be outsourced. Case companies seem to be in the right track of urging employees to be active and take part in social media. In particular one company thought that employees have a major role for communicating in social media on behalf of the company. In addition, they value the information that the staff delivers to the business. Employees are being aware what is being discussed and as a result, everybody wins. All companies also have some kind of guideline and social media policy. However, employee advo-

cacy seem to be its early stages in the most case companies, but there is an interest to further develop the concept and take it in the practise. The researcher also reckons that the lack of resources for managing social media could be relieved with the help of involving more employees.

To summarize the key findings researcher would state that managing social media conversations is seen as very important for different reasons, such as brand management and protection, crises management and customer dialogue. Management requires systematic work, producing relevant content and monitoring publications and conversations. More and more it is seen that employees are also wished to be actively present in social media. Social media policy guides and encourages employees to take part in monitoring and delivering content social media channels. The findings also support theoretical insights of the thesis. It is essential to monitor social media, in order to know what is being discussed about the company in question and related issues. Knowledge of the rising themes and trends in social media conversations can be utilized, for example when producing content that might be of consumers' current interests. On the basis of monitoring and analysing the content, company is able to develop and create more interesting content. In the light of the findings it seems to require much effort and fine tuning to find the optimal ways for monitoring social media conversations.

It is not possible to wholly control social media conversations, but with an active presence in social media, the direction of conversation could be steered. It is essential to react quickly, since social media is of that nature and consumers expect quick respond particularly in social media. Most case companies had not established customer service in social media, but they did state that customer messages are taken care also in social media. At least one of the interviewed thought that responsibilities of managing social media will be expanding and more employees will have tasks in their job description for social media. Also other sources support that decentralization of corporate communication is encouraged by most of communication directors.

6.2. Statement of limitations and ideas for further research

Because of the nature of social media, it is good to keep in mind that the research data describes the current situation. Social media is developing fast and thus most probably the interviewed companies are developing their functions concerning social media. It could be valuable to update the status of social media management in the companies once a year.

Given the extent to social media management, a more in-depth analysis on several topics such as producing and delivering the optimal content, decentralization of social media responsibilities and employee advocacy could be good continuum to gain more in-depth analysis on the topics covered in the study. It could be research how to support employees as ambassadors. Since the use of different social media channels is arising, employees can spread the company messages via their own social media profiles. In addition, it could also be seen in the literature that the presence of employees as representatives of the company is important. Companies are not sympathized whereas people are, which makes employees a great asset for companies. In addition, writing with your own name, grows the professional reputation.

The focus of this research was managing social media conversations in external social media networks. External social media refers to social media networks outside the company, such as communities Facebook and Twitter. Other limitation was that the thesis is about dialogue between consumers and companies. Therefore, managing internal social media communication could be an interesting research topic. How to integrate and utilize social media into internal communication? There is software such as Yammer and Company Facebook that allow internal social communication.

Moreover, while discussing with the case companies, one of the current topics that arose is the customer service and how to integrate it to social media? It appears, that traditional channels (forms in the homepages, e-mail, phone) are still the main channels when handling customer contacts. However, case companies thought that consumers are increasingly giving feedback through social

media and they are replied also in social media or advised to give feedback through a form in company homepage. Replying in social media should happen almost immediately, since those forums are fast and conversations grow and spread rapidly. It would be interesting to research the interfaces with social media and customer service. How customer service is best practised these days?

Researcher's impression, based on the findings through the research is that much of the social media management related theory is applicable to variety of companies, them operating in b-to-c or b-to-b sectors. It would be interesting to research more in-depth how do the companies in different sectors behave differently in social media? In particular, in business-to-business sector companies seem to communicate mostly via traditional channels and perhaps social media is not yet thought as a relevant channel for them. It will be interesting to see how utilising social media also in that sector will develop. Since in the end, the employers of these b-to-b companies, decision makers, use social media in their private lives.

In addition, analysing the data and information is a wide topic itself. While reading the current news and following up the conversations, it appears that "knowledge management and leadership" are the current hot themes. Monitoring social media, analysing the findings, optimizing and acting upon could be researched more, in a profound way. Like Valio's Community Manager (PR) emphasized, there is much data available, but it needs to be analysed and utilized. That requires analytical skills. Also Cloetta's Community Manager (TH) shared that monitoring is on going process that need fine tuning.

Social media seem to touch many different functions and it really inspires the researcher. Therefore many ideas for the future research came up. To add one more, there is a very interesting interface with the customer experience, in social media. In the bottom, the main function to act both in traditional channels and in social media is to serve the customer and make her happy. How social communication can help to serve the customer better? How to develop the customer experience in social media?

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APPENDIX 1.

semi-structured interview questionnaire

MANAGING SOCIAL MEDIA CONVERSATIONS – YRITYSTÄ KOSKEVAN KESKUSTELUN TUNNISTAMINEN SOSIAALISESSA MEDIASSA JA KESKUSTELUN HALLINTA

Aluksi

1. Minkälainen rooli sosiaalisella medially on yrityksessänne?
Miten siihen suhtaudutaan (tärkeys)?
Onko some osana markkinointiviestintää, asiakaspalvelua vai miten integroitu liiketoimintaan?
2. Onko yrityksellä sosiaalisen median strategia, erikseen tai osana yrityksen liiketoimintastrategiaa?
3. Miksi yrityksenne mielestä on tärkeää seurata yritystä koskevaa keskustelua sosiaalisessa mediassa?
4. Miten yrityksenne voi sitouttaa käyttäjiä (asiakkaita) sosiaalisen median yhteisöissä? (engagement) Toteutetaanko käytännössä?

Keskustelun tunnistus, monitorointi (Monitoring social media conversations)

5. Miten yrityksenne tunnistaa sitä koskevaa keskustelua sosiaalisessa mediassa?
 6. Olen oheen listannut keinoja, jotka auttavat monitoroinnissa. Mitä mieltä olette :
- A. **Manuaalinen haku**
 - Hakukoneet (Google, medioiden omat; hashtagit ja työkalut)
 - Blogien lukeminen
 - Muu mikä?
 - B. **Työkalut / järjestelmät**
 - Oma tai ulkopuolisen toimiston tarjoama palvelu (sosiaalisen median seurantajärjestelmät ja työkalut)
 - Mitä tunnuslukuja tai tietoa järjestelmät antavat?
 - Mitä sosiaalisia medioita järjestelmät koskevat? (FB, Twitter, blogit, uutiset, muu?)

- avoin keskustelu

C. Sosiaalisen median experttiapu

- Hyödyntääkö yrityksenne ulkopuolista palvelua sosiaalisen median johtamisessa? (Mediatoimiston, viestintätoimiston, pr toimiston tai vastaavan toimiston asiantuntijuus?)

D. Roolit

- Kuka tekee työn yrityksessänne, talon sisällä joku vai ulkopuolinen toimisto (viestintä- tai mainostoimisto)?
- Kuinka vastuutettua ja systemaattista sosiaalisen median seuranta on?
- Avoin keskustelu:

7. avoin keskustelu koskien keskustelun monitorointia

Keskustelun hallinta (Controlling social media conversations)

8. Voiko mielestänne yrityksenne hallita sitä keskustelua (= yritystä, sen tuotteita ja/tai palvelua, brändiä, toimialaa, kilpailijoita) koskevaa keskustelua sosiaalisessa mediassa?
9. Jos voi niin miten, mitkä ovat keinot?
10. Hoitaako yrityksenne asiakaspalautteita (asiakaspalvelua) somessa? Onko asiakaspalautteiden hoito somessa osa kriisiviestintääänne?
11. Onko yrityksellänne ohjeistusta (social media policy, guidelines) työntekijöille miten sosiaalista mediaa tulisi käyttää :
 - työtehtävien kannalta (yrityksen edustajana) ja
 - onko ohjeistettu somen käyttöä yksityishenkilönä (yrityksen edustajana)?

Avoin keskustelu liittyen yritystä koskevan keskustelun johtamiseen sosiaalisessa mediassa