

Corporate branding in Facebook

-Communicating strategic vision: A case study

International Business Communication
Master's thesis
Noora Pihlström
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Aalto-yliopisto
Kauppakorkeakoulu

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Objective of the Study: The objective of the study was two-fold. Firstly, the study aimed to increase knowledge of how the case company (Stockmann) uses social media for corporate branding from the perspective of openness and interaction and secondly, the study aimed to find out how the case company communicates its strategic vision through Facebook. Four research questions were outlined as follows: 1) How and for what reasons case company uses social media for corporate branding purposes; 2) What kind of content is published on their Facebook page; 3) What posts create most interaction; and 4) How is interaction depicted from case company's Facebook communication.

Methodology and Analytical Framework: The study used a qualitative approach in a single-case study, and Stockmann was chosen as the case company. Content analysis was used in data collection, by using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Data was collected within six month period from Facebook. Additionally, one semi-structured interview was conducted. The theoretical framework presents the corporate branding process in the social media environment, where openness and interaction emerge as strategies. In the focal point of the theoretical framework are three important variables of corporate branding: strategic vision, organizational culture and stakeholder images.

Findings and Conclusions: The findings showed that Facebook is considered as integral part of case company's social media and it is used for both marketing purposes as well developing the corporate brand. Nearly half of the posts (45%) communicated in Facebook could be considered as communicating the strategic vision and they clearly seemed to create more interaction than promotional posts which accounted for the other half (55%). The findings also indicated that even though Stockmann wants to create engagement with stakeholders, they consider themselves more as creators of content than active participants in the discussion. In respect of the earlier studies, the findings show that Stockmann's corporate branding in Facebook is mainly management driven, rather than mutual co-created process with engaged stakeholders. Also findings show support to earlier studies in corporate branding highlighting that openness and interaction is not fully used in communicating corporate brands in social media.

Keywords: corporate branding, stakeholder theory, social media, openness, interaction, stakeholder engagement, international business communication

Yritysbrändäys Facebookissa - strategisen vision viestiminen: caseyö

Tutkimuksen tavoitteet: Tutkimuksella oli kaksi tavoitetta. Ensimmäinen tutkimuksen tavoite oli lisätä tietoa siitä kuinka caseyritys (Stockmann) käyttää yritysbrändäystä sosiaalisessa mediassa hyödyntäen avoimuutta ja vuorovaikutusta. Toiseksi tutkimuksen tavoite oli selvittää kuinka caseyritys viestii strategista visiotaan Facebookissa. Tutkimuskysymyksiä oli neljä: 1) Miten ja miksi caseyritys käyttää sosiaalista mediaa yritysbrändäyksessä, 2) Mitä sisältöä julkaistaan yrityksen Facebook-sivuilla 3) Mitkä julkaisut saavat aikaan eniten vuorovaikutusta, ja 4) Miten vuorovaikutus näyttäytyy caseyrityksen Facebook viestinnässä.

Tutkimusmenetelmät ja analyttinen viitekehys: Tutkimukseen käytettiin laadullista menetelmää hyödyntäen case-tutkimusta. Stockmann valittiin caseyritykseksi. Aineistoanalyysi käsitti niin kvalitatiivista kuin kvantitatiivista menetelmää aineiston tutkimiseksi. Aineisto kerättiin Facebookista kuuden kuukauden jaksolta. Myös yksi puolistrukturoitu haastattelu tehtiin aineiston tueksi. Teoreettinen viitekehys kuvaa yritysbrändäystä sosiaalisessa mediassa, jossa avoimuus ja vuorovaikutus nousevat strategioiksi. Viitekehysten keskiössä on kolme yritysbrändäyksen kulmakiveä: strateginen visio, organisaatiokulttuuri ja sidosryhmien mielikuvat.

Tutkimuksen tulokset ja johtopäätökset: Tulokset osoittivat, että Facebook on oleellinen osa Stockmannin sosiaalista mediaa, jota käytetään niin markkinointiin kuin yritysbrändäykseen. Noin puolet (45%) Facebookin julkaisuista viestii yrityksen strategista visiota. Ne selvästi lisäsivät vuorovaikutusta sidosryhmien kanssa, toisin kuin mainokset, joita oli noin puolet kaikista (55%). Tulokset osoittivat, että Stockmann haluaa luoda vuorovaikutusta Facebookissa eri sidosryhmien kanssa, mutta pitävät itseään enemmän sisällöntuottajina kuin keskustelijoina. Muiden tutkimusten valossa voidaan osoittaa, että Stockmann ei hyödynnä ja sitouta sidosryhmiä riittävästi yritysbrändin kehittämiseen. Tämän tutkimuksen tulokset tukevat aiempia tutkimuksia, jotka osoittavat että avoimuutta ja vuorovaikutusta osana yritysbrändäystä ei vielä hyödynnetä sosiaalisessa mediassa riittävästi.

Avainsanat: yritysbrändäys, sidosryhmäteoria, sosiaalinen media, avoimuus, vuorovaikutus, sidosryhmien sitouttaminen, kansainvälinen yritysviestintä

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1 INTRODUCTION

The rise of new media and the establishment of the internet have changed the way people and companies communicate (e.g. Hearn, Foth & Gray, 2007; Argenti, 2006; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). While blogging, MySpace, wikis and social media sites were originally used by corporations to interact with their customers, Hearn et al. (2007) highlight that the traditional one-way communication has changed into dynamic two-way communication where also customers create content. On the one hand, new media communication allows companies to engage in timely and direct contact with their clients at a relatively low cost and high level of efficiency, compared to traditional communication tools. On the other hand companies have lost full control over the communication in these channels (Kuvukaite & Piligiemene, 2013). Although social media is not easy manageable and it requires new ways thinking, the potential gains for companies are far from being negligible (Kaplan, 2010).

Globalization and increased competition has shifted companies' branding focus from product branding to corporate branding (Hatch & Schultz, 2001; 2003; Bickerton & Knox, 2000). Through using the core values and symbols of the organization and bringing corporate vision and culture as part of the unique selling proposition, companies can differentiate, which can lead to competitive advantage (Hatch & Rubin, 2005). Since corporate branding offers potential opportunities, corporate brands are seen as a valuable resource and a strategic tool and thus corporate branding has become one of the central considerations in managerial decision making (Balmer & Grey, 2003; Hatch & Schultz, 2001).

In corporate branding, stakeholders are increasingly considered as co-creators of the brand (eg. Hatch & Schultz, 2003; Hatch & Rubin; Gregory 2007; Ind & Bjerke, 2007). The corporate branding process, once considered only a management task, today invites all the stakeholders to the collaborative process (Hatch & Schultz, 2003; Hatch & Rubin, 2005; Ind & Bjerke, 2007). A corporate brand which resonates the values stakeholders helped to create is likely to get support from the stakeholders and thus become more successful (Gregory, 2007). Although not all corporate brands may fall under Gregory's (2007) "negotiated brand", which emerges from engagement of all stakeholders, the importance of both external and internal stakeholders and their output in the process is widely accepted. For that reason, management increasingly widens the involvement of all the company's stakeholders in contributing to brand meaning and "acting as ambassadors of the brand" (Hatch & Rubin, 2005 p.57).

The rise of social media is increasingly leveraged by companies for corporate branding purposes (Kuvykaite & Piligrimiene 2013; Vernuccio 2014). The new interactive communications facilitate brand communication and collaboration between the company and its stakeholders and although the dominant role of firms in the brand creation process is challenged, social media with its communication opportunities offer companies a new collaborative strategy to corporate branding through openness and interaction. (Vernuccio, 2014.) The success lies in the company's resources and new skills to communicate and once succeeding, companies can use the new interactive platforms to establish, maintain, and reinforce the brand's connections, image, and reputation (Kuvykaite & Piligrimiene 2013; Vernuccio 2014).

Due to the increased competition and rise of new media, companies leverage social media increasingly for corporate branding purposes and stakeholders are becoming co-creators of the corporate brand (Vernuccio, 2014). Although the topics of corporate branding and

social media have received increased attention in academia, researches have mainly been conducted from the marketing perspective. Vernuccio (2014) researched corporate branding from the corporate communication perspective and found out that new strategic approaches of *interactivity* and *openness* emerge via social media. Due to fewer researches to corporate branding from the corporate communication perspective, the purpose of this study is to increase knowledge to this research gap. Furthermore Facebook as a new media communication channel offers a dynamic communication base where the corporate brand – with its vision, culture and image can be developed. For those aforementioned reasons the study focuses on Facebook as the main channel for investigation.

To investigate communicating corporate brands in Facebook, the oldest Finnish department store Stockmann was chosen as the case company for several reasons. Firstly, although Stockmann is one of the strongest brands in Finland, the company gained negative attention in social media in 2014, which questioned its positive image and thus corporate brand. After an unofficial social media discussion to develop the company's strategy, Stockmann reacted to the vast discussion by creating an official social media campaign to ask advice from customers. After this widespread social media discussion it became evident that many people were interested in developing Stockmann's corporate brand and the company's new strategy. For this reason, it is interesting to study how after six months, Stockmann uses social media and Facebook for corporate branding purposes and if stakeholders are participating in the process. In addition to these aforementioned reasons, the researcher also has a strong personal interest in the company due to her long working history for the company.

1.1 Case company: Stockmann Corporation

Established in 1862, Stockmann is a Finnish listed company operating in the retail trade. The company has over 15 000 employees and 60 000 shareholders and its operating structure since January 2014 is under three divisions: Stockmann retail, real estate and fashion chains. Moreover, Stockmann retail consists of 16 department stores and two online stores in four countries and the revenue in 2014 resulted in EUR 1101.2 million. The Stockman Group's core values are profit orientation, customer orientation, efficiency, commitment, respect for our people and responsibility. The core values define the value framework where the Group operates and bases its decisions. (Stockmann Group, 2015)

In recent years, the economic downturn, declining sales and operational changes in Stockmann have caused a nation-wide worry among customers and other stakeholders. In the summer of 2014 a Facebook group "Save Stockmann" first created by a sales consultant, gained vast popularity among Facebook users and Stockmann customers. In a short period of time many people joined the group to discuss the past and current situation of the company and to create concrete advice for the future (Taloussanommat, 2014). After an intense discussion on the internet, the Facebook group decided to gather all its important development ideas together, and finally a 55-page report was handed in to Stockmann's management by the group. The report, which consisted concrete ideas such as more experiences, new brands and happenings to the department stores and other ideas, is taken into account in the company's ongoing strategy work (Helsingin Sanomat, 2014).

In addition to having received this report Stockmann also launched its own advisory campaign on Facebook where they asked for advice and fresh ideas for the future. During the campaign, the company gathered more advice and information from customers to be used in the ongoing strategy work. Overall, the company was surprised about how

committed and interested people were about the company's future and how the discussion went on in different media (Helsingin Sanomat, 2014).

Before the social media discussion about Stockmann's future peaked in the summer of 2014, the company had started its strategy work in the beginning of the year with the need to improve the Group's long term competitiveness. Nearly a year later, the first strategic decisions were announced and visible for customers and in the beginning of February 2015 the company announced its new customer promise which is "signed for you". In the core of the promise is the customer, to whom Stockmann wants to offer top-notch shopping experience both online and in the department stores. The new promise emphasizes that Stockmann wants to be in the core of customers' everyday lives by offering inspiration, ideas and solutions easily and effortlessly. The promise will be delivered through best-in-class service, an up-to-date mix of brands and styles and by rewarding customer loyalty. Customer experience is at the focus and core of all activities and professional staff helps in delivering that promise. In the core of making this promise real is the professional staff that meets the customers daily (Stockmann Group, 2015). The strategy work is still ongoing today.

This study will focus on examining the Stockmann retail division and the corporate Facebook pages in Finland. Also as the company's new strategic vision plays an integral part in the study, the researcher has made a summary of the main messages of the new strategy as follows. The new strategy emphasizes that Stockmann wants to be an *eventful* department store with a customer promise "*signed for you*". In addition the strategy could be summarized as threefold based on what the company wants to offer (Stockmann Group, 2015):

1. Inspiration
2. Best mix of brands, high class service and rewarding loyalty
3. Customer experience at the core of all the making

1.2 Research objectives and research questions

The research objectives of the study arise from social media and the case company's ongoing strategy work. During the widespread social media discussion, Stockmann received a large amount of negative media attention which may have affected the images of its corporate brand. Overall the vast social media discussion provided a good example of a social media's strength and also potential threats for corporations today and thus Facebook forms an interesting base for studying corporate branding. With these in mind, the objective to this study is two-fold. Firstly the study aims to increase knowledge of how Stockmann uses social media for corporate branding purposes from the perspective of openness and interaction. Secondly, the study aims to find out how Stockmann communicates its strategic vision through Facebook.

The research objective and the research questions are outlined on this basis. Firstly, the openness in communicating corporate brands is explored though finding out how and for what reasons Stockmann utilizes social media and what kind of content is published on their Facebook page. Furthermore, the content which highlights the strategic vision will be depicted. In addition, the level of interaction in communicating corporate brands in Facebook is studied by depicting how Stockmann engages and interacts with stakeholders and what posts generate most interaction. As a result, four research questions were outlined as follows:

1. How and for what reasons does the case company utilize social media?
2. What kind of content is published on their Facebook page?
3. What posts generate most interaction?
4. How is interaction depicted from case company's Facebook communication?

1.3 Contributions to IBC

The study fits well to the international business communication field for several reasons. Firstly, according to Cornelissen (2007), corporate branding can be viewed as a guiding concept in corporate communication field. Although the study investigates Stockmann as the case company, during at the time of the data collection it also operated internationally, both in Russia and in the Baltics. Furthermore, corporate branding stems from the same objectives globally and thus the matter of the country of the investigated market is not in a big role. Thus, although the investigated field is the Finnish market, the research objectives of this study could be those of any international company and Facebook as a new media channel offers challenges and opportunities for any corporate communication professionals world-wide. For these reasons, it is considered that this study contributes to the field of international business communication well.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 presents the introduction and background for the thesis as well as the case company information. It also presents the research objectives and questions of the study and contributions to international business communication. Chapter 2 presents earlier studies related to this topic and also presents the lens of the researcher and the theoretical framework. Chapter 3 discusses the

methodological choices for this research and their justification. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study by answering the listed research questions. Chapter 5 discusses the results in the light of the earlier studies presented in the literature. Finally, Chapter 6 summarizes the research and its results and presents conclusions. Furthermore, the chapter also discusses the limitations of the study and recommendations for future study.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter introduces relevant earlier studies for the research topic. The first subchapter 2.1 introduces corporate branding as a definition and explains how the branding process has changed from product branding to corporate branding. It introduces also relevant corporate branding frameworks, that of Hatch and Shultz (2001;2003) with vision, culture and image and the six conventions of corporate branding by Bickerton & Knox (2000). The subchapter 2.2 introduces stakeholder view in corporate branding and introduces the classical stakeholder theory by Freeman (1984) followed by Cornelissen's (2007) view on stakeholder communication. Also the salience model by Mitchell et al. (1997) is presented showing the connection between legitimacy and power and how specific stakeholders can be identified when combined with urgency. Finally the subchapter introduces the relevance of stakeholders in corporate branding concluding Gregory's negotiated brand (2007) as an example of stakeholder engagement in corporate branding process.

Subchapter 2.3 introduces social media as a concept, explains the main logic behind Facebook and explains its new opportunities for companies. Also the changes in communication process are presented as well as new opportunities through stakeholder engagement. Finally, the subchapter introduces the main guidelines for attending social media and potential challenges and threats it offers to companies.

Subchapter 2.4 discusses social media and corporate branding, the new interactive brand communication and finally the principles of capitalizing the strengths of social media for brand building purposes. The subchapter also discusses openness and interaction in corporate branding and finally, Vernuccio's (2014) four distinctive corporate branding strategies are presented as cautious beginners, confident communicators, selective strategists and rising stars. Subchapter 2.5 discusses the lens of the researcher and the

guiding theories behind this study. Finally the theoretical framework is presented and discussed.

2.1 Corporate branding

This subchapter aims to shed light on what corporate branding is and how it relates to corporate communication as a discipline. It will also discuss how corporate branding has become an important aspect of many organizations today and what its opportunities are. Furthermore in the end of this chapter the basic guiding concepts in corporate branding are presented.

Corporate branding is viewed as a guiding concept in the corporate communications discipline (Cornelissen, 2011) and through Argenti's (2002, p.4) definition it can be viewed as "*corporation's voice and the images it projects of itself on a world stage populated by its various audiences.*" . From the marketing perspective Balmer, 2001 (p.281) defines it as the systematic marketing effort taking the organization's identity as the center of the unique branding proposition and enhancing it through all stakeholders and networks.

The classic definition of a brand by Aaker (1991, p. 7) states that a brand is a distinguishing name and or a symbol which identifies and differentiates it from those of competitors. Although corporate branding stems from the same objectives than product branding in terms of differentiation and creating preference (Bickerton & Knox, 2000), differentiation in corporate branding requires positioning not only for products but the whole corporation. Thus, in contrast to managing just one product, corporate branding deals with the whole organization and aims to manage interactions with multiple stakeholders while having support from the entire organization. Similarly, the core values and symbols of the

organization have become the center of differentiation and brought corporate vision and culture as part of the unique selling proposition. (Hatch & Schultz, 2003). Balmer & Grey (2003 p. 991) defines corporate brand as the “face of the organization”.

Globalization and increased competition have shifted companies’ branding focus from product brands to corporate brands (Hatch & Schultz, 2003). Corporate brand – with its identity, image and reputation has become the central aspect of organizations and any interested parties since they generate value for the organization (Hatch & Schultz, 2003;Cornelissen 2011). Dowling (1993) argues that world’s most successful companies should invest in their images as in order to develop the image as a valuable marketing asset, management “must coordinate the company’s vision, marketing communications, corporate strategy, organizational design and culture. “ (p. 101). Due to the potential opportunities, corporate brands are seen as a valuable resource and a strategic tool, which in the right context can lead to competitive advantage (See e.g. Balmer & Grey, 2003; Hatch & Schultz, 2003).

Many researchers have presented frameworks for the process of corporate branding. In that of Hatch & Schultz (2003, p.9), they argue that corporate branding is a simultaneous process that consists of three elements (1) strategic vision, (2) organizational culture and (3) corporate images. (See also Hatch & Schultz 1997; 2001).

1. *Strategic vision* - the central idea behind the company that embodies and expresses top management’s aspiration for what the company will achieve in the future
2. *Organizational culture* - the internal values beliefs and basic assumptions that embody the heritage of the company and communicate its meanings to its members;

manifests in the ways employees all through the ranks feel about the company they are working for.

3. *Corporate images* - views of the organization developed by its stakeholders; the outside world's overall impression of the company including the views of customers, shareholders the media, the general public, and so on.

In order to create an authentic corporate brand, Hatch & Schultz (2001;2003) argue that all three elements of vision, culture and image must be aligned (see Figure 1). According to them, the corporate brand should resonate with the meanings and values that the organizational members share, as organizational culture and the members of the organization are important contributors of the corporate brand value. The branding process includes elements outside the management's control as the strategic vision is interpreted by existing corporate images of stakeholders. The alignment between the vision and image or the vision-image gap explores if the management is taking the company into the direction its stakeholders support. Thus, as creating a powerful corporate brand depend on the interplay between vision, culture and image Hatch & Schultz (2001) argue that the key to success in corporate branding is the sensitivity to arising discrepancies or tensions in between these three variables. For that reason, an active dialogue between top management and both internal and external stakeholders is essential (Hatch & Schultz, 2001 p.20-24).

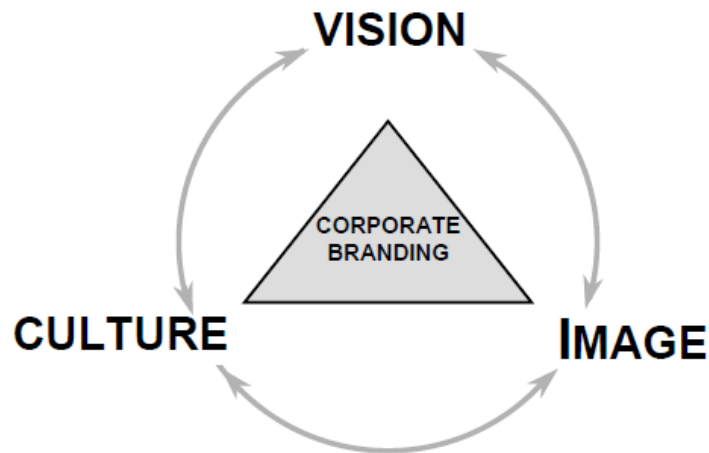


Figure 1. Corporate branding on a foundation of interplay between strategic vision, organizational culture and corporate images (Hatch & Schultz, 2003, p 1047)

Although branding management frameworks such as that of Hatch & Schultz (1997; 2003) attempt to conquer the challenges of multiple identities and images, Bickerton & Knox (2000) argue that they still remain too conceptual. With this in mind, they created a corporate branding model which consists of identified six different practices or “conventions” as they name them (p.1006-1012). In brief, the six conventions of their brand building model are as follows (see Figure 2): first of the conventions, *the brand context* sets the co-ordinates for the process. In addition to vision, culture and image as the main variables of corporate branding, Bickerton & Knox (2000) argue that the competitive landscape is a fourth remaining variable. Although the three variables do create a strategic setting where strengths and weaknesses of a corporate brand can be reviewed, there is a need to consider the future competitive landscape. Thus, the development of this practice builds understanding of two factors, (1) the current image of the organization and its future competition: and (2) the current culture of the organization and its vision for the future.

According to Bickerton & Knox (2000 p. 1006-1012) the second convention *brand construction*, aims to create and identify the corporate brand positioning framework using customer value as the starting point to better understand the strengths and weaknesses and desired future position of the brand. The third convention, *brand confirmation* seeks to articulate the brand position to internal and external audiences. Furthermore, the fourth convention, *brand consistency* refers to creating consistent corporate communication to the brand and the fifth convention, *brand continuity* aims at creating a holistic view to corporate branding in all business processes engaged in value delivery. Finally, the last sixth convention, *brand conditioning* calls for the ability to review the corporate brand on a continuous basis to keep the distinctiveness of the brand. Not only is it important to keep the brand proposition communication consistent but ensure that the organization supports it. Overall, the six conventions can be seen as a guiding tool for top management for the structured process of corporate branding.

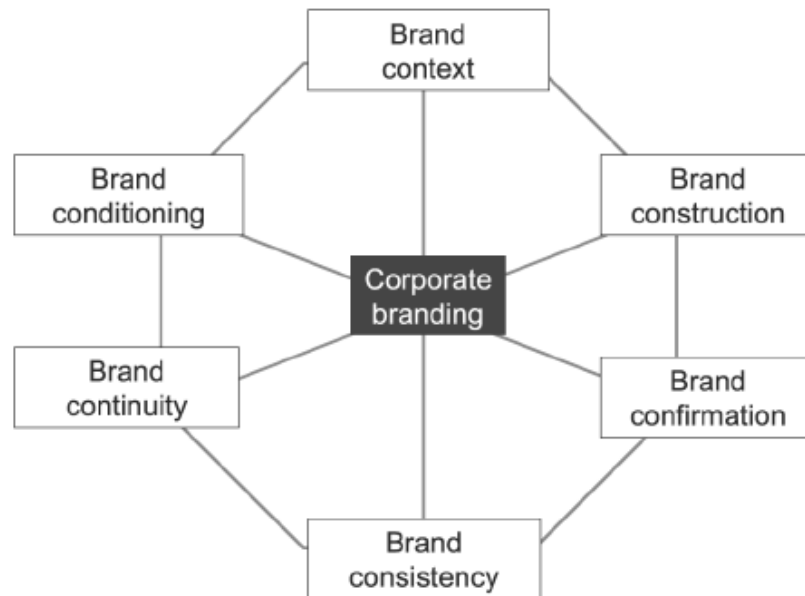


Figure 2. The six conventions of corporate brand management (Knox & Bickerton, 2003, p. 1012)

2.2 Stakeholder view in corporate branding

This subchapter discusses the role of stakeholders in brand building literature. It begins with an introduction to stakeholder theory, introduces a typical stakeholder model for companies, followed by a strategic stakeholder intake from stakeholder identification and management. After the general view of corporate branding and stakeholder theory, this subchapter discusses how stakeholder management relates to organizations' success and finally, it will discuss how stakeholders can be engaged in the corporate branding process by introducing Gregory's (2007) concept of negotiated brand.

Researchers agree that branding is a joint process between an organization and its stakeholders, shifting stakeholders to the core of corporate branding process (see eg. Balmer, 2001; Hatch & Schultz, 2003; Hatch & Rubin, 2005). For that reason, understanding their needs, wants and behavior are essential to the organizations and therefore an active dialogue with them is needed. Balmer, (2001 p. 57) argues that "*the value of the brand should be conceived not as an asset that can be wholly controlled by management, but as the result of multiple interpretations that evolve over time*". Similarly, Hatch & Rubin, (2005) view stakeholders as crucial contributors of the brand.

2.2.1 Stakeholder theory

Although stakeholder as a concept is widely used in management literature today, its definition is varied. The classical definition of a stakeholder was first introduced by Freeman (1984, p. 46) as: "*any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives*". In stakeholder theory Freeman (1984) stresses the interconnected relationships between all the parties that have a stake in the

organization. Thus, organizations should create value not only for its shareholders but also to its customers, suppliers, employees, communities and others who have a stake in the organization. Cornelissen, (2011 p. 42) builds on the classical theory and expands the concept of stake further as any groups or persons with a legitimate stake or interest in the organization and presents the legitimate stakeholders of an organization in his stakeholder model (See Figure 3) The arrows in the model underline the interdependency of the organization and its stakeholders.



Figure 3. Stakeholder model of strategic management (Cornelissen, 2011)

Beyond identifying various stakeholders that the organization has, they must also be addressed for the stake they hold (Mitchel et al, 1997; Cornelissen 2011; Grey & Balmer, 1998). By identifying and analyzing the stakeholders' influence and interest in the organization, companies have a clearer idea on the expectations and perceptions they have. The identification of stakeholders helps the organization in planning their communications based on the different needs, demands and perceptions different stakeholders may have. As stakeholders may also belong to several stakeholder groups, organizations are challenged to

balance all their needs and create consistent communication between them (Cornelissen, 2011).

According to Cornelissen (2011) there are several ways in which organizations can identify their stakeholders. One way of identifying stakeholders is to simply answer such questions as, who the organization's stakeholders are, what stakes they have, what opportunities and challenges they pose, and what responsibilities the organization may have. Another way of mapping the stakeholders used in strategic planning is the power-interest matrix which categorizes the stakeholders depending on the level of power they have to influence others and the level of interest they have on the issue (p. 46-52). Furthermore, in order to cope with the needs of different stakeholder groups, Mitchel et al. (1997) group stakeholders by dividing them by the possession or attributed possession of one, two or three of the following attributes: "(1) *The stakeholder's power to influence the firm*, (2) *the legitimacy of the stakeholder's relationships with the firm*, and (3) *the urgency of the stakeholder's claim on the firm*" (p. 854). This Saliency model is presented next to show an example of one mapping tool that organizations can use to identify their stakeholders.

2.2.2 The salience model

Building upon stakeholder theory, Mitchell et al. (1997) concentrated on the identification of stakeholders and their salience, in other words, how management decides how certain stakeholder groups get prioritized over others. The salience model shows the connection between legitimacy and power and how specific stakeholders can be identified when combined with urgency. When stakeholders are identified in relation to their power, legitimacy and urgency altogether seven different stakeholder groups can be identified of which three possess only one attribute, three possessing two attributes and finally one possessing all three attributes (See Figure 4). Finally, these variables help managers in

identifying what stakeholder groups actually exist and how they should be prioritized rather than learning to map certain stakeholder groups that should be left unnoticed. In other words, the framework specifies how management should respond and communicate to a specific stakeholder group. (Mitchell et al. 1997; Cornelissen, 2011).

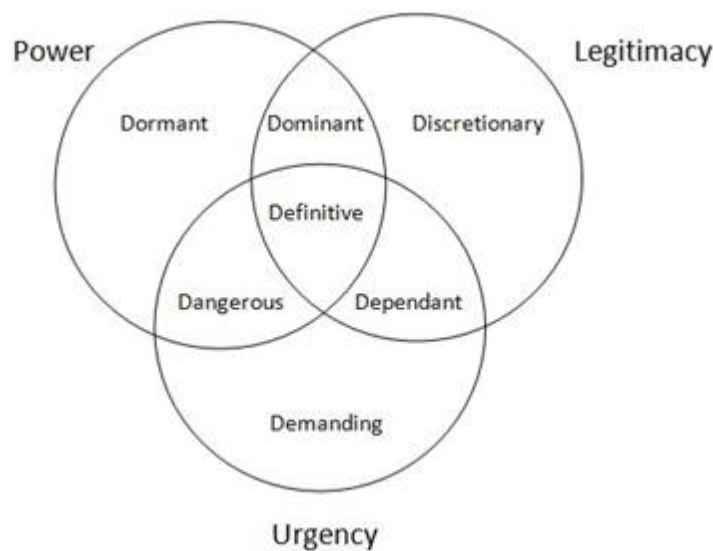


Figure 4. The Salience Model (Cornelissen, 2011 p.48)

Thus, the salience model groups stakeholders in three groups based on the number of their attributes. First, the three parts possessing only one attribute can also be called *latent stakeholders*. As this group has only one attribute, when management has limited time and resources these stakeholders get less attention if at all. The three latent stakeholder groups can be identified as *dormant*, *discretionary* and *demanding* stakeholders (Mitchell et al. (1997). Dormant stakeholders have power but not a legitimate relationship with the firm or an urgency claim. These stakeholders have limited interaction with the organization but due to their potential to acquire another attribute, management should be aware of their

existence. In comparison, discretionary stakeholders are legitimate but they have limited power to influence the firm and no urgent claims. Due to absence of power and urgency, management has little pressure to address this group although they can still do so. Finally, the last of the three latent stakeholder groups is demanding stakeholders whose attribute is urgency. Despite their urgency claim, Mitchell et al. (1997) highlight that since these stakeholders are unable or unwilling to move legitimacy or power claim, these stakeholder groups are mostly ignored by the management (874-876). Although the latent stakeholders have been previously considered less important stakeholders to the organization, the availability of social media may have changed their urgency claim.

Second, from one attribute to two attribute stakeholders, these expectant stakeholders expect to receive responsiveness to their interests due to the combination of two attributes. (Mitchell et al. 1997.) Firstly, dominant stakeholders have both power and legitimacy and they have the ability to act these claims and therefore their views are considered vital for the management. Although they have often been considered as the only important stakeholders of the firm, Mitchell et al (1997) do not support this view. Secondly, stakeholders who have urgent legitimate claims but no power can be characterized as dependent stakeholders. Since these stakeholders lack power, they often need other stakeholder groups to support their interests to the management. Lastly, dangerous stakeholders are those who have power and urgency and even without legitimacy attribute this stakeholder group is important to be identified (877-878).

Third, the stakeholders with all attributes, power, legitimacy and urgency have the highest salience and they can be called definitive stakeholders (Mitchell et al. 1997.). As they possess an urgent claim, management should give priority to their interest. All stakeholder groups can become definite if they acquire the missing attributes. In addition, from a management perspective, it is important to understand that stakeholder salience can change

over time or vary from issue to issue and thus stakeholders may ask for different degrees and types of attention at different times (p. 878-879).

2.2.3 Corporate branding and stakeholder engagement

In public relation literature the connection between stakeholder communication and organizational success has been well recognized (Foster & Jonker, 2005; Kaptein & Van Tulder, 2003). Smudde & Courtright (2010) argue that stakeholders are a valuable resource for organizations and through active dialogue the arising stakeholder matters can be depicted. Although companies agree that engagement with stakeholders is necessary and it creates strategic value, Kaptein & Van Tulder (2003) argue that most companies still fail to do so. This one-sided engagement keeps the control firmly in the organization and communication is rather monologist. In contrast to this, some companies are performing engagement in a different way moving from one-sided communication into a two-way relationship where the interests and concerns are partially shared. Although interests and concerns often conflict, companies can acknowledge alternative views of stakeholders and may even adapt their behavior in relation to them. In the long run, researchers agree that stakeholder dialogue promotes trust and stakeholders are more committed when they have been listened to. Thus engaging and listening to stakeholders is an important part of businesses today. (Kaptein & Van Tulder, 2003; Foster & Jonker, 2005).

In corporate branding literature, the role of stakeholders as co-creators of the brand is well recognized (eg. Hatch & Schultz, 2003; Hatch & Rubin; Gregory 2007; Ind & Bjerke, 2007) Hatch & Schultz (2003) argue that active dialogue with stakeholders is necessary through creating a successful corporate brand and similarly Hatch & Rubin, (2005) argue that a corporate brand evolves over time through value-co creation with stakeholders. As such a corporate branding process is not only considered as a management task but includes

both internal and external parties (Ind & Bjerke, 2007). Management increasingly widens the involvement of all the company's stakeholders in contributing to brand meaning and "acting as ambassadors of the brand" (Hatch & Rubin, 2005 p.57.) Furthermore, Gregory (2007) highlights that a corporate brand which resonates the values stakeholders helped to create are more likely to get support from the stakeholders and thus become more successful.

Although studies in corporate branding have implied the importance of stakeholders in developing brands, Gregory (2007) argues that a comprehensive process on how stakeholders are engaged in the corporate branding process is missing. Given this acknowledgement but lack of evidence of the process, she created the concept of a negotiated brand as the outcome of stakeholder engagement in the corporate branding process. As seen from Figure 5, the organization works with its internal and external stakeholders and is responsive to their input. The company values and management vision are at the core of this negotiated approach and they are further communicated to stakeholders. Furthermore, through dialogue and negotiation with stakeholders, the corporate brand evolves over time into a negotiated brand.

A negotiated brand is a dynamic and continuously emerging process of which the outcome may not be exactly as precise and intended as the management's vision-driven corporate brand (Gregory, 2007 p. 63). The process begins with active engagement of all stakeholders, through which the core values are reviewed, evaluated and refined for providing knowledge for the organization. This is followed by action, where potential adjustments to strategy or mission of the organization affect how the brand is communicated further. In the negotiated brand process, the management's vision is constantly informed by reality and stakeholders are likely to support the corporate strategy as they are co-creating it. Finally, although constantly evolving – negotiated brands are not

chaotic as the set of values, although emerging over time, build the base for the process.
(Gregory, 2007 p. 63)

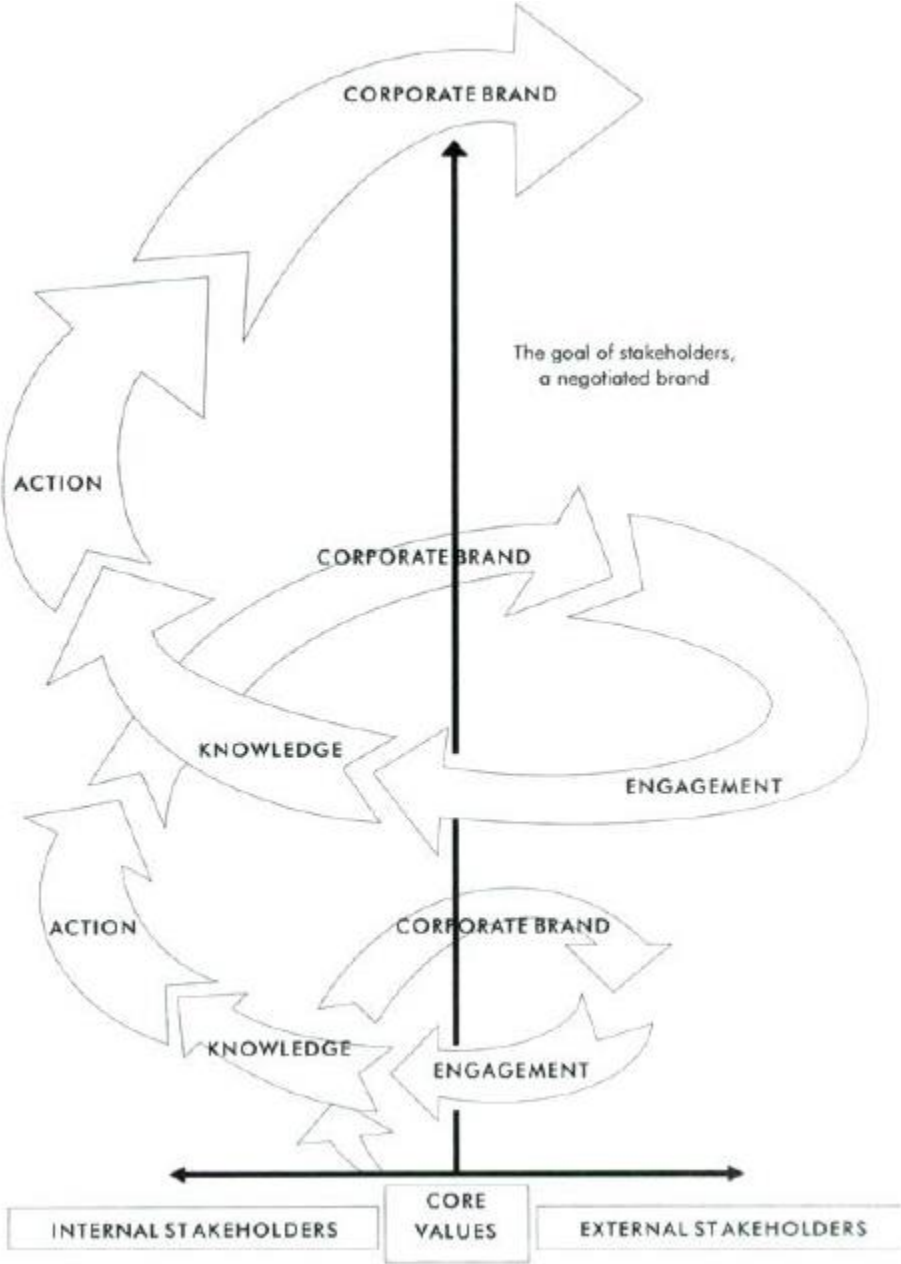


Figure 5. Engaging with stakeholders: the negotiated brand process (Gregory, 2007, p. 63)

In conclusion, the importance of stakeholders and their engagement has been widely accepted by management today (Foster & Jonker, 2005; Kaptein & Van Tulder, 2003; Smudde & Courtright, 2010). From the corporate branding perspective, active dialogue with stakeholders constantly remind the management of the alignment between the management vision, identity and image and thus acts as an important aspect in corporate branding (Hatch & Schultz, 2003). Although not all corporate brands may fall under Gregory's (2007) negotiated brand, the importance of both external and internal stakeholders and their output in the process could be considered as an important part of any corporate branding practices.

2.3 Social media

This part will first begin with the identification of social media as a concept and then it introduces Facebook as a social media channel in order to understand the environment where this study is placed. After this it will discuss how social media has changed corporate communication practices and what are its opportunities and challenges for organizations today. Finally, literature combining corporate branding and social media will be summarized.

2.3.1 Social media definition and Facebook

Social media is a broad term and it can be defined in many ways. For instance, Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) define social media as *“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”* (p.61). In other words, they categorize social

media as an outcome of Web 2.0, a new participatory and collaborative platform which has shifted the content creation and publication from selected individuals to all users. Also, they highlight that User Generated Content (UGC), referred to as various forms of media content that is public and available and created by end users, can be seen as the sum of all the ways in which people make use of Social Media. Pannunzio (2008) defines social media similarly in a broad way as many interactive broadcast activities and social networking sites, whereas Mangauld & Faulds (2009) argue that social media is simply an extension of traditional word-of-mouth communication.

In order to get an idea what social media is, Kaplan & Haenlein's (2010) classification was chosen for this study. They classify social media into six categories as: blogs, collaborative projects, social networking sites, content communities, virtual social worlds and virtual game worlds. Furthermore, they identify social networking sites as applications that allow users to create a personal information profile that enable users to connect with friends and colleagues through profiles and with instant messages. The profiles can consist of various types of information, such as photos, videos, audio files and blogs. Table 1, demonstrates the different classifications of social media based on their social media presence or media richness and self-presentation or disclosure.

Table 1 Classification of social media by social presence/media richness and self-presentation/self disclosure (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010 p. 62)

		Social presence/ Media richness		
		Low	Medium	High
Self-presentation/ Self-disclosure	High	Blogs	Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook)	Virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life)
	Low	Collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia)	Content communities (e.g., YouTube)	Virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft)

According to Kaplan & Haenlein (2010 p. 62) Facebook is considered one of the social media networks. Founded in 2004 by Marc Zuckerberg, today Facebook is the biggest social networking site with over 1.04 billion active daily users as in December 2015. Facebook is used mainly for three reasons: to stay connected with friends and family, be aware of what is happening in the world and to share and express what is important to the users. (Facebook a 2016; Mashable 2016). Since 2007, Facebook users have been able to create a “page”, which in this study is that of Stockmann’s corporate page on Facebook. These are public profiles which allow for instance public figures, artists, and businesses to create presence on Facebook to connect with the Facebook community. When someone “likes” the page, they start seeing updates from that page. A “post” is a written status update visible to the followers and these posts can also be liked, commented or shared by the followers, which increase the page’s reach to the community (Facebook 2016 b).

2.3.2 Social media as a communication channel

The rise of new media and advances in web technology have changed corporate communication in many ways (see e.g. Argenti, 2006; Hearn et al. 2007; Mangold &

Faulds, 2009; Kuvykaite & Piligrimiene, 2009; Lillqvist & Louhiala Salminen, 2014). Hearn et al. (2007) state that technological innovations swift the communication flows away from the general one-way communication of business-to-consumer model as customers produce their own content in the new media platforms making the communication into a dialogue (See however, Lillqvist & Louhiala-Salminen, 2014). Although in a traditional sense companies are able to talk directly to their customers, untraditionally the new media platforms also enable customers to talk directly with one another and due to this Mangauld & Faulds, (2009) argue that social media is the new hybrid element of the promotion mix.

As social media is not just a passing trend, corporate communicators are starting to explore how to take advantage of these new dynamic channels and how to engage in them effectively (Hearn et al. 2007; Pannunzio, 2008). As social media enables real-time conversation with customers and a large reach for the messages, customer engagement is easier than before (Dekay, 2012; Byrd, 2012). Mangauld & Faulds (2009) also argue that companies should leverage the power of word-of mouth communication through social media by shaping consumer discussions to suit company mission and goals. As customers are likely to share their thoughts with people similar to themselves, companies should provide platforms for those discussions, create interesting material and provide feedback once needed. Once customers feel engaged, they are likely to spread the word and thus companies can leverage the power of positive word-of mouth communication. Due to the changes in social media communication, Mangold & Folds (2009 p.361-9.) point out that companies “*must learn to talk with their customers, as opposed to talking at them*”.

In addition to changing how companies communicate, the wide explosion of social networking sites has also created new opportunities for marketing. For instance, Gironda & Korgaonkar (2013) argue that in addition to advertising use, companies can leverage the

social media sites to build and maintain consumer-brand relationships by interacting and communicating with their current and potential customers. In addition, Trusov, Bucklin & Pauwels, (2009) argue that word-of-mouth referrals in social media are related with new customer acquisition and thus this is a more effective marketing channel compared to the traditional marketing channels. Through reaching new audiences, social media increases brand recognition and thus helps companies in achieving their strategic goals (Pannuzio, 2008). In order to benefit from social media communication, companies should create rich and intimate engagement by combining both new and traditional media (Hanna et al. 2011).

As the benefits from social media are evitable, companies need to prepare for new media communication (See eg. Hean et al., 2007; Pannuzio, 2008; Mikkelsen, 2008; Hanna et al 2011; Kuvykaite & Piligrimiene, 2003). Companies need to understand the distinctiveness of this new media and its power through word-of mouth communication and get accustomed with the fast changing landscape, both in the content of the message and their technology platforms. Overall companies need to acquire a new set of skills to manage new media campaigns. (Hearn et al., 2007; Kapoor, et al., 2013.).

Prior to entering social media, companies should make cohesive social media and communication plans in order to keep the communication consistent through both traditional and new media channels (Mikkelsen, 2008; Hanna et al., 2011.) while supporting the two-way communication (Kapoor et al., 2013). Thus before formulating a social media strategy, Kuvykaite & Piligrimiene (2013) highlight that companies need to create a desired image which will be transferred in social media through the elements of identity, company's style, values and organizational behavior. Hanna et al. (2011) point out that companies' communication strategies should support customer engagement through both traditional and social media channels. Successful social media communication can have a powerful impact on performance but in its very essence "*social media is about*

creating, influencing, and sharing” (p. 271). Although many companies have included the mandatory elements of Youtube, Facebook and Twitter in their communications, Hanna et al. (2011) argue that few have a systematic approach for operating and managing them.

Social media and the new user generated content also present challenges and threats to companies and their reputation (Kuvykaite & Piligrimiene, 2013; Haigh & Wigley 2013; Ramsey, 2010). In addition to having less control over the communication in social media channels (Kuvykaite & Piligrimiene, 2009; Kaplan 2010) negative user generated content spreads fast and also impacts stakeholders perceptions of the organization (Haigh & Wigley, 2013, Ramsey, 2010.). The anonymity of the internet has also empowered individuals to express their emotions in an easier manner than before and customers are more aware of the power they have over organizations through social media. Knowing how to make their voice heard, customers are in the forefront for either fostering or harming the brand image. In addition to this, negative customer feedback, company wrongdoings, public mistakes or unsatisfactory service may lead to crises easier than before (Champoux, et al., 2012). Although social media has brought new risks that may harm the company image, Kuvykaite & Piligrimiene (2013) state that the new platforms can also be used in developing the corporate brand.

2.4 Social media and corporate branding

This subchapter will discuss the use of social media for corporate branding purposes and introduces “openness” and “interaction” emerge as part of the corporate branding strategies in social media. Furthermore, also the different corporate branding strategies will be discussed.

According to De Chernatony (2000 p. 186) there is no need to differentiate brands from an online opposed to an offline environment and because of this the corporate brand and its definition is similar in the online world.

The strong competitive environment and the digital evolution have made corporate brands as the link between the firm and its stakeholders. Facilitating interactive brand communication and collaboration, social media enables stakeholders to communicate directly with firms and themselves and create and share content. Although the dominant role of firms in the brand creation process is challenged, social media with its new communication opportunities offer companies a new collaborative strategy to corporate branding through openness and interaction (Vernuccio, 2014). Based on Constantinides & Fountain, (2008) and Wright's (2006) view, Vernuccio (2014) named the following three principal ways of capitalizing the strengths of social media for brand building purposes (p . 215):

- 1) Using existing social media in public relations programs to reach new online opinion leaders, such as bloggers and podcasters, and inform them about products and services, societal initiatives, or innovations;
- 2) Using social media to listen to the voices of the stakeholders in discussions focused on topics relevant to the firm;
- 3) Initiating direct interactive platforms, feeding them with input from employees and managers, and using these one-to-one and many-to-many forms of communication to establish, maintain, and reinforce the brand's connections, image, and reputation.

2.4.1 Openness and interaction in corporate branding

An increase in the awareness of openness between organizations and stakeholders in the corporate branding process is widely accepted by management having Gregory's (2007) "negotiated brand" as the focal point of the attention (Vernuccio, 2014). The corporate branding process traditionally governed by management has turned into a collaborative task (Balmer, 2001), where brand value is now collectively perceived between organization and its stakeholders (Mertz, He & Vargo, 2009). Mertz, He & Vargo, (2009 p. 340) argue that the corporate branding process has changed into a dynamic and a social process as brands become co-created activity of all stakeholders. Jones (2005) argue that "*brand value is created through interaction with multiple strategic stakeholders*" (p. 10).

The new interactive landscape of social media brings the corporate branding into a new level (Vernuccio, 2014). Multiple social media platforms open possibilities to interact, participate, and co-create corporate brands with interested stakeholders, rather than just accepting a brand as it is. Vernuccio (2014) argues that an "open brand" is not created solely by stakeholders, but rather, they are each a participant in the brand building process and the interaction between them and the company takes a central focus.

Vernuccio (2014 p. 216) argues that due to the changes in the appreciation of stakeholders in the brand building process and the collaborative platform of social media, new strategic approaches to corporate branding via social media are emerging: *interactivity* and *openness*. According to her, the balance between the corporate branding variables of organization's strategic vision, its organizational culture and corporate image is best reached when both internal and external stakeholders are "*characterized by openness, interactivity, and a listening orientation*" (p. 216) . Within those circumstances stakeholders are more likely to engage in the corporate branding purposes. Through openness and interaction with

stakeholders, the corporate brand-building becomes “*a process of co-creation of shared meanings*” (p. 216). Similarly, Kuvykaite & Piligrimiene, (2013) argue that the level of interaction in Facebook communication can be measured in many ways. As communication in Facebook should support interactivity it can be expressed through the content by sharing it, commenting, publishing, controlling, critique and evaluation. Another ways for measuring the interaction is according to them as: “*volume* - how many people talk, *influence* – who talks and *sentiment* –what people talk (p. 307).

Vernuccio (2014 p. 221) further studied emerging branding strategies in social media by analyzing the level of companies’ openness and interaction in their communication based on the strategic questions as depicted in Table 2. Firstly, in order to analyze companies’ level of openness, she analyzed the company presence or absence in the six different social media channels (where). In order to find out (what) is communicated, the themes were distinguished either as *company-focused* or *user-and-company-focused*. The texts were analyzed as what the theme is saying and if the focus is only on the firm’s offering and its corporate behavior or the combination of those and a personal experience. The latter of those would indicate the openness orientation. By analyzing the nature of stakeholders’ participation and psychological motivation for involvement in an open dialogue as either rational or emotional, the strategic question (why) was analyzed. Finally, the variety of stakeholders (who) participating in the dialogue would assume a higher degree of openness in the brand building process. The variety of stakeholders may be for instance actual and potential customers, employees, investors, influencers, industry experts, former leaders and so forth. Similarly, she analyzed the companies’ level of interaction by answering the question (how) through analyzing the interaction between the company and its stakeholders and among those users and assessed the extent to which one or the other preominated.

Table 2. Approaches, coding variables, classification criteria, and strategic questions (Vernuccio, 2014 p. 220)

Approach	Coding variable	Classification criterion	Strategic question
Openness	1. Social network	Social media deployed	Where?
	2. Corporate blog		
	3. Content-on-demand		
	4. Content community		
	5. Virtual world		
	6. Internet forum		
	7. Company focused		
	8. User-and-company focused	Predominant theme of content	What?
	9. Rational	Predominant user motivation	Why?
	10. Emotional		
	11. Customers	Stakeholders in the "conversation"	Who?
	12. Employees		
	13. Financial community		
	14. Influencers		
Interactivity	15. Consultation	Predominant type of interaction	How?
	16. Conversation		
	17. Consultation and conversation (equilibrium)		

2.4.2 Corporate branding strategies on Facebook

As Figure 1 indicates, Vernuccio (2014 p. 223-227) identified four distinctive corporate branding strategies on social media as: *cautious beginners*, *confident communicators*, *selective strategists* and a *rising star* (See figure 1). For cautious beginners, the content of the social media was completely company focused and having customers as the predominant target. Interactivity is low and considered as consultation type and having rather traditional nature of content. The confident communicators, in contrast, have high

level of interaction through different social media channels. The content is both user and company focused and motivation for participation rational. In this cluster, the stakeholders were highly interactive and the mode of communication was conversational. The selective strategists use a selective branding strategy that focuses on emotional message appeals and content created mainly for customers. Thus, the strategy followed the logic of corporate marketing. Interactivity is considered as both consultation and conversation and thus the interactivity is considered high. Finally, the rising stars use social media widely and target the communication to various other stakeholders in addition to customers. The content is both company and user focused and motivation to participate is mainly rational. In contrast interactivity is medium as conversation is not embraced exclusively.

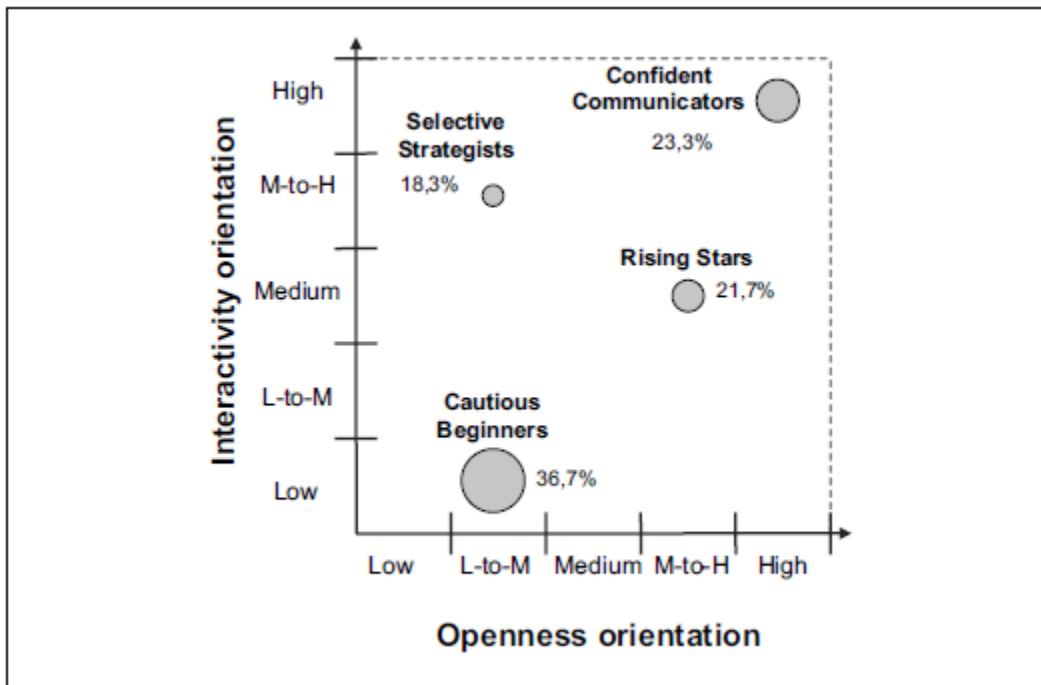


Figure 6. Cluster diagram: Openness versus interactivity in corporate brand-building via social media (Vernuccio, 2014 p. 225)

Although brand communication is steadily moving from one way communication towards dialogue, Vernuccio (2014) argues that interactive branding strategies which embrace active participation of different stakeholders are not fully in use. Only when there is systematic use of the full range of social media, the engagement of different stakeholders and content which is both user and company focused can social media's benefits be exploited in brand building purposes for co-creation of content and the brand itself. The cautious beginners in the other extreme have not exploited the benefits of social media and use an unchanging brand building perhaps due to cultural resistance on innovation and fear of losing control over brand messages. In conclusion, in order to fully exploit social media in brand building, managers need to learn how to widen the engagement of stakeholders into contributing to brand meaning and acting as ambassadors of the firm (p. 227-229) .

To summarize the literature review in the present study, the following aspects can be highlighted. Since web 2.0 and the new collaborative communication channels, the corporate communication process has changed from one-way communication into two-way communication. Especially the widespread use of social media and Facebook has changed traditional communication forms into collaborative platforms where also stakeholders create content. In addition to this, corporate branding have become a central consideration for organizations today and the importance of stakeholders as adding value to the corporate branding process has been noticed. Hence, stakeholders are increasingly considered as brand ambassadors to the corporate brand. Furthermore, social media has changed the corporate branding process and openness and interaction emerge as basis for corporate branding strategies.

Hatch & Schultz (2001)'s framework of the corporate branding process with its vision, image and culture acts as the basis for this study. Building upon Vernuccio's (2014) study on emerging branding strategies in social media through interaction and openness, they serve as the lens for corporate branding in social media in this study.

2.5 Research framework

Figure 2 demonstrates the theoretical framework which was outlined this study. Corporate branding is seen as the rectangular shape in the figure and it supports the ongoing alignment between vision, image and culture. The communication between stakeholders and organization is crucial in the corporate branding process and thus they are the key elements of this framework and the arrow between them demonstrates the ongoing communication between them. The arrow crossing the corporate branding rectangular highlights that the alignment between vision, image and culture is continuously communicated between these parties and thus also developed. Furthermore, the level of interaction and openness between these two variables depicts the strength of the corporate branding process. Overall, the framework is inserted in an environment, referring to social media where the corporate branding process takes place. As this study aims to study social media and Facebook, the corporate branding process demonstrated in the framework is thus situated in the social media context.

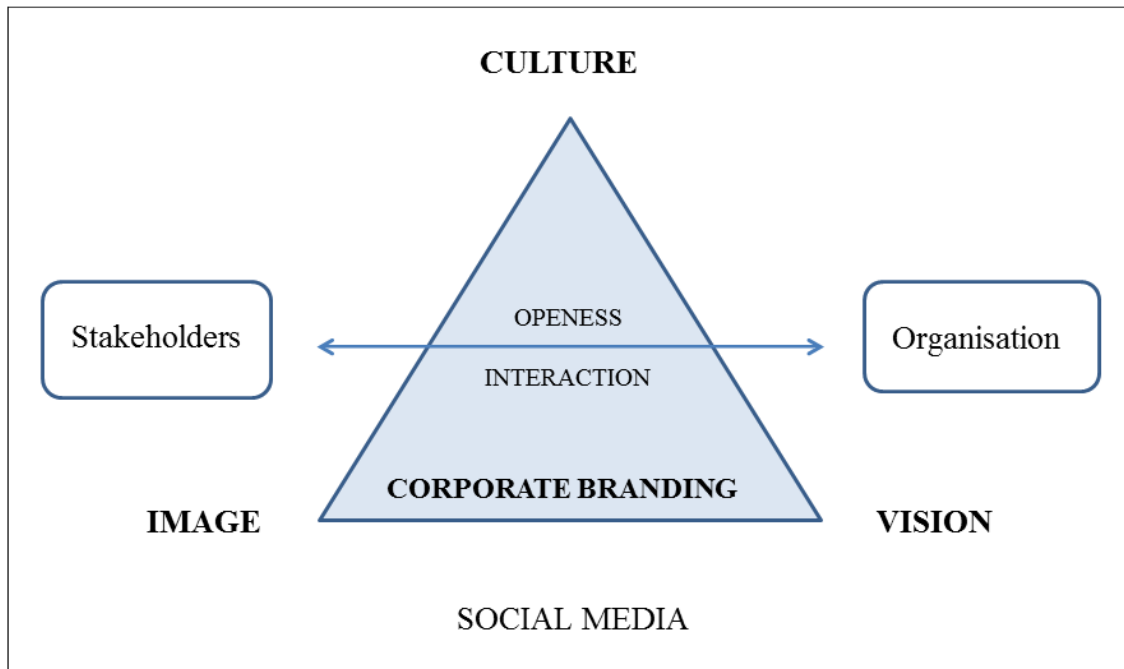


Figure 7. Theoretical framework of the study

3 DATA AND METHODS

This chapter introduces the methodological choices underlying the study and how data will be collected and analyzed. Beginning with the research design, the first sub chapter introduces the underlying principles for conducting a research stating also the methodological choices behind this study. This section is followed by description of data collection and finally, the analysis of the data will be explained. Finally, the chapter ends with explaining the trustworthiness of the study.

3.1 Research design

Qualitative and quantitative studies stem from different epistemological considerations making them two distinct ways of doing research. According to Bryman & Bell (2003) quantitative study arises from positivism which considers the world through natural sciences and measuring. In contrast to quantitative study, qualitative research arises from interpretivism and bases the research on interpretation rather than measuring. Another distinctive feature to these two ways of doing research is the way theory is used. Quantitative research applies a deductive approach to theory, in which a particular theoretical framework acts as a starting point whereas qualitative research uses an inductive approach where theory does not lead the study (Bryman & Bell, 2003).

With the two distinct ways of doing research in order to study social media as a phenomenon, a qualitative approach was chosen as the most suitable for this thesis. As the overall purpose of this study is to increase knowledge on how social media is used for corporate branding purposes from the perspective of openness and interaction and furthermore to find out how Stockmann communicates its strategic vision through

Facebook. The four research questions form the outline for the study. The first research question aims to shed light on the openness in communicating corporate brands by finding out how and for what reasons Stockmann uses social media for corporate branding whereas the second question aims to shed light on what is communicated. Furthermore, to study the level of interaction in communicating corporate branding, the third research question aims to find out how Stockmann interacts with stakeholders in Facebook and finally the fourth question focuses on finding out what of the themes create most engagement.

In order to answer the research questions thoroughly from the company perspective a single case study was chosen as the best decision with qualitative methodology being the most suitable method. Furthermore, in order to answer the research questions a qualitative content analysis on Stockmann's Facebook pages was conducted which serves as the primary source of data. In order to deepen the understanding of the findings from the content analysis and to find out about the company's social media communication strategy, a qualitative semi-structured interview was conducted which will be examined in addition to the primary data. The following chapters will discuss the chosen methodological choices more thoroughly.

3.2 Data collection

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the data collection of this study is twofold. First, next subchapter will explain the data collection of the primary data, i.e. Facebook posts. It is followed by the data collection of the semi-structured interview.

3.2.1 Content analysis of Stockmann's Facebook posts

Content analysis is a general term for a research technique that analyses communication in an objective and systematic way (Kassarjian, (1997). There are several types of content analysis including both qualitative and quantitative methods all sharing the same purpose of categorizing text to understand it. The difference is in ways how the categorizing is made and how the text is further analyzed by using either quantitative or qualitative methods (Forman & Damschroder, 2008). For instance, quantitative content analysis uses predetermined categorizes to analyze the text, whereas qualitative content analysis uses mostly inductive ways (i.e. derived from the data) for categorizing.

According to Krippendorff, (1989) content analysis can be used for many kinds of texts that have a meaning for a specific group of people and which are not focused on research purposes. This method enables the researcher to reveal trends, patterns and differences through categorizing large amounts of data to entities that are derived from the purpose of the study and the research questions (Krippendorff, 1989; Kassarjian, 1997). For the purpose of this thesis, content analysis was considered as the most suitable method as Facebook posts are texts which are not purposely made for research purposes and as they have a meaning for a specific group of people.

Qualitative content analysis was chosen as the primary source of data for this study. As Stockmann's Facebook page is a relatively active communication channel where both the company and customers communicate, the online observation time was narrowed down to a 6 month period from February 2015 to July 2015. In addition to deciding to narrow down the data to this period of time, the data was collected only from company posts and their comments. No photos or separate customer inquiries was analyzed, but solely the textual posts which the company had posted on its wall and their comments. This allowed the

research to focus only on the company perspective without further analyzing data that is not necessary in answering the research questions. In order to analyze the collected data further, the posts and their comments were gathered from Facebook and transcribed to a separate document for further analysis consisting altogether of 74 pages. In addition this the quantitative information of the posts being comments, likes and shares were also collected for further analysis. As the company and customer posts were mostly Finnish, they were translated to English once used as quoted examples in report. Furthermore, in order to keep the writers anonymous, all customer information was deleted and they are further referred to in the findings as e.g. Member A and Member B.

3.2.2 Semi-structured interview

To support the primary source of data a semi-structured interview was conducted with Stockmann's concept manager who is one of the persons responsible for their social media. Prior to the interview, the predesigned general research questions (See appendix 1) were outlined as the starting point for the qualitative part of the research. Once the qualified person for the interview was found, the semi-structured questions were sent to her on the interviewee's request prior to the interview. The actual interview was a face-to-face interview and lasted approximately 90 minutes. The interview was held in Finnish. In order to help analyzing the data, the whole interview was recorded and transcribed directly after the interview took place. The parts of the transcription which are used as reported quotes in the present report were translated in to English.

Initially, the researcher had the intention to interview two people in charge of the social media in the case company. Once the interview was held, it became evident that the concept manager interviewed for this study was capable of answering all needed questions.

Thus the researcher decided not to interview another person, as the interview was enough to complement the primary source of data.

3.3 Data analysis

All non-numeric data or data that has not been quantified can be identified as qualitative data. Saunders, Levis & Thornhill (2007) indicate that the analysis of qualitative data allows to develop theory from the data by using both inductive and deductive approaches. Common to either way according to Saunders et al. (2007) is to start analyzing the mass of qualitative data into meaningful and related parts or as categories as they name them. Grouping the data into categories help in comprehending and managing the data from different sources. Beyond that the categorization helps in identifying key themes or patterns that arise, which can be used to draw or verify conclusions.

The analysis of the qualitative data of this thesis began with identifying the key themes or categories that arise from the text (Bryman & Bell 2003; Saunders et al 2007). The categorizing can be done either by grouping regularities of the data based on similar answers or by using existing theoretical considerations as the basis (Saunders et al. 2007). These categories help in creating a structured analytical framework which will guide the analysis further. After categorization, the units of data were attached to the appropriate categories to further analyze the data by recognizing relationships in the data. “The unit of data may be a number of words, a line of transcript, a sentence, a number of sentences a complete paragraph, or some other chunk of textual data that fits the category.” (p. 480).

In order to shed light on Stockmann’s perspective into openness and interaction in communicating corporate brands in Facebook, the data was analyzed in the following way.

First, the analysis began with answering the second research question to see what content is published on Facebook and what of them communicate the strategic vision. From the collected primary data, the company posts were grouped into three categories of *strategy*, *events* and *promotion* based on the context of the post. From these themes, events and strategy were further analyzed as they were more relevant to answering the research questions. Finally, after grouping and analyzing the company posts and the customer responses, the secondary data was used to complement the findings from the primary data. Second, to answer the first research question, the secondary data of the semi-structured interview was further analyzed. In conclusion, the findings to these two research questions showed evidence on how openness is used in communicating the corporate brand.

Furthermore, in order to study how interaction is used for communicating the corporate brand the qualitative data of the posts and their themes were further analyzed. The secondary data was analyzed to find regularities and examples of how interaction takes place in Facebook. In addition to this, the nature of the comments was further analyzed as for being negative or positive to see if it affects the interaction somehow.

According to Saunders et al. (2007) qualitative data can be also quantified. In this thesis, the quantification will be used to answer the third research question by counting the frequencies of engagement each post received in terms of likes, comments and shares. After counting this information, all the data was moved to an excel sheet. Finally, the collected data was used in counting the averages of the engagement per theme, and this would help in the analysis phase, when the themes and their quantitative information can be compared with each other to draw conclusions. By using both units of text and quantification the researcher was able to answer the research questions in a more consistent way.

Finally, after combining both the secondary and primary data in the light of the theoretical framework, the researcher is able to answer all the research questions.

3.4 Trustworthiness of the study

According to Bryman & Bell (2003 p.74-75) reliability is originally concerned with issues of consistency of measures. Although reliability and validity are important for quantitative studies, according to Bryman & Bell (2003 p.86) their assessment in qualitative research is of less importance. Instead, trustworthiness is proposed as a way of assessing a qualitative study. In the context of this study trustworthiness is achieved through carrying out the research according to a good practice, which creates credibility to the study. In addition to this, transparency is created by careful documentation of each step through reporting on all phases of the study. Furthermore, in order to investigate the research problem in a comprehensive way, qualitative research with a single case study was considered as the best suitable method for this study. Thus, a content analysis was carried out, using both qualitative and quantitative methods for analysis and the online observation to Stockmann's Facebook posts and their comments was narrowed down to a six-month period, which was considered enough for collecting the data. In addition to this a semi-structured interview was carried out with good practice to support the primary data, which was transcribed for further analysis. The anonymity of all the participants was considered and maintained throughout the study.

Furthermore, the analysis part of the study followed the good principles of carrying out a qualitative study in order to maintain the trustworthiness of the study. The data was analyzed first grouping the regularities and themes which arise from both the primary data and the interviews. In addition, the quantified measures of likes, comments and shares were also transferred into an excel sheet and finally the averages of each emerged themes were calculated. Finally, beyond identifying themes which arise, the interaction and engagement of stakeholders was further analyzed to find regularities as well as analyzing the reactions of stakeholders. In conclusion, although Bryman & Bell (2003 p.288-289) remind that complete objectivity is impossible in business research, in order to maintain the

trustworthiness of the study, the researcher has carried out the study in good faith and understands the objectivity issues that may take place.

4 FINDINGS

This chapter outlines the findings based on content analysis on Stockmann's Facebook posts as well as the qualitative interview conducted with the company's social media responsible. Thus, the findings of the study are divided into four chapters based on the context of the findings.

To begin with, the research questions and the research framework guide the analysis of the data. Firstly, the first sub chapters of 4.1 and 4.2 aim to shed light on the level of openness in communicating corporate brand by answering the first two research questions of how and for what reasons Stockmann utilizes social media for corporate branding purposes and what is the content that is published on Facebook. In addition, the findings on how Stockmann communicates strategic vision are presented. Moreover, subchapters 4.3 and 4.4 show findings on the level of interaction that takes place in Facebook through answering the remaining research questions of how is interaction depicted from Stockmann's Facebook communication and what of the themes create most interaction.

4.1 Facebook as part of social media strategy

Stockmann's social media strategy links with the corporate marketing strategy and consists of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter as channels. The official Stockmann Facebook page in Finland was opened in September 2011 after the company realized the need for presence in social media. Prior to opening the official Facebook site, unofficial pages had been created and thus the company noticed the interest there was for company presence and decided to open the site along with a big marketing campaign. The corporate Facebook page has always been public, meaning that anyone can see the company posts and also write on the

wall and react by either liking, commenting or sharing to the posts that Stockmann has published.

Based on the findings from the interview, the social media strategy seems to be rather stakeholder specific. Despite the overall social media strategy, the findings show evidence that all social media channels are not operated within the same department. According to the interviewee, Facebook and Instagram are managed through marketing department as their main target audience is customers, while Twitter is handled from the corporate communication department. Thus, the findings indicate the following. Firstly, Stockmann targets its Facebook communication mainly to customers failing to consider other stakeholder groups and secondly, Facebook seems to act mainly as an online customer service platform. The following finding emphasizes how the communication tactics are planned depending on the stakeholders:

Interviewee: [...] "In all campaign communication we consider the nature of the channel and the expectations of the followers... In Facebook we take part in relevant happenings and phenomena perhaps differently... as there we produce more of that ad-hoc-communication". [...]

The findings show that Facebook is considered an integral part of the company's social media communication and the following examples indicate what opportunities it offers.

Interviewee: [...] "...Facebook offers a new different possibility to reach our customers. Compared to traditional communication channels, it's more up-date-than other channels. I could some it up as "efficient and modern". [...]

In addition, Facebook offers new opportunities to maintain and develop the corporate image, as the following example shows:

Interviewee: [...]... "Facebook is a dynamic channel where the brand image can be developed. Exactly by creating that sort of material that shows our brand as it is and what we want to offer for our customers. [...] In all communications, we look for a strong tone-of-voice, meaning recognizable communication so customers know it's Stockmann's post. That's the purpose. " [...]

[...] "in developing our brand image, the social media channels are in key role as there we can react in a fast pace to new issues " [...]

In answering the first research question on how and for what reasons Stockmann utilizes social media, the following findings were found. 1) Stockmann considers Facebook as an integral part of their social media communication, which includes also Instagram and Twitter. 2) Stockmann uses Facebook for the following purposes, firstly Facebook is considered as an efficient and modern communication channel, and secondly, its communication aims at creating inspiration for customers and serving as another or extended customer service platform. Furthermore, Facebook is considered as an efficient and dynamic channel for developing the corporate brand. However, the findings show that 3) although Stockmann uses Facebook for corporate branding purposes, their social media strategy seems to be rather social media channel specific, than stakeholder specific meaning that its communication is mostly targeted to customers rather than all stakeholders. This finding emphasize that Stockmann considers Facebook as rather a marketing channel with customers in the focus, failing to fully engage all stakeholders in developing the corporate brand.

4.2 Content of the Facebook posts

This sub chapter aims to continue analyzing the case company's openness in communicating the corporate brand by showing findings to the second research question of what Stockmann communicates in Facebook, through what themes emerged from the data. As corporate vision is an important contributor to the corporate branding process, also the themes which highlight the corporate vision are presented in order to see how frequently and openly Stockmann communicates their vision. Finally, the findings on the themes and their engagement will be presented to answer the fourth research question to analyze the level of interaction Stockmann uses in communicating corporate brands.

Within the data collection time from January to July Stockmann posted all together 55 posts. All the posts consisted of text, photo, video or the combination of them. First, in order to get a basic understanding of what Stockmann communicates in their Facebook page, the researcher analyzed all the posts and categorized them into themes that emerged. They were named as: 1. promotion, 2. strategy and 3. events (See Table 3) and they are analyzed in the same logic.

Table 3. General themes of Facebook posts and their frequency

THEMES	Posts of total (no)	Percentage of total (%)
Promotion	30	55%
Strategy	14	25%
Events	11	20%
Total	55	100%

First, from all the Facebook posts, Stockmann communicated most on general marketing and advertising posts, referred to as *promotion*, which with over 30 posts accounted for 55 % of the total number of the posts during the time period. Overall, the posts which were grouped under the theme promotion had similarities as being general marketing posts with a company focus. Furthermore, from the promotion theme, three sub themes could be depicted as food, cosmetics and general. For instance, the posts about food communicated about sharing new dinner posts, marketing the order service and informing about the seasonal cooking ingredients. Similarly, cosmetic posts included for instance, marketing of cosmetic brands and their new lines. The rest of the promotion posts were miscellaneous promotional posts about promotional codes, and general information. Overall this theme had no stronger emphasis on vision or strategy.

Second, the posts grouped under theme *strategy* communicated about the ongoing strategy work or new vision accounting for 25% of all the posts (See Table 3). From these posts there were 5 different topics communicated in Facebook within 14 posts which were the Finnair Plus partnership, new customer promise, new digital loyal customer magazine Premiere, partnership with Expert-chain and the launch of the digital fitting rooms (See Table 4). Of these topics, the Finnair Plus partnership was communicated most, as during the studied time it received all together 8 different posts. Of these themes, the post on the customer promise communicated most strongly the new management vision. In conclusion, as 25% of all the posts can be grouped under this theme, this finding indicates that Stockmann communicates on their strategy quite frequently.

Table 4. Facebook post topics under theme strategy

Topic:	Number of posts:
Finnair Plus partnership	8
Customer promise “signed for you”	2
New digital Premiere- magazine	2
Partnership with Expert-chain	1
Digital fitting rooms	1
Total	14

Third, as Stockmann’s new strategy emphasized that the company wants to be a store that provides experiences to customers, the posts on events are considered to communicate the corporate vision. From all the posts, they were second biggest theme which was communicated with altogether 11 posts accounting for 20% of all of the posts (See Table 3). During the time frame, there were 6 different events that were communicated in the Facebook page For instance, Stockmann communicated on a spring fashion show which received four different posts or an Asian fusion campaign with two posts (see Table 5).

Table 5. Facebook post topics under theme events

Topic:	Number of posts:
Spring fashion show	4
Asian Fusion campaign	2
Wonderful Helsinki event	2
Paula Koivuniemi event	1
Children pop-up event	1
Choir event	1
Total	11

After the analysis of the engagement in terms of likes, comments and shares per theme, the following findings can be drawn. Firstly, as seen from Table 6, the theme which created most engagement was strategy posts, with the average of 349 likes, 8 comments and 26 shares per post. Close to this, the events posts received almost as much engagement in total as the strategy posts on average with 303 likes, 6 comments and 28 shares. Secondly, strategy posts had clearly more comments and likes compared to event posts, but events received more shares than strategy posts. Thus the findings may indicate that strategy posts create more discussion and events promote more shares on average, meaning that they are likely to share the post with their friends. Thirdly, although strategy and events received both a great number of engagement, there is a clear difference compared to the promotion posts. Promotion posts had the least engagement, with only 142 likes, 2 comments and 3 shares which was clearly under the averages of all the themes. Thus, the findings show strong evidence that promotional posts receive less engagement than posts that communicate the corporate vision.

Table 6. The average likes, comments and shares of each theme

THEMES	Likes/post (no)	Comments/post (no)	Shares/post (no)
1. Strategy	349	18	26
2. Events	303	6	28
3. Promotion	142	2	3
TOTAL averages	227	7	14

In answering the second research question on what content is published in Facebook, the following findings were found from the data. 1) The content which was published in Facebook was grouped under themes of promotion, strategy and events. 2) From all these themes, promotional posts were communicated the most with over half of the posts whereas strategy and events fulfilled the other half. 3) From these themes, both strategy and events were considered as communicating the corporate vision and thus the findings show that from Stockmann's Facebook posts, the corporate vision is communicated frequently highlighting the important element of corporate branding.

Furthermore, in answering the third research question on what posts generate most engagement and what kind, the following findings were found. 4) In terms of creating most engagement in terms of likes, comments and shares strategy posts created most likes and comments on average, whereas events had most shares. 5) Finally, the findings showed clear evidence that promotional posts generate less engagement than those of communicating corporate vision.

4.3 Stakeholder engagement

This subchapter aims to shed light on the level of interaction Stockmann has in communicating their corporate brand in Facebook. To reach this, the subchapter presents findings to the fourth research question on how interaction is depicted from Stockmann's Facebook communication and how stakeholders are engaged for corporate branding purposes.

Stockmann's Facebook communication supports interaction and engagement with customers and other stakeholders in many ways. First, Stockmann's general Facebook settings support interaction. As the Facebook page is public, meaning that stakeholders can comment on company posts as well as write on their wall and send private messages to them. With the open page, stakeholders can also communicate between each other. Second, although the findings show that Stockmann monitors the ongoing discussion on Facebook, none of the posts gets deleted if only it is not insulting. Although the previous findings show that Stockmann's Facebook communication is targeted mainly to customers, also other stakeholders can participate in the discussion. Due to these findings, it can be considered that Stockmann respects the nature of the channel as for being an interactive platform that supports a dialogue.

The following example supports the purpose of two-way interaction in Facebook communication:

Interviewee: [...] *"We definitely want that the communication is not just from us to you, but from you to us as well. [...] "We definitely would want to create discussion and that our customers talk with themselves. [...]"*

Although the findings show that Stockmann wants to support a dialogue and create discussion in their Facebook communication, the following examples show that Stockmann wants to rather provide material for discussion, which would lead to positive brand image rather than actively engage in discussion with stakeholders.

Interviewee: [...] *"We want to produce material that would organically create word of mouth and discussion...." [...]"*

Similarly, this example shows evidence that Stockmann considers Facebook dialogue rather as consultation similar to customer service, than conversation which could lead to stronger engagement.

Interviewee: [...] "If the nature of post asks for a reply, we of course comment on them. But otherwise we respect the customer discussions and their right to express their opinions [...]"

Furthermore, the communication style of Stockmann's Facebook communication supports the consultation mode as it is very official and similar to the other communication channels as stated in the following example:

Interviewee: [...] "We always answer as "Stockmann's customer service"... From the company perspective the answers are always in line with what our customer service would answer in any channels." [...]"

The following example shows an example of the communication style when company replied to a directed question. The style is often very official without any engagement or personalized touch.

Member A. *“What happens to my Stockmann points after registering to Finnair ll I benefit from my Stockmann purchases no longer?”*

Stockmann: *“Hi Member A! Yes, you will still benefit from Stockmann purchases as before. The Finnair plus points will be further collected to you Finnair Plus account.”*

In addition to findings that show Stockmann’s interaction with stakeholders rather consultation type, the following example also supports the finding that Stockmann rather creates engagement through their content. The following example shows how the posts are formulated. The interviewee noted:

Interviewee: [...] “We do try to activate our posts yes... We may write a teaser like... let’s say, during our Asia campaign... we ask a question “would you use sticks or a fork?” [...]

Despite the company’s aim at activate and create discussion through questions in the post, the findings show no evidence on them creating more interaction. During the research period, the company posts did not provide many straight questions or other requests which would create discussion or activate the customers. Furthermore, even though 9 posts out of 55 included a question or a request, some did not receive any comments from stakeholders and some got only few. As such, the findings show that a question does not necessarily lead to active participation and create discussion. The following examples are of posts which presented a direct question and still received no comments:

Stockmann: *“Have you already activated your Stockmann loyalty card? It’s easy to register online in the following address (link)”*

“Have you already got to know the new digital premiere-magazine online? You can read about new trends and fashion easily online with phone, tablet or a computer. We make new context nearly every day. Fall in love with Premiere (link).”

Although the following findings support the earlier findings that Stockmann rather takes a consultant role in conversation and does not engage in discussion, this post created discussion among the stakeholders themselves and as such Facebook and the content of the post generated much discussion between the customers as well. The following example is one of the discussions that emerged under this post and how stakeholders commented to each other.

Member A: *“I hope from the bottom of my heart that Stockmann shows its respect to its staff and also listens to the feedback from them”*

Member B: *“Have you found out the name of the sales person who served you and given feedback? This way the sales person receives a personal gift....”*

Member C: *“Have to remember this”*

Member D: *“Thanks for the tip.”*

To summarize, in answering the fourth research question on how is interaction depicted from case company’s Facebook communication, the following findings were found from the data. 1) Although Stockmann wants to create two-way communication, their communication is still more in a consultation type rather than active engagement of

stakeholders in the corporate branding process. 2) Similarly, the findings show that Stockmann considers themselves rather as creators of content than active participants in discussion, thus failing to engage the stakeholders in creating the corporate brand. 3) Stockmann aims to create engagement through activating the posts but findings show they do not necessarily create discussion. And finally 4), although Stockmann fails to join the discussion, stakeholders discuss between themselves emphasizing the nature of the channel as an interactive platform.

4.4 Interaction in positive and negative discussion

The corporate branding process includes elements outside the management's control, as the strategic vision is interpreted by the existing corporate images of stakeholders (Hatch & Schultz, 2001) Thus, the discussion with Stockmann and its stakeholders was analyzed to find out how the stakeholders react to different posts and how the interaction takes place in either positive or negative discussion. The findings of this sub chapter present further evidence to the fourth research question of how interaction is depicted from Stockmann's Facebook communication.

The findings show evidence that Stockmann carefully plans the content of the posts in the hopes of leading the discussion to positive. The following example demonstrates this logic.

Interviewee: [...] "Of course we understand that the discussion cannot always be positive, but we aim at creating that kind of material, which would create positive discussion, of course" [...]

From all the themes, the event posts seemed to generate much positive discussion out of all the posts communicated while the strategy posts created more negative discussion related with the topic. The following example is of one of four posts which Stockmann posted on one of the biggest events they had during the studied time, the spring fashion show. This post was a reminder for the actual event, still creating positive discussion with altogether 384 likes, 10 comments and 28 shares.

Stockmann: *Don't miss out on spring's most controversial fashion event!*

Member A: *"Let's support Stockmann!"*

Member B: *"Let's go see this"*

Member C: *"I will come, of course"*

Another example of an event which received much engagement and a positive response was during an Asian Fusion – campaign, when Stockmann posted a video on a surprise event which was held in Delikatessen on March 1. This post and a video received 583 likes, 6 comments and 81 shares. In addition to the praising comments, the number of shares indicates again that customers are willing to share this post and the video with their friends. Here is the example.

Stockmann : *Watch the video and see how the Asian Fusion – dragon march and spicy rhythm surprised yesterday in downtown Stockmann. Campaign continues until 15th March, welcome to taste a bit of Asia! .*

Member A: *“Wonderful to have this again in Finland, and where else than in Stockmann!”*

Member B: *“Great activity!”*

Member C: *“Wow!”*

Despite Stockmann’s aim in creating a post which would lead to positive discussion, the posts do not always create the wanted outcome. Although the following example is a positive event post it still received negative comments from customers related with another strategic issue.

“Friendship is valuable every day but tomorrow has even a special meaning to celebrate it. On Valentine’s Day 14th Feb the local choirs are singing love songs in Helsinki, Turku, Tampere and Oulu. Read more about our events on (link).:”:

Member A: *“Don’t close down Oulu department store – there’s a great Valentine’s gift for us all.”*

Member B: *“I hope that Stockmann continues in Oulu. Best store and best service. Don’t close down, please!”*

Member B: *“Sometimes you should just stay quiet, sh. Stockmann”*

In this example, Stockmann communicated on an event of choirs performing in Helsinki, Turku, Tampere and Oulu on Valentine's Day. As post came out right after the company had announced closing down the Oulu department store, stakeholders engaged in the discussion and showed their concern for the news. So despite the positive angle in the post, this post received mostly negative comments. So the findings show that even though Stockmann may tries to communicate only things which would create positive discussion, social media acts as a platform for any discussion, negative or positive. Also despite the negative comments, Stockmann did not reply.

Furthermore, the strategy posts created both positive and negative discussion. In the following example, a positive post turned to negative. Although the new partnership with Finnair was a positive strategic announcement, some customers experienced problems with signing in to the program, which created also negative discussion. Although the post received many negative comments, Stockmann kept its passive role as communicators and answers mostly comments with a direct question. The following example shows some replies that Stockmann gave to this topic when asked a question.

Perfect couple – Stockmann & Finnair Plus. Now you can collect Finnair Plus points also with your Stockmann purchases! Go activate your loyalty card through the link and start collecting now! [...]

Member A: *“Will I get points only for my purchases from now on or also previous purchases?”*

Stockmann: *“Hi Member A! You will get points for the new purchases, not old.*

Member B: *“It doesn't work even if I wanted to. . [...] Wondering where the problem is? “*

Stockmann: *“Hi Member B! Unfortunately the page is jammed, please try again later.”*

Another finding is that although Stockmann keeps it consultation mode in answering only customer questions, the findings do not indicate any clear logic why also some comments get a reply. While some customers had problems signing in to the website and commented the post, one of the comments was answered leaving similarly 9 comments unanswered. The following example shows the only comment which got an answer followed by those comments which did not.

Member C: *“It is impossible to activate this, I have tried several times!!!!”*

Stockmann.: *“Hi. Activating the card is possible also at the department store’s customer service....”*

Member D: *“My activation doesn’t work???”*

Member E: *“I can see the page, and fill out the form but at some point comes an error.”*

Similarly, the clear logic to commenting is missing also from the next example. This strategy post created most discussion among all the posts within the researched time with 87 comments both positive and negative. Despite the wide-spread discussion company failed to comment all but two of 87 comments. As an example, here are first some comments that from stakeholders who joined the discussion and gave a positive response to the news.

“Stockmann’s new strategic direction has been chosen: we want to be a store with experiences and which is Signed for you. In February we celebrate our loyal customers and our staff. In the video you will find Lotta, Tiina and Henri from the Helsinki department store and the CEO Per Thelin. Read more about the new Strategy of Stockmann: (Link). “

Member A: *“Great, it’s important to differentiate and the feel of luxury brings experiences. “*

Member B: *“Great that you will react to the feedback given. Waiting for that. “*

Member C: *“Thank you. Great that you realized that customer is at the forefront. “*

Also, the new strategic direction raised also negative discussion among the stakeholders without any commenting from the company.

Member A: *“In recent times, there has been no customer service or really bad, but that’s an experience also I guess. “*

Member B: *“I make 80% of my purchases online nowadays. And I’m not the only one, so make the e shop also an experience. “*

Member C: *“Does the exceptional customer service include the web store also? A long way to go... “*

Despite either the positive and negative comments or the most wide-spread discussion during the studied time, Stockmann did not join the discussion. However, without a clear logic, the following two comments (out of 87) got a reply despite all other comments:

Member A: *“Electrolux will take cosmetics’ place, cosmetics underground [...] who leads?”*

Member B: *“They should keep cosmetics in the ground floor, this is the way it is all over the world. Stocka takes down everything they’ve offered: books, next probably cosmetics. Not very customer oriented I’d say. “*

Stockmann: *“Hi Member A & B and thanks for comments! Cosmetics will stay on its place in Helsinki department store. Expert-store is coming to basement, to replace the old electronics. “*

The data clearly showed that, although the strategic direction created much discussion among the stakeholders, the company failed to join the discussion. However, it is impossible to detect any particular reason why these comments received a reply. Two days later a similar strategy post was posted and then the company simply commented on the previous post to thank for all the discussion that the post had created. This was done in an official way without providing any material that could provide further discussion. Here is this example:

“Welcome to us! The staff is Stockmann’s heart, we are Signed for you. Take a peek to February’s campaign shooting and get to know our professional staff. Order a newsletter and you will always receive the latest news to your email. (Link)”

Stockmann: *“Hello! Thanks for your comments and feedback, we will take them forward in our organization. “*

To summarize the findings to the fourth question on interaction the following findings were depicted. 1) Stockmann aims to create content which would lead to positive discussion. 2) However, as communication in Facebook is harder to control compared with traditional media, the discussion does not always turn out positive as stakeholders perceive the messages through their existing images of the company. 3) Events posts created positive discussion the most, whereas strategy posts created both positive and negative. 4) Despite the wide-spread discussion, either positive or negative, Stockmann did not engage in the discussion even though stakeholders clearly needed answers. 5) Finally, the findings did not provide any clear logic on why Stockmann answered to some comments which did not include a question. There did not seem to be either any relevance on if the comments were either positive or negative.

5 DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the empirical findings of this study against the theoretical framework presented in chapter 2. The objective of the study was twofold, to increase knowledge of the use of social media for corporate branding purposes from the perspective of openness and interaction and to find out how vision is communicated in Facebook. Thus, with these objectives in mind, this chapter aims to show the connections between the empirical findings and theoretical framework. Finally, the managerial implications of the study are discussed in the end of the chapter.

According to Vernuccio (2014) new strategic considerations of openness and interaction in communicating corporate brands are emerging. According to her, the balance between the corporate branding variables of organization's strategic vision, its organizational culture and corporate image is best reached when both internal and external stakeholders are "*characterized by openness, interactivity, and a "listening orientation"*" (p. 216). The study showed findings on both openness and interaction as characterized in Stockmann's Facebook communication.

Vernuccio (2014) named three principal ways of capitalizing the strengths of social media for brand building purposes based on Constantinides & Fountain, (2008) and Wright's view (2006) (p . 215) of which the first of them emphasizes the following.

- 1) Using existing social media in public relations programs to reach new online opinion leaders, such as bloggers and podcasters, and inform them about products and services, societal initiatives, or innovations;

Reflecting this view of using social media for corporate branding purposes, similar findings were found from the data. Firstly, the findings provided evidence that Stockmann considers Facebook as a modern and efficient communication platform also actively utilizing Facebook in informing stakeholders on the company offerings and news. Furthermore, their social media strategy (including also Twitter and Instagram as channels) is linked with the overall marketing strategy and findings highlighted that Stockmann aims to communicate consistent message through the traditional and new media. This finding is also in line with Mikkelsen's (2008) and Hanna et al.'s (2011) view that companies should make careful communication plans in order to keep the communication consistent through both traditional and new media channels.

Although the role of stakeholders as co-creators of the brand is well recognized (eg. Hatch & Schultz, 2003; Hatch & Rubin; Gregory 2007; Ind & Bjerke, 2007) findings show that Stockmann considers only customers as the main target group for their Facebook communication, failing to consider other stakeholders. This finding also emphasize the fact that Stockmann considers Facebook mainly as a marketing communication channel and an online customer service platform, failing to fully exploit the benefits of social media for corporate branding purposes. In this respect, Stockmann's corporate branding is not in line with Hatch & Rubin,'s (2005) view of corporate branding as a process that involves elements of all the company's stakeholders in contributing to brand meaning and "acting as ambassadors of the brand". However, it needs to be understood that this study focused on studying only Facebook as a channel, and the findings show that Stockmann's social media strategy is social media specific.

Hatch & Schultz (2001) emphasize that success in corporate branding lies in the sensitivity to arising discrepancies or tensions between, strategic vision, organizational culture and corporate images. Thus the dialogue between management and both internal and external

stakeholders is necessary to find out if management is taking the company into the direction its stakeholders support. To find out how Stockmann uses Facebook in communicating the strategic vision, the following findings were found. From all the content communicated in Facebook, three themes could be depicted as promotion, strategy and events. From these themes two of them, strategy and events were considered relevant for communicating the strategic vision which go in line with Hatch and Shultz's (2003 p. 9) definition as *"the central idea behind the company that embodies and expresses top management's aspiration for what the company will achieve in the future."* As the posts relevant to vision accounted for nearly half of all what was communicated in Stockmann's Facebook page the following implications may be drawn that Stockmann uses Facebook in communicating their strategic vision and it was communicated quite frequently.

Furthermore, the findings showed that of the themes, strategy posts created most engagement in terms of likes, comments and shares. Overall, the event posts seemed to create more positive discussion whereas strategy posts created also negative discussion. Of all the topics communicated, the new strategic direction and customer promise emphasized most strongly the new strategic vision and they also created most discussion both positive negative. Potentially, the vast discussion both positive and negative may indicate that Stockmann had a potential image-vision gap (Hatch & Schultz, 2001) meaning that stakeholders did not support the strategic vision highlighted by the management, thus failing to fully support the company's strategic direction.

Interestingly, although both negative discussions were depicted, Stockmann mostly did not engage in discussion except for answering to questions directed at them. The findings showed that although Stockmann aims to create engagement and a dialogue in their Facebook communication, the findings show evidence that their communication is still mainly one-sided, lacking the true interaction with one-to-one and many-to many forms of

communication. In other words, Stockmann seems to consider themselves rather as creators of content than active participants in the discussion. In this sense, the findings show that Stockmann's communication style is more consultation type than conversation failing to consider Mangauld & Faulds' (2009) view that companies should also leverage the power of word-of mouth communication through social media by shaping consumer discussions to suit company mission and goals. From this perspective it can be questioned whether Stockmann could have tried to shape the negative discussion to positive if only they had provided a dialogue with the stakeholders. Mangold & Folds (2009 361-9) point out that companies "*must learn to talk with their customers, as opposed to talking at them*". Now the findings support only the "talking orientation" of consultation.

As the findings showed that Stockmann had taken a fairly passive communicator role in Facebook, the findings against literature for using Facebook for corporate branding purposes can be questioned as the final two ways to capitalize social media for brand building purposes are as follows (Vernuccio, 2014):

- 2) Using social media to listen to the voices of the stakeholders in discussions focused on topics relevant to the firm;
- 3) Initiating direct interactive platforms, feeding them with input from employees and managers, and using these one-to-one and many-to-many forms of communication to establish, maintain, and reinforce the brand's connections, image, and reputation.

On the one hand, the findings indicated that Stockmann actively monitors the Facebook discussions and takes customer feedback into consideration in their strategy work and thus seem to be in line with this view. On the one hand, although Stockmann plans its

communication carefully aiming to create content which would lead to positive word of mouth, the lack of interaction with stakeholders does not fully support this view. As such it could be questioned if Stockmann fails to capitalize the benefits of social media for corporate branding purposes to the fullest potential.

Clearly, social media has changed corporate communication, leaving companies with less control and predictability over the messages than before (Kuvykaite & Piligrimiene, 2009). Although companies may want to choose the messages it uses in different channels, social media as an interactive and open platform may feed any discussion whether it was intentional or not. The findings of the study also supported this view. Despite Stockmann's plan to create content mainly to customers with a positive angle, the findings showed that even though not all strategic issues were published, stakeholders brought also other issues to discussion. As researchers (Kaptein & Van Tulder, 2003; Foster & Jonker, 2005) agree that stakeholder dialogue promotes trust and stakeholders are more committed when they have been listened to, the lack of engagement may harm the relationship with stakeholders as Stockmann does not fully show that their opinions matter.

In conclusion, Vernuccio (2014 *p. 216*) highlights that only when there is systematic use of the full range of social media, the engagement of different stakeholders and content which is both user and company focused can social media's benefits be exploited in brand building purposes for co-creation of content and the brand itself. The corporate brand-building becomes "*a process of co-creation of shared meanings*" when openness and interaction takes place with stakeholders. In light of the findings, the level of openness is quite high as Stockmann is present in different social media and thus provides platforms and content for discussion which is both company and user focused. However, the findings show that the level of interaction in communicating corporate brands in Facebook is rather low. The findings seem to indicate that corporate branding in Facebook is considered a

management task rather than seeing the process as a mutual process including both internal and external stakeholders.

Furthermore, Vernuccio (2014) emphasized that collaborative corporate branding strategies are not yet fully in use for organizations today. In this respect, the findings of this study are in line with her view and the corporate branding strategy of Stockmann could be identified as “cautious beginners”. For now, the findings indicate that Stockmann’s strategy on corporate branding in social media could be categorized as for being in the face of considering that the content of the social media was mainly company focused and having customers as the predominant target. Also the interactivity could be predicted as low as communication is rather as consultation type and having rather traditional nature of content.

Thus, in order to further capitalize the strengths of social media for corporate branding purposes the level of interaction should increase and management need to loosen the full control of the corporate branding process. As Vernuccio (2014) concludes, only when managers loose the fear of losing control over brand messages and learn to widen the engagement of stakeholders into contributing to brand meaning and acting as ambassadors of the firm. Thus, failing to comprehensively engage in the discussion with stakeholders, it could be concluded that Stockmann’s corporate branding is firmly management driven and thus far from Gregory’s (2007) negotiated brand, which considers corporate branding process as dynamic and continuously emerging.

However, it needs to be taken into consideration that engagement of stakeholders and being an active contributor to the discussion also take company resources. For that reason, the findings do not clearly show whether Stockmann would engage in discussion more if they had further resources.

6 CONCLUSION

This chapter concludes the research, reviewing its purpose, method and main findings. Practical implications and recommendations follow the summary and finally the limitations of the study and recommendations for further research are presented.

6.1 Research summary

The overall objective to this study was two-fold, to increase the knowledge of the use of social media in corporate branding from the perspective of openness and interaction and to find out how strategic vision is communicated through Facebook. As due to the increased competition and rise of new media, companies leverage social media increasingly for corporate branding purposes (Vernuccio, 2014). Stakeholders are becoming co-creators of the corporate brand, and new strategic approaches of interactivity and openness emerge via social media. Although social media and corporate branding has received interest in academia, less research has been from the corporate communication perspective. With this in mind, the purpose of this study is to shed light in this research gap.

As a result, four research questions were outlined as follows:

5. How and for what reasons does the case company utilize social media?
6. What kind of content is published on their Facebook page?
7. What posts generate most interaction?
8. How is interaction depicted from case company's Facebook communication?

The literature review of this study presented earlier studies in this particular topic, introducing corporate branding, stakeholder theory, social media, and openness and interaction as emerging strategies in corporate branding. The focus of the study was based on Hatch & Shultz's (2001;2003) three-fold corporate branding process where strategic vision, culture and image are aligned. As such the purpose of investigating how strategic vision is communicated in Facebook is gathered. Furthermore, Vernuccio's (2014) study on interaction and openness in social media provided base understanding the emerging corporate branding strategies in social media. These two researches along with other literature review and research objectives guided the formation of the theoretical review of the study.

The research used qualitative approach and a single-case study and Stockmann was chosen due to the relevance to the study and personal interest of the researcher. The data was collected from Stockmann's Facebook page during six month period including all posts Stockmann posted as well as the comments to them. In addition to collecting data from Facebook, one face-to-face semi-structured interview was conducted with company's social media responsible to understand the underlying principles of company's social media communication. After transcribing the interview, the used comments and quotes in the findings were translated into English and the anonymity of the people was ensured by deleting all personal information and referring to them in the study as Member A, B, C and so on.

The qualitative content analysis was chosen as the methodological choice to guide the study with the analysis of the data by using both qualitative and quantitative methods. First, all the data was analyzed qualitatively to see which themes emerge and which of the posts communicate vision. Finally, all the likes, shares and comments were counted to each Facebook post in addition to calculating averages of each theme. This quantification of the

posts allowed the researcher to see first, what posts generate most engagement and secondly which of the themes seem to generate most engagement. Finally, to complement the findings on the level of openness in communicating the corporate brand, the secondary data was further analyzed and compared with the findings from the primary data. Furthermore, in addition to the quantification of the posts in order to analyze the level of interaction, examples of how Stockmann interacts with their stakeholders were depicted from the data.

Regarding the first research question of how and for what reasons Stockmann uses social media for corporate branding purposes the following findings were found. First, the empirical study showed that Facebook is an integral part of their social media communication and its nature as a dynamic and efficient communication channel offers Stockmann new opportunities in listening to their customers and serving them online. In addition to this, Facebook and social media can be used for corporate branding purposes. However, the findings show that Stockmann's social media strategy is rather social media specific than stakeholder specific. Facebook is considered most as a marketing channel, targeting only customers in contrast to considering wider group of stakeholders as target.

The findings to the second research question of what content is published in Facebook showed also evidence on how Stockmann communicates its strategic vision in Facebook. From all the posts, three themes emerged as promotion, strategy and events of which strategy and events were considered communicating the strategic vision. As such the evidence from the empirical study show that Stockmann uses Facebook communicating its strategic vision.

Concerning the third research question of which of the themes create most interaction, the findings showed that strategy posts created most discussion, both positive and negative whereas events created mostly positive discussion and the most amount of shares. Furthermore, the findings showed strong evidence that promotional posts created less interaction. Thus the findings may indicate that if Stockmann wants to engage their stakeholders more through interaction, they should communicate less promotional posts.

In terms of the fourth research question the following findings were gathered. Firstly, Stockmann wants to create positive discussion and benefit the interactive nature of Facebook that enables them to keep dialogue. However despite this aim, the findings show that Stockmann considers them more as creators of content than active participants in discussion. The findings show that Stockmann mainly answers the questions targeted at them, although either positive or negative discussion have occurred. Overall as Stockmann also targets its communication solely to customers rather than all stakeholders, the study failed to discover strong evidence of co-creative nature in the process of corporate branding. Thus the research shows evidence that Stockmann's corporate branding process seem to be more management driven and thus more controlled, compared with Gregory's (2007) negotiated brand which emerges through stakeholders' engagement.

Finally, as the objective of the study was to increase knowledge on the use of social media for corporate branding purposes through openness and interaction, the findings indicated the following. Although Stockmann communicates their corporate brand quite openly through different channels the findings show that the level of interaction that takes place in Facebook is still rather low. As the findings showed that the communication is still fairly management driven, without true engagement of all stakeholders Stockmann's Facebook communication could be considered as cautious beginners for exploiting the benefits of social media for corporate branding to the fullest potential. As such, the findings show

evidence to support earlier studies in the field that despite the benefits that social media brings to corporate branding are still not fully exploited today.

6.2 Practical implications and recommendations

The practical implications of the study are considered three-fold. Firstly, due to the nature of Facebook as a new dynamic and efficient communication channel, companies have discovered the many opportunities for corporate communications. However, achieving and exploiting the benefits of social media go beyond just joining these platforms and creating a company presence. Companies need to understand the nature of social media as a dynamic channel, which offers and asks for openness and interaction with all stakeholders rather than just communicating at them. Thus, management should loosen their control of communications and create an ongoing dialogue.

Secondly, the corporate branding process of vision, culture and image can be considered similar in an online as oppose to an offline world. As social media offers new opportunities for corporate branding through openness and interaction, companies should keep constant dialogue with their stakeholders and also engage them in the corporate branding process. As companies have lost full control over their communications in social media, companies should rather do the opposite and try to shape the discussions that take place. Without true engagement with stakeholders in social media, the images of the stakeholders may be harder to change. Thus, the corporate branding process in an online word should be rather considered as an opportunity due to its dynamic nature, rather than a threat which typically leads to more control of the communications.

Finally, companies should use social media channels and Facebook beyond marketing purposes. As showed in this study, stakeholders rather engage in a discussion which matters to them compared to simple marketing posts. For that reason, although Facebook offers opportunities for marketing purposes, companies should perhaps always try to create an interesting angle to simple marketing posts to attract the stakeholders' attention. And also, increasingly companies should communicate more on vision and perhaps also strategy as stakeholders most probably are interested in co-creating the corporate brand which can then lead to further benefits. Overall, companies should rather see corporate branding process as a mutual process, rather than simply a management task.

6.3 Limitation of the study

There are some limitations to this study that have to be taken into consideration. First of all social media is a dynamic communication channel that changes continuously, which opposes challenges to academic research which takes a longer time to be published. In that matter, it needs to be understood that also the findings from this study may be somewhat outdated. As such the findings from this study present only the findings drawn from this specific time period. In addition to this, the research period of six months limits the findings only to a restricted time period.

In terms of trustworthiness of the study, certain limitations have to be kept in mind. First, the qualitative content analysis of this data naturally entails the researchers' own interpretations of the data, and it needs to be understood. For instance, as the researcher grouped the posts based on the themes which emerged, there is always possibility for different interpretations of certain posts' belonging to certain themes. Beyond that, the quantification of the posts based on likes, comments and shares as the variables of engagement was a decision chosen by the researcher and as such it opposes some

limitation. Furthermore, the stakeholder categorization is challenging and thus categorizing of certain stakeholders groups may be hard to draw, or they may belong to many groups.

Third, although the semi-structured interview gave rich data from the company perspective, the collected data came only solely from one person. Conducting more interviews with different employees of the company may have given more diverseness into the data and thus more in-depth analysis.

6.4 Recommendations for further research

Corporate branding in social media has not been widely studied especially from the corporate communication perspective. Although this study aims to fill this research gap with the focus on corporate branding on Facebook, a research focusing companies' all social media channels would also provide an interesting aspect to study. In addition to this, a similar research could also be done as a multiple case study, which could provide information on corporate branding from a larger perspective. Furthermore, in multiple case studies the companies could be chosen either from the same line of business or for instance comparing B2C organizations to B2B organizations.

Another interesting recommendation for future research would be to study in more detail companies' strategy posts and what the stakeholder reactions are, as either negative or positive. In this research the focus of the study would be in more on the images of the stakeholders compared with the vision communicated. Also, by choosing a company which would engage in the discussion more it would provide interesting data to investigate if there is any evidence that the company reply or engagement actually affects the stakeholder

perceptions and changes the discussion to either positive or negative way. This type of research could also have stakeholder interviews to provide this angle to the research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview semi-structured questions

Taustaa Background information

- Mikä on tittelisi ja mitä työkuvaasi kuuluu? What is your current role and what is included in your job?
- Milloin Stockmann avasi Facebook-sivunsa? Miten ja miksi päätös sosiaaliseen mediaan menosta syntyi? When did Stockmann launch its corporate Facebook page? What drove the decision to go into social media and reasons behind it?
- Onko Stockmannilla paikalliset Facebook-sivut kaikilla markkinoilla? Kuinka ne eroaa toisistaan? Does Stockmann have separate Facebook pages in different markets? How do they differ?

FB Viestintäkanavana FB as a communication channel

- Onko teillä erillinen sosiaalisen median strategia? Voitko kertoa siitä jotain? Do you have a separate social media strategy? Can you tell something about it?
- Miten sosiaalinen media otetaan huomioon koko viestintästrategiassa? How is social media taken into consideration in corporate communication strategy?

- Miten Facebook-sivua hallinnoidaan? Miten suunnittelette tulevat julkaisut? How is the corporate FB page managed? How are the posts designed?
- Miten suhtaudutte negatiivisiin kommentteihin? Monitoroitteko postauksia? How are negative comments perceived? Are posts monitored?
- Millainen viestintäkanava Facebook on mielestänne? What kind of communication channel is Facebook from corporate perspective?
- Eroaako FB jotenkin muista yrityksen viestintäkanavista? Jos niin miten? Miten huolehditte, että yhteinen ilme ja viesti välittyy kaikissa kanavissa? Does Facebook differ from other corporate communication channels? If yes, then how? How do you ensure a consistent image and message through different channels?
- Kuinka tärkeä viestintäkanava Facebook on? How important communication channel is FB?
- Onko FB viestintä jotenkin kohdennettu eri sidos/asiakasryhmille? Is FB communication directed into certain stakeholder or customer groups?
- Yritättekö innostaa asiakkaita tuottamaan sisältöä FB:ssä? Jos kyllä niin miten? Do you encourage customers to engage in creating content in FB? If yes, then how?
- Miten hallinnoitte Stockmannin imagoa Facebookin näkökulmasta? Kuinka tärkeänä näette Facebookin roolin imagon rakentamisessa? How is stockmann's image managed through Facebook? How important is Facebook in managing the corporate image from your perspective?

Pelastetaan Stockmann ja Asiantuntija Nyt

Kertoisitko tästä FB ilmiöstä ja miten se otettiin vastaan yrityksessä. Could you tell about this phenomenon and how was it taken in the corporation?

- Mitä toimenpiteitä “pelastetaan stockmann” aiheutti? What actions did you do after ”save Stockmann” ?
- Kuinka Asiantuntija Nyt suunniteltiin? Miten se onnistui yrityksen mielestä? How was the campaign created? Was it a success from company’s point of view?
- Kuinka asiakkaat suhtautuivat tähän? How did customers react to this?
- Kuinka yritys hyödynsi kerättyä dataa? How was the gathered data used for further purposes?
- Hyödynnettiinkö dataa yrityksen strategiaan? Jos kyllä niin miten? If yes, then how? Was the data used in company’s strategy work? If yes then how?
- Käytetäänkö sosiaalista media, eritoten facebookia muuten asiakkaiden mielipiteiden keräämisessä tai ideoiden generoimisessa? Jos kyllä niin miten? Is social media, especially FB further used in gathering customer feedback or in idea generation? If yes, then how?
- Hyödynnetäänkö sosiaalisesta mediasta kerätyt asiakkaan mielipiteet ja ideat yrityksen kehittämiseen? Jos kyllä niin miten? Are customer opinions and ideas gathered from FB used to develop company processes? If yes then how?