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Antecedents of social media B2B use in industrial marketing context: customers' view

Hanna Keinänen

Tieto Finland Corporation, and

Olli Kuivalainen

School of Business, Lappeenranta University of Technology, Lappeenranta, Finland

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to clarify business-to-business (B2B) customers' behavior regarding their social media use for B2B purposes and the antecedents of this behavior in the industrial marketing setting. It explores the influence of corporate culture, colleagues' support and personal and psychological factors on customer behavior toward social media business use.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors conducted an online questionnaire survey among key customer accounts of an information technology service company ($N = 82$). Partial least squares (PLS) path modeling was utilized to analyze the relationship between the dependent variable (social media business use) and the independent variables.

Findings – Results show that private social media usage has the most significant relationship with the social media business use. Colleagues at work are also supporting B2B social media use and personal characteristics are also of importance. Surprisingly, perception of usability of social media for B2B use did not explain social media business use within our sample.

Research limitations/implications – The chosen methodology, sampling frame and sample size may limit generalizability. Therefore, researchers are encouraged to test the proposed hypothesis in other settings, particularly as the diffusion of B2B social media increases.

Practical implications – The paper provides insights into how marketing managers can make an impact with their social media marketing. For example, when planning social media activities, companies need to consider which social media services could serve their marketing and communication targets and would reach the customers.

Originality/value – Studies related to social media in B2B, especially from a customer's perspective, are still limited, and the authors do not know how customer firms value industrial marketing activities in social media. This novel paper provides insights into managers' reasons for using social media and gives guidelines for B2B marketers on how to conduct social media marketing in the future.

Keywords Social media marketing, Consumer behavior, Social media, Business-to-Business marketing, Online marketing, B2B

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The use of social media has increased remarkably over the past few years. Social media marketing is common in the business-to-consumer (B2C) area, and the concept of social media related especially to B2C has been extensively studied (Hanna *et al.*, 2011; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011; Trusov *et al.*, 2010, 2009). One of the outcomes of these studies is that social media has profound effects on how marketers should behave. For example, Weber (2009) suggests that marketer's role has changed from a broadcaster sending messages to a specific target segment to a company which collaborates with its customers and participates in virtual communities.

The utilization of social media is now spreading also to the business-to-business (B2B) sector. For example, in a recent study among technology industry decision makers in the USA

and in Europe, it was found out that 55 per cent of technology decision makers participate in social networks and 29 per cent of the decision makers participate in the social networks for business purposes (Bernof, 2009; Ramos, 2009). Consequently, many B2B companies have begun to investigate how to utilize social media in their marketing efforts. However, the studies related to social media in B2B, especially from a customer's perspective, are still extremely limited and we do not know, for example, how customer firms value industrial marketing activities in social media and which factors lead to the use of social media for work-related purposes.

The purpose of this study is to clarify B2B customers' behavior regarding their social media use for B2B purposes and the antecedents of this behavior in the industrial marketing setting. More precisely, we explore the influence of corporate cultural, social, personal and psychological (i.e. perception of usability) factors on customer behavior toward social media business use. In addition to the factors affecting the use of social media for work-related activities, we also explore which social media channels the respondents use. By doing this study, we are able to offer several contributions.

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First, we are able to provide reasons why and how social media is used or in many cases not used for business purposes. In a number of recent studies, it has actually been found that the business use of the social media is limited and also the interest to begin to use this has been low. For example, in a recent Finnish study of the 143 Finnish enterprises in technology industries, only 9 per cent of the respondents valued their understanding of social media as good or very good, and only 15 per cent had considered the development of the social media strategy toward their customers (Lakkala, 2011). Second, with the increased understanding of the underlying factors behind the use and the utilized social media tools, we are able to provide guidance for practicing managers how to develop better and more relevant social media marketing strategies in B2B context.

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. First, we explain what social media and social media marketing are. Second, we explain our conceptual framework. Third, our methodologies and the empirical results are presented. The empirical part of this study ($N = 82$) is based on an online survey, the target of which is the key customer contacts of an information technology (IT) service company. Finally, we follow with the discussion, after which implications for managers and researchers alike are given.

Research background

To put the projected contribution of this study in context, we briefly review the key concepts of the study, i.e. social media and social media marketing.

Social media

Several social media definitions exist in the current literature. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 61) 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”. This definition contains the key elements found in a number of definitions, i.e. online content, people (users) having a key role and the role of technology (Web 2.0 technologies and applications). In B2B context, there are several potential participants (customers, manufacturers and partners); in this study, we highlight the customer perspective, i.e. how potential B2B customers actually use and why do they use social media for business purposes.

Social media marketing

Social media marketing is a term which describes the actual acts of using social networks for marketing purposes. Constantinides and Fountain (2008) propose a classification based on various application types which can be used as social media marketing channels to provide and promote social media services. These include:

- blogs, i.e. online personal journals which were one of the earliest well-known Web 2.0 applications and can be seen as social media’s equivalent to personal Web sites (cf. e.g. Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010);
- social networks, which are applications allowing users to build personal Web sites accessible to other users for exchange of personal content and communication; example of these is Facebook;

- (content) communities, which are Web sites meant for organizing and sharing particular types of content (e.g. YouTube);
- forums/bulletin boards, which are sites for exchanging ideas and information usually around special interests and can also be seen as communities; and
- content aggregators, which are applications allowing users to fully customize the Web content they would like to access (various RSS sites).

Lehtimäki *et al.* (2009) or Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) have slightly different classifications into which they have also added virtual worlds such as Second Life or Word of Warcraft.

Factors affecting the use of social media for business purposes

The rapid growth of information-related technologies has had a huge impact on how, when and where B2B marketers interact and do business with their customers (Schultz *et al.*, 2012). Here, social media is seen as a great opportunity as it can provide two-way communication effectively, for example. But do B2B customers actually value the efforts of marketers and use the social media for business purposes? Several theories have been used to explain the behavior of the customers in general and the same applies to the B2B context (for various literature streams see, e.g., Sheth, 1996). Adoption of e-business practices by individuals and/or companies has been studied by using theory of planned behavior, technology acceptance model (TAM), diffusion of adaptation theory or task-technology fit model, for example (Bordonaba-Juste *et al.*, 2012; Chong *et al.*, 2009; Norzaidi *et al.*, 2008; Pikkarainen *et al.*, 2004). Based on the review of the existing literature, there are several different factors which affect customer behavior in B2B context. These include marketing mix-based factors such as product, price and used distribution channel, as well as all kinds of other elements such as economic, political and cultural elements and customer characteristics (cf. e.g. Hawkins *et al.*, 2003). In this study, we study several factors which affect B2B customers’ use of social media for B2B purposes. Our inquiry incorporates factors both from the personal and organizational level, i.e. social media private and personal characteristics such as age and gender as well as organizational culture and the behavior of peers in the team.

Social media private use

For most people, social media is much about “connecting with network of friends and family” and less about professional use (Baird and Parasnis, 2011, p. 31). In the same study, it was found out that business executives’ ideas about why customers interact with their companies on social media platforms were too rosy: the customers were less keen on learning about new products and getting general information than on receiving more specific benefits regarding their current wants and needs (Baird and Parasnis, 2011). These results could be seen as an indicator that the actual use is often driven by personal factors. Consequently, although business customers and buyers are seen as professionals in their field and a number of people typically influence business buying decisions, they have the same personalities and usually similar behavioral models when

they act as private persons/consumers or business persons (Rieck, 2010; Webster and Wind, 1972; Wilson, 2000). In the case of social media business use, it could be proposed that the use of social media for private purposes is often related to the use of social media for business purposes because people tend to act similarly in different roles. This would mean that the managers and directors who use social media tools for personal connections often use them for professional connections alike (for empirical results related to this, cf. e.g. Bolton *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, the following hypothesis is made:

- H1.* The use of social media for private purposes has a positive effect on the use of social media for business purposes.

Corporate cultural factors and the use of social media

Culture refers to a set of values, ideas, artifacts and other meaningful symbols that help individuals communicate, interpret and evaluate as members of society. Hofstede (1980, p. 24) defines culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another”. Culture, in this sense, is a system of collectively held values. Constantinides *et al.* (2010) point out that the cultural influence on consumer behavior in online global environments is a relatively new research topic compared to the quite substantial amount of research on consumer behavior in traditional physical markets that has been conducted during the past 40 years (cf. also Aaker and Maheswaran, 1997; Roth, 1995). The results of research by Constantinides *et al.* (2010) underline the importance of being aware of cultural differences in designing and implementing online marketing activities. Company or organizational culture represents a complex pattern of beliefs, expectations, values, attitudes and behaviors shared by the members of an organization (Hellriegel *et al.*, 1995; McShane and Von Glinow, 2005). More specifically, organizational culture includes the “rules of the game”, i.e. philosophies and dominant values in the organization that guide people in the way they interact and feel, as well as the norms that are shared by working groups within an organization. In B2B market, we can assume that corporate culture has an impact on the use of social media for work. If the corporate culture sees the use of social media as important, then a person uses social media. Supervisors have often been seen as significant reference group for their employees (Homburg *et al.*, 2010; Schultz *et al.*, 2012). Their influence may be direct as they may urge subordinates to adopt new technologies or more subtle on the basis of exemplary use of which subordinates are aware (Homburg *et al.*, 2010; Leonard-Barton and Deschamps, 1988). Furthermore, an organization can often be seen as a reflection of its top management team (Rapp *et al.*, 2008). Hence, the following hypotheses are made:

- H2.* Corporate culture, which is favorable to social media, has a positive effect on the social media business usage of B2B customers.

- H2a.* Company motivates the use of social media through its corporate culture – when there is a supporting culture, social media business use increases.

- H2b.* When a supervisor in the company sees benefits in using social media, the social media business use increases.

Social factors – colleagues’ support in using social media

For a long time, researchers have acknowledged group membership as one determinant of behavior. The fact that people often act in accordance with a frame of reference produced by the groups to which they belong is a long-accepted and sound premise (Hyman, 1942; Murell Dawson and Chatman, 2001). Social or subjective norms can be defined as “an individual’s perception that people who are important to him or her think he or she should or should not perform a behavior in question” (Schultz *et al.*, 2012, p. 177; Venkatesh *et al.*, 2003).

The term reference group can be used to describe any and all of the groups that influence the attitudes and behavior of individuals, but often two major types of relationships between individuals and groups are distinguished, i.e. “normative” reference group behavior and “comparative” reference group behavior (Murell Dawson and Chatman, 2001). The latter reflects the group a person can compare his/her own behavior with. People are significantly influenced by their reference groups in at least three ways, although the level of reference-group influence varies. First, reference groups expose an individual to new behaviors and lifestyles. Second, groups also influence the person’s attitudes and self-concept because he or she normally desires to fit in. Third, groups can create pressures for conformity that may affect the person’s choice (cf. Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Kotler and Keller, 2012). According to “normative” reference group theory, a group behavior guides individuals’ behavior (Murell Dawson and Chatman, 2001). It could be assumed that active utilization of business social media by co-workers, such as team and project team members, would increase the usage of social media among other team and project team members. If more and more colleagues use social media successfully or motivate their peers to use it for B2B purposes, it is likely to increase and encourage the adoption of the same habit (Schultz *et al.*, 2012). Thus, the following hypothesis is made:

- H3.* Colleagues’ support increases the social media business usage of B2B customers.

Personal factors – user characteristics and the use of social media

Identity is the individuals’ psychological relationship to particular social classification systems (Frable, 1997). According to social identity theory, there are two components in identity:

- 1 a personal component consisting of personality and physical and intellectual traits; and
- 2 social component derived from group memberships such as race and sex (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Mor Barak *et al.*, 1998).

Diversity represents a multitude of individual differences and similarities that exist among people, and it is based on personal and background factors. Primary dimensions are

mainly visible to other people and they are likely to evoke responses that are associated with biases, prejudices or stereotypes; these include age, gender, ethnic heritage, race, mental and physical abilities and characteristics and sexual orientation, for example (Frable, 1997; Kreitner and Kinicki, 1999). Secondary dimensions are individual differences that we acquire, discard and/or modify throughout our lives and they are less visible to others (Kreitner and Kinicki, 1999; McShane and Von Glinow, 2005).

Identity and diversity dimensions affect behavior (Kreitner and Kinicki, 1999; McShane and Von Glinow, 2005; Mor Barak *et al.*, 1998). In this study, the possible influences of age and gender (i.e. personal components) and organizational level (i.e. social components in an organization) on customer behavior toward social media are studied. Age and gender can affect customer behavior; for instance, people buy different goods and services over their lifetime (Kotler and Keller, 2012). Based on the study by Isokangas and Kankkunen (2011), Finnish CEOs use social media very seldom, and one reason for this is the fairly high age of the CEOs. The negative relationship between age and willingness to use social media for work-related purposes has been found also in other studies (Schultz *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, the organizational role and level can have an impact on customer behavior; for instance, a company president can favor different social media sites than an office clerk (Kotler and Keller, 2012). These reasons lead to a hypothesis and sub-hypotheses as follows:

- H4.* User characteristics affect the social media business usage of B2B customers.
- H4a.* *Age:* Younger people use social media more for business purposes.
- H4b.* *Gender:* Gender affects the social media business usage.
- H4c.* *Job level:* Job level (e.g. manager or C-level manager) affects the social media business usage.

Psychological factors: perception of the usability of the social media for B2B purposes

Several psychology-related factors which can explain people's behavioral tendencies have been presented in the existing literature. For example, attitudes and beliefs have been discussed as antecedents of behavior (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Yang and Yoo, 2004). Often, attitudes are formed on the basis of perceptions and intentions. One of the most relevant theoretical models predicting behavior is the previously mentioned TAM model, which explains the user acceptance of technologies by focusing on perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh and Davis, 2000; Venkatesh *et al.*, 2003). First, people tend to use or not to use an application to the degree they believe it would help them to perform their work better. In TAM model, this would be called "perceived usefulness". Second, even if they considered the solution useful, they might believe the system would be too difficult to use to gain performance benefits. This would relate to the "perceived ease of use" (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh and Davis, 2000; Venkatesh *et al.*, 2003). In many empirical studies, especially perceived usefulness has proved to be an essential driver of usage

intentions (Venkatesh and Davis, 2000). Eventually, TAM model has been extended in a number of studies; one interesting behavioral dimension is potential user's judgment of job relevance, which can be described as "an individual's perception regarding the degree to which the target system is applicable to his or her job" (Venkatesh and Davis, 2000, p. 191). Depending on the degree of adoption, the people may either possess perceptions of usability or attitudes regarding the usefulness of social media for business purposes. This could relate to the perceived easiness to use, for example, the short period of time needed to learn how to use social media to gain relevant information about suppliers' activities. Furthermore, applicability may be an issue. Attitudes represent a cluster of beliefs, assessed feelings and behavioral intentions – they are judgments reflecting people's background and various life experiences (Hellriegel *et al.*, 1995; McShane and Von Glinow, 2005). If a person felt that social media was no good, he would not be using his company's Wiki for information gathering. This means that perceptions and attitudes toward social media affect social media usage of B2B customers. Hence, the following hypothesis is made:

- H5.* The higher the perception of the usability of the social media for B2B purposes, the more the social media business usage increases.
- H5a.* Perceived easiness to use increases social media business usage.
- H5b.* Perceived social media's applicability for B2B activities increases social media business usage.
- H5c.* Perceived social media's usage benefits for B2B activities increase social media business usage.

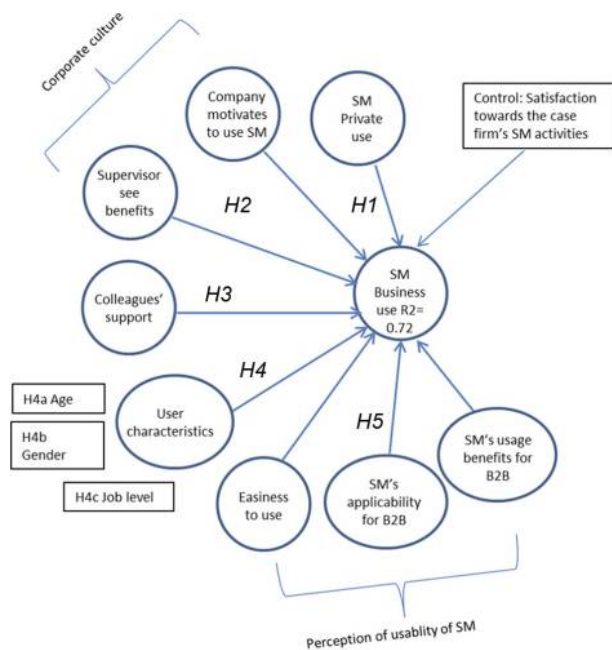
The conceptual model which will be tested in the empirical part of the study is presented in Figure 1.

Research design and methodology

Sample description

To test the hypotheses, a survey was conducted in cooperation with an IT service company operating mainly in Northern Europe. The case company provides IT and product engineering service and its main markets are in Scandinavia, Russia and Poland. The survey was conducted in Finnish as the target segment consisted of case company's B2B-customers having operations in Finland. The questionnaire was pre-tested to validate the content, questions, format and scales before the actual survey was conducted (internally and with five customers who are not included in the final sample as some modifications were made to the questionnaire to improve its clarity). The sampling frame was received from the company's marketing representatives and consisted of key customer contacts. The data were collected by means of an online cross-sectional survey in spring 2011. The respondents were contacted by email, which included a covering letter and the link to the online survey which could be filled in 10-15 minutes. The survey was sent to 616 key contact persons from the customer companies of the case company from industries such as processing, energy, forest industries as well as telecom

Figure 1 Conceptual framework



and media, government and public and retail and logistics. After one reminder, the response rate reached a figure of 13 per cent ($N = 82$). Three-fourths of the respondents were male and one-fourth female. The age of the respondents varied between 18 and 65 years the average being 47 years. 36.6 per cent of the respondents were between 40 and 49 years. Almost all the responses (95 per cent) were given by senior, middle or general managers. Approximately half of the respondents followed the case company's social media marketing at the time of the data collection. The most important social media types to follow the case company were business social media communities and forums (50 per cent of the respondents) and LinkedIn (26 per cent), followed by the case company or its product profile Web sites (10 per cent). Almost half (49 per cent) of the respondents considered that restricted social media network would support the co-operation between the customer companies and the case company well. This can be seen as a clear indicator of the security concerns many B2B companies have for the public social media (Isokangas and Kankkunen, 2011). Approximately one fourth of the respondents felt that the case company should increase its social media presence; at the time of the data collection the case company had social media presence and it had used e.g. YouTube for external communication and marketing but the use of social media for external purposes can be seen having less importance.

Variable measurement, constructs and methods

Operationalization was done by choosing specific variables that capture the constructs that are examined. Majority of the items and scales defined in operationalization are adapted from different sources, and in most of the cases, Likert scales were used (1-7 or 1-5). The items and scales are presented in Appendix. Both academic and managerial references have been used to develop the relevant measurement combination

(for main sources see e.g. Constantinides and Fountain, 2008; Hanna, 2009; Lehtimäki *et al.*, 2009). These three sources were used, for example, to classify social media tools/channels for the "use of social media" questions. First, the exploratory factor analysis (Varimax rotation) was utilized to analyze the dimensionality of the corporate culture and usability dimensions. Based on the factor analysis, the corporate culture variables were merged into two factors and the usability variables into three factors, of which we created summated latent variables. The two factors for corporate culture are named as:

- 1 company motivates to use social media; and
- 2 supervisors see benefits in social media.

Corporate culture items related to the social media guidelines or policies were adapted mostly from Lehtimäki *et al.* (2009), and other sources for these include e.g. Avandade (2008). Psychological dimension (i.e. in relation to perceived usability and attitudes) included three latent variables:

- 1 usage benefits of social media in the B2B setting;
- 2 applicability of social media in B2B; and
- 3 social media's easiness to use.

These items were adapted, e.g. from Ramos (2009) and Lehtimäki *et al.* (2009). For social measures (reference group, i.e. colleague's support), our key sources from where the items are adapted are Lehtimäki *et al.* (2009) and Kotler and Keller (2012). We also controlled the role of the case company's social media marketing. This was done by studying the effect of satisfaction toward the case firm's social media activities on general usage of social media for business purposes.

In this study, partial least squares (PLS) modeling was utilized to analyze the relationship between the dependent variable (social media business use) and the independent variables simultaneously by using SmartPLS software (Ringle *et al.*, 2005). PLS is a variance-based and prediction-oriented multivariate approach suitable for testing exploratory theories (Henseler *et al.*, 2009). Descriptives, correlation matrix containing the main scales utilized and information on their discriminant validity can be found in Table I.

Results

The use of social media services (or applications) is not very common within the key customer contacts of the focal company. The respondents of this study use the different social media services for both business and private purposes monthly or less than monthly on average. Many persons also reported that they never use many of the social media services. This is in line with other countries; for instance, more than 25 per cent of North American B2B companies are only slightly or not at all involved in social media (Accenture, 2011). There is no significant difference between the social media private and business use. The three most used social media services for business purposes are as follows: to follow discussion in business communities and forums (e.g. the biggest Finnish daily business newspaper Web site Kauppalehti.fi), participate in social networks (e.g. LinkedIn) and read content on third-party content sharing sites (e.g. YouTube). The three social media services that the respondents would see beneficial to use more for business purposes are as follows: webinars and podcasts, user ratings and reviews and searches. The majority

Table 1 Descriptives, correlations and discriminant validity

Construct	Mean	SD	CR	AVE	Alpha	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1 Age (1 = youngest, 4 = oldest)	2.29	0.96	NA	NA	NA	NA	0.011	0.000	0.004	0.090	0.030	0.000	0.003	0.124	0.093	0.050	0.007
2 Satisfaction toward case firm SM	4.57	1.14	NA	NA	NA	0.104	NA	0.017	0.001	0.004	0.035	0.000	0.005	0.002	0.001	0.005	0.000
3 Colleagues' support	3.84	1.45	0.907	0.765	0.851	0.001	0.132	0.875	0.155	0.013	0.034	0.036	0.232	0.078	0.177	0.241	0.138
4 Company motivates to use SM	4.28	1.47	0.935	0.707	0.917	0.060	0.032	0.394	0.841	0.005	0.033	0.018	0.114	0.055	0.038	0.055	0.240
5 Easiness to use	3.01	1.31	NA	NA	NA	0.299	-0.064	0.115	0.069	NA	0.007	0.009	0.021	0.073	0.201	0.133	0.012
6 Gender (1 = male, 2 = female)	1.24	0.43	NA	NA	NA	-0.174	-0.186	-0.183	0.181	0.083	NA	0.017	0.000	0.000	0.008	0.001	0.011
7 Position (1 = highest, 5 = lowest)	2.21	0.84	NA	NA	NA	0.000	-0.022	0.191	0.134	0.097	0.131	NA	0.037	0.002	0.001	0.043	0.002
8 Social media business use (DV)	3.82	0.83	0.902	0.605	0.869	0.051	-0.073	0.482	0.337	0.143	-0.001	0.192	0.778	0.557	0.201	0.340	0.147
9 Social media private use	3.53	0.99	0.919	0.618	0.896	0.352	-0.039	0.279	0.234	0.271	0.010	0.045	0.746	0.786	0.226	0.288	0.075
10 SM's applicability for B2B	3.62	1.29	0.868	0.767	0.705	0.304	0.024	0.420	0.196	0.448	-0.092	0.033	0.448	0.475	0.876	0.351	0.113
11 SM's usage benefits for B2B companies	3.42	1.18	0.903	0.650	0.867	0.224	-0.068	0.491	0.234	0.365	-0.034	0.208	0.583	0.536	0.593	0.806	0.208
12 Supervisor see benefits	4.09	1.16	0.880	0.786	0.727	0.081	0.011	0.371	0.490	0.112	0.103	0.050	0.384	0.274	0.337	0.456	0.886

Notes: Social media use scales (8 and 9) Likert 1-5, where 5 = daily use and 1 = never; scales 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11 and 12 are Likert 1-7, where 7 is fully agree and 1 fully disagree; CR = composite reliability, AVE = average variance extracted, SD = standard deviation, Alpha = Cronbach's alpha value; bold diagonal figures are the square roots of AVE; the figures below the diagonal are the construct correlations and the figures above are the squared construct correlations

of the respondents think that restricted social media tools with, e.g., suppliers would support business. This is in line with the report by Lakkala (2011), which highlights that B2B companies would like to widen the internally used social media workings and start using them in cooperation with partners.

Assessment of the measurement model

Internal reliability of the model was examined by calculating Cronbach's alphas and composite reliability scores. All the multi-item scales have alpha values above > 0.7 and composite reliability scores greater than the suggested threshold of 0.7 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1998, see also Table I). The indicator reliability was measured by taking in only the indicators with the standardized outer loadings above 0.7. Convergent validity was assessed by studying average variance extracted (AVE). All the AVE values for latent multi-item constructs are 0.5 or greater (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity was examined by using AVE and cross-loadings. All the AVE values were greater than the squared correlations between the constructs, as shown in Table I (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Also, the cross-loadings were all lower than the indicator loadings for each construct, which advocates discriminant validity.

Path analysis and the assessment of the structural model

The predictability of the actual structural model was analyzed using R^2 . The R^2 value explaining our endogenous construct, social media business use, was 0.72, and consequently, the model predicts the use of social media for business purposes very well. The results of the PLS analysis are presented in Table II. Private social media usage ($H1$) has the strongest relationship with the social media business use (coefficient = 0.671, $t = 8.693$), and consequently, $H1$ is supported. The other significant exogenous variables are colleagues' support for using social media which provides support for $H3$ (coefficient = 0.150, $t = 1.785$, which is significant with a single-tail test criterion), and age (coefficient = -0.217 , $t = 2.633$) and job position of the respondent (coefficient = 0.107, $t = 1.751$), providing support for $H4a$ and $H4c$. Consequently, the lower the age or the position of the

respondent in the customer organization, the more he/she uses social media for business purposes. We have to note, however, that job position is only almost significant if the two-tailed test criterion is used.

As seen from Table II, the other hypotheses were not supported in our sample. This is partially surprising especially regarding the perception of usability (or attitude)-related factors. Coefficient for applicability is positive but really small, for example. It seems that within our sample the respondents do not yet see social media as usable, i.e. they believe that their suppliers do not do social media marketing activities in a way which would create additional value to them. Also, our control variable regarding the case company (i.e. satisfaction toward the case firm's social media activities) is negative although insignificant.

Discussion and conclusions

The usage of social media and networks has increased remarkably over the past few years. Social media and social media marketing are common in B2C domain. B2B marketers have also begun to investigate how to utilize social media in their marketing efforts, and there is potential in social media for B2B companies to gather valuable information from customers, network with customers and establish a communication dialogue with customers. The aim of this study was to clarify the use of social media among B2B customers and how they are exposed to social media marketing in B2B domain. The first major objective was to study whether social media private use influences social media use for business purposes. Our results show that private social media use has the most significant relationship with the social media business use. Therefore, it can be concluded that in many cases, the persons who use social media for private purposes tend to use social media also for business purposes. This is in line with the finding that people have the same personalities and usually have similar behavioral models when they act as private persons and consumers or business persons (Rieck, 2010; Webster and Wind, 1972).

The second major objective was to study whether corporate culture and social (i.e. colleague-related) factors and personal (i.e. general user characteristics) and psychological (i.e.

Table II Assessment of path analysis

Paths	Standardized coefficient	t-statistic	Hypothesis supported?
Control: satisfaction toward the case firm's SM	-0.051	0.671	No
<i>H1. SM private use</i>	<i>0.671</i>	<i>8.693</i>	Yes*
<i>H2a. Corporate culture: company motivates to use SM</i>	<i>0.063</i>	<i>0.828</i>	No
<i>H2b. Corporate culture: supervisor see benefits in the use of SM</i>	<i>0.064</i>	<i>0.657</i>	No
<i>H3. Colleagues' support for using SM</i>	<i>0.150</i>	<i>1.785</i>	Yes*
<i>H4a. User characteristics: age</i>	<i>-0.217</i>	<i>2.633</i>	Yes*
<i>H4b. User characteristics: gender</i>	<i>-0.043</i>	<i>0.540</i>	No
<i>H4c. User characteristics: job position</i>	<i>0.107</i>	<i>1.751</i>	Yes*
<i>H5a. Perception of usability: easiness to use</i>	<i>-0.082</i>	<i>1.087</i>	No
<i>H5b. Perception of usability: SM's applicability for B2B</i>	<i>0.056</i>	<i>0.607</i>	No
<i>H5c. Perception of usability: SM's usage benefits for B2B</i>	<i>0.124</i>	<i>1.283</i>	No

Notes: Dependent variable: SM business use, $R^2 = 0.72$; numbers in italics show the significant paths ($p < 0.05$ or more); *single-tailed test, significance level 0.05 or more

perception of usability-related) factors influence social media use for business purposes. Based on this study, organizational culture does not have a significant impact on business social media behavior. The correlations between the cultural constructs and the use of social media for business purposes were positive, but in the path analysis, these relationships were not significant. Therefore, our study does not find support for the statement that corporate culture has a major influence on customer behavior (cf. Kotler and Keller, 2012). One reason for this can be found from the fact that only 30 per cent of the respondents reported that their supervisors think that social media can benefit B2B sector operations, whereas half of the respondents did not have an opinion on the matter and every fourth (26 per cent) respondent answered that the senior management does not see benefits in social media. Our conclusion here would be that most of the organizations have not really taken this issue forward and they are lacking guidelines, policies and consequently corporate mindset on this matter (although approximately 50 per cent of the companies had some kind of social media guidelines). Therefore, it is mostly the early adopters independently who take the lead in this development or inspired by their peers. Our results support this type of thinking by showing that the behavior of colleagues is significantly impacting the use of social media. The respondents, whose colleagues use social media for business purposes and see benefits in social media business use, tend to use social media for business purposes more. This result supports the finding of behavioral scientists that people often act in accordance with a reference group (Hyman, 1942; Kotler and Keller, 2012; Merton and Kitt, 1952; Murell Dawson and Chatman, 2001). Regarding user characteristics, our results highlight that social media business use is connected to age and job position (job level) as those key customer accounts who were younger and in lower corporate positions tend to use social media more for business purposes. The age proved to be a significant driver of the behavior though the number of young respondents was very small in this survey. Therefore, the results of the study support earlier studies conducted in Finland, for example, in which it has been found that young adults use social media more than older people and women use social media a bit more than men and CEOs use social media very seldom (Isokangas and Kankkunen, 2011; Lakkala, 2011).

The results related to the perceptions of the usability are more puzzling from the B2B social media marketers' perspective as within our sample the perception of usability was not significantly related to the use of social media for business purposes. Behavioral scientists, in general, suggest that attitudes or perceptions affect behavior (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Hellriegel *et al.*, 1995; McShane and Von Glinow, 2005; Venkatesh *et al.*, 2003), but in our case, it may be that the respondents currently do not see social media as an effective medium to receive marketing communications or B2B marketers just do not use the social media well at the moment. The means for the latent variables were somehow low as well (e.g. 3.01 for "easiness to use" and 3.42 for the "applicability for B2B"). The path coefficient for easiness to use was even negative although not significant. This might again have to do with the age and background of the key account people in customer companies, which makes social

marketing contingencies challenging for an industrial marketer. However, the reason might be contextual which is at least partially proven by our case study as well. The satisfaction toward the case firm's social media activities did not increase social media business use in general. Consequently, this may mean that at least currently it is not believed to be useful to receive marketing information about IT projects via social media, and in more general terms, the respondents do not see added value in their suppliers' presence in social media and consequently, are not using social media for B2B. This is in line with general thinking of the TAM model as the behavioral intention is determined by perceived usefulness and perceived easiness to use (Venkatesh and Davis, 2000; Venkatesh *et al.*, 2003). One could ask what additional benefits social media brings if the social media is considered as another channel (cf. Weinberg and Pehlivan, 2011) and is compared to personal selling which dominates many B2B marketing relationships.

Implications for managers

The results show that social media services are still very seldom used for business purposes among managers and senior managers. There can be several reasons why social media is not utilized for business purposes. One reason is the fact which is stressed in the results of this survey: social media does not reach industrial customers and the customers' senior management does not see social media marketing bringing them benefits. When planning social media activities, companies really need to consider which social media services could serve their marketing and communication targets and would reach the customers. Furthermore, they need to give their customers a reason to engage in social media and the first step is to listen to customers and find out what they would like to hear, like to talk about, enjoy and value (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The B2B sector differs from the B2C, and therefore, the similar kind of social media activities may not serve both sectors. Several characteristics of the B2B-sector, for instance security requirements, need to be taken into consideration when planning social media activities. The business social media use is still fairly passive, i.e. customers do not actively comment and open a discussion in social media, but the social media is more a source of information. The active participation is the corner stone of social media, and thus, companies need to consider how to activate business social media users to get the best out of social media services. If customers prefer social media services as only a source of information, then social media activities can be reduced to certain limited social media services as blogs (cf. e.g. the classification of the social media based on interaction; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). From these points of view, it is important to investigate which social media services the customers would prefer to use and not to invest a lot of money and resources into several social media services at once. Choosing the right medium for any given purpose depends on the target group to be reached and the message to be communicated (Bernof, 2009; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Companies should be active wherever their customers are present (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), and our results support the idea of more restrictive social media services taking the

prime position in this development. This would mean a new generation of intranets, for example.

Furthermore, as private use is the key driving factor for business use, companies have to consider how to make their customers start using the same tool for business purpose and how marketing could support this migration. It is also of importance to be able to find the persons in the customers' organization who are willing and able to use social media, as colleagues' support increases the use of social media for B2B purposes. Consequently, it might be wise to market social media services to certain key persons in the customer organization or launch social media services, for instance, with a project group consisting of members from the customer side.

Limitations and further research

This study includes some situational factors which may have had an influence on the results. First, due to the rather low response rate (13 per cent, 82 respondents) no explicit conclusions and generalizations concerning the wider B2B population can be drawn based on this study. We believe, however, that our results give a rather realistic picture of the B2B social media following among senior managers as this study included the case company's key customer contacts who typically are managers or directors with quite a lot of experience. Second, this leads to the fact that the average age of the respondents is high (47 years). Most likely, younger respondents would behave differently and consequently testing the conceptual model in other settings is suggested. Third, the survey was cross-sectional. Therefore, no comparison between different periods of time or analysis of the progress of social media use could be carried out. Consequently, questions about causality and normal worries in relation to common method bias can be presented. Fourth, there are naturally other factors affecting behavior which have not been studied in this article, such as technological factors, which should be taken into consideration in the future studies focusing on business social media use.

Furthermore, social media use is clearly changing and there will be diffusions of new innovations and developments in the user base. The model suggested should be tested in the future again so that the progress could be followed. Second, it would be useful to conduct a study focusing on social media marketing which incorporates cooperative development and implementation with customers. Every company needs to plan their own business social media strategy which takes into account the customer cooperation requirements, and therefore, social media activities cannot be automatically copied from one company to another. However, a study of social media development and implementation project could highlight common aspects which should be considered when planning and implementing business social media activities in the B2B sector.

Our firm belief is that social media will evolve toward tighter cooperation between suppliers and customers. This article provides a platform for further studies as one of the first studies focusing on social media customer behavior in B2B setting. All in all, companies need support in the planning of social media activities and marketing and hopefully our study provides insights and ideas for relevant audiences.

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Appendix. Measures (Likert 1-7 if not stated otherwise)

User characteristics (three single-item scales)

Age (age), Scale 1-4 (1 < 40 years, 2 = 40-49 years, 3 = 50-59 years, 4 = 60-65 years).

Gender (gender) (1 = male, 2 = female).

Occupation – Job level (job position) Scale 1-5 (1 = C-level [e.g. CEO, CFO], 2 = senior management [e.g. VP, GM], 3 = middle management [e.g. director, dept. head], 4 = manager, 5 = individual contributor).

Corporate culture: company motivates to use social media (6 items, alpha = 0.917) (company motivates to use SM)

My company encourages its employees to follow public social media (e.g. read blogs and follow discussions).

My company encourages taking part in public social media (e.g. comment, write a blog, share documents).

My company encourages its employees to follow social media sites restricted for certain users (e.g. read blogs and follow discussions in company internal sites or in joint networks with the supplier or customer).

My company encourages taking part in restricted social media networks (e.g. comment, write a blog, share documents).

My company allocates time and resources for communicating via public social media and updating and monitoring public social media applications.

My company allocates time and resources for communicating via restricted social media sites and updating and monitoring restricted social media applications.

Corporate culture: Supervisors see benefits in social media (2 items, alpha = 0.727) (supervisors see benefits)

Senior managers in the company think that social media can benefit in B2B sector operations.

My supervisor thinks that social media can benefit in B2B operations.

Social measure: colleagues’ support (3 items, alpha = 0.851) (colleagues’ support)

My co-workers (i.e. people I work with e.g. team/project members) use social media for business purposes.

My co-workers think that social media supports business/team/project work.

My co-workers do not motivate my team members to utilize social media. (reverse coded).

Perception of the usability of social media (psychological) measures

Social media usage benefits for B2B companies (5 items, alpha = 0.867) (SM’s usage benefits for B2B).

Social media is a good way to gather feedback and recommendations in B2B sector.

A supplier which utilizes social media (public or restricted) for customer cooperation and marketing purposes is innovative and efficient.

A supplier which utilizes social media (public or restricted) for customer cooperation and marketing is efficient.

Presence in social media can strengthen the credibility of a company.

It is important for an IT-company in the B2B sector to be present in social media.

Cooperation with suppliers via restricted social media tools (e.g. restricted communities, forums) supports work*.

Social media’s applicability for B2B 2 items, alpha = 0.705) (SM’s applicability for B2B)

Social media does not reach industrial customers (reverse coded).

Information in public social media is unreliable. (reverse coded)*

Social media is suitable only for private use and cannot be utilized in co-operation between B2B companies. (reverse coded).

Social media’s easiness to use (single item) (easiness to use)

Utilization of social media is too time-consuming. (reverse coded)*

Social media applications are difficult to use. (reverse coded)

Control: satisfaction toward the case firm’s social media activities (single item) (Satisfaction toward the case firm’s SM activities)

I receive relevant information of the X company via social media channels.

Social media business use (6 items, alpha = 0.869) (business use)

Which social media resources do you use for business purposes? (Likert 1-5)**

Read user ratings and reviews for business product or services.

Visit company or product profile pages on social media sites (public or restricted sites).

Conduct searched for business information on social media sites.

Attend webinars or listen to podcasts*.

Visit company blogs.

Participate in online social networks (e.g. LinkedIn).

Follow discussions (i.e. no personal comments or discussion openings) in online business communities or forums (e.g.

member-initiated, company-hosted or third-party established; public or restricts sites).

Participate in discussions in online business communities or forums (e.g. member-initiated, company-hosted or third-party established; public or restricts sites).

Read business-related content on customer or supplier content sharing sites (e.g. customer-supplier wiki/forum/community)*.

Read business-related content on third-party content sharing sites (e.g. slideshare.net, Wikipedia)*.

Download business-related content on customer or supplier content sharing sites (e.g. customer-supplier wiki/forum/community)*.

Download business-related content on third-party content sharing sites (e.g. slideshare.net, Wikipedia)*.

Subscribe to RSS feeds of business-related news or information sites*.

Social media private use (5 items, alpha = 0.896) (private use)

Which social media resources do you use for private purposes? (Likert 1-5)**.

Read user ratings and reviews for business product or services*.

Visit company or product profile pages on social media sites.

Conduct searches for information on social media sites.

Attend webinars or listen to podcasts*.

Visit blogs.

Participate in online social networks (e.g. LinkedIn).

Follow discussions (i.e. no personal comments or discussion openings) in online communities or forums (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, TripAdvisor).

Participate in discussions in online communities or forums (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, TripAdvisor).

Read content on customer or supplier content sharing sites (e.g. society/company maintained restricted forum)*.

Read content on open third-party content sharing sites (e.g. YouTube, Slideshare.net, Wikipedia)*.

Download and distribute content on customer or supplier content sharing sites (e.g. customer-supplier wiki/forum/community)*.

Download and distribute content on third-party content sharing sites (e.g. YouTube, Slideshare.net, Wikipedia)*.

Subscribe to RSS feeds (automated information regarding the updates)*. (*Item deleted in the measurement purification process; ** Likert scale: 5 = daily, 4 = weekly, 3 = a couple of times per month, 2 = less than monthly, 1 = never Likert scale 1-7: 1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree).

About the authors

Hanna Keinänen works as a Senior Project Manager for Tieto Corporation. She received her MSc degree in economics and business administration from the Lappeenranta University of Technology (LUT), School of Business.

Olli Kuivalainen, DSc (economics and business administration), is a Professor of international marketing and entrepreneurship at the Lappeenranta University of Technology (LUT), School of Business, Finland. His expertise covers broad areas of marketing, international business and technology management and their interfaces. His research interests are in the areas of international entrepreneurship, and strategic management, marketing and internationalization of knowledge-intensive firms, the focus especially being on firms operating in the domains of media and information and communication technologies. His work has been published in journals such as *Journal of World Business*, *Journal of International Marketing*, *International Business Review*, *Technovation*, *International Marketing Review*, *International Journal of Production Economics* and *Journal of International Entrepreneurship*. Olli Kuivalainen is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: olli.kuivalainen@lut.fi