Social media marketing from a bottom-up perspective
- the social media transition

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Abstract

It is in the interest of organizations to understand that the public demand for quick and easy accessibility is growing at a rapid pace. However, the transition from traditional marketing strategies to social media marketing is not a straightforward process, but more complex.

The aim of the thesis is to, from a bottom-up perspective, draw conclusions from a comparative study of the social media praxes of Umeå-situated businesses and organizations.

The study indicates that the transition into social media still continues, but that there has been a change in organizations’ mindsets. It also shows that the application of a bottom-up approach provides new ways of viewing and understanding activities within social media.

1 Introduction

Social media is often thought of as a buzz concept that has just hit the market. This is not entirely true since social media has in some form actually been around since the 1950’s (Lapsley, 2010). The social media wave started when so called ‘phone phreaks’ used homemade devices that could link up to the telephone system. BBS or electronic ‘Bulletin Board Systems’ were very popular from around 1980 to 1995. These boards were connected to a small server where a person could dial in and promote their message (Lapsley, 2010).

The Internet has existed since the late 1960s as a closed network and became public, as the World Wide Web, in 1991 (Gillies & Cailliau, 1995). From then on, different services such as IRC and ICQ became increasingly popular. A big shift in the usage of the web became obvious around 1999 when Napster released their client, which was built to share media between users via so called ‘peer to peer’- or ‘P2P’ sharing (Gummadi et al, 2002). One of the very first social networking websites was ‘SixDegrees’ (1997) which let people create profiles and connect with friends (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). This kind of interactive social web application style became popularly known as ‘Web 2.0’ (O’Reilly, 2005), which is a term describing a new generation of web applications, sites and companies that emphasis openness, community and interaction. A Web 2.0 site allows its users to interact with each other as contributors to the website’s content, in disparity to websites where users are limited to the passive viewing of the information that is provided to them. Examples of web 2.0 appliances include technologies such as blogs, wikis and multimedia sharing (Millard et al, 2006).

Social media gained momentum with ‘Friendster’ around 2002, followed by ‘MySpace’ (2006) and ‘Facebook’ (2007) (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). During the last few years social media has become a household concept offering a unique platform for communication. Social media services allow people to stay connected in what some would claim is an extension of the physical world. These channels for communication are being used by more people than ever before, and they are rapidly expanding. Facebook has over 400 million active users and if it
were a country, it would have been the 4th largest in the world (facebook.com). Hence, social media platforms have become important and potentially powerful marketing places.

The emergence of contemporary social media services allow business and organizations to communicate with their audiences in a direct, quick and inexpensive way. The benefits of social media use can be substantial, but this is still a relatively novel and unexplored area, without any established specific theoretical models.

How do organizations and companies (in this case local ones) behave in social media? What do they consider to be important in these contexts? What similarities and differences of usage can be found between organizations and to what extent does the concept of bottom-up apply? The application of a bottom-up perspective enables a different point of view to these questions. It is an organizational mindset through which actions and processes can be assessed.

The aim of the thesis is to, from a bottom-up perspective, draw conclusions from a comparative study of the social media praxes of Umeå-situated businesses and organizations, and how they implement social media services into their activities.

2 The bottom-up approach

In management and organizational arenas, the terms ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ are used to describe how decisions are made. A top-down approach is one where an executive, decision maker, or other person or body makes a decision. This approach is spread under their authority to lower levels in the hierarchy, who are to a greater or lesser extent, bound by them. For example, a structure in which decisions either are approved by a manager, or approved by his or her authorized representatives based on the manager’s prior guidelines, is top-down management. A bottom-up approach is one that works from the grassroots - from a large number of people working together, causing a decision to arise from their joint involvement. A decision by a number of activists, students or victims of some incident to take action is a bottom-up decision (Dubois, 2002). Positive aspects of top-down approaches include their efficiency and excellent overview of higher levels. Also, external effects can be internalized. On the negative side, if reforms are perceived to be imposed ‘from above’, it can be difficult for lower levels to accept them. Evidence suggests this to be true, regardless of the content of reforms. A bottom-up approach allows for more experimentation and a better feeling for what is needed at the bottom (Dubois, 2002). Microsoft and Sun Microsystems use bottom-up blogging strategies. These firms seek to maximize the capabilities of blogs by supporting employees who are highly productive and efficient. However, this approach might negatively affect companies because high levels of autonomy among self-directed employees can become a liability (Langfred, 2004). Bottom-up blogging companies tend to focus on product development and customer service, while most top-down blogging companies tend to prefer thought leadership or promotional content strategy (Lee, 2006).
By adopting product development and customer service content strategy, bottom-up companies can take advantage of employee bloggers who respond to customers inquiries quickly and effectively. However, this content strategy is radically different from the common approach to exploit the Internet's potential in that it attempts to improve product quality prior to market introduction of the product, by disclosing product development processes and actively seeking feedback (Lee, 2006).

This relates to the point of view of this thesis in the sense that social media is based on lower level interactions where content is user generated. The bottom-up approach is a way of thinking about the structure and is transferrable to social media marketing. Traditional marketing strategies applied to social media tend to be perceived as dated and somewhat intrusive. To successfully communicate as a company in social media it is crucial to realize the differences between traditional and social media marketing.

3 Defining social media

People interpret and use the term social media in different ways. In this paper the concept of social media will be defined as “a broad term to describe all the different kinds of content that form social networks: posts on blogs or forums, photos, audio, videos, links, profiles on social networking sites, status updates and more. Social media allows people with no knowledge of coding or web development to upload and post unique content easily and share with the world instantly. Simply put, social media is any kind of information we share with our social network, using social networking sites and services” (Eley & Tilley, 2009). However, focus will mainly be on the mainstream channels and services of social media such as Facebook, Twitter and blogs.

3.1 Social media marketing

Social media marketing is a recent component of organizations' integrated marketing communications plans. Integrated marketing communications is a principle organizations follow to connect with their targeted markets. Integrated marketing communications coordinates the elements of the promotional mix - advertising, personal selling, public relations, publicity, direct marketing, and sales promotion - to produce a customer focused message (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). The emergence of social media platforms offers
marketors inexpensive ways to create and implement marketing campaigns. These channels enable an interactive and dynamic communication not possible through traditional media. Social media marketers typically focus on creating content that generates attention, word of mouth/mouse as well as motivational incentive for people to share it with their social network. The access to user information allows social media marketers to create highly specified advertisements that are more likely to be relevant to their demographic. The low cost of social media marketing as well as the amount of users and user information available has contributed in making social media marketing big business. However, it is important to understand that, at its core, social media is not marketing or advertisement. This insight is especially important to the producing spectrum of social media marketers as they are facing potential customers on their territory.

3.2 Social media services

In this section an explanatory summary of the most commonly used social media services and their functions, is presented as well as an overview of some of the commonly used marketing types in the context of social media.

3.2.1 Twitter

Launched in October 2006, Twitter is a micro-blogging social network service, which allows users to share anything with their followers by answering a simple question: ‘What are you doing?’ Answers to this question are short messages called ‘tweets’ which length is limited to 140 characters. Twitter is more open than for example Facebook since friendships are not necessarily mutual. You can ‘follow’ people you have an interest in while they in turn don’t have to follow you. Twitter is mainly used for daily chatter, short conversations, information sharing and reporting news and has been hugely successful with mobile device users (Gaonkar et al, 2008).

Compared to regular blogging, micro-blogging fulfills a need for an even faster mode of communication. By encouraging shorter posts, it lowers users’ requirement of time and thought investment for content generation. The second important difference is the frequency of update. On average, a prolific blogger may update her blog once every few days; on the other hand a micro-blogger may post several updates in a single day (Finin & Tseng, 2007). Twitter is currently ranked as the 11th most popular website worldwide (alexa.com). Estimates of the number of daily users may vary because the company does not release the number of active accounts. Twitter has somewhere between 6-8 million unique returning users based on different statistic rankings (blog.compete.com).

3.2.2 Facebook

Founded in February 2004, Facebook is a social network site that helps people communicate more efficiently with their friends, family and co-workers. Anyone can sign up for Facebook and interact with the people they know in a trusted environment. Facebook’s simplified navigation gives users easy access to games and other core applications such as profile, friends, networks and inbox which has a prominent place at the top of the user’s profile page. Other applications are photos, notes, groups and events. A post on Social Media Today
(socialmediatoday.com) says that eMarketer (emarketer.com) has predicted a 39% increase in advertising spend on Facebook for 2010. The increase is primarily based on the notion that sites like Facebook have a great deal of data on their users and that this information can be exploited to deliver highly targeted ads to its huge user base. Facebook is currently ranked as the world’s second most trafficked site in the world (alexa.com), and one of the largest MySQL installations anywhere, running thousands of databases. Facebook has over 400 million active users and is translated to more than 70 languages (facebook.com).

3.2.3 Blogs
A blog, short for web log, is a web page that serves as a publically accessible personal journal for an individual (Blood, 2002). Because the blog can be used to convey various types of information, such as personal, public, commercial and political, it has become an effective communication tool over the Internet (Lee et al., 2006). A blog can be a simple and personalized tool to reach out with it’s marketing. It can also serve as a company archive and make it easier to find material in chronological order. The blog is an inexpensive marketing tool, the only real cost is the time it takes to write for the blog. The blog is a powerful marketing tool and can be used for various tasks, such as customer service, internal communication, managing reports as well as presenting your company as a personal and credible one. A blog can, with the help of a good placing on search engines like Google.com, be very effective and help customers reach the company in an easy way (Frankel, 2007).

3.2.4 Multimedia sharing
One of the biggest growth areas has been amongst services that facilitate the storage and sharing of multimedia content. Well known examples include YouTube (video) and Flickr (photographs). These popular services take the idea of the ‘writeable’ web (where users are not just consumers but contribute actively to the production of web content) and enable it on a massive scale. Literally millions of people now participate in the sharing and exchange of these forms of media by producing their own podcasts, videos and photos (Anderson, 2007).

3.2.5 E-mail marketing
E-mail marketing is increasingly recognized as an effective Internet marketing tool (Chittenden & Rettie, 2003). Successful e-mail marketing builds on processing existing clients and contacts. Marketing towards existing clients is often more successful than finding new clients this way. E-mail is a much faster way of communicating than the traditional dispatch via the postal service with printing, designing and responses, which often takes several weeks. A well-prepared marketer can write the ad during midmorning, send it out during lunch and get response before the workday is over (Frankel, 2007).

3.2.6 Search engine
The basic idea with search engine marketing is to get a good position at the search engines search lists to drive the traffic to the company’s website (Moran & Hunt, 2005). It’s used to help customers find the company when they are looking for something that a particular company might be offering. The Internet usage is constantly expanding and so is the usage of search engines which globally has over 800 million searches per day. Its’ strength lies in the
fact that the customer is already looking for something, such as a product, service or information. Companies can buy an ad-space on, for instance, Google.com to get the company higher up in the search results (Frankel, 2007).

3.2.7 Viral marketing
Viral marketing is about getting as many hits as possible on a certain link, to create a reputation or to get countless people to read a message. It’s often called ‘word of mouth’, or as on the Internet, ‘word of mouse’ (Helm, 2000). Some tips for successful viral marketing are:

- Making sure that there is value in it, both for the sender and receiver.
- Keeping it easy is often a key factor because if it requires a lot of steps to participate, many people won’t.
- Understanding the recipients and the networks they are using. Different target groups work in different ways. Some may prefer SMS as a communication tool while others prefer e-mail.
- Making sure that there is something to spread. The unexpected or unusual is often a good way to start a ‘virus’. (Frankel, 2007).

3.2.8 Affiliate marketing
Affiliate marketing is a marketing form for Internet where an advertiser pays for an ad-space which generates a certain amount of activity to a website. The foundation of affiliate marketing is about pushing traffic between websites where the ad-space (affiliate) steer people to the advertiser, and the spreader gets paid based on the results of the traffic. The offer to the buyer is often a key in affiliate marketing. The price, product or design must seem as a bargain to the buyer for affiliate marketing to work. Another key is to build up strategic partnerships for lucrative link exchanges (Hoffman & Novak, 2000). If nobody clicks the link it doesn’t matter how much you’re paying for the ad (Frankel, 2007).

4 Method
This chapter describes the techniques used in the study as well as approach and selections made.

4.1 Research
As this study aims to collect data from different areas of the business spectrum, and in particular from single representatives, you need to be able to extract as much information as possible from them. A quantitative research method measure data while a qualitative research method wants to increase the understanding of data. Within a qualitative research you can be more open minded and let the questions grow during the work process. (Jacobsen, 2002). These methods allow and enable more in depth contextual information collecting and are therefore suitable methods of inquiry when dealing with individually interpreted phenomena.
4.2 Approach
A qualitative field study was conducted using semi-structured interviews documented with notes and a digital voice recorder. These recordings were later transcribed, and since the interviews left room for discussion to some extent, some parts that were found irrelevant were left out. Sentence condensation was applied to present concrete and essential meanings. This choice was made in order to capture the core points of topic. All participants were interviewed separately to enable them to speak freely and ensure that they were not affected by one another. Questions about the nature and usage of social media were asked, in general and in regard to their specific organization.

As the title of this paper would suggest, the concept and approach regarding bottom-up imbues the overall context and was often present in some form in the matters discussed.

4.3 Selection
Potential respondents for interviewing purposes could have been representatives from any company that uses social media in their marketing. To find respondents to be interviewed, a web search through different social media channels was conducted. Since there was a desire to both research and support local organizations active in the region of Umeå, the choice was made to focus on these. This had a positive effect on the practical aspect of the research as well. The selection process narrowed down to Umeå-based companies which are considered to be active and big in social media. A common denominator is that the companies have a big fan base or many followers in social media, or that they actively use social media in their marketing. It is a very broad selection that spreads from a local skateboard collective to a corporate group which has a turn-over of more than a billion Swedish kronor. This is an active choice and of big importance in this paper as the different companies may show a variation in regards of mindset and strategy. These people are active in social media on a day to day basis and can share their insight of how social media can be used as a marketing tool on its own, or to support the traditional marketing channels. Our seven (7) respondents are:

- **Glad Reklam** - An advertising agency which states they don’t know how to do traditional advertising.
- **Västerbottens Kuriren** - The 4th biggest local daily newspaper in Sweden.
- **Umeå Energi** - An energy company who uses social media frequently in their customer service.
- **Random Bastards** - A local skateboard collective which is engaged in fashion and the club scene.
- **Plakat** - An advertising agency that is big in public relations, media strategy and web design.
- **DUÅ** - A local deli shop, which has almost 4000 readers on their weekly letter.
- **T-Post** - An unusual t-shirt company that produces one t-shirt per month as a subscription.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Representative</th>
<th>Number of employees</th>
<th>Using social media since</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject 1 (S1)</td>
<td>Glad Reklam</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject 2 (S2)</td>
<td>Västerbottens Kuriren</td>
<td>Web editor</td>
<td>~200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject 3 (S3)</td>
<td>Umeå Energi</td>
<td>Web editor</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject 4 (S4)</td>
<td>Random Bastards</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject 5 (S5)</td>
<td>Plakat</td>
<td>Project manager</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject 6 (S6)</td>
<td>DUÅ</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject 7 (S7)</td>
<td>T-Post</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
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*Figure 2. Subjects of study.*

### 5 The social media transition

It is in the organizations interests to understand that the public demand for quick and easy accessibility is growing at a rapid pace. However, the transition from traditional marketing strategies to social media marketing is not a straightforward process, but more complex. All of the companies included in the study started using social media in their businesses between 2006 and 2008. Companies from the media side of the business spectra seem to point at the technological advances and their work contexts as the main reasons for venturing into social media, while larger and senior companies accentuates the customer accessibility and economical benefits social media marketing has brought about. The possibilities of dialogue and a two way communication were also strong arguments for transitioning into social media marketing.

The transition from traditional marketing strategies to social media marketing was more complex for the larger organizations. They explain how they had to, to certain extent, convince the upper management that social media was more than buzz phenomena, and was probably going to be around for a foreseeable future. Key factors to this issue were generational differences that relates to the underlying understanding of the media. S2:

“It can be easy to continue along the same lines as in the past and it has been a difficult transition. Old patterns can be hard to break but modern society has different requirements for transparency now”. (Subject 2)
This clearly indicates that bridging the gap between companies and their customers, and becoming more transparent as a company in the context of social media, has its difficulties. It indicates tendencies of friction regarding the change of mindset.

The remaining subjects had more autonomous influence since they were either their own supervisors and/or had previous experience in social media services. S6 describes their incentive:

“The traditional image of how to be visible does not quite go hand in hand with the way we want to be perceived since we don’t want to be like everyone else. We do not want to be like all the supermarkets that send out flyers every Wednesday”. (Subject 6)

This can be interpreted as a struggle to move away from established traditional ways of thinking regarding marketing. It also indicates that social media offers new means of communicating where there is a higher degree of mutual respect between the sender and recipient compared to traditional one way advertising. And S1:

“Instead of placing an ad in the newspaper and reaching as many people as possible, we could use that money and focus on the ones you really want to touch and make a more lasting impression”. (Subject 1)

The low (if any) cost of the media plays a definite role in its appeal, especially for new business, as S7 describes:

“I had no startup money in the beginning and that’s why I couldn’t afford to run weekly ads in newspapers. This is where social media really comes in handy. I had six months to gain 1000 subscribers to our service, because that was what I needed to be able to survive with the company full time, and afford a small office. I sat down and e-mailed various bloggers during almost 4 months and it paid off”. (Subject 7)

The transition into social media still continues in many ways but there has been a definite change in the way organizations are thinking about these channels, as S5 states:

“For me there’s no difference between engaging in dialogue through social media and talking over the phone, but there is always a threshold and a period of hype to overcome when new technologies emerge, and for some that takes longer than for others”. (Subject 5)

This can be understood as a transformation regarding means of communication where these new channels are becoming integrated into the structure of organizations. The transition into
social media is an ongoing process which shapes the way organizations communicate with customers. However, there is a diversity of experiences among companies, which relates to factors like the size of the organization, internal age differences, the level of understanding and prior experience with the medium.

5.1 Objectives and benefits

The main goals of social media use among the subjects of study are to enhance communication, increase the contact area and becoming more transparent. However, these aims do not seem to be specified to any great extent, but rather considered in a more rhetorical and idealistic sense. Examples of this can be found among all subjects. S4:

“We want to communicate with our audience in a simple way. If they have a question we can give them an answer right away”. (Subject 4)

Hence, the main objective in this case relates to relationship-oriented issues, as opposed to quantifiable or economical benefits. S5 confirms that by stating:

“On our part, we have no real goal other than to communicate with our customers and those who are interested in us”. (Subject 5)

Despite the lack of concretely formulated objectives, the respondents have all thought about what they want to achieve with their usage of social media, an important factor in being successful in these contexts. S7:

“One goal is to be honest all the time, which in turn increases the credibility of the company. It is also the best way for us to grow”. (Subject 7)

The application of a bottom-up perspective on this reasoning would indicate that these companies have all realized the importance of understanding the nature of social media. If one view the structures of social media services as bottom-up frameworks where actions derive from lower levels, they would, based on their statements, have the appropriate mindset to enable them to be successful in the synthesis. Even though there obviously are economical interests, they are not attempting to force traditional marketing approaches onto their customers, but rather letting them decide for themselves. As S3 states:

“The customer dialogue has priority. We can step down from the pedestal as a big corporation may have, and achieve a direct contact between the customer and a human being within our walls”. (Subject 3)

This statement is backed up by S5 who answers the question about what benefits there are, in the following way:
“Being in social media as an organization is a bit of a statement; we’re listening. It’s easy to, with any kind of presence, show that you care, since it’s not completely obvious to all senders to actually listen”. (Subject 5)

According to the respondents, the benefits acquired by activity in social media ranges from customer dialogue and accessibility to viral proliferation potential. Hence, the emphasis lies on relationship oriented returns rather than direct financial and economic benefits.

5.2 Disadvantages

There is a divergence regarding disadvantages and problems with social media usage among the respondents. However, they seem to agree that the time it requires to maintain the social media accounts could be perceived as an issue, as well as the balance between being active and the risk of causing redundancy. In the context of potential problematic areas regarding social media, S4 states that:

“Media noise can be an issue, because social media is so easy to use, everyone uses it and that makes it harder to stand out”. (Subject 4)

Through a bottom-up point of view, social media offer and enable possibilities for any person or organization to, with minimal technical knowledge, attempt to be a part of the synthesis, i.e. lower level actions can, in theory, be taken by anyone. This contributes to the user generated content in a wider perspective, and adds to the mass of information through which marketers attempt to emerge.

An issue discussed by several informants concerns the aspects of time and resources needed to maintain social media accounts, and S5 states that:

“Senders with large amount of customers and stakeholders can have enormous amounts of input they have to respond to. But overall, the benefits far exceed the disadvantages”. (Subject 5)

It appears that efforts need to be made to ensure that sufficient resources are available in order to cope with large quantities of input, and the responsibility to produce feedback. Viral spread is often sought after in social media marketing due to its economical efficiency and effects on brand awareness. However, through a bottom-up perspective, there seems to be somewhat of a duality since it, if not handled properly, can generate negative effects on a large scale, very quickly.

5.3 Usage of services

Mainstream services of social media, such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter are important tools for all subjects of study since this is where the majority of their customers are. Though not all subjects use it as their primary channel, they agree that Facebook is an outstanding tool when it comes to customer relations. Twitter is used in a more sporadic and
complementary way due to its relatively narrow user base in the region. Services like YouTube and Vimeo are used as media platforms where one is redirected to related content from the main services. Mainstream services provide a solid base for social media marketing, however, as S5 points out:

“There are tendencies to equate social media with Facebook and Twitter”. (Subject 5)

Organizations without prior experience of social media marketing tend to focus on services, which in recent years, seem popular and have had the most attention. Despite the obvious benefits of marketing in services with vast amounts of users, companies would benefit from researching which services their target audiences are actually using. If the focus solely lies on mainstream services, they might end up missing parts of their potential customers. As S1 describes:

“We have estimated that there are about 200 to 250 active Twitter users in Umeå, so the potential in our region is rather small”. (Subject 1)

So despite the hype around specific social media services, this would indicate the importance for organizations to investigate where they should be investing their efforts. In the context of combining and using several social media services, companies should be aware of the fact that in order to be successful in social media, one needs to maintain and upkeep all registered accounts. If a channel is neglected, it can cause irritation, which can spread to other services. Ideally, a clear link is established between different services, which in their turn direct users to the corporate web site. An example where this was taken to a previously unseen level is candy manufacturer Skittles’ social media campaign, launched in March 2009. S1:

“They turned their whole corporate web site into a single large flow of social media, where the start page consisted of a Twitter feed. At the top was a menu where you could click on different headings, and if you clicked on “media” you were presented with their YouTube channel, if you wanted information about the company, their Wikipedia page was presented. The entire site was based solely on various social media, but within the structures of their corporate web site”. (Subject 1)

In relation to the concept of bottom-up, Skittles enabled content on their official web site to be primarily user generated, where lower level actions became the core of its structure. Traffic to skittles.com increased by 1332% in a single day.

The risk of producing redundant material i.e. presenting the same text in more than one channel, increases when using several services. This relates to an organizations’ resources regarding time and staff. S6 describes their approach:
“I think you should be careful not to put the same information on different channels. It’s probably easy for the user to deregister from all but one channel if he/she has access to the same information through just one service”. (Subject 6)

However, as S5 points out:

“I think it’s better to post the same thing in several channels than to not be present at all”. (Subject 5)

All subjects have in one way or another, reflected on the matter, and even if they are not all acting upon in, they appear to agree that there are negative effects with redundancy. This indicates that even though redundancy is something to avoid, it might still be preferable to be active in more than one service, regardless of the risk of redundancy.

Based on the study, there is a definite need to measure the outcome and impact of activity in social media, and also to be aware of how the organization is perceived in this context. As S2 explains:

“We measure all traffic on Twitter and Facebook. We also use Google Analytics and other measurement tools for other traffic. However, it is difficult to quantify the long term and ‘soft’ values, as well as effects related to brand building and customer relations”. (Subject 2)

The process of measuring traffic in services is made simpler by specifically dedicated tools, and can be done by anyone with just basic knowledge. Tools for measuring values regarding relationship building and brand perception are still not available to any real degree.

Using keyword searches in search engines and dedicated tools provide companies with a richer image of what is being said about them. The use of such services is applied by the subjects and is recommended. S7:

“It is definitely important to search social for conversations about the company. You can learn a lot from it. If someone posts negative comments about us, we try to respond to them as quickly as we can to solve any potential problems. It’s very good for the company and contributes to the customer satisfaction to a high degree”. (Subject 7)

S1:

“It is probably among the most important things to consider in your social media activity, to have a look at what is being said and to respond to it, whether it is positive or negative comments”. (Subject 1)

To be accessible but also actively reach out to users has proved to be very beneficial in the maintenance of customer relationships as well as requiring new customers. Emphasis in this context appears to be on the dialogue and the two-way interactions, and from a bottom-up
view this indicates that users and customers appreciate when organizations initiate contact on lower levels of the structure.

5.4 Social media conduct

Behavior in social media on an individual level is in many ways different than in the context of an organization. Where private persons only need to consider how they are portraying themselves, users within companies are representatives of the entire organization, in many cases even somewhat in their private usage. It is important for companies to consider these differences when engaging in social media. However, the level of importance regarding these issues relates to the size, management, and brand profile of the organization. For smaller businesses it is easier to handle these types of questions. Guidelines and strategies can be formulated and applied to tackle matters regarding customer perception. S3 on the matter of guidelines:

“We have a clear policy on a detailed level for Twitter since it was the first channel we used. We have an outline of a more general policy for other social media services which contains key words such as ‘common sense’ etcetera”.
(Subject 3)

There is a diversity of opinion among the subjects of study as can be seen in the statement by S6:

“What we publish in social media is mostly freebased since most of what we do is in that fashion. However, we are so involved in the company and our instincts are often the right way to go”. (Subject 6)

S1 also has a relatively unrestricted approach regarding strategies and guidelines:

“We have no official ‘rules’ on what to publish, but we are also a small agency. Despite that, we have both a clear visual identity and a market profile which includes a set of values; youthfulness, creativity and innovative thinking, and if something doesn’t communicate that, it’s not going to be published”. (Subject 1)

Applying a bottom-up approach on the matter of restrictions and guidelines in social media usage reveals indications of differences in how structures affect the freedom of activity. In larger organizations there is a need to reach a consensus on what types of information, and also how the information is published by employees. Smaller businesses have shorter internal distances of communication, which contributes to a lesser need for formulated constrictions in their usage.

Since content in social media is generated mainly by individual users, and the structure in which interactions take place is designed for individual communication, it can be difficult for organizations to know how to ‘fit in’. Some companies attempt what could be described as a ‘simulated bottom-up approach’ where the strategy is to seem and act less like a company and
more as a private user. There are different opinions of whether this a good approach or not. On the topic of acting officially versus privately, S3 states that:

“It should be made clear that it is a business, because that’s what we are, but at the same time you want that personal service from a real person”. (Subject 3)

S1 has a slightly different take on the matter:

“It’s a bit of a dated approach that companies don’t really have the guts to highlight any individuals within the organization. Apple has been really successful in profiling Steve Jobs as a ‘real’ person instead of an anonymous CEO. It’s easier to generate emotions connected to a person than to a brand, so if done properly, you can take somewhat of a shortcut that way”. (Subject 1)

Regardless of what approach an organization has in the matter of acting official versus private, there needs to be honesty and a genuine connection to someone or something within the organization. The ‘simulated bottom-up approach’, if seen through, can be interpreted as a dishonest way of profiling the organization, which can lead to mistrust, and a decrease in the company’s credibility.

Related to freedom and restrictions in social media usage is the matter of who in the organization that should be the active users. The use of moderators and social media managers represent the top-down approach in an organizational context. They act as representatives for the entire company, and questions regarding transparency can emerge. Both sides of the social media manager debate are represented in this study. As S4 states, it is not an easy thing to decide on:

“It’s probably both positive and negative if someone has that position in a company. On one hand, someone is actually taking care of the social media, but on the other, it may look a bit odd if someone sits 8 hours a day talking to customers, representing the entire company”. (Subject 4)

While S2 has a more positive approach towards social media managers:

“I think a community manager is a great asset to have in a business and I would have preferred that we had someone who had an overall approach to our activity in social media. Someone who takes an overall responsibility, highlights and develops certain parts, not someone who dominates and dictates”. (Subject 2)

Therefore, the issue of whether or not to use social media managers may vary depending on the style of the company and the organizational mindset. There are different approaches and attitudes towards the use of managers, where some might find it constricting and not
representative others might experience it as a valuable and important function of the business. In this context, S5 points out the aspect of the company's scale:

“In large organizations, it probably makes sense; it is more a question of the size of the organization. In general, it is probably a good idea to have a social media manager if you have the volume. If you can justify a position where someone’s job is to take care of you communications in social media, you will probably bring more attention to you brand as well”. (Subject 5)

Apparently, there are no generalizations to be made regarding the use of social media managers, but rather contextually based decisions. These contexts relate to scale, brand profile, management style etc. From a bottom up perspective, however, there are indications that point towards potentially negative effects when restricting lower level choices and actions. Organizations would benefit from researching, which approach is most suitable for them, and even more importantly, which approach is most suitable for their customers.

There are a lot of general pointers available regarding how to be successful in social media, some more valuable than others. However, many of them are plain common sense. The subjects of this study have contributed in presenting more contextualized ideas based on their own experiences in social media. S6 on how they adapt their communication to their target audiences:

“Depending on what we want to publish, we can choose among our active channels. What is published in our newsletter shouldn’t feel as thick as a bible, which you won’t manage to read through, this should be posted on the blog instead. If you want more information you can visit the website and for today’s lunch you can check Facebook. This is the division we have done and it feels natural. We will not flood people with information. We write in a quite relaxed style, pretty much like a spoken language, so that it feels personal and not so pompous. Simplicity is the key word and we often try to explain things as simply as possible to minimize the use of technical terms”. (Subject 6)

The approach applied regarding the combination of services is of a relatively divergent nature, in the sense that information is segmented and differentiated into several channels. This allows for a richer user experience due to the absence of redundancy. It is a strategy attuned to the customer base and reflects the overall business in a transparent sense. It indicates, from a bottom-up point of view, a high regard for the customer experience in that it adapts information to suit the context in which it is presented. Redundancy, or rather the avoidance of it, is also discussed by S4:

“If we organize an event which takes place somewhere nearby, we don’t send invitations to those who probably won’t have the opportunity to attend, for example those who live abroad. We do this to avoid sending out unnecessary
information, which can irritate. A good thumb rule is to get to the right information to the right people.” (Subject 4)

The adaptation of communication to fit customers anticipated perception of the organization is discussed by S7:

“We have pretty much started from the opposite direction. We have created something that attracts and has attracted customers. If we make changes now, we need to be careful not to remove something that some customers really value, such as styles, illustrations and articles. At the same time, we do want a dialogue so we can improve things that might be of interest to our customers”. (Subject 7)

This approach to not adapt to the customers anticipation, can be just as important as the opposite, depending on the overall genre of business. If one of the core values with the company, from the customers’ point of view, is to be rebellious and somewhat individualistic, the perception of adaptation could have negative effects on the brand image. The lack of specified guidelines or restrictions in social media communication can, in certain contexts, be crucial. This matter is also discussed by S1, who states that:

“We try to avoid pleasing others and doing things on other people’s conditions, but rather do things our way and let people choose if it suits them. However, we are, after all, a business and we do need to make money, so you have to adapt in certain situations. It’s more about our image and attitude”. (Subject 1)

Here, as well as the previous example, there are tendencies towards pursuing an image of independence and integrity in social media, qualities which are highly valued in ‘real life’ contexts. The transference of the organizations’ ‘genuine’ image from the physical world to the digital one appears to have been important, as well as successful.

S5 provides a general mindset regarding how to address customers in social media where the importance of a narrative aspect of the information being produced is highlighted, as well as an emphasis on the two-way communication between sender and receiver:

“You should keep in mind that you are writing for someone else’s sake as much as for your own. It is like the universal journalistic approach; for who am I writing, and why, combined with what you, the author, want to say”. (Subject 5)
6 Conclusions

The purpose of this thesis has been to, from a bottom-up perspective, draw conclusions from a comparative study of the social media praxes of Umeå-situated businesses and organizations, and how they implement social media services into their activities.

The social media transition

The transition from traditional marketing strategies to social media marketing is more complex for larger organizations. They have to, in some situations, convince upper management that social media is more than a buzz phenomena. Key factors to this issue are generational differences that relates to the understanding of the media. The transition into social media still continues, but there has been a change in organizations’ mindsets.

There is a struggle to move away from traditional ways of thinking regarding marketing, as well as indications that social media offers new means of communicating where there is a higher degree of mutual respect between the sender and recipient. On a wider level, this is affecting the entire way in which people view advertising where traditional marketing outside of social media, may become subject to criticism on a larger scale than before.

Objectives and benefits

Objectives in social media do not seem to be specified to any great extent, but rather considered in a more rhetorical and idealistic sense. Even though there obviously are economical interests, the subjects of study are not attempting to force traditional marketing approaches onto their customers. The lack of formulated objectives would suggest that the new way of advertising is fundamentally different from established ways of marketing, where a deeper understanding of the customers’ perspective has been reached in social media.

Disadvantages

The time it requires to maintain the social media accounts could be perceived as an issue, as well as the balance between being active and the risk of causing redundancy.

It appears that efforts need to be made to ensure that sufficient resources are available in order to cope with large quantities of input, and the responsibility to produce feedback.

Organizations need to require a feel for the media in which they are operating, and realize that relationships in social media are ‘real’.

Usage of services

Despite the obvious benefits of marketing in services with vast amounts of users, companies would benefit from researching which services their target audiences are actually using. If the focus solely lies on mainstream services, they might end up missing parts of their potential customers.
If a channel is neglected, it can cause irritation, which can spread to other services. Ideally, a clear link is established between different services, which in their turn direct users to the corporate web site.

The risk of producing redundant material increases when using several services. To fully take advantage of the opportunities which reside within social media services, organizations have to understand that social media is a part of many people's lives and is going to be for a foreseeable future. Hence, efforts to, in an organic way, become part of the synthesis, as well as respecting the structure in which they are active in, is crucial.

**Social media conduct**

Where private persons only need to consider how they are portraying themselves, users within companies are representatives of the entire organization. It is important for companies to consider these differences when engaging in social media.

In larger organizations there is a need to reach a consensus on *what* types of information, and also *how* the information is published by employees. Smaller businesses have shorter internal distances of communication, which contributes to a lesser need for formulated constrictions in their usage.

Some companies attempt what could be described as a 'simulated bottom-up approach' where the strategy is to seem and act less like a company and more as a private user. The 'simulated bottom-up approach', if seen through, can lead to mistrust, and a decrease in the company's credibility.

There are no generalizations to be made regarding the use of social media managers, but rather contextually based decisions. These contexts relate to scale, brand profile, management style etc. From a bottom up perspective, however, there are indications that point towards potentially negative effects when restricting lower level choices and actions. The approach to *not* adapt to the customers anticipation, can be just as important as the opposite.

This study has shown that the application of a bottom-up approach enables analysis of the structure and parsing of social media services, which in turn provides new ways of viewing and understanding activities within that system.

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8 References


**Web resources:**


facebook.comx (2010-05-30).