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# **Customer Relationship Management Via Social Selling**

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Abstract  <p>Social selling is a growing phenomenon in the world. The increasing use of social media in personal and professional life is driving the decision-making process to online environments. Nowadays, decisions are made based on recommendations from peers rather than based on facts. Professionals have started engaging their customers and decision makers directly in social media, which is making the sales process very personal. We are dealing with the next level of customer relationship management (CRM), which is not visible in the companies' CRM systems. This led to the following question: Should we adapt social media channels as part of CRM?</p> <p>The aim of this study was to reveal why we should use social media channels as part of companies' CRM. Other objectives were to reveal whether there would be some positive and negative aspects in doing so and whether customer engagement would be more effective through social media.</p> <p>The research method that was used in this research was qualitative. Ten people from the small and medium sized business sector were interviewed. They were asked four to eight questions related to social selling and CRM. In the analysis part of the study, the focus was on finding the similarities and differences between the interviewees' answers. The semi-structured interview method was used to collect this information.</p> <p>According to the results, the respondents seemed to agree on the potential of social selling in new contacts. However, people need still more information about social selling and the possibilities that are available when CRM and social media channels are connected.</p>		
Keywords/tags Customer relationship management, Social selling, Marketing automation, sales force automation, Social CRM, Social media		
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## Description

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<p>Abstrakti</p> <p>Sosiaalinen Myynti on kasvava ilmiö maailmalla. Sosiaalisen median kasvanut käyttö arki- ja työelämässä on johtanut siihen, että päätöksentekoprosessi tapahtuu verkossa. Nykypäivänä päätöksiä tehdään tuttavien suosituksien mukaan, ei niinkään faktojen pohjalta. Ammatillaiset ovat ruvenneet kontaktoimaan asiakkaitaan ja päätöksentekijöitä suoraan sosiaalisessa mediassa, tehden myyntiprosessista hyvin henkilökohtaista. Kyseessä on kehittyneempää asiakkuudenhallintaa, joka ei jätä jälkeä yritysten asiakkuudenhallintajärjestelmiin. Tämä johti seuraavaan kysymykseen: Tulisiko sosiaalisen median kanavat sisällyttää osaksi asiakkuudenhallintaa.</p> <p>Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoitus oli selvittää pitäisikö sosiaalisen median kanavia käyttää osana yritysten asiakkuudenhallintaa. Muina päämäärinä oli selvittää olisiko tällä jotain positiivisia ja negatiivisia vaikutuksia asiakkuudenhallintaan sekä selvittää onko asiakkuudenhallinta tehokkaampaa sosiaalisen median kautta.</p> <p>Tutkimustapana käytettiin laadullista tutkimusta. Kymmenen ihmistä haastateltiin pienien ja keskisuurien yritysten sektorilta. Heiltä kysyttiin neljästä kahdeksaan kysymystä liittyen sosiaaliseen myyntiin ja asiakkuudenhallintaan. Analysointi vaiheessa keskityttiin löytämään samanlaisuuksia sekä eroavaisuuksia vastauksista. Vastausten saamiseksi käytettiin teema-haastattelua.</p> <p>Tulosten mukaan vastaajat näyttivät olevan samaa mieltä siitä että, sosiaalisen myynnin mahdollisuudet ovat uusissa kontakteissa. Ihmiset kaipaavat kuitenkin vielä lisätietoa sosiaalisesta myynnistä sekä mahdollisuuksista, kun asiakkuudenhallinta ja sosiaalisen median kanavat yhdistetään.</p>		
<p>Avainsanat</p> <p>Asiakkuudenhallinta, Sosiaalinen myynti, Markkinoinnin automaatio, Myyntivoiman automaatio, Sosiaalinen asiakkuudenhallinta, Sosiaalinen media</p>		
Miscellaneous		

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# 1. Introduction

## **History of Customer Relationship Management (CRM)**

Before we had a superfast internet and highly complex information and communication technology -systems (ICT), everything was done in a more traditional way. Pen and paper were the tools for practicing CRM. Those in charge of CRM had the name of the customer, knew their weekly order, and all they had to do was to write this information down and they could predict the future. This kind of data was collected data from each customer, put in a box, and this resulted in a simple CRM system. However, the early stages of the process are for nothing if the data is just lying in the box and it is never used. After all, the main idea of CRM is to create sales for a business organization by using customer data. (Buttle & Maklan 2015)

Nowadays, CRM ties together almost everything that is relevant to an organization's business. Whether it is the customer or prospective customer contacts, leads, accounts or sales prospects, they can all be found in one central location.

## **History of Social Selling**

The roots of social selling lead back to a study completed by the British Columbia University. They found that if a salesperson and a prospect share common interests, they are more likely to do business together. (Jiang, Dahl, Chattopahdyay & Hoegg 2009) In order to understand social selling, we should know something about the evolution of sales. Sales used to be about making numerous phone calls, convincing the prospect with the sales pitch and making them feel secure about the message, and the more one did this, the more closed deals one could achieve. (The 7 Steps of the Sales process) The sales have changed little from what was described above. The most clearly changed aspect in the sales process would be the customer behavior. Nowadays, unlimited data and information have driven prospects to look for information online and ask for recommendations from other people, which has led to a situation where customers are highly knowledgeable of their options in each market field. A study completed by Forrester shows that the average prospects have already completed 60% to 90% of their decision-making process before even engaging the

sales professionals. (Miller 2013) We are in the era of sales where the potential prospects know probably more about the seller's business than the seller knows about theirs. This drives salespersons to a point where they must become masters of their own field to match customer expectations or they will not succeed in sales.

### **Research Motivation**

The motivation to write this thesis comes from the author's own life. CRM and sales are part of the author's everyday life. The author has also been closely following the rise of social media. It is a booming trend affecting all the business areas, and it would be foolish not to take a closer look at the opportunities it creates. The author's approach to this topic comes mainly from a salesperson's perspective. CRM can be technically complex, challenging and confusing but the author does not take a deep dive into the technical side of CRM. He wanted to grasp the main idea of CRM, which was creating sales by using customer data. We can take that ideology and move on to the next part of the topic, which was social selling. We try to understand how the opportunities that social selling offers us could be used to support customer relationship management

### **Research Objectives and Questions**

The author chose two research questions for which he sought answers.

Research question number 1: Why use social selling as a part of CRM?

Answering to this question gives us a good understanding of the current state of why specialists are using social selling as part of their CRM. This is quite an easy question that helps us to see the different aspects that we might not have thought ourselves.

Research question number 2: What might be the advantages and disadvantages of using social selling as part of CRM?

Answering to this question gives us professionals' view of the positive and negative sides of social selling as part of CRM. Through this, we can evaluate in which situations we should use social selling and in which we should absolutely not use it.

Obliviously, in the era of social media, sales persons should promote themselves in social media. The complex part of doing so is how to make it an advantage and success for the business.

## 2. Theory and knowlegde base

Keywords

**Customer relationship management (CRM):** refers to strategies, technologies and practices that companies use to master and analyze their customer lifecycle. Analyzing interactions and customer data are the key factors. The main goal of CRM is to improve relationships with the customers and maintain the already existing customers and, most importantly, increase companies' sales growth. (Buttle & Maklan 2015, 3-4)

**Marketing Automation:** Marketing automation as a definition refers to software whose main goal is to automate marketing. (Sweezey 2014, 7-9)

**Sales force automation (SFA):** Refers to software applications that help salespersons with their sales process. (Agnihotri 2010, 7-8)

**Social CRM:** Refers to using social media channels, techniques and technology to allow organizations to communicate and engage with their customers online. (Lacy, Diamond & Ferrara 2013)

**Social selling:** Refers to a concept about creating a social network with the right prospects, building trusted relationships among them, and finally, reaching the sales goals. (Hughes & Reynolds 2016, 1-5)

**Social media:** Refers to an online process involving people creating content and communities using different web technologies. (Ahlqvist, Bäck, Halonen & Heinonen 2008)

### 2.1 Customer Relationship Management

CRM as a definition refers to strategies, technologies and practices that companies use to master and analyze their customer lifecycle. It includes analyzing interactions

and customer data. The main goal is to improve relationships with the customers, maintain the already existing customers and, most importantly, increase sales growth. (Buttle & Maklan 2015, 3-4) If we take a closer look, we can see that more than a half of the users adapt CRM within their company's first five years in business. (Hollar 2015) This leads us to the conclusion that CRM is something that companies recognize that they need early on.

Complex CRM systems are designed to combine customer data and information from all the possible platforms that companies use, for example, companies' websites, social media channels, emails and mobile phones. Furthermore, it can give detailed information about the customers' buying habits, purchases, contracts and concerns. (Agnihotri 2010, 8-9)

Different CRM systems vary based on the technical level, but the main concept is almost always the same. CRM has traditionally two key functionalities that are marketing automation and sales force automation. In addition, there might be a possibility for contact center automation, but the author thought that it would not be very relevant to the topic and left it out.

### **Marketing Automation**

Marketing automation as a definition refers to software whose main goal is to automate marketing. The idea of marketing automation is simple: it helps marketers with lead generation, nurturing the leads, customer segmentation, lead scoring, maintaining customers, measuring marketing return of investment (ROI) and, of course, with up- and cross-selling. (Sweezey 2014, 7-9) CRM would be the tool for marketers and salespeople to keep their customer information in one place where all the previous data is accessible. Which campaigns the customer has received, how the customer has interacted and behaved are all important items of information, which helps companies to segment their customers with the future growth in mind. Usually, CRM also has the place where the marketing automation is created (or at least it offers the synchronization between the marketing automation tool and CRM). It offers an engagement engine for the marketers. It is the place where the automation processes are created, managed and automated. (Justen 2014)

### **Sales Force Automation**

Sales force automation (SFA) is something that comes right after the marketing automation phase. The marketing automation part usually has already all the basic information about the customer, but SFA brings more detailed information available. In addition to customer information, SFA usually contains handling leads, opportunities and reporting. Sales forecasts and performance-based figures help managers to manage their team, but they also give critical information to the salespersons for finding new sales opportunities among their existing customers. With carefully managed SFA, salespersons are able stay aware of what is happening with each customer. (Rouse 2011) This allows them to focus on their sales opportunities and on growing sales.

One of the CRM trends has been the Social CRM as part of SFA, which means connecting companies' Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or other social media accounts to their CRM and in this way monitoring how customers are behaving online. This will inform the companies about which channels the customers use, what they talk about and what kinds of problems they are trying to solve. All this is information that can be used to boost the company's next interaction with the customer and even to win the customer over from the competitors. (Lacy, Diamond & Ferrara 2013) Social CRM as part of CRM is a valuable addition that supports both marketers and salespersons.

## 2.2 Social Selling

Social selling, on the other hand, is something more personal than Social CRM, and it is based on the idea that individuals are in control. Social selling as a concept is about creating a social network with the right prospects, building trustful relationships among them, and finally, reaching sales goals. (Hughes & Reynolds 2016, 1-5)

Social selling has been divided to four pillars:

The first one is creating a professional brand. People seek for trust. Furthermore, it is human to trust. (Kramer 2009) However, people find it difficult to trust in new persons. Our ability to trust is usually the reason for our disappointments. Everyone is trying to sell something, and sometimes it is simply too difficult to separate the trustworthy from the untrustworthy ones. (Kramer 2009) Nowadays, buyers in B2B will

only work with companies in which they can trust. A strong professional brand usually means that the person is an active and respected individual in the industry, which could help winning the prospect's trust.

The second pillar is focusing on the right prospects. Social selling has made it easier to connect with prospects online. The numbers of social media users worldwide have increased immensely. The forecast for the future is that the numbers will keep growing as can be seen in Figure 1 below.

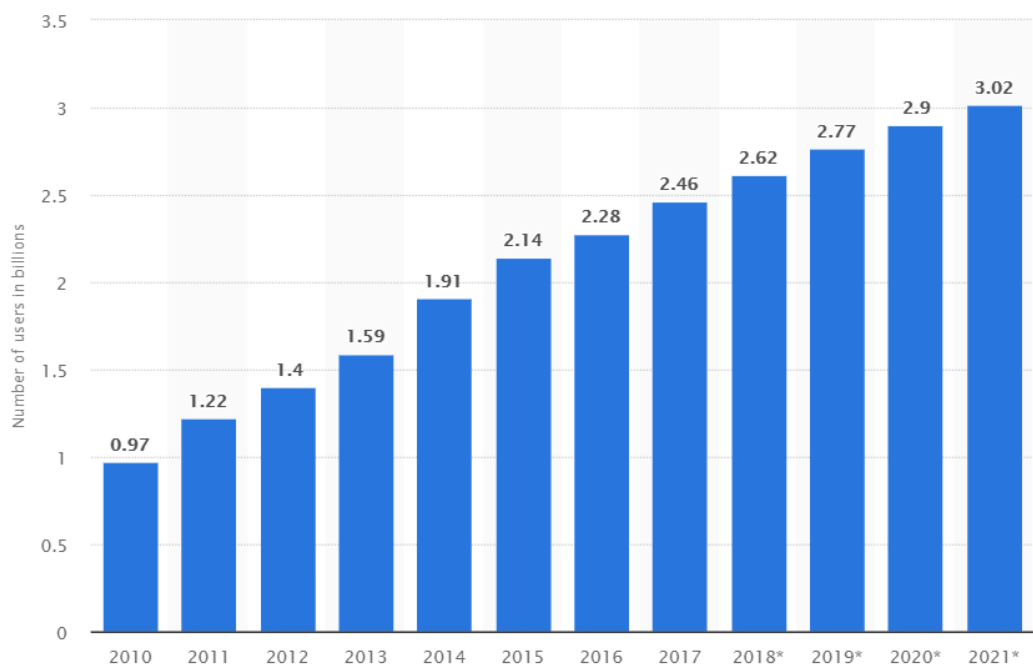


Figure 1. The number of social media users worldwide from 2010 to 2021 in billions. (Statista.com 2017)

Social media are connecting people from all over the world. Business partners do not have to be local anymore in order to start doing business together. This also means that the prospective customers might not even be in the same country as the seller. Social media is breaking the boundaries of the traditional sales. Over 76% of buyers are ready to have conversations online, and they are more eager to reveal

their role or function in the firm or industry. The right prospects could lead sales persons to the right networks and the sales persons' network equals their net worth. (Ghaderi 2016)

The third pillar of social selling requires the seller's own investment of time. It is all about engaging with insights. Sales people should work towards positions where they are the first to react to new products, publications, news or other important offerings of their industry. Furthermore, they should comment others' posts and share their own insight on various but still relevant topics. According to studies, 49% of people say they share valuable and entertaining content to others because it allows them to inform others about products or services that they find interesting. Furthermore, this might even lead to a change in opinion or even lead to action. The same study points out that people share to others because sharing defines them to others. 68% of people share because they think it gives a cleaner picture about them to their peer groups. (Moon 2014) From this, we could conclude that people are quite self-centered when it comes to sharing. We share information which is relevant to us or makes us look better in the eyes of our peers.

This leads to the fourth pillar of social selling: building trustful relationships. Before we can build a trustful relationship, we should understand something about trust. Below we can find a Figure 2 that describes the inter-relationship of the three core domains of trust: competence, reliability and sincerity.



Figure 2. Inter-relationship between the three core domains of trust. (Warrell 2015)

### Competence

Competence refers to measuring if the person whom one has met has the knowledge, skill or resources to perform the specific tasks that need to be performed. (Sasaki & Marsh 2012, 22-23) For example, if one is buying a computer, one would probably trust the salesperson at the computer store to choose the computer. However, one would probably not trust this person when taking a blood sample. It is all about evaluating if someone is trustworthy for the job.

### Reliability

Reliability means trusting people that their will honor their obligations and do what they have promised to do. (Warrell 2015) For example, we should be able to trust our car mechanic will repair our car in a given time. People who say that they will do something in a given time but fail to deliver are damaging their trustworthiness and, thus, damaging their reliability.

## Sincerity

In its purest form, sincerity is freedom from hypocrisy and deceit. (Markovits 2010, 21-23) This might be the most difficult element of trust to really grasp and understand. It might even be the most difficult to achieve because different situations demand different approaches. The main question would be whether a person can be counted on to do what is right no matter what the consequences might be. As sincerity is so delicate to build, it also means that it is the most difficult aspect to repair if it has been broken.

Now that we understand how trust works, we can go back to the fourth pillar of social selling which was building trustful relationships. For a salesperson, it might be difficult to keep from selling all the time. However, it might be damaging for the relationship if sales talk does not solve the prospect's pain points. The prospect is probably already measuring the seller's competence for the job. If the sales person promises to solve something for the customer but fails to deliver, the customer will probably not consider the sales person a reliable partner. Finally, the prospects want to buy something from the seller. However, if they could get it at a cheaper price from somewhere else, the seller has a problem of whether he/she should tell them or just sell it anyway and hope that they will never find out about the better option. If the seller gets caught, the prospect would probably not regard him/her as a sincere person.

## **3. Research approach, Design and Data Collection**

### **3.1 Methodology**

#### **Secondary Data**

The study was implemented by using both secondary data and primary data. The secondary data was collected from multiple sources found on the internet and in books. While collecting secondary data, the researcher must stay media critical of the sources. Sometimes we cannot possibly know if the author of the secondary data has written their text from a sales perspective to increase their own sales or if they have

written it to raise the common awareness of the topic. Thus, collecting and evaluating the relevant information from the secondary data falls totally upon the author's own informed decision, which affects the research deeply. The advantage of using secondary data is that it is quite economical. By this, the author means that it can be easily collected, and this saves a great deal of effort and expenses. Without relevant secondary data, it would be impossible to create relevant primary data. It gives us a direction to the questions for which we still need to find answers through our primary data collection. Moreover, it helps us to understand our problem more closely. At the same time, it helps the researcher to understand the topic more deeply. (Varianian 2011, 13-17)

The most important disadvantage of using secondary data is, as mentioned above, that we cannot know the accuracy of the data. Thus, the author must stay media critical through the whole process and look for multiple different sources to back up the theories used in the research. Secondly, authors must stay aware of the fact that information used in their research might already be outdated. (Brodeur, D. Israel & D. Graig 2017) This fact was one of the most important ones that the author kept closely in mind while writing this research. Social selling is an area that develops rapidly and keeps changing all the time as users discover better methodologies to use. Thus, the author stayed critical about information found in the books, simply because the data found in books might already have been outdated for this research. The author had to use multiple sources found on the internet, which were more likely suitable and up to date for this research purpose. For this research, the author started by searching secondary data related to customer relationship management and social selling. Even though there are already multiple studies on CRM and social media, the author had to conduct his own survey in order to obtain relevant primary data.

### **Primary Data**

Primary data by meaning is gathering specific data or information for you own research purposes. There are two types of primary data: quantitative and qualitative. From below in Figure 3 we can see examples of primary data in social research.

	<i>Solicited</i>	<i>Spontaneous</i>
Quantitative	Experiment	(Passive) observation
	Interview survey	Monitoring
	Mail survey	Administrative records
	Structured diary	(e.g., statistical records,
	Web survey	databases, Internet archives)
Qualitative	Open interview	(Participant) observation
	Focus group	Existing records (e.g.,
	Unstructured diary	ego-documents, images, sounds, news archives)

Figure 3. Examples of primary data in social research. (Hox & Boeijs 2005)

As we can see from the table, primary data collection can be done in multiple different ways. It can be done through experiment, observation, survey or interview. While choosing the methodology to collect primary data the researcher must keep their research questions in their mind. Furthermore, to what they wish to find the answers for. For example, according Ghauri & Grønhaug, if the researcher would like to hear about people's opinions, behavior and experiences in the past, they should contact these people and ask them questions. Choosing the right method to collect primary data can be critical and thus, the researcher is always affecting the outcome of the research.

There are many advantages of using primary data. The first advantage would be that it addresses specific research issues because the researcher controls the research design to fit the specific research problems. The second advantage of using primary data would be that the researcher has better control of how the information is collected. This way researcher has a better knowledge about the project. Furthermore, they can define the timeframe and goal far more efficiently. (Lamb, Hair & McDaniel 2011, 299) Even though collection primary data is highly powerful and useful method for acquiring data, it does not come without a fault. Collecting primary data can be costly. Creating the survey and concluding the survey takes time and resources. The expenses of these two factors compared to what secondary data requires are high. (Lamb, Hair & McDaniel 2011, 299) One of the biggest challenges for credibility of the primary data would be the researcher. Researcher might be looking for data that fits

hypothesizes which they have defined at the beginning of their research. This affects the research results and might be misleading. The last disadvantage would be the fact that primary data research requires large sample group for data to be credible. As said above concluding large scale surveys can be time consuming and costly, which usually leads that the surveys tend to be way too small for data to be credible. (Robyn 2014) Author of this text also had problems with this specific disadvantage.

### 3.2 Collecting Primary Data

Collecting primary data is extremely important for the success of the research. Challenging part of this would be as said before, that researcher must conclude it themselves. Researcher is constantly being influenced by outside factors and it might be challenging to stay neutral through the whole process. Preparation is the key for success in this case. If researcher has done their secondary data collecting carefully and reflects regularly back to their research questions during the primary data collection they have better chance in succeeding.

#### **Interviews**

As already mentioned, if the researcher would like to hear about people's opinions, behavior and experiences in the past, they should contact these people and ask them questions. (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2002, 81-82) For this reason, author decided to use interviews as a primary data collection method. More closely, the author decided to use semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews normally do not strictly follow any formalized list of questions. (Galletta 2013, 21-24) Author used question topics in more general level leaving room for discussions because the topic is so rapidly shaping and individuals tend to have their own preferences how to utilize it. Because of the time being essence here on both sides of the parties, author and the interviewees, the interviews were conducted via phone, email and in some rare exceptions in person.

#### **Planning and Executing Interviews**

As mentioned above, preparation is the key to success. Because author is lacking experience in conducting interviews they trusted model about designing and conducting semi-structured interviews prepared by Ted Zorn from Waikato Management School.

First step was to carefully prepare the interview. Even though the interviews are semi-structured it's important to write the key topics and questions down so that we will be able to ask them conceivably. (Zorn 2005)

Second step was to find the right target group for interviews. Luckily the research topic is quite hot topic in all business fields nowadays, so finding the target group wasn't that hard. Connections that author already had in the business world helped significantly to conclude the survey in such sort timeframe. Interviewees all work at the small and medium-sized businesses (SMB's) sector. Each one of them works closely with sales or marketing. However, their businesses operate in multiple business areas which made the interviews quite interesting. Author decided to focus only for SMB professionals because many sources state that social selling professionals come from SMB sector. We could argue that small and medium sized companies can adapt new things a little bit faster than large size companies. Rather new methods, like social selling are more easily adapted and performed in smaller firms. Thus, small and medium size businesses most likely have the social selling experts.

The interviewees were asked to participate for interviews beforehand, this way the author made sure that the interviewees would not be surprised by the topic. Author also delivered the topic of interview and the intended use of the collected data for the interviewees as Zorn recommended in his publication.

To create relaxing and comfortable climate at the start of the interview the author asked the interviewees few background questions concerning their job title and main responsibilities at their firms. Interviews through emails also had these questions to serve as a warm up for the interviewees. In top of that the interviewees answered the following questions presented by the author:

- How would you describe your behavior in social media? Would you describe it professional or unprofessional?

- In which ways are you trying to engage with your customers? Or are you having problems engaging with customers in right channels.
- Could you see a upside adapting social media channels as part of your CRM? What would be the key problems adapting social media channels as part of your CRM?
- Could you see any possibilities which social media could bring to you as a sales/marketing person? Which kind of possibilities and threats you see?

Questions were presented all in all to 15 authors business contacts. Unfortunately, only ten could answer them due the strict timeframe.

### 3.3 Analyzing the Data

Qualitative data such as data from interviews contains words and observations, not numbers. To analyze this kind of data researcher must use discipline, creativity and systematic approach. The main idea when starting to analyze data is to bring it to form in which it can be clearly see as organized and it will be understood. The process highly relays on three key figures. Firstly, the researchers must truly acknowledge the research questions. Secondly, they should understand the need of those who will use the research information. And thirdly, resources should support your research. (Taylor-Powell & Renner 2003)

People who are most likely to read this research are salespersons who are looking to improve their CRM process by adapting social selling as a part of their CRM. In addition to that focus group, marketing persons and system professionals might be interested reading this research to understand the needs of salespersons in their sales process. Without leaving out the fact that this is part of authors degree studies which might lead authors supervisors and fellow students to read it.

### 3.4 Research Credibility

#### **Credibility**

Credibility deals with three questions asking whether the research is trustworthy and believable and whether the conclusions are supported by the findings. (Marsden 2013) In this case, the author would argue that the research is trustworthy because the research questions were clear and the author conducted a systematic and comprehensive secondary data review. Of course, the biggest threat for the credibility of this research is the author himself. Others might have interpreted the data differently, but eventually, the author thinks that others would have made similar conclusions based on the gained results. Believability follows the trustworthiness of this research. As stated above, the biggest threat for the research would be the authors and the limited skills that they have in interviewing and conducting research. Authors should be extra careful not to make lightweight conclusions but rather just follow strictly the data. In this way, the authors ascertain that their conclusions are supported by the research findings.

### **Validity**

Validity can be understood as whether the findings are what they seem to be. Authors must make sure that their research design can answer the research questions. Furthermore, the authors must ascertain that their interviewees have understood the topic and the research purposes to maximize validity of their research. (Marsden 2013) In this case, all the interviewees were aware of the topic and the research purpose. The concepts of customer relationship management and social selling were clear to all the participants of the interviews.

### **Reliability**

Reliability indicates if the research process is repeatable. Research is reliable if the same research process can be completed repeatedly and it still gives the same results every time. (Marsden 2013) For this research, this might be the most difficult point to prove because of the limited time that the author had for completing the research. This research should be conducted multiple times instead of only once. However, the author argues that the data would still lead to the same findings if the research was repeated. Data received from this research should be applicable to other studies because the results give a good insight on the plausible future preferences in

this constantly evolving business area of social selling. Should someone start using social selling as part of their CRM, this study could prove to be useful.

### **Transferability**

Transferability refers to the possibility of applying the research findings to another context. Furthermore, it deals with the generalizability of the results. (Marsden 2013) In this case, the author argues that the findings of this study could be applied to another context. The findings could be used as a part of social media research and might be even used in studies that try to understand buyers or sellers' behaviors.

### **Ethics**

Ethics are with us every day in social and professional life. We can divide ethics in two aspects. Firstly, ethics refers to well-founded standards of right and wrong. (Velasquez, Andre, Shanks, S.J. & Meyer 2010) This means that as human beings, we ought to do what is right and what we are obligated to do. Secondly, it refers to a constant study and development of our own ethical standards. To do so we must examine constantly our ethical standards to ensure that those are reasonable and well-founded. (Velasquez, Andre, Shanks, S.J. & Meyer 2010)

Ethics in this research were mostly associated with data collection methods. In secondary data collection, the researcher must respect other researchers and the sources. All the sources used should be quoted correctly and one should never suggest something that another person said or discovered as their own. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, 73-75)

The primary data collection phase also has important associations with ethics. We are working with people and interviewing them. Thus, we are obligated to obtain the participants in good faith. Furthermore, we should brief them about the study and the purpose of the study. As in all research, we are trying to gain results from the research. Therefore, we should remember that the results are untouchable. One should never tamper with the results for someone's purposes. The results should be presented honestly and objectively by the researcher. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 70-75)

### **Limitations**

However, this research has some limitations because the business area is so rapidly changing. Do's and do not's might change in short range time. New social media channel might open and all the traffic might move to that platform which would make the results of this research questionable. Salesperson also gain more information every day and that information affects their behavior and preferences. Thus, in one year they might have totally changed their preferences towards social selling. Author reminds that this study is highly focusing on sales persons point of view of social selling. More importantly it's focusing on the current status of sales persons impressions of social selling as part of CRM.

#### **4. Research Results**

To effectively analyze the data author decided to create excel sheet. Excel sheet was divided to boxes by the similar key points made by the interviewees which author noticed. In the excel sheet we can see the main points which the interviewees made. Author argues that this way the reader creates a deeper understanding with the topic and will be more capable of analyzing the actual answers of the interviewees which can be found from the chapter 4.1. to 4.4. The box also helps us to understand how the answers were divided by the interviewees. As we can see above the questions were divided in two parts. The last question was more like a helping one. Thus, author left the second part out of the boxes.

Questions	Point 1	Point 2	Point 3
How would you describe your behavior in social media?	Depends on the social media channel (4 interviewees)	Strictly professional (2 interviewees)	Mixing it up (2 interviewees)
In which ways are you trying to engage with your customers?	Multichannel engagement mail, phone, social media etc. (5 interviewees)	Depends on the customer, others have different preferences (5 interviewees)	-
Could you see upsides or down sides adapting social media channels as part of your CRM?	Lots of possibilities with some new problems (5 interviewees)	Neutral about the adaptation. (4 interviewees)	Wouldn't adapt it at all (1 interviewee)
Could you see any possibilities which social media could bring to you as a sales person?	Possibility of Connections were recognized by everyone	Word of mouth leads to new possibilities (4 interviewees)	It's getting super personal in good and in bad. (2 interviewees)

As mentioned before, the survey was answered by ten individuals who work closely with CRM, sales and marketing. Because of the semi-structured interview method there were lots of data which had to be sorted to find the key resemblances. Thus, author created this table which makes presenting the data a little bit easier. On the following chapters author is going to go through the similarities more closely.

#### 4.1 Behavior in Social Media

As we can see from the chapter 3.2. the first question was "How would you describe your behavior in social media? Would you call it professional or unprofessional?"

4 interviewees:

The behavior depends on the social media channel. Many made the following comment "LinkedIn and Twitter are the two channels where I act professionally". Facebook and Instagram were also mentioned by them but those channels they liked to keep as personal channels.

2 interviewees:

Two of the interviewees said that they use social media strictly professionally way. "There's no goofing around the channels, just business".

2 interviewees:

The last two liked to mix it up. Just like the first group they use multiple channels to communicate. However, they didn't feel the need to act differently on different channels. "I like to use my social media channels for business and pleasure. If someone doesn't accept my behavior on social media as it is we probably wouldn't match either on personal level."

## 4.2 Engaging with Customers

The second question: "In which ways are you trying to engage with your customers? Are you having problems engaging customers in right channels?"

5 interviewees:

Five interviewees were engaging by using multiple channels. These channels were the following ones: traditional ways, by phone, text messages and mails. They had also brought social media channels as engaging method. They had adapted the logic that answer received in any chosen channel was good for them. They recognized that people don't always have time to answer phone. "However, tweeting and direct messaging are effective way to reach someone even if they are in the middle of something". So, finding the channel where you can get the answer can help you significantly to engage.

5 interviewees:

The other half, were used to choosing their engaging channels depending on the customers. "Older customers won't probably even use social media channels so there's no point trying to reach them through those channels". So, why use your time on something that won't work anyway. They wanted to focus their resources on the channels that they know their customers are using rather than spamming them in every possible channel.

### 4.3 Social Media Channels as Part of CRM

Third question was "Could you see an upside in adapting social media channels as part of your CRM? What would be the key problems adapting social media channels as part of your CRM?".

5 interviewees:

Five saw lots of potential adapting social media channels as part of CRM. The possibilities of generating leads and contact cards with more relevant information was key interest among four interviewees. At the same time, they recognized that wave of information could be challenging because there isn't a simple way to interpret people's actions in social media.

4 interviewees:

Four were feeling a little bit uncomfortable with the idea that social media channels would be part of their CRM systems. They were fine with their companies' social media channels being part of it but they wouldn't add their own accounts to be a part of it. "Privacy security could be a problem, could use more information". Thus, they stayed quite neutral with the topic. Some were also wondering if connecting the social media channels would bring too much information available.

1 interviewee:

One interviewee was strongly against adapting the social media channels to CRM. "Information flow from social media would be irrelevant to business and it wouldn't help with closing the deals".

#### 4.4 Possibilities of Social Selling

The fourth question was: "Could you see any possibilities which social media could bring to you as a sales person? Which kind of possibilities and threats you see?"

All 10 interviewees:

The possibility of connections was recognized. "You can just join your industry groups in social media and start engaging". Without new connections there wouldn't be new sales. The better connections you have the better are the chances on closing brand new sales.

4 interviewees:

The word of mouth in social media is powerful tool. "In LinkedIn people ask straight questions to their problems and expect to get answers for those from their own contacts". People like to praise good services and products. Same goes for services or products which are poor. Salesperson might receive hot lead without even doing anything or in the other hand, they might be losing potential customers because of bad reviews.

2 interviewees:

Two of the interviewees said that salespersons engaging their customers in social media is making the process super personal. It has its upsides and downsides but if it's done right it's one of the strongest ways to create trust among your customers and peers. People are looking for trusted partners with whom to work with. Strong and appreciated person brand can be the game changer in this case.

## 5. Conclusions

While concluding the interviews author recognized that interviewees answers started to resemble each other's, as we see above from the table. Thus, we can argue that data saturation was reached. Interviewees wide scale of answers could lead to conclude that social selling is still shaping among the sales persons. As the answer show, people and even professional of their own area are still trying to figure out which method is working on social selling and which way is not. In the era of increasing information, it is no wonder that people are driven to look answers from the internet and from social media channels. However, this means that salespersons should invest their time and resources to learn about the usage of social selling. As we could argue from the research results, understanding the customer needs and the channels they use could be the game changer between successfully engaging with customers or miserably failing at it. One could compare social selling with the more traditional engaging methods. As we can argue from the results social media is creating opportunities to connect with new potential leads. To support this statement there are variety of different research which have proved that adding social media as part of your sales process can increase the exposure and trough this lead to increased sales. (Colwyn 2014) As mentioned before, decision making is moving to social media and variety of the decision makers use social media to reach the final decision. (MacDonald 2017) In conclusion, the salespersons should use social media channels to find the right decision makers which helps them to reach their sales goals and increase their sales revenue. Which was the main purpose of customer relationship management in the long run. Thus, it would be logical that social selling is added to this process. Research results support the argument Ghaderi made "your network equals your net worth" which was mentioned early on this research.

### **Behavior in Social Media**

Behavior in social media according to interviewees varies on personalities and by the chosen channels. Increasing number of professionals are engaging with their custom-

ers through social media channels. It is proven to be effective way to gain more connections and possible sales opportunities. However, by looking at the research results we could argue that people still need guidance to fully understand how they should behave in social media. Furthermore, understanding the activities which salespersons should be performing in social media to reach their target audience are still rather blurry.

### **Engaging in Social Media**

Prospects have usually made their buying decision before even engaging the salesperson (Miller 2013) and they are using the social media as the decision-making tool. (MacDonald 2017) This makes engaging prospects in social media super critical. As the interviewees said, finding the right channel to reach your target audience is the key thing you should be focusing on. If you cannot reach your decision-makers then you probably should change your engagement methods. However, as the interviewees pointed out, usage of different channels can be challenging and finding the right channels can take a little bit of time. Thus, old fundamental method for problem solving: trial and error, could be applied here.

### **Social Media Channels as Part of CRM**

When we look at the research result towards this question we can see variety of answers. People are feeling little bit unsure whether social media channels should or should not be part of their CRM. On the other hand, interviewees can see the possibility of generating hotter leads through social media. But at the same time, they were worried about the information overload and privacy security issues. Processing the endless data from social media could be time consuming and the results could be lower than expected. Thus, author argues that adapting social selling as part of CRM should start from creating the metrics which we wish to follow during the process. This does not just help sales persons to follow their success, furthermore, it clarifies the process for whole organization. Process comes transparent which could help the organizations to create needed guidelines and goals.

### **Possibilities of Social Selling**

Interviewees came to an agreement that possibility of social selling lies on connections. Without new connections there wouldn't be new sales no matter which sales approach we look at. If we look a little bit deeper we can see that interviewees recognized that word of mouth plays a big role in social media. It helps creating and destroying possibilities, whether, or not we knew about these possibilities. To support this theory author refers to study completed by Nielsen, which says that 83% of people trust recommendations from people they know over advertising. (Nielsen 2015) It could be argued that salespersons should be able to engage with their customers by listening their pain points. Moreover, they should offer them something to talk about like their companies' products and services. And finally, empowering those conversations by offering different ways for their target groups to communicate and share their opinions with salespersons and peers. All this leads to building a strong personal brand as recognized professional on their own business area. If salesperson can become recognized professional of their own field we can argue that person has managed to create a huge amount of trust among their peers. Creating trust is the key for building trusted relationships as was mentioned in chapter 2.2. Thus, the research results support the theory.

## **6. Discussion**

### **6.1 Assessment on The Quality of Research**

#### **Reliability**

Because of the short timeframe that author had to complete this research the reliability of this research could be lacking. To gain reliability one should complete the same study for different groups multiple times. Author of this research didn't have time to do that but author argues that the test results would be at least close to the same results as in this research. Different studies have found the same kind of results as this research and some of those are even used as references in this study.

#### **Validity**

Validity of this research could be argued to be quite well. All the interviewees were picked personally and their expertise's were from the desired are of business which

was essential for the success of this research. Interviewees knew about the study and they knew that their answers will be used to conclude this research. Furthermore, the interviewees were informed about the research questions and interviewing questions. They all understood the questions and the topics which creates more valid research. (Marsden 2013)

### **Reflection on Research Design Implementation**

The research design was rather good. Author was able to create the questions and receive answers from the interviewees which helped to answer the research questions. The one thing that was lacking was time. Author didn't have enough time to fully deploy their research in as big scale as they hoped. Lack of time affected on multiple things during the research. Because of the lack of time author might have made errors in rendering the primary data. The conclusions that author made might have been made in a little bit hurry and they might not be as deeply analyzed as they might have been if there would have been enough time. Once the time came became a challenge it lowered authors motivation towards this study. Author argues that if this research should be completed again it should be done in peace.

## **6.2 Discussion**

All aspects covered, the research went smoothly from start to ending. It was suprising to see how ethuastic interviewees were while taking the interviews. Certainly an interesting topic at the moment. Nowadays, technology is affecting on every business area and therefore people are keen on to seeing how it shapes their industry.

Probably the most interesting observation during the research was to see that professionals are still unsure how to use social selling for their favor. Author tought that professionals in Finland could have had a little bit more confidence when it comes to social selling. It seems like Finland, as one of the top leading technology countries, could still use lots of more professional engaging in social media. However, we have to be critical because the sampling of this study was heavily focused on SMB-area. But as we can see from the "Social selling 2017 trends report" completed

by Sales for life, small size companies and specially business-to-business oriented firms are the leaders when it comes to social selling.

Success in social selling is still rather hard to measure but maybe in the future CRM systems can be able to help salespersons to grasp the concept. It will be interesting to see how CRM providers adapt to the trending era of social selling. Does their systems start to support social selling options or does it still fall in the hands of the salespersons to handle their social selling on their own. Furthermore, will social selling stay as individuals method to gain benefits over competitors or could it be duplicated across the business fields without losing the benefits.

### 6.3 Future Research

This research was quite limited in time and sampling. Author argues that the professionals interviewed were exactly from the field (SMB) where the potential social selling experts will emerge in the future. However, the sampling could be a lot bigger for the upcoming studies to really understand the benefits of social selling as part of CRM.

Furthermore, this study was heavily leaning on the sales points of view. Interviewees' were all salespersons and they might have had limited knowledge about their CRM systems in terms of connectivity. This leads to conclusion that study about CRM systems available and connectivity of those systems to differ social media channels could help professionals to understand which kind of systems they need behind their success.

This study was also limited while comparing the success of social selling as part of salespersons methods. Closer study between social seller and nonsocial seller would be in order to measure their success in gaining new customers and sales revenue.

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