



Norwegian University of
Science and Technology

The Role of Social Media in the Communication of Leaders

Joachim Viktil

NTNU School of Entrepreneurship

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Supervisor: Roger Sørheim, IØT

Co-supervisor: Arne Krokan, ISS

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social media is a set of internet based applications (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010) that is changing the way people communicate. The largest of these applications is Facebook.com, a social networking site. More than half the Norwegian population has a profile on this site (Halogen, 2011). All these users spend more time on Facebook than on any other web site; 6,5 hours a month (ABC, 2011). In addition, there are several other social media with large user bases. LinkedIn provides a social networking arena for professional relations. With more than 420 000 users registered in Norway, and more than 100 million users worldwide, it is the largest social networking site for business relations (Synlighet, 2011). Another medium that is regarded as a social one, is blogging. There are more than 450 000 blogs in Norway and over 180 000 users of the micro-blogging service twitter.com (Saxvik, 2009). The Norwegian section of Wikipedia, a social media for sharing knowledge, has about 300 000 articles (Wikipedia, 2011b). None of these services existed ten years ago. And so, people use new tools to communicate.

Social media is changing what people communicate. On Facebook, people share information about themselves, pictures, and videos. They also share information about what they like, and recommend different services and products. About 200 000 people share their knowledge through contributing to the Norwegian part of Wikipedia – the online encyclopedia (Wikipedia, 2011b). Blogs and micro blogs, such as Twitter, allow people to expose themselves and promote their opinions. A survey of 2063 bloggers from Norway showed that 85 % blog about their everyday life (Moen, 2011). The same report showed that their two main reasons for blogging are that they “like sharing their thoughts and opinions”, and that they “want to share their day with the rest of the world”. To make their blog known 77 % tell their friends about it on Facebook. This activity is occurring with an unprecedented frequency. About 90 % of these bloggers make new entries into their web logs every week, 33 % update it at least once a day (Moen, 2011). Through this behavior, people are changing the norms of communication. As people shift their ways, companies follow.

Social media is changing how companies communicate. Seeing consumers shifting their attention from the papers and television to social networking sites, companies follow suit. As consumer-oriented companies enters the social web, business-oriented companies follow in order to maintain good relations to their customers. About 67% of Norwegian companies have decided to use social media, with an increasing effort on Facebook and Twitter (Dataforeningen, 2010). It is spreading out through the organization. For the company that uses social media, the most common users are heads of Marketing/Public Relations (68%), followed by the Chief Executive Officers (49%), and the heads of Sales (36%), IT (25%), Human Relations (18%), and Finance (12%) (Dataforeningen, 2010). Further, Norwegian companies state that the use of social media will increase over the coming year through both existing and new efforts. Leaders have become more visible in the organization as social media causes the leaders to communicate more with both the internal, and the external environment of

the company. They are impacted directly by social media, but also through the impact of social media on employees.

Social media is changing who communicates on behalf of the company. The notion that employees represent their company, also when using social media for private use is supported by 70 % of Norwegian employees (Dataforeningen, 2010). To help their employees understand what can and cannot be communicated, 59 % of Norwegian companies have introduced guidelines for social media usage. However, only 26 % of employees in these companies experience encouragement to use social media from their leaders. About one out of three feels that the leaders of the organization does not understand these media or their opportunities (Dataforeningen, 2010). The norms of communication are changing for companies, its employees and its leaders.

Communication is central to leadership (Spangler and House, 1991, Shamir et al., 1994, Kirkpatrick and Locke, 1996, Den Hartog et al., 1997, Frese et al., 2003, Riggio et al., 2003, Towler, 2003). As stated in the previous paragraphs, social media is changing communication, and with it; leadership.

Leadership is about relationships, and as social technologies are changing relationships, leadership also needs to change.

(Li, 2010, p 163)

Social media is a new field of research. Some researchers offer insight into characteristics of social media (McAfee, 2006, Vickery and Wunsch-Vincent, 2007, Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Other publishes handbooks for understanding and using social media (Safko and Brake, 2009, Clapperton, 2009). Further, leadership and communications is a highly recognized field of research. Amongst other things, it has been explored with respect to the leader's responsibility of selecting communication channel (Lengel and Daft, 1989). Insight is also given into different communication styles of leaders and their effect on desired outcomes (de Vries et al., 2010). On a higher level, the effects of organizational climate (Boudrias et al., 2010) and structural mechanisms for processing information (Daft and Lengel, 1986) has been studied. Several books are being written on the topic to further help leaders understand and use social media (Amazon, 2011). Some even publish books on how leaders will need to change how they, and their organization work, in order to take advantage of the new opportunities for communications presented in social media (Li, 2010). However, there is a gap in the research on how social media impacts the communication of leaders.

Building on theory of leadership and communication, this thesis will explore the impact of social media on leadership. This brings us to the topic of this thesis; **The role of social media in the communications of a leader.**

This topic will be taken on from a general point of view, asking first how leaders are impacted by social media. Further, the study is based on the notion that a leader must choose the right communication channel and apply the optimal communication style, in order to communicate effectively. Thus, it seeks to explore the impact of social media on the communication channels used by leader. Adding to this, the study will also explore how social media impacts the communication styles of leaders. This results in the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: How is social media impacting leaders?

RQ2: How is social media impacting the communication channels used by leaders?

RQ3: How is social media impacting the communication styles of leaders?

2. LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNICATION

Leadership can be bisected into managerial and the interpersonal aspects (Daft, 2003, McCartney and Campbell, 2006, de Vries et al., 2010). The managerial aspects include non-interpersonal activities like planning, organizing, decision-making, problem solving, and controlling (de Vries et al., 2010). These activities does not include direct communication, rather they prepare for and facilitate communication. The interpersonal aspects revolve around the communicative activities of interpersonal relationships (de Vries et al., 2010). For this aspect, leadership = communication (de Vries et al., 2010). These activities are impacted by the organizational climate (Boudrias et al., 2010). The managerial aspects of communication include structuring and selecting the correct communication channel. Academics have researched the topic of structuring of the organization to process information (Daft and Lengel, 1986). Others have studied the matching of tasks with the channels of communication to effectively achieve the desired outcome (Rice, 1992). In this, it is important to leave the communicating parties with a feeling of control over the information being passed (Feaster, 2010). This thesis proposes that a leader must commit two choices when communicating. On one hand, there is the interpersonal aspect of selecting the communication style. On the other hand, there is the managerial aspect of applying the optimal communication style. This section contains a literature review on these two topics.

2.1.CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION

One of features in the managerial aspects is the organizational structure. This is important for the organization's ability to process information, i.e. communicate. This activity takes place in the channels of communication. In communication theory, the term channel pertains to the medium through which a message travels (Rothwell, 1999). Using the available mediums to process information serves two purposes for the organization; to reduce uncertainty and resolve equivocality (Daft and Lengel, 1986). Uncertainty is defined as the absence of information (Miller and Frick, 1949, Shannon and Weaver, 1949, Garner, 1962, Daft and Lengel, 1986) and may be reduced through attaining new information. Equivocality means ambiguity (Weick, 1979, Daft and Macintosh, 1981, Daft and Lengel, 1986) and is reduced through collaborating towards a shared understanding of the information. Mintzberg et al. (1976) found low uncertainty when researching 25 organizational decisions. However, they found ambiguity where almost nothing was easily determined. Managers had to define and figure things out for themselves. The nature of the task at hand sets the premises for which channel the leader should choose. More complex tasks require channels of greater richness (Lengel and Daft, 1989). The richness of a channel pertains to its capacity for immediate feedback, the number of cues transmitted, personalization, and language variety (Daft and Wiginton, 1979).

Rice (1992) elaborates on the need of the channel to match the nature of the task at hand. He explored how different communication channels relate to analyzable and unanalyzable tasks. Analyzable task environments contain events and processes that are "hard, measurable and determinant". For unanalyzable task environments,

processing is "more personal, less linear, more ad hoc and improvisational" (Daft and Weick, 1984). The latter has a higher demand for richness of the information being communicated as it is characterized by a higher level of equivocality. Increased efficiency was found for all media when working with analyzable tasks, while it is only significant for voice mail and videoconferencing when working with unanalyzable tasks (Rice, 1992). The issue of matching the channel of communication with the nature of the task at hand presents a challenge to the manager (Lengel and Daft, 1989).

Selecting the right channel can be regarded as a managerial activity as it pertains to organizing for communication. Face to face is the preferable channel in complex situations as it allows for the highest level of richness (Daft and Lengel, 1986). This is in line with the hypothesis of Feaster (2010); that people prefer channels with higher richness in face-threatening situations. This hypothesis, deducted from (O'Sullivan, 2000), was not supported. However, the study showed that mediums that allow for a higher level of expressive and privacy information control is preferred in face-threatening situations. In this, Feaster (2010) relates *expressive information control* to the ability to regulate the flow of information, while *privacy information control* relates to the ability to restrict or halt certain forms of information.

The various channels of communication have a different potential for reducing uncertainty and resolving equivocality. When choosing the channel of communication the leader has to match the richness of the channel and the complexity of the task at hand. Selection of channel also needs to leave the leader, and his/her peer, in control of the information being passed. All these issues pertain to the managerial aspects of leadership and are summarized in Figure 1 Leadership and Communication.

2.2.COMMUNICATION STYLES

De Vries et al. (2010) defines a leader's communication style as "*a distinctive set of interpersonal communicative behaviors geared toward the optimization of hierarchical relationships in order to reach certain group or individual goals*". In their study, they found that a leader has to be supportive of his employees, while showing a high level of certainty in order to accomplish the desired leadership outcomes. This was found when investigating how six different communication styles relate to three different leadership styles with regard to generating leadership outcomes. The communication styles being tested are; leaders' verbal aggressiveness, expressiveness, preciseness, assuredness, supportiveness, and argumentativeness. Supportiveness, preciseness and assuredness was found to be the most effect on leadership outcomes across the leadership styles, while the leader's argumentativeness was found to have the weakest correlate. These categories were defined in a lexical study by De Vries et al. (2009). Here, *preciseness* relates to conciseness, efficiency, having a businesslike composure and to clarity rather than vagueness. Further, *supportiveness* pertain the actual communication behaviors in response to someone else. It relates to accommodation, admiration, and stimulation. *Assuredness* is the reversed style of a category named emotional tension (de Vries et al., 2010). The latter category is defined by De Vries et al. (2009) as a category relating to sadness, irritability, anger, and tension.

De Vries et al. (2010) found that leadership outcomes are affected by the communication style of the leader. Leadership outcomes researched by include perceived leader performance, satisfaction with the leader, subordinates' commitment, and both donating and collecting knowledge sharing. The results show that a subordinate's knowledge collecting from a leader relies on supportiveness and preciseness in the communication style of the leader. Further, the leader's assuredness was related to perceived leader performance, satisfaction with the leader, and subordinate's team commitment, but not to knowledge donating and collecting behaviors. These results can be interpreted as a balancing act leaders have to perform. De Vries et al. (2010) concludes that a leader has to be precise and radiate certainty, while being supportive of his employee's ideas and opinions. Too much of one of these elements will result in discontent and thereby inefficiency.

The importance of the supportiveness is also emphasized by Boudrias et al. (2010). They found that the organizational climate has an impact on the ability of a leader to empower the employees. Lines can be drawn between the leadership outcome coined "subordinates' commitment" and the empowering of employees. Organizational climate can be defined as employee perception regarding the manner with which they are treated and/or, managed in their organization (Jones and James, 1979, James and James, 1989, Boudrias et al., 2010). Looking at the desired leadership outcomes of de Vries et al. (2010), it is clear that leaders will have a huge effect on the *"participative process to utilize the entire capacity of workers, designed to encourage employee commitment to organizational success"*, i.e. employee empowerment (Cotton, 1996, p. 219). Several academics advocates that empowerment begins at the top as organizational systems that influence climate are largely set by upper management (Lawler, 1992, Ledford and Lawler, 1994, Shadur et al., 1999, Tesluk et al., 1999, Boudrias et al., 2010). If the organizational climate is perceived as unsupportive it has a negative impact on the effect of the practices of the leader (Boudrias et al., 2010). Hence, the leader has to adapt a supportive communication style in order for the employees to perceive the organizational climate as supportive.

With regards to communication styles, supportiveness, preciseness and assuredness has the strongest correlate with leadership outcomes (de Vries et al., 2010). In order for these styles to work effectively, they need to be applied in a supporting climate (Boudrias et al., 2010). The communication style of the leader impacts the organizational climate, increasing the importance of being supportive. All these issues pertain to the interpersonal aspects of leadership and are summarized in Figure 1 Leadership and Communication".

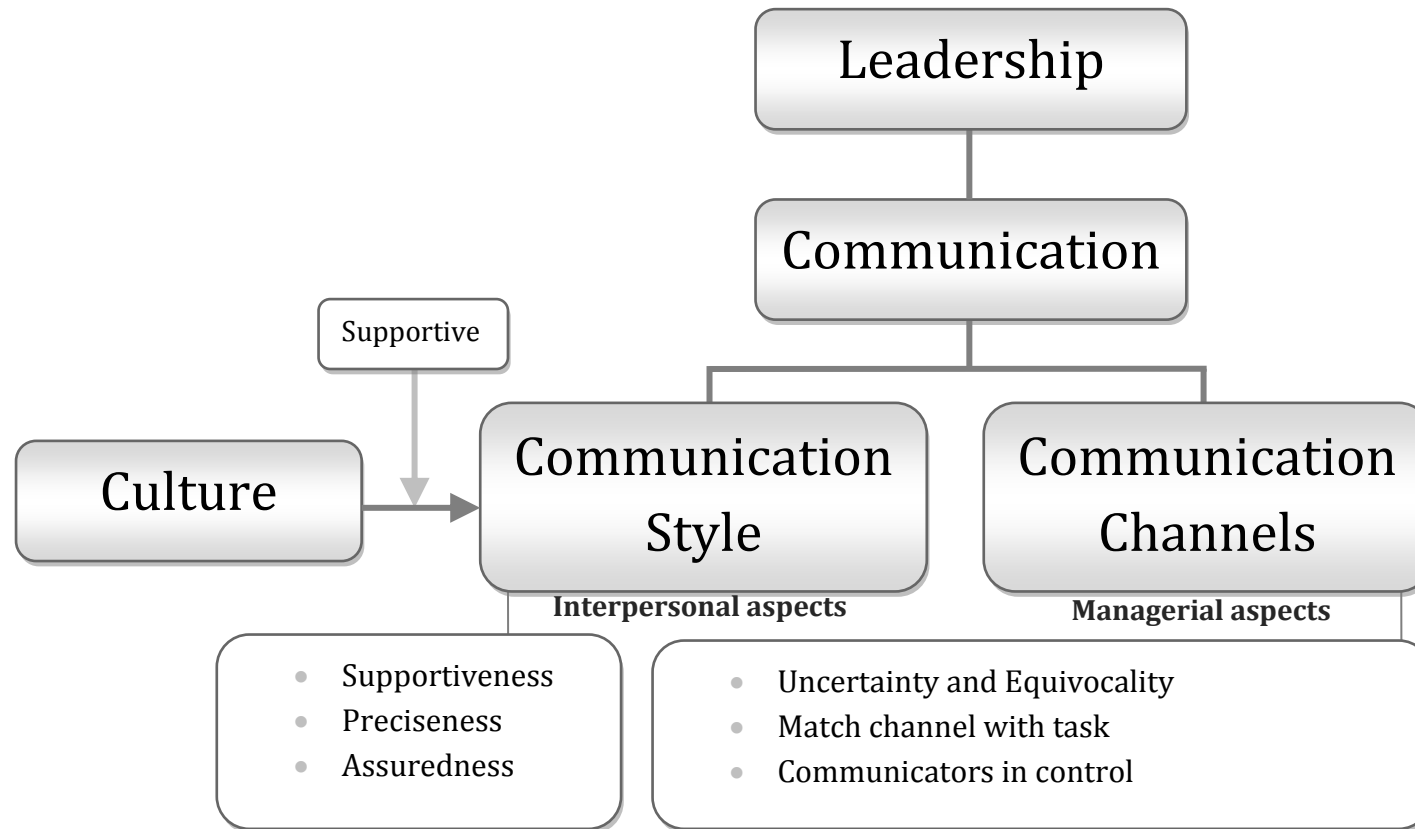


Figure 1 Leadership and Communication

3. THE NATURE OF *SOCIAL MEDIA*

Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) define social media as follows; *“Social Media is a group of Internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content.”*

In this definition, the word “exchange” relates to communication. The “internet based applications” are commonly referred to as different communication channels, but could also be regarded as networks for communities to interact online (Safko and Brake, 2009). Two concepts take part in the definition by Kaplan & Haenlein (2010); web 2.0 and user generated content. The first relates to the technology, and the latter to the ideology of social media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The characteristics of these elements will be presented to provide an insight into the nature of social media.

3.1. THE TECHNOLOGY

Web 2.0 pertains to the technology behind social media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). O’Reilly (2007) defines Web 2.0 through a six core pattern:

1. Harnessing collective intelligence
2. Data is the next Intel Inside
3. End of the software release cycle
4. Lightweight programming models
5. Software above the level of a single device
6. Rich user experiences

These points speak to the characteristics of social media. The opportunity to listen to the masses is illustrated in the first point. Here, O’Reilly (2007) draws on blogs as an example, stating that the widespread use of blogs can grant access to the wisdom of the crowds. The second point speaks to the cost driver of social media. This is the creation of content, or data, something the creator then holds property rights to. Point number three is a vote for continuous improvement. Instead of delivering products, companies deliver services which are in a state of perpetual beta. Point number four speaks to the importance of simplicity in the services that are created. Further, social media becomes more accessible as it is on more devices, becoming more universal as illustrated in point number five. Lastly, O’Reilly (2007) argues that social media provides a rich web experience for the user. This is found in that user interfaces makes it easier to use. Further, he exemplifies this in stating that wiki-style collaborative editing supports the rich formatting seen in PC-based word processors. In this way, some of these points give deeper insight into the nature of social media.

Several properties can help describe the differences between social media and industrial media. This resonates with the definition of Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2007) and aids a deeper understanding of social media. The properties are presented in an article in an online encyclopedia (Wikipedia, 2011a):

- Reach
- Accessibility
- Usability
- Immediacy
- Permanence

The article explains that both have the capabilities to *reach* a global audience, but that the production and utility of social media is more decentralized and less hierarchical. This could be said to reflect the first point of O'Reilly (2007). Further, it states that most tools for publishing in social media are available to the public at little or no cost. Making distribution easier gives this media a higher level of *accessibility* to its users. This resonates with point number five on the list of O'Reilly (2007). *Usability* is better as the tools of social media do not require lots of training to employ, making production of content easier in social media. This could be tied to the fourth point of O'Reilly (2007). The next point of the article, *immediacy*, refers to the time lag from production to publication. While this can be long in industrial media, it can be close to zero in social media. However, the industrial media is putting emphasis on minimizing this time lag. This resonates with point number six on the list of O'Reilly (2007). The last point of the article talks to the possibility of altering published material. This is not an option in industrial media, while it is possible in social media. This results in lower *permanence* for social media, this is a parallel to point number three on the list of O'Reilly (2007). All these points help explain the nature of social media further; it is easier to produce and distribute content as the tools do not require the same amount of money and skill as for industrial media. Speed is greater, but you have the opportunity to change a message after publishing it.

Another insight into the technology of social media is given in advice for companies, presented by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010). They present ten pieces of advice, of which the first five relates to the "media" of social media; choose social media service carefully, pick the service or make your own, ensure activity alignment, create a media integration plan, grant access for all (employees and externals). These advices give indications on the nature of social media. Firstly, to a company it is relatively easy to create their own channel. Secondly, it is important to integrate efforts in the channels of social media with other channels. And lastly, the channels are democratic to the extreme, allowing all that wishes to participate.

Social media consists of numerous mediums. For that reason, a categorization is useful to increase the understanding of social media. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) categorizes different types of social media based on social presence/media richness and self presentation/self disclosure. They use six categories; blogs, social networking sites,

virtual social worlds, collaborative projects, content communities, and virtual game worlds. For the purpose of this thesis; the six categories can be said to present the different types of communication channels presented in social media. These are becoming fields of research themselves. Collaborative projects like Wikipedia has been explored by several academics (Voss, 2005, Völkel et al., 2006, Gabrilovich and Markovitch, 2007, Ponzetto and Strube, 2007). Content communities like YouTube has caught the fascination of yet other academics (Keelan et al., 2007, Benevenuto et al., 2008, Paolillo, 2008, Burgess and Green, 2009). Virtual social worlds like Second Life has also been given attention (Boulos et al., 2007, Boellstorff, 2008, De Lucia et al., 2009). Virtual game worlds such as World of Warcraft have been researched by yet other academics (Nardi and Harris, 2006, Nardi et al., 2007, Ducheneaut et al., 2007). Blogs as a field of research have received attention in combination with higher education (Williams and Jacobs, 2004), medicine (Boulos et al., 2006) and politics (Adamic and Glance, 2005) amongst others. Some academics (e.g. Easley and Kleinberg, 2010) link the science of social networking sites is being linked to network theories like the strength of weak ties (Granovetter, 1973) and structural holes (Burt, 1995). Supported by research from The Facebook Data Team (Marlow, 2009) a new way of understanding networks is advocated. All though the number of *maintained relationships* is increasing drastically with the use of social media, the amount of *mutual communication* or *strong ties* is not increasing. There is just not enough time to maintain strong ties with a large number of people (Easley and Kleinberg, 2010).

This new form of interaction is also explored by Li (2010) as she describes the new culture of sharing. She argues that the *culture of sharing* is deeply rooted in human behavior. With each new wave of technology; printed press, telegraph, telephone and e-mail sharing gets faster, cheaper, and easier. She continues by stating that both production and distribution of content is easier with all sorts of devices (mobile phone, computer, etc.) on different services (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc.). She concludes that sharing has become easier and more scalable.

In concluding, the technology of social media can be said to be characterized by its reach, accessibility, usability, immediacy, and permanence (Wikipedia, 2011a). These key elements are presented in Figure 2 Social Media. This definition has a stronger emphasis on how companies build the platform that is Web 2.0, rather than its properties. As the elements in list on Wikipedia (2011a) is supported by several academics (O'Reilly, 2005, O'Reilly, 2007, Li, 2010, Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), and to a larger extent presents the general idiosyncratic of the technology of social media, it will be used as the basis for this thesis. There numerous social media channels can be categorized into six categories (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), which are becoming fields of research in themselves. The field of social networking sites provides an approach to social media based on network theory (Easley and Kleinberg, 2010). Based on this social media can be said to facilitate the sustaining of more weak ties, while not impacting strong ties notably.

3.2. THE IDEOLOGY

User generated content is related more to the ideology behind social media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Three basic requirements content must be fulfilled in order to be termed *user generated* (Vickery and Wunsch-Vincent, 2007)¹:

- The content is published on a publicly accessible website, or a social network accessible to a group of people
- The content needs to show an amount of creative effort
- The content needs to be created outside of professional routines and practices

These three points tell something vital about social media; it is for the unprofessional masses, by the unprofessional masses. This sets the tone of communication. And so, the norms of social media states that participants need to openly publish their own content, showing creative effort with signs of being informal and personal.

Another insight into the ideology of social media is given in advice presented by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010). They present ten pieces of advice, of which the latter five relates to the social part of social media; be active, be interesting, be humble, be unprofessional, be honest. This advice provides further information on the nature of social media. Communicating in social media demands constant activity of creating and sharing interesting content. Moreover, it is important to respect the numerous peers one has in social media and be authentic. This resonates with advice for leaders, provided by Li (2010), to respect that customers and employees have power as a result of social media. In addition, she strongly emphasizes the importance of being authentic.

The mentality behind social media is defined by Li (2010) as she describes the impact of social media on the human culture of sharing. She states that the act of sharing is inherent in humans; social media is merely increasing its intensity. An impact on culture is supported by Michael Hyatt, the Chairman of Thomas Nelson Publishers, the largest Christian publishing company in the world. In a blog post he quotes an interview with Charlene Li before postulating generosity as the key parameter to succeed online (Hyatt, 2011). He refutes that social media is advocating narcissism and promote the opinion that the “takers” are less successful in attracting followers than “givers”. This blog post receives several comments, some of which points to social media exposing the culture of a company, rather than altering it.

A note on the culture of sharing in social media can be seen in a quote by one of the interviewees of this thesis:

The value is not in the data, but how they are being used, thus justifying the sharing of data.
Director of Public Relations and Communication of a Bank

¹ More on these requirements in appendix 1

In concluding, the ideology of social media states that content must be open, show creative effort, and be created outside professional routines (Vickery and Wunsch-Vincent, 2007). In participating in this media, one must be active, interesting, humble, unprofessional, honest, and authentic (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, Li, 2010). Moreover, social media supports a culture of sharing (Li, 2010, Hyatt, 2011) However, social media does not necessarily change the culture of a company, rather it makes it visible (Li, 2010). These key points are summarized in Figure 2 Social Media.

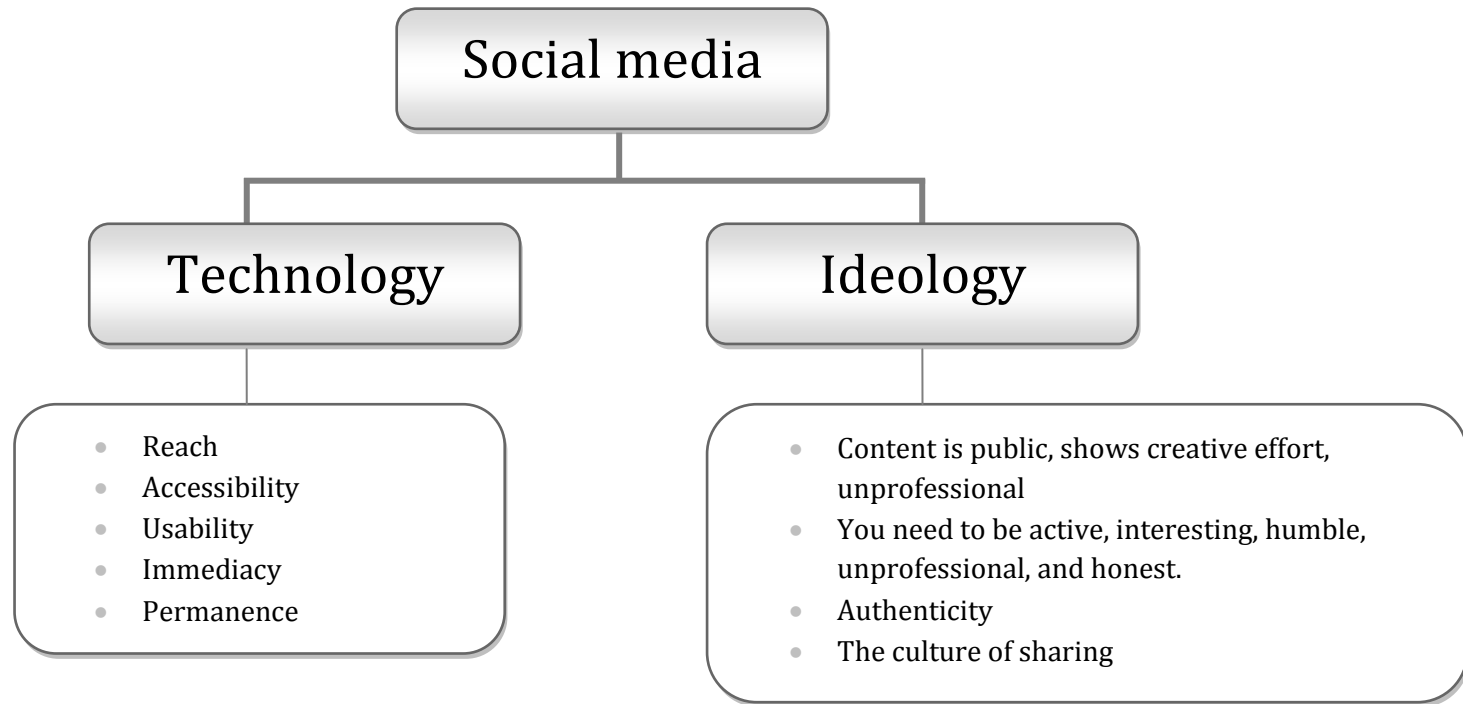


Figure 2 Social Media

4. FRAME OF REFERENCE

The theory presented combines to form Figure 3 “Frame of Reference”. This is a result of merging Figure 1 “Leadership and Communication” with Figure 2 “Social Media”. The foundation of the figure can be found in the notion that leaders must apply the correct channel and style in order to communicate effectively. These are treated as separate issues in most literature. De Vries et al. (2010) states that the communication style of the leader has impact on the leadership outcomes. This can be said to pose an argument for the communication style of leaders impacting the effectiveness of their communication. Several academics note that the leader must match the channel with the task at hand (Daft and Lengel, 1986, Daft et al., 1987, Lengel and Daft, 1989, Williams, 2006, Feaster, 2010). More specifically, Rice (1992) states that “*effective communication depends on the selection of a medium that has the capacity to engage the sender and receiver in mutual understanding of the message at hand*”. And so, this thesis presents two elements of communication that has to be in place for leaders to communicate effectively; the optimal communication style and channel. To the researcher's knowledge, such a link has not been made before. In dividing leadership into interpersonal and personal aspects, it is more common to relate communication to the interpersonal parts (de Vries et al., 2010). Still, it can be argued that activities related to the managerial aspects like planning, organizing, decision-making, problem solving, and controlling, also needs to be performed when communicating. This supports the dividing of communication into interpersonal and managerial aspects.

In addition to this bisection of communication, the frame takes advantage of the link between culture and communication style, presented by Boudrias et al. (2010). Hence the three elements from theory on communication and leadership are; the interpersonal aspect of communication styles, the managerial aspects of communication channels and company culture. These three elements are reinforced with theory on social media (Safko and Brake, 2009, Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, Li, 2010, Hyatt, 2011, Wikipedia, 2011a). Several sources are accepted to form the basis for this theory as this is a relatively new field of study, more on this in section 5 “Method”. The theory on social media is parenthesis in the transparent boxes of the figure.

Various elements of social media have different theoretical impacts on the communication styles of leaders. The effect of supportiveness can be said to increase as a result of the culture of sharing, content being openly published, and increased usability. Following the advice to be humble (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), leaders must be more supportive as a result of social media. Preciseness can also be said to be of higher importance as content is openly published. Adding to this is the global reach of social media, the speed coming from its immediacy, and the ease of distribution originating in its accessibility. Permanence provides the opportunity to alter content after it is published, reducing the importance of preciseness. However, advice on being interesting (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010) can be said to impact the leader to be more precise. All in all, this speaks in favor of leaders needing to be more precise with social media. Further,

there is a demand for authenticity in social media (Li, 2010). This increases the value of assuredness. Building on this increase, is the requirement for honesty. Thus, all three communication styles under the loupe gain theoretical importance as a result of social media.

Several elements of social media impact the importance of company culture on communication styles. Company culture needs to be perceived as supportive in order to facilitate the leader in his or her communication (Boudrias et al., 2010). In social media, the leader must respect that the employees have power (Li, 2010). Moreover, the leader must be humble when embarking on social media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Both these points can be understood as advice to be supportive. Lastly, there is a rise in the culture of sharing (Li, 2010). In sharing the material of others, people are showing supportiveness. Thus, the theoretical impacts of social media results in more focus on building a supportive organizational culture.

The different features of social media have various theoretical impacts on the communication channels of leaders. A channel is characterized by its ability to reduce uncertainty and resolve equivocality (Daft and Macintosh, 1981, Daft and Lengel, 1986, Daft et al., 1987, Rice, 1992). This is impacted by the immediacy of social media, as it allows participants share opinions in real-time, in other words; initiate a dialogue. Such activity is directed more at the resolving of equivocality than reducing uncertainty. Being able to alter content after it is published allows people to mend information resulting in ambiguity, resolving equivocality in the process. Still, demanding a creative effort from the distributed content could increase equivocality. In other words, more people adding their personal opinions to information could cause more ambiguity. On the other hand, openly publishing content, and increased accessibility reduces uncertainty. And so, social media serves the purpose of reducing uncertainty, while having little impact on equivocality. It could be argued that matching the channel with the task at hand becomes more difficult as a result of the openness of social media. A leader has to give greater consideration to which channels he or she uses as information passed in social media is open to a larger crowd, a result of its reach. In addition, it's spreading faster as a result of the immediacy of social media. The demand for content being openly published also increases the issue of control. Adding to this is the speed caused by the immediacy. Moreover, all can produce and distribute information as a result of usability and accessibility. Thus, all the issues of communication channels of leaders become theoretically more difficult as a result of social media. Further, the importance of succeeding in performing them increases.

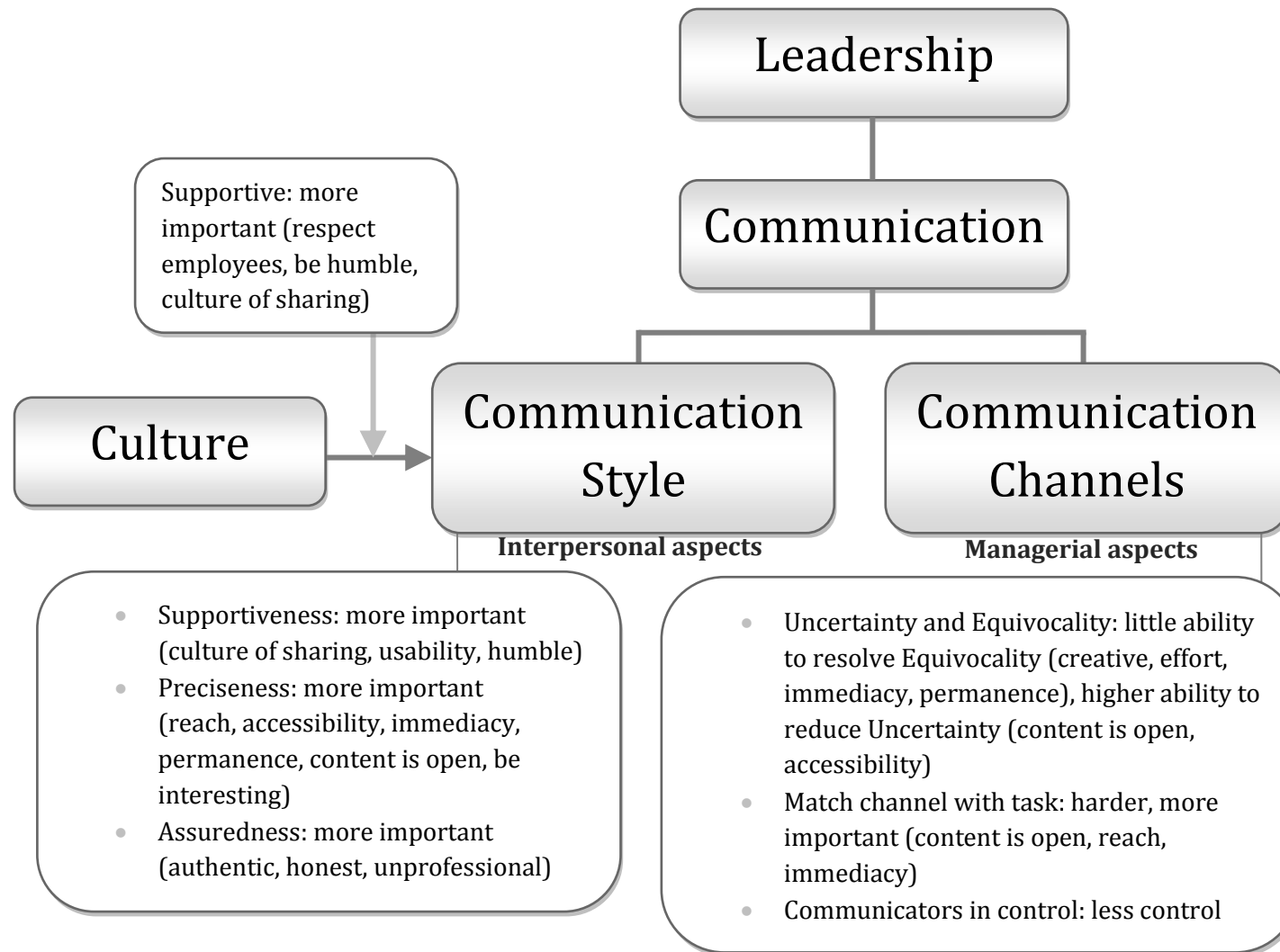


Figure 3 Frame of Reference

5. METHOD

The research questions of this thesis have been studied through applying a qualitative research method. Using a multi-case design, the method for gathering of empirical data has been interviews. In order to analyze this data, a grounded theory approach has been applied. This section contains a description of the methodology used for this thesis on the role of social media in the communication of leaders.

5.1. DEFINING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As described in the introduction to this thesis, social media is on the rise. It is impacting communication and with it, leaders. The topic of social media and leadership was chosen on the basis of the attention this topic has received (HBR, 2011). This was a topic that was discovered when writing a pre-master thesis project on how small growth companies could use social media to increase their likelihood of success. This led to the focus on the role of social media on the communications of leaders, yielding the first research question:

RQ1: How is social media impacting leaders?

Thus the open question used in the ten initial interviews was “How is social media impacting you as a leader?” The interviewees answered this each in their own way. Two commonalities were found, one in the belief that social media was altering the way leaders communicate, their style. Another commonality revealed itself in the notion of several interviewees that social media presents several new communication channels. This led to a literature study starting from the media richness theory of Daft and Lengel (1986) and the communication styles of leaders by de Vries et al. (2010), resulting in the second and the third research question.

RQ2: How is social media impacting the communication channels used by leaders?

RQ3: How is social media impacting the communication styles of leaders?

5.2. RESEARCH STRATEGY

This thesis sheds light over the role of social media in the communications of leaders. This is a quest to understand human behavior and the reasons that govern such behavior. Seeking to generate theory from research, and emphasizing how individuals interpret the world called for the use of a *qualitative research strategy* (Bryman, 2001, p. 22).

5.3. RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to choose the right design, one should start off by inspecting the research questions (Yin, 1989). For this thesis, all the research questions start with “how”. This supports the use of experiments, histories or case studies as a design for research. Being unable to manipulate how leaders are impacted by social media resulted in the selection

of the case study design. Here, *multiple case studies* was chosen as it is superior to a single case study with respect to internal validity (Tellis, 1997). A case study is an intensive analysis of a single case to reveal important features of its nature (Bryman, 2001, p.62). In this regard, each of the interviewed leaders can be regarded as a “case”. A limitation to keep in mind when evaluating the research design has been time, with a maximum of 21 weeks allowed for a master thesis. In addition to the time issue, the budget frame to cover traveling costs etc. has been strongly limited. As data was collected from more than one case and at a single point in time, the study can also be said to contain elements of a *cross-sectional design* (Bryman, 2001, p.44).

5.4. RESEARCH METHOD

The method used for gathering data was *interviews*. Interviewing allows us to “*enter into another person’s perspective*” (Patton, 2002). For this study, it has been various leaders’ perspective on social media and communication. The starting point was ten open interviews about the impact of social media on leadership. Over the phone, each interviewee was presented with the question of “How have social media affected you, as a leader?” All the interviews had durations between 10 and 20 minutes in which the interviewee was allowed to speak freely. Questions were posed to cause the interviewee to clarify or elaborate on unclear issues.

In order to elaborate on the findings of the initial interviews, five *focused interviews* were conducted. Focused interviews are characterized by that they enquire interviewees about a specific situation that is relevant to the interviewees of interest to the researcher (Bryman, 2001, p. 196). In this study, the specific situation under the loop was the impact the interviewees felt from social media on their function as leader. For some interviews the situation was the impact advisors felt on leaders, a more indirect perspective. The focused interviews were semi-structured, lasted between 40 and 50 minutes, and took place face to face in the office of the respective interviewee.

5.5. SELECTION PROCESS

The selection of interviewees was conducted in two stages. The first stage included the locating and selection of ten interviewees for the initial interviews. After this, the second stage included the selection of for the five focused round of interviews.

For the first stage, ten interviewees were selected on the basis of participation in a discussion on social media and leadership (LinkedIn, 2011). The discussion took place on LinkedIn.com, a social networking site for business, under the group by the name of “The LinkedIn Norway Group”. The discussion was started by the Joachim Viktil the 3rd of February 2011. It had 68 comments by a total of 16 participants, over the course of two months. The discussion was started with the purpose of learning more about social media and leadership. As it developed, it became clear that this was a source of interviewees that had personal perspectives on the role of social media in the communication of leaders. Out of the 16 contributors, seven were chosen on the basis of their background. Most of the interviewees were leaders. All were using social media, evident in the fact that they use LinkedIn. This selection process refers to *purposive sampling* (Bryman, 2001, p.415). In addition to these seven, two of the focused interviewees participated in this phase. This selection process is described in the

following paragraph. The last interviewee was found through the use of the researcher's personal network. As is the norm of purposive sampling, the heterogeneity of the sample was emphasized, more on this in section 5.5 "sample".

In the second stage, five interviewees for the focused interviewees were selected on the background of their positions as leaders or leadership advisors and their presence in social media. This was done through trawling the internet for corporate blogs originating from Norway. This was achieved through the search engine Google.com with key words including, but not limited to, "Norwegian company blog", "Norwegian leader blog", "Norwegian leader blogging", "Norwegian corporate blog". A social search was also made on both Facebook and Twitter yielding several leads to different blogs. This latter search also revealed some non-blogging leader engaged in social media. Out of eight contacted leaders, five responded positively to being interviewed. Requirements set for selecting an interviewee was that he or she was a leader, or an advisor to leaders, and had experience in using social media. This is what is known as *purposive sampling* (Bryman, 2001, p. 415). Firstly, it is not random. Secondly, the selection has been conducted with emphasis on ensuring a significant level of variety, something that will be explored in the following section 5.5 "sample". And thirdly, the unit (person) is selected because of their relevance to understanding of a social phenomenon, i.e. the role of social media in the communications of leaders. This method of sampling has lower external validity, i.e. generalization, than probability sampling. Still it allows for more generalization than a convenient sample, i.e. available to the researcher by chance (Bryman, 2001, p. 415).

5.6.SAMPLE

The sample consists of 13 interviewees from the two rounds of data collection. The first round contained 10 interviews, while the second contained 5 interviews. Two interviewees participated in both rounds.

The interviewees from the initial interviews present a heterogeneous sample with respect to several parameters. The sample was made up of three females and seven males. The age was spanning from 39 to 63 years, with an average of 47 years. Income in 2009 was between 330 000 NOK and 1.6 M NOK.² This salary was paid by companies of different sizes and in different industries. Four companies have between 1 and 10 employees, four have between 11 and 50, one company has between 5001 and 10 000. One person was self-employed. Industries included hospitality, telecommunications, government administration, design, management consulting, banking, information technology and services, and non for profit organization management.³ In the companies, the interviewees hold different positions; Innovator, Chairman and Owner, Sales- and Project Manager, Head of IT, Managing partner, Business advisor, General Manager, Marketing Director, Chief Executive Officer, and Director of Public Relations and Communication of a Bank. Thus, the data sample from the first round of interviews present a heterogeneous group with respect to several parameters.

² Data on age and salary was gathered from www.skattelister.no

³ Data on company size and industry has been collected from LinkedIn.com

There are several commonalities in the interview objects of the first round of interviewing. With the exception of one self-employed, all are leaders. All are engaging in social media to different extents. As described in the selection process, seven of the objects were contacted through LinkedIn. The contact was made on the basis of the participation in an online discussion on LinkedIn. This ensured that the interviewees had an opinion in the matter of social media, communication and leadership. Out of the ten people, six are working directly or indirectly with ITC in their everyday job.

After the initial interviews, 5 focused interviews were conducted. These are listed in Table 1 Interviewees of the focused interviews. Interviewees from the second round share several characteristics important to this thesis in common. All but the employed in a communication company are, or have until recently been, leaders. The entire sample, apart from the Public Relations Advisor, is blogging on behalf of their organization and is thus using social media.

Table 1 Interviewees of the focused interviews

Position and Company Type	Company info	Relevance
President and CEO of a Construction and Property Development Company	Operates in Scandinavia, over 6000 employees	One of the first CEO of a publicly listed Norwegian company to blog, started two years ago
Director of Public Relations and Communication of a Bank	Operates in Norway, over 6000 employees	Has a five years old corporate blog, is the leader of the department handling social media in the corporation
PR Advisor, Previous Head of Communications for the Norwegian part of an Airline Company	Currently: Operates in Norway, 3 employees. Previously: Operates international, more than 30 000 employees	Successfully introduced social media in his previous employment, little over one year ago. Currently advises leaders in public relations, and with it; social media
Consultant in a Communication Company and lecturer on Social Media at a Norwegian business school	Operates in Norway, focuses on online marketing	Advices and lectures leaders on social media, editing chief for the two years old corporate blog of his company
CEO of a Business Association	20 employees and about 1000 companies in its member base	Has a three years old blog linked to the association

5.7. DATA ANALYSIS

As this thesis seeks to create theory from research, a grounded theory approach has been applied. This approach is one of the two main general strategies for qualitative data analysis. It is characterized by the desire to create theory out of data and that it is *iterative* (Bryman, 2001, p. 541). Firstly, all the interviews were transcribed and analyzed. Based on a content analysis of these texts, seven categories were created. These formed the background for the questionnaire applied for the semi-structured, focused interviews.

In the initial interviews seven categories of social media impacting leaders emerged:

- Openness
- Transparency
- Personification
- Power
- Control
- Speed
- Guidelines/Filters

Out of these, speed and guidelines/filters were merged with the category of control. This was done as both were consequently mentioned along with control and its opposite; crisis. Speed was often related to the handling of a crisis. Filters and guidelines, on the other hand, were advocated as precautionary measures to prevent a crisis. All the categories showed strong correlation to openness. This was seen in that interviewees often mentioned increasing openness as a reason for other categories. The different categories each have its own specific definition, see section 6 “Results”. Because of the difference in the nature of the categories, no merger or exclusion was done on this basis.

Further, the initial interviews formed the bases for a literature review. As a result of interviewees speaking about “social media” in connection with “communication channels” in the initial interviews, a literature review was conducted focusing on Media Richness Theory (Daft and Lengel, 1986, Daft et al., 1987, Lengel and Daft, 1989, Rice, 1992). The notion of the different way in which one must communicate in social media led to an investigation of theory on the communication styles of leaders (De Vries et al., 2009, de Vries et al., 2010, Feaster, 2010, Boudrias et al., 2010). Supplementing this was theory on social media. This is a relatively new field, and as students in a field that is currently suffering from insufficient coverage in academia, it is appropriate to quote Bruce (2001)“... students working in relatively new research areas need to read even studies that are of peripheral interest...”. This supports the use of blogs, Wikipedia and other websites in the previous theory chapters.

The literature was reviewed until theoretical saturation was achieved. This can be achieved in three ways; when no new data seems to be emerging regarding a category, when the category is well developed in terms of its properties and dimensions demonstrating variation, or when the relationships among categories are well established and validated (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 212). For this study, saturation was found through the second of these points. The results of this study on the role of

social media in the communications of leaders are a number of categories setting the frame for new theory on the topic.

The literature review resulted in a second set of codes; communication channel and communication control. These were applied on the transcribe text of the focused interviews, resulting in a set of quotes, offering insight into the impact of social media on the communication channels and communication styles of leaders.

5.8. EVALUATION OF METHOD

Several academics have provided critique of the grounded theory approach. Bulmer (1979) postulated that theory-neutral observation is not feasible. Researchers cannot put aside relevant theories until a quite late stage in the process of analysis. This has been less of an issue for this thesis as the researcher had little knowledge on theory surrounding leadership and communication. Being educated in theory on social media could however have impacted the researches objectivity.

Bryman (2001, p.549) presents three additional criticisms of the grounded research approach. Firstly, researchers are required to spell out the possible implications and how they build on existing theory, again preventing theory-neutral observation. This was reduced as the councilors of this thesis provided a large degree of freedom in defining it. Secondly, transcription is time consuming, and can limit the contrast interplay of data collection and conceptualization. Being constricted to merely 21 weeks, this was indeed an issue in the writing of this thesis. And as being iterative, or recursive, is one of the two main features of grounded theory, this matter should not be taken lightly. This issue was reduced through spreading the transcription out in time. That is, sharing the time available between the investigation of theory and transcription, rather than doing this sequentially. Thirdly, questions can be asked whether a grounded theory approach does create theory. These studies are normally substantive of nature, explaining one phenomenon rather than a broader range of phenomena. This reduces the outcome of this thesis to categories⁴, or propositions, rather than theories. In order to form *substantial theory* from these, the propositions of the discussion must be empirically tested as hypotheses (Bryman, 2001, p.544). In order to become *formal theory*, with a wider range of applicability to several substantive areas, data collection must take place in contrasting settings (Bryman, 2001, p.544).

Using interviews as has several potential sources of errors. The main issue here is the impact of the interviewer on the interviewee. As the initial interviews were conducted over a telephone, this issue is reduced to tone and other characteristics of voice. For the focused interviews, body language and other features of the interviewer has to be included as possibly having an impact of the responses of the interviews. Further, the

⁴ Grounded theory is vague. One example is the difference between *concepts* and *categories*. Ex.: Strauss and Corbin (1998, p.73) refer to theoretical sampling as “sampling on the basis of emerging concepts” (emphasis added), Charmaz (2000, p.519) states that it’s used to “develop our emerging categories”. A trend is that “categories” are more used than concepts, and will thus be used for this thesis.

interviewer's knowledge of social media could at times surpass that of the interviewees, also impacting their results.

Lastly, some technical issues can be said to impact the results. One of these is the translation of the quotes from Norwegian to English, something that might alter their meaning. To mend this, quotes have been validated by the interviewee behind them. Another issue goes to the selection process. Initial interviewees were exposed to each other's opinions in the online discussion forum on LinkedIn.com. An interviewee mentioned one of these opinions in the interviewee, illustrating this point. To reduce this issue, the translated texts were compared to the statements given in the discussion forum. None of the texts showed that the interviewees had fundamentally changed their dispositions on how social media impacts leadership.

6. RESULTS

I believe that, to a certain extent, all leaders are impacted by social media. I'm affected a great deal as I have chosen to be active in social media.

CEO of a Business Association

The interviewees in the initial interviews showed different levels of passion with regard to the impact of social media on leadership. One of the interviewees claimed a low level of impact. This can be explained with this interviewee's level of engagement in social media. The interviewee stated that he was in a test-phase and would progress if the company experienced visible returns from participating in social media. However, all the interviewees agreed that social media is impacting leadership, although to different degrees.

Continuing on the notion that social media impact leaders, these results aim to explore how. Five categories were deduced from the initial interviews asking how the interviewees were affected by social media, as leaders. The categories of impact were found to be openness, transparency, personification, power, control. Their definition has been derived from the gathered data and can be seen in Table 2 Categories defined".

Table 2 Categories defined

Category	Definition
Openness	Accepting inputs from others and engaging in two-way communication. More openness increases the amount of, and the willingness to communicate with others.
Transparency	Presenting information about the activities of persons or companies. In other words; more transparency means people have insight into the information being passed.
Personification	Publishing private information. An increase leads to more information being available about the leader. In addition, it makes him/her more accessible, and more visible in the organization.
Power	Level of influence over decision making. More power would result in others having less impact on the decisions of leaders.
Control	Internally; administrating the sharing of information by employees. An increase of internal control would make this task easier to the leader.
	Externally: impacting the sharing of information related to the company. An increase of external control would give a leader more impact on this flow of information.

In the initial interviews, the different categories received an unequal amount for attention as the interviewees were free to speak about what they pleased in the open interviews. Out of the five categories, social media's impact of openness, transparency and personification were advocated the strongest. Several interviewees also put emphasis on the change in power, seen through an impact of social media on their

decision-making. One of the interviewees in particular was adamant about the changing issue of control. All in all, openness was mentioned by 8 out of 10 interviewees, transparency 7, personification 8, power 6, and control 7. The number of times an issue was mentioned is not of great importance as the sample size is too small to generalize the results. Still, it provides an indication of the importance of the categories as the initial interviews were open and the interviewee free to talk about their topic of choice.

The focused interviews provide examples of how the five categories impact leaders. Interviewees shared their personal experiences as leaders, or advisors to leaders, that are using social media. A second review of these interviews formed the bases for illustrating the impact of social media on the communication channel and communication style of leaders, i.e. the second and third research question of this thesis.

6.1 KEY FINDINGS

The analysis of the data gathered in the interviews resulted in five features of social media that impacts leaders; openness, transparency, personification, power, and control. Further, social media was found to impact two issues of communication for managers; the communication channels and the communication styles.

6.1.1 *THE FIVE FEATURES OF SOCIAL MEDIA IMPACTING LEADERS*

1. Social media causes leaders to be more open. This does not mean sharing trade secrets, it means sharing information that can be shared. In order to succeed in this, the company culture needs to be an open one. Lastly, one interviewee advocated that leaders can use the openness to empower employees.

2. Higher transparency is another result of the impact of social media. New types of information is created and published openly. In addition, "old" information is being shared in more transparent channels. This creates new business opportunities, and does not necessarily reduce the value of information. As information gets more easily available, the competitive advantage lies in using the information, rather than owning it. Lastly, as information is presented to a larger audience, leaders must display a good ability to handle the information, especially critique and exposed failures.

3. The importance of personification increases as a result of social media. Presenting more of oneself is a valued trait of a leader. Internally, this is impacting large organizations more than small ones, as they have larger power distance. As leaders share more private information both internally and externally, an identity issue arises. It gets harder to separate the role as a leader and the role as a private person. Still it is not advisable never to start a virtual life, or to start an anonymous one, to avoid this issue.

4. The power of the leader is not altered by social media. Social media is causing more voices to impacting the decision-making of leaders. In the end it is still the leader who makes the decision. The total influence is not affected; the increase in number of influencers is causing each of these to get less influence.

5. Leaders get less control as employees and customers get more freedom. As a result of loss in external control, leaders must allocate resources for monitoring and interacting with the company stakeholders in social media. As a result of loss in internal control, the leader must apply a filter, guidelines, or attitude campaigns. In this, the latter

two are preferred. However, leaders must loosen up on control and focus on achieving a company culture built on trust.

6.1.2 *THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE COMMUNICATION OF LEADERS*

I. Social media impacts the communication channels of leaders. A company or a leader can use social media channels to impact the traditional channel. This could be to spread their side of the story when facing a crisis. In creating such a channel, leaders must be aware of the requirement of keeping it open and letting everybody publish their opinions in it. Being important, it is still a supplement to other channels. It is not impacting the daily communication between leaders and their immediate subordinates. However, it is a tool with the potential of broad involvement in the organization.

II. Social media impacts the communication style of leaders. Interviewees emphasized the demand for, and value of, being personal and informal. Still, being precise and concrete was also valued traits of a leader. Another point of significance was the opportunity for the leader to build company culture using social media. Weight was also put on the importance of having a healthy company culture when embarking on social media.

6.2 PRESENTATION OF DATA

The background of the data is the transcribed texts from the two rounds of interviews. Five categories were deduced when asking how the interviewees were affected by social media as leaders. The categories found to be affected were openness, transparency, personification, power, and control. Data from the interviews is presented in the form of quotes of the interviewees. These quotes have been selected to show the appropriateness of the categories. All quotes have been translated from Norwegian to English and verified by the interviewees.

6.2.1 *OPENNESS*

In the initial interviews, openness was highly emphasized by the interviewees as a feature of social media that impacts leaders. Strong support was given to the claim that social media lead to more openness. This is illustrated in the quote presented below. Several comments were made on the leader's opportunity to, and requirement for entering in a dialogue with the surroundings. For this to be successful, emphasis was put on being both interesting to listen to and be interested in listening. This two-way communication, indicates a higher level of openness than the previous one-way communication of press releases, and leader comments on the intranet of the company.. One of the interviewees made the argument that technology facilitating openness did not necessarily result in more openness. As social media facilitates the sharing of more information one might be led to believe that participants are more open. However, this might result in a reluctance to share confidential or personal information. As this issue is advocated strongly by several interviewees, it is regarded as an issue, originating from social media, which impact leaders.

I think the role of the leader has become more difficult as there are more people contributing and offering input, it is more open.

Director of Public Relations and Communication of a Bank

How the issue of openness impact leaders was explored in the focused interviews. The notion that social media lead to greater openness was advocated by all the interviewees. However, social media was not the sole reason for more openness. Emphasis was put, by several interviewees, on the company having an open culture, and social media as the ideal tool to facilitate this culture.

I think we've always had an open culture. Social media is a suitable platform to promote what we want to promote.

CEO of a Business Association

Several interviewees argued that this does not mean openness at any cost. Issues concerning personnel, trade secrets and other sensitive information are not to be shared, as illustrated in the quotes bellow.

As a publicly listed company, I have to guard my trade secret and not give up inside information. Still, there is no doubt that using social media increases the openness of the company, both internally and externally, maybe more so externally.

President and CEO of a Construction and Property Development Company

More than one interviewee talked about what leaders could not be more open on. One of the interviewees advocated what a leader should be open about. He made the argument that if a leader is to use social media; he (or she) should be open about the issues that concern him (or her). Otherwise it will not come across as authentic or interesting. Leaders are concerned with executing strategy. Social media, the interviewee noted, can facilitate the execution of strategy.

Using social media will make the employees feel a higher level of ownership, it will result in a higher level of engagement and an increased understanding of the problem at hand. Leaders need to understand that this is two-way communication, and this is what it is meant to be.

PR Advisor

6.2.2 TRANSPARENCY

In the initial interviews, transparency was mentioned by several interviewees. This was found in comments on how they used social media. Several examples were given, that supports this category. One example was seen in the process of obtaining information about others, as illustrated in the quote by a CEO of a Business Association. Several interviewees mentioned that they used social media to keep updated on activities in their network. With social media this goes to not only the activities, but also the opinions of their peers. One interviewee mentioned how he was associated with his leader blog and its topics, rather than previous employments. Further, several interviewees stated that this was easier and less time consuming than previously. The ability to obtain information faster and easier indicates a higher level of transparency in social media. One of the interviewees disagreed with the rest by claiming that a higher level of transparency would only lead people to share less. Transparency was a strong area of focus for several interviewees and is regarded as an issue of social media, impacting leaders.

Finding people who have a presence in social media is a lot easier. This goes to finding information about how to contact them. Perhaps even more so, it goes to where to place them in relation to what they're doing and their opinions on topic of your concern.

CEO of a Business Association

How transparency impacts leaders was investigated in the focused interviews. One of the interviewees stated that some social mediums lead to the creation and sharing of new information. This new information provides a larger degree of transparency.

On one level, there is the same information. The New York Times have their Facebook pages where you can subscribe and get the news. Then there is a whole new type of information in which Twitter may be the best example. It is short and quick, visible to all, and with a low threshold for posting comments.

PR Advisor

In addition to new information, known information is being spread in social media. One leader praised the value of transparency as it created business opportunities for him and for the company. What would have been an e-mail to his colleagues is now posted openly on his blog. This led to a leader in the rock n' roll music business hosting a seminar on leadership for the member base of the company.

I posted an article on rock 'n roll leadership on my blog. I must have fired off a message on Twitter as well, because I got response almost immediately. It was from a rock artist in the black-metal community responding that he was a key note speaker on the matter I've blogged about.

CEO of a Business Association

The statement above makes it clear that publishing information openly can create additional value. As the leader is free to share information, so are others. This includes positive and negative opinions about the company. Customers publishing opinions of a bad nature can be regarded as a bigger problem in the transparent social media. One of the interviewees sees the opinion as the problem, not the fact that it is spread. This pertains more to the culture allowing the mindset behind the opinion, than the technology and ideology of spreading it.

In my view, it is just as bad to voice an unacceptable opinion around the dinner table as it is to post it to Facebook. The consequences might be bigger, but this cannot be an evil for humanity. Instead, you end up getting rid of these weeds as well, this is my fundamental attitude.

PR Advisor

Another example of this is provided by another interviewee. For better or worse, higher transparency causes the company culture to become more visible. An example, provided by an interviewee, is a case of employees bullying other employees place on Facebook. The interviewee described the situation, concluding with the following comment:

This is not a social media-problem; it is an internal culture problem. Sure, social media makes it more visible, but it is not causing the bullying.

Consultant in a Communication Company

Having a good company culture does not necessarily mean that it is acceptable to publish the produce of the company to all that are interested. Some interviewees claimed that giving out information, obtained by using resources of the organization, have long been frowned upon. The justification for such action is given in the quote bellow.

We have published out guidelines for use of social media in our organization and all are free to copy these. But the value lies in how we use these guidelines, how we use the information that is open and free. This is gives us a competitive advantage, not necessarily the information itself.

Director of Public Relations and Communication of a Bank

Performing this sort of publishing of the produce of the company is not without risk. Transparency will cause a crisis to become visible to a larger audience. It will be published to a larger audience with greater speed. The issue of not having control is a frightful thought for most managers and could cause them to be less transparent. An example is customer complaints; these are now taking place in the transparent channels of social media. In receiving complaints in their own channels, that are visible to all, companies must show that they are able to handle these in a good way. If this is done correctly, it can create value to the company in the form of people bragging about it in social media, i.e. marketing the company on its behalf. This is illustrated by the quote bellow.

These days, most things are visible. Everybody can see that there is a problem, but they can also see how you're handling it. What we're experiencing is that when we take our problems and deal with them in a good manner, people will take notice and spread this information to others.

Director of Public Relations and Communication of a Bank

Still, all problems should not be handled under the watchful eye of the public. An interviewee mentioned how the municipal were obliged to delete information of a personal character, i.e. people sharing their national identity number or their medical records. On a more general level, an interviewee described how he would remove comments from the blog, if he felt they were related to personnel issues. This is illustrated in the quote bellow.

If I perceive a comment as a personnel issue, I will remove it from my blog and discuss it personally with the employee in question. This is for their personal protection.

President and CEO of a Construction and Property Development Company

6.2.3 PERSONIFICATION

Personification gained broad support as a feature of social media impacting leaders. Several interviewees mentioned social media caused leaders to share more about themselves. Further, some stated that they appreciated this information. One of the interviewees mentioned the issue of some social media acting as online discussion forums. On services like LinkedIn, it is not possible for companies as entities to participate in these debates. There is both an issue when trying to marketing a company; one might end up marketing oneself. Then again, trying to participate as a private person might prove difficult as one is associated with the company one is employed in. And so,

the interviewees stated that it is important to be clear about who the leader is representing at a given point, himself/herself or the company. Some comments were made on the issue of our private and personal life overlapping ever more. Providing several good examples, the interviewees made it clear that personification is a feature of social media that impacts leaders. One interviewee supported the value of leaders presenting more of themselves in the following quote:

I regard a female politician (name excluded) as one of the best leaders on the use of social media as she invites to personal interaction. People are free to friend her on Facebook where she shares political opinions, but also parts of her private life.

Self-employed designer

How personification impacts leaders was explored in the focused interviews. The importance of presenting the people behind the company was emphasized by one interviewee. Exposing the people of the company poses a challenge to leaders in the form of employees that are reluctant to being published.

In a lot of companies, you cannot find the people. We emphasize the importance of finding the people first. There are some deviating views, as some are less happy about having their picture published. Still, there is an agreement that bringing the people to the front is a good thing.

CEO of a Business Association

From an internal perspective, personification is making the leader more visible and accessible to the employees. This assumes a distant leader to begin with. A leader governing the company from high above is an unknown situation to small companies. One of the interviewees stated that the employee-leader relationship might be impacted more by social media in larger companies.

There is a big difference between large and small companies when it comes to leadership. For large companies, the leader is elevated above, and separated from the employees... the role of the leader is changing because of social media. Leaders make themselves more accessible, something that is causing them to become more impacted by others.

Consultant in a Communication Company

Sharing more of their private lives presents leaders with a challenge. The issue of separating of private life and the role as a leader becomes harder. The question of who the leader is representing is illustrated in the comment bellow.

I attended a talk given by the leader of the European part of LinkedIn. She was advocating the importance of clear guidelines between work and private life. This sounds nice, but it not how the world works. The reality is; I have my PC in my lap at home, one second I'm working, the next I'm on Facebook or watching TV

PR Advisor

Having your separate virtual lives merge might sound like a lot to deal with. One would expect it to cause virtual schizophrenia amongst most leaders. Some leaders avoid the issue by not starting their virtual lives at all. One of the interviewees is advising against it, as illustrated in the quote bellow. He also explained how people now associated him

with his blog, rather than the political party he once was involved in. In this regard, he advocated the blog as an opportunity for leaders to impact their personal branding.

We're building our online identities. There is a lot of focus in different mediums on things like; do not publish your old party photos or negative information about yourself. In the time to come, I think it will be worse not to find anything about a person when you're searching the web. If you cannot be found when using a search engine, you're not there.

CEO of a Business Association

The world is starting to demand that leaders have online identities. Using a medium allows the person behind a message to hide his, or her, identity. Having a hidden identity becomes less and less tolerated with social media. In other words, a leader should not participate on an anonymous basis in order to resolving the identity issues. Personification as opposed to anonymity is described by an interviewee in this manner;

A Norwegian politician [name excluded] announced that she would not allow anonymous comments on her blog anymore. I get this, because some people feel they can backstab people quite brutally if they does not reveal their name in the process.

CEO of a Business Association

6.2.4 POWER

Power was supported in several comments made by the interviewees. Social media facilitates people in share and gaining support for their opinions. It concerns the leader in the decision-making process. The decision is not made using social media, but it is impacted by it. All this indicates that social media is impacting the power of leaders. This is illustrated in the quote by a leader of an Information Technology and Service company.

Social media allows more people to voice their opinion and influence me at different levels. This often allows me to see several perspectives in matters where I used to be convinced one way or the other. I find that I alter these convictions more often after the introduction of social media.

Leader of an Information Technology and Service company

How power impact leaders was elaborated on by the interviewees in the focused interviews. One of the interviewees noted that they used social media to find opinions and information from others when making a decision. This presents a new level of external impact on the decision making of leaders.

Input I've received through social media can have an impact on my decisions. I wouldn't say it is common, but I think it is increasing in both frequency and level of impact.

President and CEO of a Construction and Property Development Company

This external impact is just that; impact. Several interviewees mentioned that all though the leaders of the company are aware of the activities in social media, it is them that make the final decision. Input from social media might have an influence, but it is still their decision to make. Several interviewees refuted the notion that they had less power as a result of social media. More people having the same total influence results in each person getting less. This was supported by an interviewee in a following quote:

Some online enthusiasts are picturing the world as flat; everybody has an equal vote in a decision. This is optimistic and I'm sorry to say; an incorrect analysis. More voices leads to more noise. Social media provides opportunities for opinions to be voiced, but there is no guarantee they will be heard. On the contrary, most are probably only heard by their closest colleagues and barely by them.

CEO of a Business Association

6.2.5 CONTROL

Control was supported by comments made more than a few interviewees. The comments all spoke in favor of the leader having less control. Topics of interest included the openness, vastness and speed of social media. The last two topics make it difficult for the leader to have a full overview of the flow of information. The first topic is of a different nature. Several interviewees mentioned the challenge of controlling employees at the company. Social media reduces the filters for communication as personification brings employees to the frontline. Leaders will need to use more precautionary measures as a result of loss in control over the execution of communication. All these worries of the interviewed leaders indicate that control is an important issue of social media for leaders. This is illustrated in the quote below.

We have about 6300 employees in our alliance. All of these are free to utter what they please on Facebook, Twitter and other services. It is challenging for a leader to understand that it is impossible to forbid this activity. Understanding that a better way would be to have the employees understand the consequence of their actions requires a different type of leadership.

Director of Public Relations and Communication of a Bank

How social media impact the control of leaders can be bisected into external and internal control. Several interviewees gave statements supporting the notion that leaders get less control over the information being shared about the company. An interviewee presented an example of the reduction of control for a company when talking about tram chaos around the World Championship in skiing of 2011.

People have gotten used to finding up-to-date information on Facebook. They're not using the homepage of the company or waiting for traditional media to tell them what's going on. If the company does not provide the info, the democracy will. This is what happened during the tram chaos of the World Championship in skiing in Oslo this winter.

PR Advisor

The key word in the quote above is "speed". As people get used to getting updates through social media first, this is where they will start looking for it. This calls for leaders to always be prepared for communication with their surroundings. Not being on the ball, results in the loss of control.

If something happened, it used to appear in the papers the next day. With social media it spreads faster, significantly reducing your time to react. This requires a higher level of preparation for dialogue with your surroundings.

Managing Partner of a Management Consulting Company

As a result of this reduction of external control, it is important to allocate resources to monitor and engage in social media activities. One interviewee mentioned how his department, the department of information used different social media services.

Everybody in the department uses Twitter externally. In addition, the department manages the company Twitter account. Two out of four employees have a responsibility for the corporate twitter account. Everybody has a collective responsibility to monitor activity on Facebook, and have been given access to the systems monitoring social media for the company.

Director of Public Relations and Communication of a Bank

In addition to less control over what others are saying, social media causes the leader to have less control over what is being published on behalf of the company. To reduce this issue, filters can be applied. One interviewee mentioned how her organization used a web master as a filter for all posts to social media. Some interviewees stated that attitude campaigns were preferable to a filter. Another interviewee claimed that having guidelines would actually cause the employees to share more, having a positive impact on the brand value of the company. Telling employees what not to share increases the knowledge about what can be shared. The same interviewee also advocated the importance of attitude campaigns. The quote below indicates that there is a lack in knowledge on the use of social media for employees that pose the problem, not evil intentions to share company secrets.

One thing we worked a lot with internally is attitude with respect to using social media. What can be shared? What cannot be shared? What can I share when I represent myself? What can be shared when I represent the company? We've talked a lot about these things internally, with special regards to the safety risks surrounding the topic.

Director of Public Relations and Communication of a Bank

Allowing employees to speak on behalf of the company, is not "business-as-usual" to most leaders. Some interviewees mentioned a dilemma originating from this topic. On one side, you want the persons in the company to speak as themselves, in order to achieve a personal and informal communication style. On the other side, you cannot control the opinions of the employees. In any case, the transparency of social media brings private and professional opinions to the surface. An interviewee advocated that leaders should loosen up on control as it is not possible to keep it. For the leader to be able to do this, it is important to have an organizational climate of trust.

We cannot control their opinions, it is a matter of free speech...Challenges some companies are facing when having to leave it to the employees to respond to online requests, are less of an issue to us. This is because we have instilled our employees with trust from the beginning.

CEO of a Business Association

All of the statements points towards leaders getting less control. Still, several of the interviewees stated that they have the same amount of control as before social media was introduced to the company. Some interviewees promoted the fact that few business leaders are using social media. For example, one stated that when it comes to corporate

blogging in Norway, there is merely a handful of leader who uses it. Another interviewee argued that this would change.

I think it [the extent to which leaders use social media] will change. Not because top level management will change, but because middle management will become top level management as time passes. The next generation has grown up on these technologies and is likely to use it when they work.

Owner of a holding company in the ICT Industry

6.3 THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Several of the interviewees from the initial interviews mentioned social media as a new channel of communication. One example of this is illustrated in the quotes below. This led to an exploration of the impact of social media on the communication channels of a leader.

There is an increasing interest amongst company leaders in that more and more evaluates social media as a channel they wish to use in communicating with their surroundings.

Business advisor on Social Media

An interviewee had a slightly different approach. He regarded social media as a platform of channels. This was supported by another interview stating that social media presented a set of new tools for communication, as seen in the quote below. He elaborated by showing a communication chart for his organization where social media channels were set side by side with traditional channels. In this chart, a social media service was regarded as a communication channel, i.e. Facebook is one, Twitter another and YouTube a third.

We've just got more channels to pay attention to and use, so the tool box has become bigger. As always, we use the tools that are relevant.

Director of Public Relations and Communication of a Bank

Social media as can be regarded as a platform containing several communication channels. The ease of publishing information and distributing it in social media is strongly connected with the control of a channel. In creating a communication channel on a social media service, the creator controls the channel. An interviewee emphasized the value of a leader or company having its own voice.

Traditional media is a filter, and most of the time, they only care about the bad news and not the good. Social media provides a platform to open up with regards to what you're doing in your own words. We've used it for news and for more technical relations.

CEO of a Business Association

Having social media channels on the communication platform of the company, allows for direct contact with the customers. As a cause of personification, this contact needs to be between a person in the company, and a customer. In the case of several of the interviewees, this person is the leader of the company. Being able to share thoughts and opinions with the surroundings can be useful to a leader. It can even be said to be crucial, perhaps the most crucial in the event of a crisis. One interviewee illustrated the value of having his own channel in describing how he used his blog when the company was facing a crisis.

The blog provided an excellent opportunity to publish balanced information on the matter. And the great thing about social media is that people can respond to it, they can voice their opinion and ask further questions.

President and CEO of a Construction and Property Development Company

There are limitations to the tools; one is that it is not advisable for a leader to create a new tool to fix a problem. In the event of a crisis, several interviewees mentioned the value of having established a social media channel in advance. A leader could not, for example, start blogging after a crisis. However, this would not feel authentic, something that is important when communicating. One of the interviewees put it like this when talking about another leaders handling of a crisis:

If he did not blog to begin with, it would have brought any credibility to his statement. It would be more of a “oh God, is he going to start blogging as well? How bad could this be?” But because he has been doing this over a long period of time, it works.

CEO of a Business Association

There is one disadvantage of opening a channel in social media; it cannot be closed down. One interviewee mentioned the issue of opening hours of a bank being inconsistent with the opening hours of Facebook. While the first have strict times when it is open for communication, the latter never closes. This issue was explored on a broader basis by another interviewee. Once the channel is there, it is not possible to close it. It might be possible to close a channel down technically. But as the creation of a channel is so easy, all are free to create a new channel, replacing the one of the company. An interviewee put it like this;

A leader needs to consider what a crisis can result in for the different channels. For example, he needs to know that if the company has a Facebook page, they cannot shut it down if people write negative comments on it. You cannot say “no comment” in social media, if you’re there, you’ve opened the door.

Consultant in a Communication Company

Another consideration when creating a social media channel is its openness. The ideology of social media requires that all have access to sharing information in this channel. This was exemplified under the previous section 6.2.5 “Control” when an interviewee spoke about the Winter Championship in skiing of 2011. Another interviewee mentioned that his company used a filter when employees blogged on behalf of the company; all comments had to be approved before they hit the internet. Still, he stated that he had never found it necessary to reject a comment. Another interviewee added to this notion with the quote below.

You cannot stop the critics from sharing their opinions about you or their product. This is one of the characteristics of social media; there is a higher acceptance of being critical, on other channels, but also on our channels.

CEO of a Business Association

Owning personal channels can benefit a company in more ways than being prepared for a crisis. In the role of a PR-advisor, one of the interviewees commented on the value of creating a social media channels to a company.

It [a social media channel] is an extremely effective tool to broaden and increase involvement in an internal dialogue. This can just as well be used externally for a dialogue around different interests in open or closed networks. For example; I’ve advised a client of

mine to establish a closed network for experts where they can share their knowledge in a new and more dialogue-oriented way.

PR Advisor

A leader might feel good getting his, or her, message out in an interactive channel he, or she, owns. In this situation, it is important to remember that there are several other channels, none that can be neglected. One of the interviewees advocated the importance of using all channels available.

You cannot believe that because you have a blog, you're reaching out to all your employees. Yes, it is a good supplement, but you still have to make sure that you're available to the organization.

President and CEO of a Construction and Property Development Company

Not neglecting the traditional channels is especially important for the daily communication. Blogs has the potential of reaching a large audience. Several interviewees argued in favor of using this type of medium to communicate to the whole organization. However, a leader normally communicates with a much smaller number of employees during the daily operations. Several interviewees stated that social media has little or no impact on the day-to-day communication.

Social media does not impact the day-to-day communication with my employees to a large degree. We're in the same environment and we talk together as we are working in an open-planned office. Besides, I think it is important to have regular meetings and formal functions like staff meetings where everybody attends.

CEO of a Business Association

It is important to integrate the channels of social media into the platform of communication of the company. An interviewee from a focused interview addressed the interplay and the differences between social and traditional media channels;

Traditional and social media channels have been completely merged. I think the only, marginal difference is that social media is faster. And tolerance for making a mistake is bigger in social media.

PR Advisor

Going even further, he mentioned the impact of social media on other channels;

Social media has contributed to more focus on openness and transparency. This is visible in the revolution of the Middle-East it is visible in all sorts of events. And it is not just in these channels, it takes place in all other channels as well. If you break the rules of social media, you'll get a counter-reaction from the public.

PR Advisor

Another, more business related example was provided by another interviewee. Having the actions and opinions of the leader presented to them impacts the employees. In this way, channels of social media impacts other channels. This notion was advocated by an interviewee, and is exemplified in the quote bellow.

It is not that everybody is running around, talking about my latest blog topic. But sometimes people come to think about it. My blog can be said to set a kind of frame for the discussions during the lunch break. This is an important responsibility as a leader. As a leader, you're not just a private person; you have a responsibility to set the agenda in job related matters as well.

CEO of a Business Association

The impact of social media on traditional media also goes to the new norms and habits of communicating. Several interviewees stated that communication is quicker and shorter in social media. The high speed issue often surfaced when they were talking about a crisis, the word about a failure spreads quicker. Most leaders would regard this as a downside of social media, granting them less control. One interviewee gave an example that proved the speed of social media could be an advantage to a leader.

A CEO I know got an unpleasant visit from some journalists, late one Friday night. They were going to publish an article placing him in a bad light, in the next morning's paper. He thought the article contained several errors. Instead of going to bed with a bad feeling about next morning's paper, he wrote a blog post and spread the word on Twitter. In this way, most people who cared about the story got to read the CEO's side of it first. This is an important feature of social media, it allows for crisis management in real time. Traditional media follows a schedule of publication. If you're good and a bit innovative, you can exploit this.

CEO of a Business Association

Information flows faster in social media, allowing a leader to spread a message faster. But it also allows all others to spread their message faster. A quote under the section 6.2.5 "Control" stated that if the company does not provide updates, the masses will. Supporting the initial quote on how leaders must allocate resources to monitoring social media, one leader gave the following quote.

Facebook has become a very effective channel, much less bureaucratic, easier to publish, and using the power of the masses to inform. I believe that if a crisis occurs and the company is present on Facebook, it has to communicate in this channel. If it does not, it will fail, it is that easy.

PR Advisor

6.4 THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON COMMUNICATION STYLES

Several interviewees from the initial interviews mentioned the need for a different communication style when using social media. This was seen in comments made on how leaders needed to communicate in a different way in social media, as illustrated in the quotes below. This led to an exploration of the impact of social media on the communication styles of a leader.

Information has changed, it has become shorter, it has become 145 characters [referring to the length of a Twitter message]. It has become more personal, more informal. Just look how the Norwegian airline companies used Facebook and Twitter in connection with the ash emulsion from Iceland. The language is much less corporate, they get social media. It requires a totally new level of personality, closeness and sort of an informal tone.

PR Advisor

The quote above touches on some of the central impacts of social media on the communication styles of leaders. Of these impacts, the importance of having a personal communication style was advocated the strongest by the interviewees. Some examples are provided in the quotes below.

I think social media is going to cause leaders and companies to become much more informal and personal in their communication. This is the most effective way of communication, and it is the communication that spreads through the growth of social media.

Director of Public Relations and Communication of a Bank

The blog have a lower threshold, I do not want it to get too high so I accept spelling errors ... press releases are more formal, while the blog is more informal, written in the first person and with a more verbal style.

CEO of a Business Association

Leaders haven't completely realized the characteristics of social media. A CEO I know, and work with, uses the communication style of a CEO in his blog. Another CEO I know, and work with is more impersonal and also writes himself, which is really good.

PR Advisor

Having such a personal communication style can be challenging. Some leaders regard social media as an opportunity to present themselves as persons and be "cool", as one interviewee of the focused interviews mentioned. This only allows them to market their company in a new way, as it is not genuine. In order to be perceived as personal and as a leader, the leaders needs to have a personal relationship to the job. This is exemplified in the quote below.

Stordalen and Olsen are two examples of CEO's that have a presence in social media where they are themselves, as people, as representatives for their companies. In the same presence, they are leaders, promoting their brands. It is something entirely different with a leader that follows their companies as these do, and leaders that are head hunted by an agency and have worked there for two years. They cannot represent the company in the same way.

Consultant in a Communication Company

In a quote presented under the topic of personification, one interviewee advocated the difference between a personal leader blog and an impersonal one. In this, he gave credit to the former style of communication. He also promoted the importance of being personal when giving advice as an advisor on public relations.

I haven't sat across a CEO and said: "you need to be more personal in your blog", but I'm happy to do so.

PR Advisor

The first quote of this section touches on another central impact of social media on the communication styles of leaders. Several other interviewees mentioned the challenge of short messages. Some stated that a leader have to be more accurate as a result of this limitation. Based on his previous role as Head of Communications for a large airline company, one of the interviewees advocated the vitality of being concrete in talking about the use of a social media for gathering ideas for improvement inside the company.

When we asked questions on how to improve the company, we got all sorts of comments. When we asked question in how we could improve in the gate, we got very concrete, very good feedback, and a lot more of it. We learned that we had to be more precise and narrow when formulating our questions.

PR Advisor

Besides requiring the leaders to be personal and precise, social media also have other impacts on their communication styles. Several interviewees advocated the ability of social media to facilitate the company culture, an element that has impact on the effectiveness of the communication style of leaders (see section 0 “

Leadership And Communication”). Social media was denounced as having an influence on company culture in a quote by the leader of the non-for profit organization in the previous section on openness. Here, social media was declared a facilitator of an existing culture. In addition, this notion is supported in the quote bellow.

We're a type of organization that believes in the broadest involvement possible. I believe that social media is supporting this attitude.

President and CEO of a Construction and Property Development Company

In addition to facilitating the existing culture, some interviewees advocated that the leader can also use social media to build company culture. This speaks in favor of social media having an indirect impact on company culture. One interviewee mentioned the opportunity for the leader to build company culture using social media.

It is important to remember that the picture employees have of their leaders is greatly affected by what they read from others, both in traditional and social media. It means a great deal to the internal company culture that you, as a leader, have opinions. You can use these opinions to build company culture.

CEO of a Business Association

Actions impacting the culture could include the leader promoting exceptional employees on the blog of the company. This is illustrated in the following quote:

What's important is to bring forth all the good stories. It is a great opportunity for me to use the blog to make our partners and outstanding employees more visible.

President and CEO of a Construction and Property Development Company

On a different level, company culture can be said to impact the social media usage in the company. An interviewee provided an example of this: When implementing an internal social media for innovation his predecessor was not happy with the adaption of the system. The conclusion was that this was not a technical issue, but a cultural issue.

My predecessor is analyzing the adaption of this social media, and isn't satisfied with the results. There is nothing technically wrong with the solution. It is just that it takes time to change the culture to be in favor of using it.

PR Advisor

7. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the role of social media in the communication of leaders. Several academics have claimed that communication is central to leadership (Spangler and House, 1991, Shamir et al., 1994, Kirkpatrick and Locke, 1996, Den Hartog et al., 1997, Frese et al., 2003, Riggio et al., 2003, Towler, 2003). As previously shown in the introduction, social media is changing communication. The consequences for leaders have received little attention in the academic realm, even though it is of ever increasing importance with the increase in use of social media.

In this section, data from the 15 interviewed leaders, and advisors of leader, are evaluated in the light of theory on communication and leadership. The background with respect to communication channels, is Media Richness Theory (Daft and Lengel, 1986, Daft et al., 1987, Lengel and Daft, 1989, Rice, 1992, Feaster, 2010). This is supplemented with theory on communication styles of leaders (De Vries et al., 2009, de Vries et al., 2010, Boudrias et al., 2010). In addition, the data is evaluated against theory on social media (Vickery and Wunsch-Vincent, 2007, Marlow, 2009, Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, Li, 2010, Easley and Kleinberg, 2010). The discussion is divided into three parts, reflecting the three research questions. Firstly, the general impact of social media on leadership is evaluated. Secondly, social media and its impacts on communication channels of leaders are elaborated on. Thirdly, the impact of social media on the communication styles of the leader will be explored.

7.1 THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON LEADERSHIP

This section treats the categories of social media that impacts leaders. These were deduced from the data gathered for this thesis; openness, transparency, personification, power and control. Validation of these categories was sought in existing literature. This search did not reveal other academic works providing similar lists of categories. The following discussion will expand on how these categories impact leaders. In doing this, the relevance of the categories is illustrated, and the list validated.

7.1.1 OPENNESS

The first feature of social media that is impacting leaders is openness. The two-way communication of social media is causing leaders to become more open. Amongst other things, this can be seen in the fact that leaders are creating blogs that are free for all to comment on. Several of the interviewed leaders have such blogs. Here, they can interact with employees and customers in a dialogue. The interviews for this thesis showed that such interaction is highly valued by leaders. In this regard, one interviewee claimed most leaders have yet to fully grasp the two-way communication that defines social media. Traditionally, information has been broadcasted by leaders through press releases for external stakeholders. For most internal stakeholders, information from the leader has been read on the intranet of the company. However, if the subordinate is close to the leader in the organizational hierarchy, then it is preferable to exchange information face to face (O'Sullivan, 2000). For these relationships, which can be said to represent strong ties (Burt, 1995), interviewees stated that social media had little impact. Interviewees claimed that social media presents an opportunity to engage in two-way communication with larger crowds. In this way, social media allows for the maintenance of more weak

ties (Easley and Kleinberg, 2010). Thus the conclusion can be drawn that social media is causing leaders to be more open, interacting more with persons they have weak ties to. Still this does not impact relationships with strong ties notably.

Openness is causing leaders to engage in dialogue with their surroundings more frequently. An interviewee said that this does not mean discussing all that can be discussed. Rather, several interviewees stated that being more open means talking about information that can be talked about. Sharing all information is an unrealistic extreme of openness, which is impossible if a company is to sustain its competitive advantage (Li, 2010). One interviewee also provided advice on what a leader should talk about. A leader should talk about topics that interest him or her. This resonates with the advice of Kaplan and Haenlein (2010); “be interesting”. Taking it one step further, the interviewee stated that one of these things is the execution of strategy. Sharing job relevant information, and letting employees take part in decision-making are activities that increases employee empowerment (Boudrias et al., 2010). The mentioned interviewee advocated the sharing of the goals of the company, before crafting and executing the strategy in collaboration with its employees. This form of collaboration supports the view that social media enables the harnessing of the collective intelligence (O’Reilly, 2007). In this way, social media is causing leaders to become more open on what they can be open about.

7.1.2 *TRANSPARENCY*

The second feature of social media that is impacting leaders is transparency. Leaders who engage in social media are publishing more information to a larger number of receivers. An interviewee stated that openly publishing information the company has invested resources into gathering does not necessarily spoil the value of the information. He added that it is the application of information that creates value, not the information itself. Another interviewee spoke in favor of publishing information openly as it could lead to new business relations being established. Answering one of his blog posts, a manager of a rock band offered to hold a seminar on leadership in the music industry. Publishing to the masses is something that characterizes user generated content (Vickery and Wunsch-Vincent, 2007), one of the two parts of social media. It is a result of humans’ inherent culture of sharing. This culture is facilitated by social media, as it makes sharing easier and more scalable (Li, 2010). Hence, leaders engaging in social media are sharing more information.

Leaders engaging in social media are publishing new information as a result of transparency. An interviewee made a distinction between old information in new channels and new information in new channels. On one side, information that existed before social media caught on is being published in new channels. The example, provided by the interviewee, is the New York Times and their use of Twitter and Facebook to spread their news articles. This is not increasing transparency notably, as this information was publicly accessible in the traditional media channels. On another side, the interviewee stated that new information is being created and spread as a result of new services like Twitter. Here, numerous leaders post information of their whereabouts and share news they come across. As these examples show, the information being shared has a personal character. In fact, most leaders interviewed said they use social media to

stay updated on their network. In this, they advocated how leaders also are presented with more information, like the opinions of their peers, as a result of social media. This information has gone from being fully, or partly, hidden from the public eye, to being visible, in other words; transparency has increased. All of this resonates with the nature of the content of social media; it is user generated, with the demand of being openly published (Vickery and Wunsch-Vincent, 2007). Thus social media is causing leaders to share more information of a personal character, to a larger crowd.

Transparency is causing leaders to alter the character of the information being shared. Having more people listening in on what is being said can cause people to be less willing to share, one interviewee noted. Another interviewee acknowledged the difference in willingness to share in an example of expressing a controversial message around the dinner table as opposed to sharing it on Facebook. In this example, there is an extreme difference in the transparency of the message, i.e. how many people it reaches. For the first scenario, only the people having dinner will hear it from the primary source. In the second scenario, a large number of people can see and share the message online, exactly as it was expressed. Communicating sensitive information to a large number of people is challenging. Complex actions require rich channels of communication (Lengel and Daft, 1989, Rice, 1992). Inverting this knowledge, a leaner channel could be said to call for a reduction in the complexity of the task. Thus the nature of the information being shared as a result of transparency can be said to be less open.

7.1.3 *PERSONIFICATION*

The third feature of social media impacting leaders is personification. To a larger extent than before social media, this is causing leaders to be representatives of their company. It is something that is visible in for example leader blogs, held by several interviewees for this thesis. These cause them to be visible in the organization beyond being a name on the organization chart. One interviewee advocated that this have more impact on larger companies, where the leader is more distant. He noted how people get to know leaders using social media, versus others who only disclose a comment in the occasional newspaper story. Another interviewee favored this feature of social media. After he started blogging, he was associated with his blog and its topics. Before this, he was associated with the political party he had once been a part of. In this way, social media allows leaders to take control over their personal branding. As mentioned, social media allows for creation and exchange of user generated content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Leaders who are sharing personal information generate trust. People trust people more than companies. As an example, referrals has substantially larger cross-over rate than traditional marketing (Trusov et al., 2009). This is important as trust is key when engaging in social media (Li, 2010). It requires the leaders to offer more of themselves in representing the company. An interviewee said that this increases the issue of identity. As leaders become more personal, it gets harder to separate private and professional life. Even though a leader is sharing a personal opinion in social media, it will be tied to the company. On the other hand, the leader can end up promoting him- or herself rather than the company when being active in social media. One solution could be to not create an online identity. An interviewee advised against it, stating that not having an online presence could hurt a leader. As previously noted, transparency is a feature of social

media that causes leaders to share more information of a personal character. As seen from the discussion above, personification is also causing leaders to share more personal information, something that could cause an online identity crisis.

With the advent of social media, leaders must lead the employees who also represent the company to a larger degree. An interviewee advocated the importance of bringing the people to the frontline of the company. Here, he raised the issue that promoting your employees could be difficult if they are reluctant to having their photo published. The notion that employees represent their company, also when using social media for private use, is supported by 70 % of Norwegian employees (Dataforeningen, 2010). Content in social media is user generated (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). In order for this to be clear, the user must be exposed. This causes people to become more visible in the organization. The leader must respect that the employees have power (Li, 2010). This is partly caused by the better accessibility and usability separating social media from traditional media (Wikipedia, 2011a). As a result, customers are starting to expect a person, rather than a company, on the other side of a social medium. This goes beyond expectations and into trust; people trust other people more than companies. As mentioned, referrals has substantially larger crossover rate than traditional marketing (Trusov et al., 2009). Thus, social media is enabling and expecting employees to stand up and be representatives of the company. As a result of social media, a leader must lead a crowd of representatives of the company, rather than being the sole representative.

7.1.4 POWER

The fourth feature of social media impacting leaders is power. Leaders are impacted by more people when making decisions, as a result of social media usage. This was evident in comments given by the leaders interviewed for this thesis. The openness of social media is causing leaders interact with more people. They also absorb more information as transparency is making information more available. Going further, several leaders stated that their decisions are impacted by input from social media. As communication is becoming more two-ways instead of one-way, it is not unreasonable to assume that the decision making of leaders is impacted. Companies should be humble when starting to use social media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). This could be said to be an advice on listening to others. More specifically, leaders should respect that employees and customers have power (Li, 2010). These notions speak in favor of the decisions of leaders being more impacted by others than previously. However, an interviewee stated that as ever more information is impacting leaders, each bit of information experiences a reduction in impact. In this he is advocating a consistency in external influence on the decision-making of leaders. Several other interviewees refuted that they were losing power as a result of social media. And so, social media is causing leaders to be impacted by more people, but not necessarily impacted more.

7.1.5 CONTROL

The fifth, and last, feature of social media that impacts leaders is control. Leaders get less control over employees because of social media. This notion was seen through interviewees advocating employees getting more freedom. One interviewee stated that sharing opinions in social media is a matter of free speech, something leaders cannot limit. The freedom of the employees can be explained through the fact that social media

consists of user generate content. A feature of user generated content is that it needs to be created outside professional routines and practices (Vickery and Wunsch-Vincent, 2007). Further it is important to be unprofessional in social media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). As discussed under the section of personification; there is a demand for employees to create content themselves. Distribution as well as production has become easier as it can take place on all sorts of devices (mobile phone, computer, etc.) and on different services (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc.)(Li, 2010, Wikipedia, 2011a). Thus, employees can also distribute their material more freely. In social media, it is important for the leader to accept that employees have power (Li, 2010). All of these arguments points towards the leader having less control in social media.

To remain in control, leaders can restrict the use of such services in the work hours of the employees. One of the interviewees stated that this is highly frowned upon by the users of social media and might cause some sorts of repercussions. Another interviewee described a solution used by her organization. It required all published material to be approved by the leader, or an employee responsible for publication to the web. A third interviewee held up a warning finger stating that not even in positions of being leaders can people sensor the opinions of employees in their spare time. Applying such a filter can cause content to become more professional, something that is ill-advised in social media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). A solution favored by multiple interviewees is attitude campaigns. The idea is that if employees understand the consequence of their actions, they will be considerate not to make mistakes in communicating. If someone violates the openness of a leader, it is important to hold them accountable (Li, 2010). And so, leaders advocates enlightening the employees with guidelines and attitude campaigns. These are preferred alternatives to having a filter when it comes to reducing the risk of open communication by the employees. In promoting such mechanisms, the interviewees are indicating that leaders gets less control as employees uses social media more.

In spite of employees having more freedom, and a need for facilitating this, several interviewees mentioned having the same control as before social media. One of the interviewees states that social media is not widely spread in all organizations, yet. Half the Norwegian population is on Facebook (Halogen, 2011) and 420 000 are on LinkedIn (Synlighet, 2011). Still, there is a large group of people, some of them leaders or employees, who are not using social media. The same interviewee elaborates by mentioning how this would change with a new generation that is raised on technology entering the job market, and becoming leaders. With this in mind, social media can be said to give leaders less control over employees as they start using it more.

Leaders also have less impact on the sharing of information between external stakeholders. An interviewee gave the example of this when talking about the tram chaos in Oslo during the World Championship of Skiing in 2011. The tram company had customers keeping each other updated through posting numerous messages on the Facebook-wall of the company. Elaborating, the interviewee stated that if the company does not share information, customers have the power to do so in its place. This example show how leaders do not have expressive control or privacy control on Facebook. Expressive information control refers to the ability to regulate the flow of

information (Feaster, 2010). Here, the leader can choose to turn the ability for others to comment on the company Facebook page off. Privacy information control relates to the ability to restrict or halt certain forms of information (Feaster, 2010). In this, the leader can choose to delete certain comments on the Facebook page of the company. The technical solutions are there, but when it comes to social media, it is advisable to grant access for all (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), i.e. not deny comments. The usability and accessibility of social media (Wikipedia, 2011a) allows customers and others are sharing their opinions on the company more freely. If the company does not adhere to this, they can expect reprisals from the public, as noted by an interviewee. Lastly, it is an issue of trust; selective posting will reduce the level of trust towards the company and its leader. Advice on social media states that leaders should share constantly to build trust (Li, 2010). The conclusion could be drawn that leaders have less impact on the information shared about the company as a result of social media.

7.2 COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Social media is impacting the communication channels of leaders. From the perspective of a leader, social media can be understood as a platform of communication, containing several communication channels relevant to leaders. This view was supported by several of the leaders interviewed for this thesis. As a different approach to this Shannonistic viewpoint⁵, a network approach can also be applied. Easley and Kleinberg (2010) leans on network theories of Granovetter (1973) and Burt (1995) when exploring social networking sites. This foundation could be extrapolated to yield a base for all social media theory. However, the interviews revealed that leaders hold a different perspective. For the purpose of this discussion, social media is regarded as a set of communication channels.

Using social media channels impacts other channels. One of the interviewed leaders stated that his blog set a frame for the face-to-face communication in the lunch break. One interviewee provided an example of this when talking about a fellow leader receiving an unwanted visit from a journalist of a newspaper. He then turned around and started blogging and posting messages to Twitter, sharing his side of the story. When the newspaper came out the next morning, most people had already heard the news from the leader himself. This is an example of how the immediacy of social media (Wikipedia, 2011a) can be valuable to a leader. As a result of the good usability (Wikipedia, 2011a), the leader does not need any particular skill to set up a communication channel in social media. In doing so, they are free to share their own or the company's side of things, they are in control. The feeling of control is especially important in face threatening situations (Feaster, 2010), such as the potential crisis described by an interviewee above. As the leader chooses what to publish in his or her social media channel, he or she can regulate the flow of information, i.e. have expressive information control (Feaster, 2010). Several interviewees mentioned how they had to approve comments before allowing them on their blog. This was to stop people from posting hateful or inappropriate messages. This feature gives leaders the ability to moderate comments from others, i.e. privacy information control (Feaster, 2010). Further increasing the control of the leader is the ability to edit published material, the permanence that characterizes social media (Wikipedia, 2011a). This example illustrates how a leader using a social media channel can have more control.

Creating a social media channel sets some new requirements of the leader. As the previous paragraph shows, leaders can gain control through creating a social media channel. However, it will be reduced as a result of the openness, transparency, and personification of social media. Several interviewees mentioned how they have to accept critique in their own channel, as it was open to all. Some of these stated that critique was what made the dialogue exciting and valuable. In this they advocated to let all comment in their channel and not to deny access to people with a different point of view. This resonates with the advice of Kaplan and Haenlein (2010); "to grant access for all". More than one interviewee talked about the issue of lacking business hours of social media. In this he exemplified the issue by stating that the Facebook page of the bank does not close

⁵ From Claude E. Shannon "the father of information theory" and his view of communication taking place in channels.

when the bank closes. In fact, another interviewee stated that a leader cannot close a channel if they get negative comments here. A leader must share constantly to build trust as selective posting reduces the feeling of authenticity (Li, 2010). The statements from the interviews show that this also goes for others sharing in the channel of the leader. And so, a leader choosing to create a social media channel must allow all to communicate in it. In addition it cannot be shut down, not because business hours are over, or as a reaction to critical comments. This shows that a leader will have less control over communication in their social media channel than in a traditional communication channel.

Social media presents leaders with an opportunity to establish a number of new communication channels. This was mentioned by several interviewees. One of the interviewees advocated the importance of integrating these as he displayed a communication chart of the organization consisting of both social media channels and traditional media channels. Such a plan could include all the four categories of social media channels relevant to leaders. These are blogs, social networking sites, collaborative projects, and content communities (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The new channels of social media should be included in the current channels of the company using an integration plan (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Several interviewees advocated the opportunity to communicate with a larger number of employees using social media, i.e. weak ties (Easley and Kleinberg, 2010). This can be said to represent an analyzable task, and thus requiring less richness (Rice, 1992). However, more than a few claimed that social media had little impact on the daily communication as this took place face to face, i.e. strong ties (Easley and Kleinberg, 2010). This can be said to represent an unanalyzable task, and thus requiring more richness (Rice, 1992). In order to fit new channels with the existing ones, it is important to evaluate the richness of the channel (Lengel and Daft, 1989). The same academics also found that the more ambiguous a task is, the higher is the demand for richness. Interpreting the statements of the interviewees above, this means keeping the employees of the company updated can be done in a medium no richer than a text-based blog. On the other hand, daily discussions are best suited for face-to-face communication. This supports the notion of social media being able to reduce uncertainty, while having limited application for resolving equivocality, see section 4; "Frame of Reference". Social media provides a rich user experience (O'Reilly, 2007). This conclusion comes from a comparison with previous tools of computer-mediated-communication, such as e-mail. For the scope of this thesis, this comparison is incomplete. A leader also has non-computer-mediated channels of communication at his or her disposal, as illustrated in the comments given by the interviewees. One of the interviewees stated that it is important not to neglect the existing communication channels when a leader uses social media. A new channel should be integrated, and in doing so, it must be evaluated against all other channels available (Rice, 1992). Social media is impacting the communication channels of leaders through presenting a set of new communication channels that need to be integrated with the existing ones.

The transparency of the social media channels increases the importance for the leader to choose the right channel. An interviewee provided an example when talking about his blog. If an employee posted a comment the leader felt was caused by a personnel issue,

he would delete it. He would then progress to have a conversation with the employee in a richer medium, such as over the telephone or face to face. This supports the notion of using richer mediums for more complex situations (Lengel and Daft, 1989), and especially for face threatening situations (O'Sullivan, 2000). As his blog is open for all to see and comment upon it becomes even more important to exclude potentially face-threatening tasks from this channel. In other words, it becomes even more important to select the right channel for the task at hand. An interviewee mentioned how the tolerance for failure is greater in social media. To the public, the most important thing is how the leader handles those failures, stated another. When it comes to communicating in social media, a leader must forgive failure, and learn from them (Li, 2010). The ability to edit published material in social media, its low permanence (Wikipedia, 2011a), allows a leader to correct failures. However, this ability is reduced as the immediacy and reach of social media (Wikipedia, 2011a), causes the failure to be spread fast, and to be spread far. In addition to the personnel case described above, another interviewee mentioned how information, like a person's national identity number or their medical records, was something they were bound by Norwegian law to remove. Just like a newspaper is responsible for the content of the paper, a company is responsible for the content in their social media channel. Having a larger audience, and being responsible for the content of the channel puts more pressure on leaders to select the optimal communication channel for the task at hand.

Choosing not to create, integrate and use social media does not scorn a leader from its impact. Several interviewees noted that they were impacted more as they chose to take part in social media. More strongly advocated was the opinion that social media impacts all leaders to some degree. This can be seen in the influence social media has on the traditional communication channels. One example is that a leader blog can set the tone for the face-to-face communication in the lunch break. Not taking part in social media causes a leader to lose this opportunity. Another example is bullying on social network sites can impact the use of other communication channels. A leader refusing to be present in social media could lose valuable insight into the communication between employees. These examples, given by interviewed leaders, support the view that a leader will be impacted even if he or she chooses not to take part in social media.

7.3 COMMUNICATION STYLE

Social media is impacting the communication styles of leaders. Several interviewees strongly advocated the need for a different way of communicating when using social media. De Vries et al. (2010) defines a leader's communication style as "*a distinctive set of interpersonal communicative behaviors geared toward the optimization of hierarchical relationships in order to reach certain group or individual goals*". The statements of the interviewees and this definition both talk about "communicative behaviors", or "way of communicating". This led to the exploration of the impact of social media on communication styles of leaders.

Firstly, an increase in preciseness in the communication styles of leaders is required as a result of social media. An interviewee mentioned the nature of communication being different in social media from traditional media. In this, he claimed the speed and frequency had increased, causing leaders to be shorter and more considerate in their communications. This fits with the social media service Twitter, which only allows for 140 characters in a message. This form of short and quick communication is becoming the norm of social media. And so, there is a technological requirement to be short and concise. Another interviewee illustrated the value of being precise in an example. His company used a social media to gather ideas from employees. In this, they learned that general questions received sparse attention. A specific question, on the other hand, resulted in a massive amount of ideas being submitted. This example indicates that the demand to be concrete is more than a technological one. Social media have lower permanence than traditional media, allowing editing of published material (Wikipedia, 2011a). As you can alter your statement in hindsight, it is possible to correct a lack of preciseness. As previously mentioned the reach and immediacy of social media (Wikipedia, 2011a) reduces the impact of its permanency, causing people to see your statement before it is edited. Moreover, a concise communication style is valued regardless of social media. De Vries et al. (2010) found that the leaders' communication style effect perceived leader performance, satisfaction with the leader, subordinates' commitment, and both donating and collecting knowledge sharing. In this, they found preciseness to have a large impact a subordinate's knowledge collecting from a leader. And so, preciseness, as a style of communication for leaders, has become more important with the introduction of social media.

Secondly, leaders need to be more personal in their communication. This statement was repeated several times under the topic of personification. With respect to communication style, "being personal" involves a different language. Refined, corporate statements are not perceived equally authentic as a personal statement from the leader. Being unprofessional is something a company needs to keep in mind when embarking on social media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). This goes to the nature of social media; a platform for spreading user generated content (Vickery and Wunsch-Vincent, 2007). Several interviewees stated that this led to private and professional life being harder to separate. An interviewee noted that a view commonly held by leaders, is that they can show an entirely new side of themselves in their blog. Publishing press releases with a corporate communication style, while blogging with a personal style will cause the messages sent by the leaders, to lose credibility. It is important to be perceived as

authentic when communicating in social media (Li, 2010). Section 7.2 “Communication Channels” showed that the social media channels affect the traditional ones. Thus, a leader must consider the impact on communication style from social media for all channels of communication.

Thirdly, social media requires leaders to adapt a more supportive communication style. One interviewee stated that his company believed in broad involvement. Further, he claimed that this was a good fit with the values of social media. Other interviewees emphasized the nature of communication in social media being two-ways. It is important to be interesting when using social media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), but it is also important to be interested (Li, 2010). Supportiveness pertains the actual communication behaviors in response to someone else (De Vries et al., 2009). Thus, “being interested”, can be said to be closely linked to being interested in what others have to say. Further, the culture of sharing (Li, 2010) constitutes that participants of social media should share their own, but also the material of other. In effect, this is what is taking place when somebody presses “Like” on Facebook or Re-Tweets a Twitter post. It shows support to the person who originally provided the content. About 30 billion pieces of content is shared on Facebook each month by its users (Facebook, 2011). In this way, social media is built on the notion of giving and getting support. In research on communication styles of leaders, supportiveness is found to be the communication style that has the most effective on achieving leadership outcomes (de Vries et al., 2010). For these reasons, social media is increasing the, already high, importance for leaders to apply a supportive communication style to achieve the desired leadership outcomes.

Lastly, social media presents an opportunity for a leader to be supportive of the employees. One of the interviewed leaders advocated the use of leader blogs to promote exceptional employees. Further, he noted that it was not possible to publish such information through traditional media channels, as it is not regarded as news. Another interviewee advocated the use of social media for leaders to be able to empower the organization and execute strategy. This requires the leader to be supportive of the views and opinions of the employees. Social media is therefore an applicable tool for leaders who wish to be supportive of their employees. If the organizational climate is perceived as unsupportive, the effect of applying the correct communication style is reduced (Boudrias et al., 2010). Thus, leaders must use organizational systems in order to instill a climate that is perceived as supportive (Boudrias et al., 2010). Several interviewees mentioned the opportunity to build company culture using social media. And so, social media can aid leaders in instilling a supportive culture, something that will have a positive impact on the effect of the communication style that is used.

8. IMPLICATIONS

This thesis proposes a new model for the communication of leaders. It combines Media Richness Theory (Daft and Lengel, 1986, Daft et al., 1987, Lengel and Daft, 1989, Rice, 1992) with theory on communication style (De Vries et al., 2009, de Vries et al., 2010, Feaster, 2010, Boudrias et al., 2010). In this, the thesis also explores the role of social media in this model. Here, it combines empirical data gathered through interviews, with theory on social media (O'Reilly, 2005, O'Reilly, 2007, Vickery and Wunsch-Vincent, 2007, Safko and Brake, 2009, Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, Li, 2010). The result can be seen in Figure 4 "The Role of Social Media in the Communication of Leaders" on page 56. This section contains the theoretical and practical implications of the previous discussion. These conclusions are presented as propositions. The propositions are structured according to the research questions.

The first research question of this thesis is: *How is social media impacting leaders?* Five categories of impact of social media on leaders were found. These were openness, transparency, personification, power and control.

1. The high level of openness of social media results in two propositions. Firstly, social media is causing leaders to be more open, interacting more with persons they have weak ties to. Still, this does not impact relationships characterized as having strong ties. Secondly, leaders become more open only on issues they can be open on.

2. An increase in transparency causes three propositions. To begin with, leaders engaging in social media are publishing more information to a larger audience. Moreover, social media is causing leaders to share more information of personal character to a larger crowd. Finally, the nature of the information being shared as a result of transparency can be said to be less open.

3. A demand for personification gives ground for two propositions. On a personal level, it requires the leaders to offer more of themselves, when representing the company. On another level, a leader must lead a crowd of representatives of the company, rather than being the sole representative. This is a result of social media giving employees more freedom.

4. The issue of power resulted in one proposition. This was that, social media is causing the decision-making of leaders to be impacted by more people, but not necessarily impacted more.

5. More freedom to employees and customers resulted in two propositions for the issue of control. First, social media can be said to give leaders less control over employees. This is increasing with the growing use of social media by employees. Second, a conclusion could be drawn that leaders have less impact on the information shared about the company.

The second research question of this thesis asked: *How is social media impacting the communication channels used by leaders?* In exploring this, four propositions surfaced.

1. Firstly, a leader can establish personal social media channels to impact the traditional media channels. This allows the leader control over the channel. However, he or she under strong pressure of the public to keep this channel open and allow critique on it.

- II. Secondly, the social media channels must be integrated with existing channels of the company. In doing this, a leader must evaluate the richness of the channel.
- III. Thirdly, the transparency of social media puts more pressure on leaders to select the correct communication channel.
- IV. And lastly; a leader will be impacted, even if he or she chooses not use social media channels.

The third research question of this thesis asked: *How is social media impacting the communication styles of leaders?* This resulted in four propositions.

- I. The importance of a precise communication style has become more important for leaders with the introduction of social media.
- II. Further, leaders are being more personal in the communication style the use in all sorts of media.
- III. Moreover, social media is also adding to the importance for leaders to apply a supportive communication style.
- IV. Lastly, social media can aid leaders in instill a supportive organizational climate. This increases the effect of applying the correct communication style.

These conclusions form the basis for the revisited frame of reference in section 8.1. The impact of social media can be seen in bold in the figure. Comments related to assuredness were not found in the empirical data and is set to “inconclusive”.

Even though they are drawn as separate elements; there is a distinctive interplay between the five categories and the impact of social media on communication channels and communication styles of leaders. In a way, these five categories of impact can be said to form the basis for the impact on communication channels and communication styles of leaders.

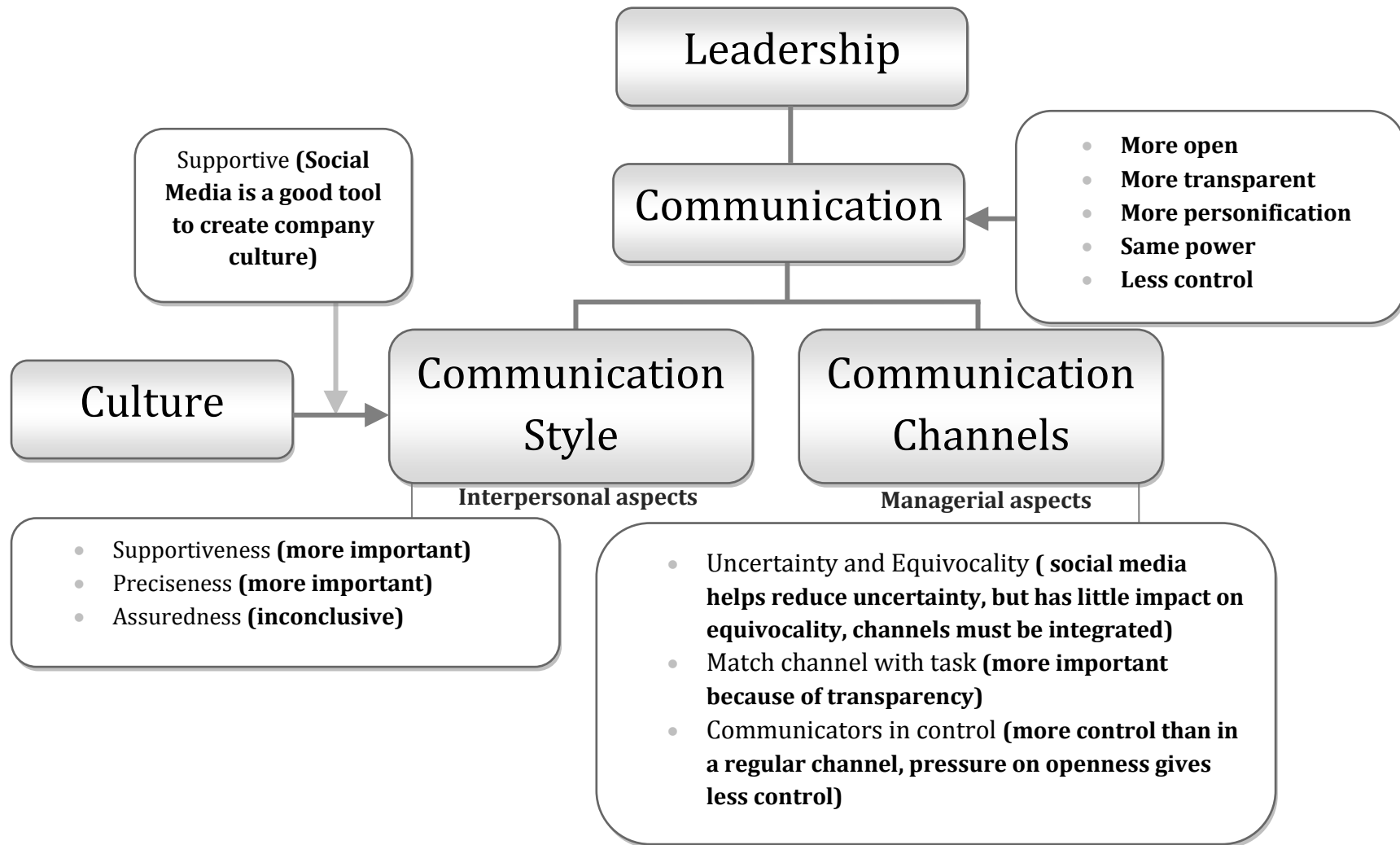


Figure 4 The Role of Social Media in the Communication of Leaders

9. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This thesis has several limitations to keep in mind. Some limitations were discussed in section 5.8 “Evaluation of method”. This section contains more limitations and provides pointers for future research.

All of the interviewed leaders have chosen to use social media. These voiced the opinion that social media impacts all leaders to some degree. However, this thesis did not include empirical data from leaders that does not participate in social media. This weakens validity of the conclusions for leaders who are choosing not to take part in social media. Further research should aim to investigate how leaders, who are not taking part in social media, are impacted by it.

Using strategic sampling, the variety of the sample was emphasized. Still, several interviewees worked directly or indirectly with information and communication technologies (ICT). This is not surprising when taking into account that social media falls under this field. Moreover, several interviewees mentioned differences between large and small companies. A recurring point of view was that social media had greater impact on larger organizations. Thus the conclusions have not been tested for various types of leaders or companies of different sizes. Further research on these topics would be beneficial in developing theory on the Role of Social Media in the Communication of Leaders.

The initial interviewees led to a theoretical exploration of the Media Richness Theory and theory on the communication style of leaders. This was combined with theory on social media. Understanding social media through network theory (Burt, 1995, Granovetter, 1973), rather than channels, could have resulted in different propositions. Further, including theories on social information processing (Fulk et al., 1987, Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978) as critique of Media Richness Theory could have been use to provide more depth to the study. Moreover, this thesis is limited to the communication channels of leaders, and with them; organizations. These are impacted by a set of structural elements (Daft and Lengel, 1986), an element that could have been included in investigating the role of social media in the communication of leaders. Thus, further research should aim to include broader theoretical foundations.

This thesis has explored the general role of social media in the communication of leaders. As shown, social media can be regarded as a set of communication channels. These have different characteristics, and could consequently impact leaders in different ways. One example, from the data gathered for this study, is how a leader blog can give a leader more control. A company Facebook page, however, does not necessarily allow for more control. Thus, further research is proposed to look at the impact of different social media channels on leaders.

In looking at the impact of different social media channels on leaders, these should be integrated with the existing channels. As this study did not evaluate various categories of social media services, this has not been explored further. Lengel and Daft (1989) states that a communication medium has the following characteristics:

1. Ability to handle multiple information cues simultaneously
2. Ability to facilitate rapid feedback
3. Ability to establish a personal focus

If these abilities are considered good for the media in question, it is a rich media. If the media scores poorly on these abilities, it is a lean media (Daft and Lengel, 1986). Thus further research is proposed to place the categories of social media; blogs, social networking sites, collaboration projects and content communities (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010) in the continuum of communication channels presented by Rice (1992).

Another limitation to this study is that it is undertaken in Norway, with the cultural implications this could include. Further research could look at other cultures, or the cultural impact on the inclination towards leaders using social media to communicate.

The five categories presented on the previous page are closely related to one another. One example is how both openness and transparency relates to “sharing more information”. As emphasized earlier, the first relates to the two-way communication of social media, while the second relates to openly publishing of information. Further, transparency and personification increases the issue of control. The discussion of this thesis showed how the categories impact leaders, thus validating that they have an impact. Still, their close interplay could be an indication of the categories not being mutually exclusive. And so, further research should test the appropriateness of these categories through gathering quantitative data.

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13. APPENDICES

As all the content on the World Wide Web can be changed after it is edited, the web resources used for this master thesis have been added as appendices. They are presented as they appeared on the date they were accessed.