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**SOCIAL MEDIA AS A SUPPORT TOOL FOR B2B  
COMMUNICATION**

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## ABSTRACT

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This research was commissioned by Oulu University of Applied Sciences and a Finnish tech company Uros Ltd. As social media adoption is growing steadily in the contemporary consumer marketing, not many cases can be found where Social Media has been successfully adopted and used in a B2B scenario. Thus, it has remained as a reserved matter for many B2B companies, which still follow the tried-and-true business principles polished through traditional marketing. This research paper aims to enhance the understanding of social media and its implications as a whole. It also aims to explore its importance, limitations and potential as a communication tool for B2B companies in general. And eventually it aims to use the outcome to determine how it works for Uros Ltd. as a B2B company.

A qualitative research was conducted by a literature review to build an understanding of the current statistics of social media in B2B, which was used to illustrate its potentials and limitations. And an online survey was conducted with a selected segment from the interest group of the client company.

The combination of the critical qualitative research of generalised usage and empirical study of the target group will give a solid direction on which Uros Ltd. needs to focus as a B2B organization. The research revealed that social media definitely works as a support tool in B2B communication, breaking the common misconception that social media is just a consumer thing. Even though there are not many instances to show companies successfully implementing social media strategies to enhance B2B relations, it was seen that the practice is slowly growing. B2B companies can benefit from social media equally like their consumer counterparts from gaining recognition and improving loyalty to developing opportunities to convert, if the companies can set a clear goal and develop proper tactics to achieve it. Qualities like a small and focused market and higher cost sales and longevity in the B2B relations make social media more meaningful and applicable for B2B.

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Keywords: Social Media, B2B, Social network, UROS, Word-of-mouth, Content

## **PREFACE**

This thesis work was written as a requirement for the completion of Bachelor's Degree in Information Technology at Oulu University of Applied Sciences.

The research topic was provided by Uros Ltd, where I had undertaken an internship earlier in the same area. The topic was approved by the university and thesis plan was formulated under the guidance of my thesis instructor Terhi Holappa. She was really supportive and motivating while leading me towards the completion of the project. Without her push in the back, it would not have been possible to complete the research paper on time.

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Similarly, I cannot forget to acknowledge CEO of Uros Ltd., Gerrit Jan Konijnenberg and our head of the product management Raimo Järvenpää for providing me the context for the research topic.

I would like to thank all my supervisors and colleagues for their utmost support and excellent guidance and also all the respondents of the survey as without their cooperation it would not have been possible to perform the analysis.

I hope this will be informative and interesting to read.

Oulu, May 20, 2016

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## VOCABULARY

**Social media(SM):** Social media means **computer-mediated tools** that allow people or companies to create, share, or exchange information, career interests, ideas, and pictures/videos in virtual communities and networks. (Wikipedia 2015)

**Social network:** A social network is a **social structure made up of a set of social actors** (such as individuals or organizations), sets of dyadic ties, and other social interactions between actors. (Wikipedia 2016a)

**Social networking sites (SNS):** A social networking website is an **online platform** that allows users to create a public profile and interact with other users on the website. (techopedia a)

**Business to business (B2B):** Business-to-business (B2B) refers to a situation where **one business makes a commercial transaction with another**. This typically occurs when: A business is sourcing materials for their production process (e.g. a food manufacturer purchasing salt). (Wikipedia 2016 b)

**Business to customer (B2C):** Business-to-consumer (B2C) is an Internet and electronic commerce (e-commerce) model that denotes a financial transaction or online sale between a business and consumer. B2C involves a **service or product exchange from a business to a consumer**, whereby merchants sell products to consumers. (techopedia b)

**Net Promoter Score (NPS):** Net Promoter Score is a **customer loyalty metric** created by Fred Reicheld, Bain & Company and Satmetrix in 2003. It is based on the perspective that every company's customers can be placed within three types: "Promoters", "Detractors" and "Passives".

**Return on Investment (ROI):** Return on investment, or ROI, is the most common **profitability ratio**. There are several ways to determine ROI, but the most frequently used method is to divide net profit by total assets. So if your net profit is \$100,000 and your total assets are \$300,000, your ROI would be .33 or 33 percent.

**Word of mouth (WOM):** Word of mouth is the **form of communication** used in the marketing world where **consumers spread the honest words about the product or service** on the basis of their experience which convinces others to purchase that product or subscribe to that service.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

It is well known that B2B companies have customarily relied on methods like cold calling, personal relationships, attending business events, ROI analysis and product positioning for building business relationships and driving sales. In recent times, social media has changed the way companies communicate with customers. Since more and more people are online today, there is a lot of direct or indirect conversation going on around the social ecosystem. Communicating with the world via social networking sites has become a commonplace now. As the consumer's behaviour shifts in social channels, their expectations from the companies change, too. Customers' consumerism in social media gives rise to the organization's responsibility towards the consumers. It is a continuous process of keeping the consumers satiated in respect to the changing scenario. The expansion of digital horizon has offered the opportunities for businesses to reach their target audience. And the leading social networks are facilitating companies to increase leads and generate sales by introducing various features. With this, more and more companies are changing their business focus and investing more in the company's social media presence. But this practice is commonly seen in a B2C scenario.

Even with the unstoppable rise of social media as a strong communication tool, an information source and a content distribution channel, it can be seen that B2B companies are still shying away from the social media usage and relying on the traditional methods of a business relationship. Are the traditional methods enough in the present day scenario when SM is taking over the older ways of communication and marketing? Is it a sensible thing to jump on the SM bandwagon without knowing all the consequences? There are many questions to be answered before going with the flow. What role do social media play in enhancing traditional B2B marketing tactics? How do people these days regard the companies without the presence of social media? Will we be giving a lot to the competitors by not participating in the social media race? This paper aims to find answers to these questions.

By providing its unique roaming solution, not just to the frequent business travellers but also to telecom operators and various organizations, Uros Ltd. has successfully positioned itself as an innovative telecom service company in a very short period of time. Being associated with Uros Ltd. from past one year in managing its social networking sites and other content related tasks, it felt like a good idea to dig deeper into the matter to find out the possibilities and challenges of SM for Uros Ltd. as a B2B company. This paper will cover all the aspects of social media and study its B2B implementations. Similarly, a little background on the company's social media performance so far will be discussed to see where the company stands now in terms of social media practices. An online survey will be conducted with the client company's interest group in order to learn about their social media preferences. It will act as a backbone to support the findings from the research and assist in formulating social media guidance for the company. Finally, a recommendation will be drafted on the basis of the research and analysis of the survey result.



## **2 SOCIAL MEDIA**

Throughout the history people have come up with new ways of communicating with each other. This has been a continuous process. With the outburst of technologies and widespread use of the internet, more and more people are getting online (internetworldstats, 2015). Proliferation of mobile devices fuelled up people's inclination towards online communication bringing people together (Finch, 2015) in a digital platform. This gave rise to social media and social networking sites challenging the traditional ways of communicating and publishing.

### **2.1 Social media vs. traditional media**

Traditional or old media was mostly used in marketing and advertising world like TV, radio, newspapers, magazine ads (Christian, 2014). These were the means of communication that companies used for years to reach consumers or other businesses. They can be called roots of marketing. Old media followed the one-to-many pattern (Rich, 2014). It was simply limited to one-way conversation. Contents were created and broadcasted or published but getting feedback was not a commonplace and it did not create any sort of engagement. And there was no possibility for a word-of-mouth promotion. It can be a major drawback in marketing because people do not believe everything that the businesses claim to do. They tend to have more trust when the word comes out from the people who are similar to them. Businesses had less chance to improve as they could not hear what the consumers had to say. It is not possible to give the best if you do not know what the consumers want. New media definitely provides the means of a two-way conversation and people can easily express their opinions in the form of comments and re-share the contents that they like. Social media provides people the opportunity to re-share or recommend the posts. Thus, apart from getting direct company messages people can get recommendations from their friend which de-commercializes the company messages. Social media encourages word of mouth promotion that makes brands more believable and trustworthy (Stanislaw, 2015). According to a survey conducted by Nielsen (Incite group, 2014), even 91% B2B purchasers said that their buying decision is influenced by WOM. In the simpler terms, social media has the capability of

providing analytics and this would not be possible with the traditional media. When the message is broadcasted through television/radio or published in the newspaper, there is little or no means of figuring out how the consumers are consuming the content and how they are reacting to it. There is a passive involvement, if there is any (Hausman, 2012). On the contrary, when a content is shared via social media, there is an active involvement. You can immediately see the performance of the content in the form of likes, shares and comments. This gives a clear view of how many people have been endorsing your message. And the availability of various analytics tools also enables you to see the number of sales resulted from the effort made in social media.

And talking about the content, traditional media required a group of trained professional to create a disciplined pre-produced content that required a lot of dedication, time and money (Hausman, 2014). But the social media content is a lot more flexible. It can be created in a really short time or in real time, it can be posted in the desirable time with the possibility of replacing or even removing if found irrelevant with time, which was not at all possible with the traditional media. In the similar manner, the social media contents are generally consumer focused rather than company focused which adds to the interest and in return engagement with the prospects.

The other major difference between traditional media and the social media is that the former is a paid platform and the latter is a free platform. This means that the reach with the social media is bigger when compared with the traditional methods. The medium of transforming a message in the traditional media is generally actors and the celebrities, whereas in social media transforming a message normally is done by the users of social media and the influencers (Digital Influence Report, 2013).

## **2.2 Social media and social networking**

Social media is generally accompanied by another term, social networking. These terms are so closely associated that some people consider them interchangeable and use one in place of the other. But there is a group of people who are totally against it and they demand the proper use of the words. Hence,

here is a small chapter differentiating the two terms. In order to be able to differentiate the terms it is important to understand the individual meaning of the words. Merriam-Webster defines the words as follows:

**Social media:** Forms of electronic communication (as Web sites for social networking and Microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos) (Merriam-Webster b).

**Social networking:** The creation and maintenance and business relationships especially online (Merriam-Webster b).

It can be clearly seen from the words themselves that one points to 'media' and the other points to 'networking'. Thus, basically social media is consisting of websites and applications that enable users to create and share a content or to participate in social networking. They form a group of internet based tools or applications created with various ideological and technological foundations that allow the creation and exchange of user generated contents (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2010). In social media, you are creating and uploading the content in the form of a blog, a video, a podcast, slides, a newsletter or e-books. You are doing a lot of talking here hoping to get a reaction from the audience and to create some engagement eventually.

Social networking involves talking, channelling and listening. It is all about finding people with similar interests, listening to what others have to say and engaging in a conversation using the dedicated website and applications like social media. In the beginning, social network was more commonly used than social media. Initially, the social media giants like Facebook and Twitter did not intend to become the channels where people would seek for news. They were designed to connect people together forming a huge network. Twitter can be taken as a best example. Originally conceived as a mobile status update service, Twitter used to ask you, "What are you doing?" As the users leveraged the open nature of the network and started posting a variety of things ignoring the original question, Twitter changed its question to "What's happening?" This shows how

Twitter grew from person-centered medium to an event-centered one (Stone, 2009).

Therefore, the bottom line is that social media is like a way or platform to transmit or share information to the broad audience. Social media involves creating and distributing, whereas social networking is an act of finding like an engagement. A group of people with similar interests or like minds associate with each other on the social networking sites and build a relation through the community. Social networking strengthens the user relationship created using social media. The leading social media platforms today are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Google+ and Reddit. (eBizMAB Rank, 2016).

### **2.3 Growth of social media**

As the world is getting more mobile, with affordable devices and ubiquitous wireless networks, 40% of the world's population is the amount of active Internet users today (internetlivestats, 2016). And 2.3 billion people have social media accounts (Kemp, 2016). Social media is redefining the way people interact with each other, share or exchange information and ideas through virtual communities and networks. Social media not only provides you information but also interacts with you. The effortlessness of publishing and sharing contents and the growing number of social platforms are other things that have skyrocketed people's indulgence in social media. It has now become an integral part of modern society. Nielsen (2012) has stated that Internet users spend more time on social media sites than other type of sites. Past years have seen a massive explosion of growth in social channels. From Myspace to Snapchat, social networking sites have come a long way (Williams, 2015). There are a variety of social channels built with various ideologies using different technologies for meeting different purposes. They are of different categories and different behaviours racing each other. Along with the expansion, adoption is also increasing likewise (Perrin, 2015). It is seen that some social networks consist of a user base larger than the population of most countries.



FIGURE 1. Global digital snapshot (Kemp,2016)

## 2.4 Social media for word of mouth marketing

Word of mouth marketing is considered to be the most effective marketing channel in the human history as it is the most trusted source for sharing content, product information or experience. People tend to trust to opinions from the likeminded individuals more than to information coming straight away from the companies. It began with people interacting with each other, sharing preferences and making recommendations which could be done via e-mails or telecommunications in the beginning of the tech advancement. But with the emergence of the Internet and mass adoption of mobile devices, social media has taken word-of-mouth marketing to the next level powering it up like never before (Stanislaw, 2015). As word-of-mouth marketing gets all digital, it will become more pervasive. Above all, the trackable and quantifiable nature of social media helps brands to gain insight into their customers' behaviour and track the influence of it.

### 3 NATURE OF B2B COMPANIES

Business-to-business (B2B), as the term explains itself, refers to a situation where one business makes a commercial transaction with another business, like between a manufacturer and the wholesaler or between a wholesaler and a retailer. Wikipedia (2016 b) has stated three situations where B2B takes places:

- When “a business is sourcing materials for their production process”
- When “a business needs the services of another for operational reasons”
- When “a business re-sells goods and services produced by others”

Normally, the overall volume of a B2B transaction is higher than that of B2C as it requires many B2B transactions before making one B2C transaction. For example, any food manufacturing company needs to make several raw material purchases from the supplier as a B2B transaction before the final product can be sold to a single consumer. A B2B sale is likely to be larger than B2C because a company needs to purchase the product for a multiple site or multiple employees.

For a consumer brand, the decision maker or buyer is usually an individual. In B2B purchase, there is a range of individuals behind making the purchase decisions (Bottom, 2015). They are important decision makers, individuals providing technical advices, the purchasing department, finance, legal and the end users. They might have various attitudes towards the brand. Because of this, decision making process in B2B takes longer time than in B2C. All the people involved in it can have a different opinion of the product and the technical details need to be studied in length before coming to an agreement. All the roles must be understood well to be able to cater to their needs. On the brighter side, once the deal is fixed between two parties, they seek a long term relation. Experimenting with more and more companies might consume too much time and it might not be good for any company. As a committee of members is behind B2B decisions, they need to justify the purchase to the other members of the organization who are well aware of the market prices and understand the product well. Hence the price and specifications are well versed. As B2B sales need a differ-

ent mind-set as that of selling to a consumer, it requires a different approach to reach the business customer. B2B marketing is about meeting the needs of other businesses through the demand of the product by the businesses that will eventually meet the need of consumers (Hague & Harrison,2005). The characteristics of an B2B purchaser will be discussed below.

-A dealer who wins the information battle wins the sales deal. It is essential to demonstrate a high level of expertise regarding the product and market while dealing with B2B sales as it means dealing with a multifaceted and knowledgeable group of people.

-B2B buyers tend to be more rational than the consumers. Even if they are the same people, the choices differ while making a decision for the company and while making a personal decision. Nobody thinks about ROI while buying a personal item. But they are more careful while making a deal for the company as there are others whom they need to answer and justify the decision. Thus it is important to design a trustworthy product in a reasonable price (Hague & Harrison,2005).

-B2B suppliers have a limited number of loyal and committed buying units. This makes it easier and essential to maintain the personal relation with the businesses (Hague & Harrison, 2005). The significance of a personal relationship is strongly seen in emerging markets like China, India and Russia and places where the concept of branding is still new. The benefits of retaining an B2B relation can be enormous, in places where the consequences of losing a customer can be severe.

-As the target companies in B2B are well aware and well educated in the product area, it is important that they are fed well not just with the product specifications but also with the details of after sales service, problem resolution and client management things.

-Another important thing to keep in mind is creating a customer oriented strategy. Do not forget that you are working with the people not with the company. Definitely, it is a company that has a challenge and is seeking for a solution. But

it is the person in the company who is accountable to find the solution. People have emotions, likes, dislikes, biases and preferences which affect their decision making process. Companies need to figure out the complete personality of the decision maker in the prospect company in order to win a good deal (Fallon, 2014).

-One more thing that cannot be neglected in B2B marketing is the importance of branding. Today, it is getting more and more difficult to distinguish one product from the other. In this situation it is highly necessary to create a distinct and strong brand image in order to stand out from the crowd. The importance of branding in the B2B buying decision has elevated in the past decade. The best idea is to stick to a 'less is more' theory when it comes to branding. It proves right to have one strong brand that customers and stakeholders can relate to rather than confusing them with a myriad of sub brandings (Regensburg, 2014).

B2B buyers are demanding yet more predictable than their consumer counterparts. They are very careful when it comes to making decisions as they are responsible for making a right decision while making a purchase decision for the organizations. They cannot take a risk when it comes to the quality of the product or service. Paying close attention to their requirement will make it possible to meet their needs and ensure the longevity of the corporate relation.



## 4 SOCIAL MEDIA IN B2B COMMUNICATION

Social media used to be centred amongst the youngsters when it first emerged but just in a few years' time it has become a great influence on people of all ages and communities; which gave rise to its implication on businesses, too. Now, it has become an integral part of a corporate culture. Thus, many companies have already adopted it and brought the social media marketing into practice. Social media has already proved to be the standard communication tool for B2C companies. But B2B companies are still sceptical of the benefits that social media can bring to them. The concept of communicating with business partners or business prospects; or prospering in SNS in order to gain exposure is not as commonly used as in the B2C scenario. As day by day, social media craze increases, the B2B world cannot remain untouched by this frenzy.

To understand what the company is losing by not participating in the social media chat, it is important to know that nearly one-third of the world's population now uses social media and 31% of the global population is participating in SNS everyday with the number of reported users around the world jumping an impressive 10% in the past twelve months (Kemp, 2016). Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn are attracting people to their world where people visit in order to access information from around the world, read messages from friends and family, get recommendations and suggestions from influencers, share their own views on various matters, comment on the product and services online and look for new product updates. In other words, people love to broadcast their thoughts online. There is a marketing revolution as B2B buyers have started using social media to guide themselves through a decision making process. Companies might be losing an opportunity to reach out to this crowd by drawing back on the SM race. It is like providing consumers another outlet to find the businesses. Social media keeps changing the way people behave and make decisions, and catching up with the trend is a challenge for businesses.

## 4.1 Possibilities

“Social media, in many respects, the window that customers have on your business,” stated Phil Rumbol (Baumgarten, Duncan & Jamison, 2012), the founding partner of Agency 101 and the former marketing director of Cadbury U.K. When we shut close the window we might be shutting out the customers intending to establish a good relation with the company. A research conducted by Bain and company (Almquist, Brahm, Barry & Markey, 2011) showed that customers who engage with companies over social media are more loyal and they spend up to 40 percent more on those companies than other customers. It was also seen that they demonstrated a deeper emotional commitment to the companies granting them an average 33 points higher Net Promoter Score (NPS), a common measure of customer loyalty.

A study conducted by Social Media Examiner (Stelzner, 2015) found that B2B companies have started to pick up on social media use no longer being confined to using LinkedIn even though 80% B2B marketers plan on increasing their use of LinkedIn. A growing number of B2B marketers are using social media platforms other than the ones that were traditionally used.

94% of B2B marketers use LinkedIn (B2B marketers claim it to be the most effective media platform). And 89% of B2B marketing companies use Twitter to distribute content (Miller, 2016). 93% of B2B marketers are using social media which makes it the most common B2B marketing tactic and more than 70% of all B2B marketers use at least one of the “Big 4” social media sites (LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube) to distribute content. (Pulizzi & Handley, 2016)

94% use LinkedIn

89% use Twitter

77% use Facebook

77% use YouTube

61% use Google+ (Miller, 2016)

84% of B2B marketers from North America said that “brand awareness” is the most important goal when it comes to organizational goal to B2B content marketing and 87% of B2B marketers are using social media to distribute the content. The same report showed that 92% of them claimed to use ‘social media’ as a content marketing tactics for their organization and 55% of B2B organizations plan to increase their content marketing budget in the next 12 months. A significant growth can be seen in the social media content tactics usage (Pulizzi & Handley, 2015).

Talking about B2B buyers, they are leveraging their professional networks in order to make high level corporate decisions (Schaub, 2014) social media being the key medium to access these networks. A global research conducted by IDC (Schaub, 2014) revealed that 75% of the B2B buyers and 84% of C-level/vice president (VP) executives surveyed use social media to make purchasing decisions. However, in the final stage of decision making, professional networks like LinkedIn are considered as the number one source in information preference. The study showed that the average B2B buyer using social media for making purchase decisions is usually more senior, with a bigger budget, purchases frequently and has a greater span of buying control than a regular buyer. Also, 52% of B2B buyers said that they expected a half of their purchase decisions to be made online by 2018 (Schmidt, 2014).

In the similar way, a study by IDG Connect (2014) which focused on the IT buyers, revealed the similar result stating that 86% of the IT buyers are using social media networks and content in their decision making process. There was also another survey (Keenan & Giamanco, 2012) that showed that 54% of the sales representatives have closed a sales deal as a direct result of social media.

A significant 92% of the marketers have reported that social media is important for their business, where 91% of them increased exposure was the top benefit that the marketers had witnessed as a result of social media efforts (Stelzner, 2015). In the same way, 70% of marketers had found social media activities increase the web traffic. Marketers have proved that with a right technique and great content, it is possible to double your traffic from social media. Social me-

dia not just gives an exposure to the company, but can as well benefit it by getting insight to the market. Social media makes it possible to study the behaviour, likes and dislikes of your prospects and to understand the market perception better. At least 68% of marketers claimed that it is true.

Definitely increasing the leads is one of the priorities for B2B professionals. But 68% of them said that the quality of leads is what matters more than the volume. When asked about the effectiveness of the lead generation program, only 16% rated their effort to be super effective. A huge majority of 80% reported their effort to be slightly or somewhat effective. (Schulze, 2015) Among that 12% had claimed social media to be a very effective tool for the lead generation and 49% said that social media was just a slightly effective tool for the lead generation. Among the social networking platforms, LinkedIn stands on the top with 79% of marketers claiming it to be the most important medium.

Now, it is believed that it is not just B2C conversation that takes place in social media. Customers and prospects also talk about business related companies. In addition, in a study (Dimensional research, 2013) 62% of B2B customers purchased more after a positive review. This shows how important it is to be on social media and to maintain the positive image. This can be seen both as positive and negative aspect of social media. Mull (2013) stated that on average, business buyers do not contact suppliers directly until 57% of the purchase process has been completed. This shows that the business buyers are forming perceptions, studying the technical specifications and other requirements without a direct influence from the seller. Hence, it becomes a challenge for the marketers to be present in all the channels where the buyers are hanging in order to educate them about the product or service and guide them towards making a buying decision.

64% of B2B marketers are planning to increase their digital marketing spend in 2016, which signals good news for the industry overall. (Demand Wave, 2016)

There is also a chance that social media benefits B2B companies more than B2C as B2B has a smaller potential customer base and a higher average price point. "Turning your customers into advocates and marketers on behalf of your

brand pays off a lot more when you're selling \$10,000 pieces of manufacturing equipment, than it does when you're selling \$3 cans of Pringles" (Baer, Convince & Covert,2016).

Social media sales quota research (Keenan & Giamanco, 2012) showed that sales people using social media outsell 78% of their peers showing that when a lead is developed as a trusted relationship through social networking, that lead is more likely to close. These things exhibit the importance of B2B companies to be on social media and draft the social media strategy in a thoughtful manner.

## **4.2 Challenges and limitations**

### Difficulty in measuring ROI:

Measuring Social media ROI has posed as a biggest problem for B2B social media marketers. Even though 95% of B2B marketers use social media, they are still struggling to find what they are getting in return. Only 29% of them have been able to track a clear ROI of their marketing activities (Demand wave, 2016).

Social media monitoring and management tools have grown in recent years for gathering intelligence about the social media efforts. 60% of B2B marketers are using a paid social media intelligence tool but only 60% of them have been able to use it most efficiently and only 5% of them have been able to use them for tracking. This has increased the dissatisfaction level because of which 30% of the people using social media monitoring tools are looking for a different tool. 87% of the marketers do not know which tools are the best for simplifying social media tasks and 88% of them want to know how to measure their return on investment for social media activities (Stelzner, 2013).

As per the social media platforms, many B2B organizations have recognized the professional networking site LinkedIn to be an excellent way for sales representatives to identify, research and engage with their prospects. B2B benefits of

other social networking sites are slowly emerging but the benefits are not too clear yet, in order to rush and embrace the social media practices.

No written strategy:

Documenting the social media strategy is important as it makes it clear what you want to achieve and how you plan to get there. But the problem today with B2B social media marketing is that it lacks a concrete written strategy. Among 80% of B2B marketers, who have a social media strategy only 32% of them have it in a written format. Having a written strategy not only makes it clear about your goals but also helps in adjusting the strategy when needed (Pulizzi & Hanley, 2016).

Hard to find audience:

One of the challenges of B2B social media marketing is figuring out where your target audience is hanging. LinkedIn and Twitter can be the most obvious platforms. But it might be a mistake to be limited to these platforms. If the buyer persona is found in other channels, they should be targeted, too.

Finally, a major roadblock is the fact that most B2B companies do not understand specifically how social media can benefit their companies. The benefits are much clearer for consumer-focused B2C companies, which are naturally more active on social media networks. Social media has matured and its business benefits are widely recognized by most B2C brands. Many B2B companies, however, still do not take advantage of social media marketing. Christine Moorman, director of Moorman stated that the biggest challenge is that many companies see social media as a cute promotional activity when it can be a strategic marketing activity (Marx,2013). Outstanding examples of B2B social media marketing are rare, and many organizations remain absent from the networks.

## 5 COMPANY'S SOCIAL MEDIA BACKGROUND

Ever since its establishment, Uros Ltd. has been fairly active in social media as the popularity of social media has grown like a wildfire in recent years. If we have to put it in different words, Uros Ltd. has always dragged its social media activities along with it parallelly on the process of expanding its horizon wider. I have been looking after the social media platforms for the company from past one year myself. But the social media platforms were ready and active for the company long before I joined the team.

I talked with the company's chief architect, and also one of the supervisors of my thesis, Jari Korkiakoski briefly and asked him to shed some light on how it all started and what was the situation like when the company started using the social media channels for the brand awareness. In the beginning, the company had appointed a PR agency to handle its social media accounts. Thus, the PR agency used to post on the behalf of the company. This arouses a very important question if the company should allow an agency to handle social media. It is true that it is a challenge to participate in the array of social networking sites yourself when you also need to take care of the actual business. A simple solution of hiring an agency, which can perform the task for you, has its own benefits. The whole burden of tackling with social drama shifts to another shoulder. It is a time consuming procedure to create a good media profile, take a toll in gaining followers and maintain a consistency in sharing relevant posts across all social channels. In such a scenario, agencies can be a great help as they are the experts in this field. They know the right way of creating a media profile and they can do an excellent job in steering the social accounts in the right direction towards developing the media presence. But on the other hand, they lack the right knowledge about your industry. Even though they might have an abundant audience or followers, they will not know the right audience for your industry, i.e. that the agency will never be able to understand your business like you do. In the same way even though you appear as a business in social media, your clients or your followers want to interact with the real person behind the account. By hiring an agency to interact with your customers you are taking away this

opportunity from your customer. And also the agencies care more about building a good relationship with your company rather than building a good relation with your clients. Thus the probable relation or connection between you and your clients will be at stake with this kind of arrangement.

Later on the company decided to take the matter in its own hands and the management of social channels was shifted from the PR agency to the marketing team itself. The company adopted the mainstream social channels like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Slideshare and Google+ as social platforms from the beginning. These accounts are distributed under two different names: UROS and Goodspeed; Goodspeed being the product or the service and UROS the company or the provider.

Setting up all the social media accounts is definitely a challenge as there are certain rules and protocols to be followed in order to create a successful social media profile. Especially when you are starting from a scratch without any prior experience, it might feel like darting in the dark. Social networking profiles rank highly in search engine results when people are searching for you. Thus, it is essential to pay attention to the details while designing your profile; either you are doing it for a branding process or trying to connect to your customers by gaining exposure. And you can as well consider each of your social media page as a landing page for your customers or prospective customers because it can be the first place where someone might get to know your company from. You need to keep the first impression as perfect as possible. It is like a door where you welcome people to your website. Two major factors to keep in mind while creating your fan pages are:

- They should be impressive (reflecting the company's image)
- They should be easy to find

I carried out a simple social media audit, making an inventory of all the social assets, mostly to get to know the current situation and to figure out the area that required focusing on. From the simplest inventory carried out, I had the impression that the company had done a proper research while creating individual pages, selecting a proper username, writing a description, selecting a profile



picture and cover pictures, handles and also maintaining consistency in bio descriptions throughout all networking channels that helped in creating a good company (brand) image.

As I had been told, after taking the social media handling responsibility in the company's own hands, the next challenge was figuring out what kind of content the company had to share. In the beginning, the target audience was a bigger group. The company started its posts with funny travel contents as lighter contents could be easily absorbed. The posts were not scheduled thus, they used to go out without taking the proper posting time into consideration. It was seen that some accounts like 'Twitter' were not performing really well. Slowly the targeted audience was narrowed down. The focus was shifted from a general traveller on business oriented travellers. Also, the people who are responsible for making decisions or influencers, whose suggestions would be followed seriously, were taken more into consideration. Contents were changed from the funny posts to more informative or security based contents. The post scheduling apps were brought into practice dawning on that fact that the time of sharing a content has an immense impact on how the shared content makes its way to the receiving end.

A social media ad campaign is another segment that the company has worked on as the way to connect and engage with the consumers. Generally, the organic contents have a limited audience; hence these ad campaigns help to expand the audience.

It is not a good idea to pay a lot of attention to plant your crops and neglect it later on. You have to pay an equal attention to the growth process and the final result. It helps to measure and track the results and plays an important role in converting a visitor to a buyer. Google analytics and Buffer analytics are being used primarily to analyse and track the web traffic and social performance.

## **6 MAIN TARGET AND AIMS**

The core aim of the thesis paper was categorised into four segments so that the reader can easily comprehend the actions taken in order to reach the aim. The foremost aim was to discover the situation of SM practices in the client company, which was achieved by conducting a social media audit and by having some dialogues with my colleagues in the company. The second aim was to determine social media's practicality in the B2B scenario, which was done by reviewing scholarly literatures and the existing contents online. The theory part in the thesis is the result of the executed literature review. The third aim of the thesis was to discover the social media behaviour of the target group of the client company in order to determine the usefulness of SM for the company and to uncover the possibilities of revising the social media practices. The final aim of the thesis was to be able to give recommendations on the basis of the above mentioned actions.

## **7 METHODS**

### **7.1 Social Media Audit**

A social media audit is the process of measuring social media performance. It is actually a repetitive process that needs to be carried out from time to time for following the goals and comparing today's performance with the earlier one. Performing a Social Media Audit is important for figuring out where we are now and deciding where we need to be, which helps to build a concrete social strategy. It not only helps in discovering what has been done so far but also reveals the area that requires focusing on. If you have a target to achieve, it is important for you to keep a constant eye on the situation, monitor the development and keep changing the plan where required. The social media audit is also a similar thing when it comes to scoring a social goal. Setting a goal, performing a regular auditing and using analytics to support the result has been proven to be a good practice. Key factors of performing a social media audit includes analysing and understanding the effectiveness of the existing media practices and planning the future strategies in order to save time wasted in unnecessary operations. For the thesis purpose, I have just focused on identifying the current practices and locating and documenting all the social media profiles.

### **7.2 Research (Literature Review)**

This thesis work is a research based work therefore a literature review was used as the main research methodology. Various data sources were referred to for collecting the facts and figures in order to comprehensively address the problem stated in the thesis topic. Along with reviewing the scholarly literature, many other relevant articles and editorials published in the online portals were taken as references. Most importantly, surveys and researches conducted by the third parties (specially the renowned ones in the field) related to the field of social media or B2B community were taken into consideration for making decision statements. During the survey period, most appropriate websites were continuously visited for extracting concurrent data in addition to survey the current professional journals, press and literature. Researches conducted in various

time periods were studied in detail in order to make the comparison and to figure out how the social media practices in the B2B scenario has been developing and evolving in time. This made it possible to determine if there have been positive or negative results seen as a result of embracing the social trend. For making the settlement process, the survey result from the most recent time period is taken into consideration as social media practices are time sensitive and it is really important to keep up with the trend in order to unleash its maximum advantages. Furthermore, various dissertation works done in the similar subject matter were examined as a source of guidance.

As the outcome of these researches, this paper is able to provide an all-inclusive overview of the addressed issue available in the published literature after studying, summarizing, analysing and synthesizing them.

### **7.3 Online Survey**

A survey (questionnaire) was used as one of the methodology in the thesis work because a survey is considered a legitimate and essential tool for research and data gathering. It gives us an air of credibility. An analysis of the collected raw data may either add weight to the theory or prove it wrong, but either way, it will help us uncover an answer to some important issues.

#### **7.3.1 Purpose of the survey**

The survey was titled as 'Social media for business relations'. It was conducted between 18th April and 3rd May, 2016. Gaining data with a statistical significance or a statistical distribution is not the purpose of the survey. Basically it is a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative research. The gathered data will be analysed in an interpretative way. The main idea of the survey is to measure the perception of Uros Ltd's target group when it comes to social networking and relation building. This survey will help us obtain standardised information which in turn helps us to identify the improvement opportunities and supports our decision making. It can be very beneficial in creating a relevant customer touch point.

The survey will basically serve two purposes:

- First, to support the findings from the research and to draw the conclusion on the general B2B social media usage,
- Second, to figure out if the outcome of the research proves to be right in this particular circle comprising people from mobile industry, which still believes strongly in the traditional way of B2B communication.

### **7.3.2 Target group (Segment)**

A blended approach is followed blurring lines between B2B and B2C while targeting at the survey segment. A new idea has emerged these days stating that businesses do not make decisions but people do. The P2P or H2H business tradition is being followed for doing business by establishing communication between people. Regardless of the industry, businesses are dealt with people. In the B2B scenario it is important to remember that behind the companies, which we deal with, are actual people. Connecting with them at the personal level might be the secret of winning over the audience. Hence, we targeted the people behind the companies for the survey and not the companies themselves.

A GSMA WAS event email list database provided by Uros Ltd. was used for sending the survey. GSMA is an association, which represents the interests of mobile operators worldwide and unites nearly 800 operators with more than 250 companies in the broader mobile ecosystem, including handset and device makers, software companies, equipment providers and Internet companies, as well as organisations in adjacent industry sectors. It organizes the largest annual event in the mobile industry, the GSMA Mobile World Congress, in addition to some smaller events. WAS is one of the annual events organized by GSMA in which hundreds of companies from the mobile industry participate. The reason behind using this segment is that the audience from the mobile industry can be identified as the client company's interest group which can make the future business prospects. Their ideas and opinions are of great value for the company. And since it is a global event, it makes us possible to gather data from the scattered locations.

### **7.3.3 Reliability and software**

The questions for the survey were coined together with representatives from Uros Ltd. They have a good understanding of the company's marketing scenario and a good knowledge of the audience that the company intends to reach. The questions were framed in such a way that it would be possible to validate the findings from the research and at the same time it would bring value to company's social media movement. The questions were discussed again and again so that they would not be misinterpreted by the respondents, which could decrease the value of the collected information. The survey was kept as short as possible keeping respondents' busy schedule in mind and the questions were kept as simple as possible for the better understanding.

The e-mail database was a courtesy of Uros Ltd. for reaching the suitable group of respondents. After testing and trying different online survey tools, Google Forms was used to create the survey as its features ruled over the others. Afterwards, the company's e-mail marketing service MailChimp was used for sending the survey to the targeted segment group using my company email id. The survey link was tested in various browsers and devices for ensuring its functionality. The fact that the survey was not distributed publicly ensured its reliability.

## 8 RESULTS

### 8.1 Inventory and measuring social performance (UROS)

TABLE 1. Social media inventory (audit report)

Social Media Network	URL	Followers	Average weekly activity	Mission Statement
Facebook (UROS Ltd)	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/urosLtd">https://www.facebook.com/urosLtd</a>	132	2	To increase company's media presence and share information related to the company
Facebook (Goodspeed)	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/GoodspeedWifi">https://www.facebook.com/GoodspeedWifi</a>	814	2	To increase media presence and share information that might be valuable for our customers.
Twitter @GoodspeedWifi	<a href="https://twitter.com/GoodspeedWifi">https://twitter.com/GoodspeedWifi</a>	769	17	To create brand awareness by increasing media presence and to interact with current or prospective customers and feed the followers with informative contents.
LinkedIn (Uros Ltd.)	<a href="https://www.linkedin.com/company/uros-ltd-">https://www.linkedin.com/company/uros-ltd-</a>	1.5 K	2	To build a business presence, create a professional network, promote the services to the audience
Pinterest (Goodspeed)	<a href="https://www.pinterest.com/GoodspeedWifi/">https://www.pinterest.com/GoodspeedWifi/</a>	152	Irregular	To share related contents in a visually appealing way in order to increase engagement in the Pinterest community
YouTube (Goodspeed Mobile Hotspot)	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/user/GoodspeedHotspot">https://www.youtube.com/user/GoodspeedHotspot</a>		Irregular	To upload and share video contents related to our service and tutorials (like how to use the device ), which is the most efficient way of explaining about us to the people.
Google+ (Goodspeed Mobile Hotspot)	<a href="https://plus.google.com/explore/Goodspeed">https://plus.google.com/explore/Goodspeed</a>	20	2	Share our contents with the people in our connection.
Slideshare (Uros Ltd.)	<a href="http://www.slideshare.net/UrosLtd/goodspeed-international-mobile-broadband-41742066">http://www.slideshare.net/UrosLtd/goodspeed-international-mobile-broadband-41742066</a>	4	Irregular	Exploring a new platform and new way of sharing content and expanding the social connection. If shared relevant topics in slideshare, gaining visibility is highly possible.

A simple social media audit showed that the company's social media profile had been set in a proper manner with standard profile pictures and a consistent bio-description tailored to meet various requirements for different social media platforms. Account names and handles are similar depending upon the product or the company profile, which makes it easy for people to find the company in all the social platforms. All the major SM platforms are in use some definitely performing better than the others. A slight growth in the number of followers has been noticed in a year's time. The referral traffic from the social media is seemingly less than other sources (The performance result has not been presented here). The weakness is seen in defining the specific social media goals.

## **8.2 Survey Analysis**

Many researches have shown that the B2B marketers are slowly moving away from the traditional marketing methods and adjusting to new challenges. Social media and mobile devices have brought a dramatic change in customer behaviour like investigating products online before deciding whether or not to engage in the sales process, reading recommendations and discussing the products and services on various social channels. This change in the consumer behaviour has compelled the B2B businesses to shift the way they approach the prospects. An online survey titled 'Social Media in B2B Relations' was conducted with the support from Uros Ltd. in order to determine if the similar behaviour is seen in this circle from the mobile industry where the traditional marketing rules are still deeply rooted.

The survey aimed to find out how these people from the mobile industry are using social media and if their business decisions are driven by the social media activities so that it could justify Uros Ltd's engagement in social media. On the other side, the survey also intended to inspect the social media behaviour of the respective organizations to back up the theory formed from the research work. 35 participants from one of the annual events (WAS) in mobile industry organized by GSM Association took part in the survey. A reminder e-mail will be sent to the respondents for collecting more data, which will be later on handed to the company. But for the thesis purpose, the data collected by 3rd May 2016 was considered the final data and an analysis will be carried out based on it.

### **STUDY POPULATION:**

The survey was anonymous for keeping respondents comfortable while taking the survey. They were not asked to reveal their names or their organization's name. But for collecting demographic data, a gender, an age-group, a country, an industry and a seniority level were listed as mandatory questions. The following maps and charts provide an introductory snapshot of the respondents in this survey.



Gender (35 responses)

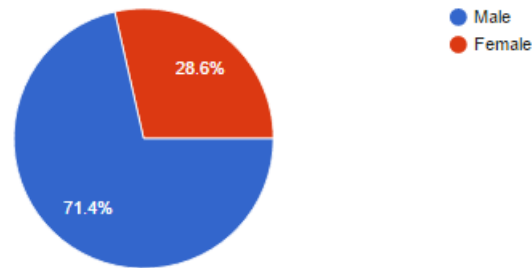


FIGURE 2. Gender (Survey result)

From figure 2 we can see that the majority of the respondents of the survey were male representing 71.4% of the total respondents and only 28.6% of the respondents were female. This gives a slight hint how mobile industry lacks female executives compared to the male counterparts.

Age Group (35 responses)

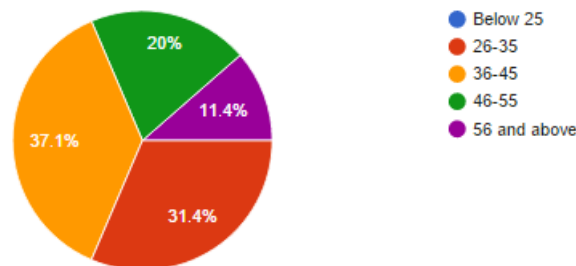


FIGURE 3. Age Group (Survey result)

- 37.1% respondents were aged between 36-45
- 31.4% respondents were aged between 26-35
- 20% respondents were aged between 46-55
- 11.4% respondents were aged above 56

Figure 3 shows that there was no significant dominance of a particular age-group; which is a good thing as social media behaviour can be highly affected by the difference in the age group, with a younger generation having more incli-

nation towards SM. But there were no respondents below 25 years which was expected as the respondents hold more senior posts in the company.



*FIGURE 4. Country (Geographic location) (Survey result)*

35 respondents from 22 different countries (USA, Jamaica, United Kingdom, Luxembourg, Sweden, Finland, Netherlands, Italy, Austria, Iceland, Portugal, France, Germany, Serbia, Israel, Lebanon, Uzbekistan, Korea, Singapore, New Caledonia, New Zealand, and Seychelles) had participated in the survey. It was expected to collect data covering all the major land masses but unfortunately there were no responses from South America, Africa (except Seychelles), Russia and Australia. From the map above (figure 4) we can see that the respondents' density is higher in European Region. Thus, the survey result cannot be generalized as the global behaviour of how people behave in China and Russia can be completely different than that of people in Europe or America.

Industry (35 responses)

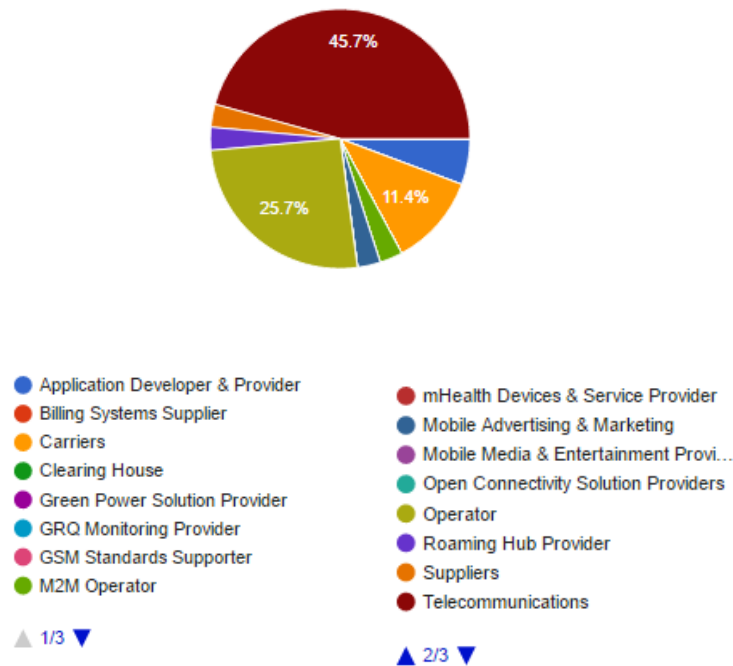


FIGURE 5. Industry (Survey result)

- 45.7% respondents were from telecommunications industry
- 25.7% respondents were from Operator industry
- 11.4% respondents were from Carriers industry
- 2.9% respondents were from M2M operators
- 2.9% respondents were from Mobile Advertising and Marketing
- 2.9% respondents were from Roaming Hub Provider
- 2.9% respondents were from Suppliers industry

It was a bit challenging to create an industry list as the respondent segment was particularly from the mobile industry. Thus, the GSMA info centre advanced search option was referred to in order to prepare a suitable industry list. Almost half of the population (45.7%) belonged to telecommunication industry followed by Operator industry (25.7%) and then the Carrier group (11.4%) (See figure 5).

### Seniority Level (35 responses)

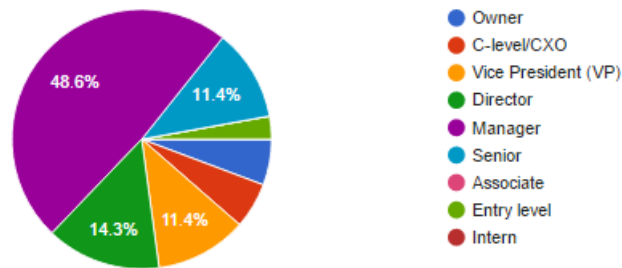


FIGURE 6. Seniority Level (Survey result)

The study (Buyersphere, 2015) shows that even though there are various units involved in the B2B business decision making process, the final decision lies in the hands of senior business leaders (the owner, chairman, CEO or MD). Almost half of the population (48.6%) were Manager level professionals followed by Directors (14.3%) and Vice Presidents (11.4%). This can be considered as an influential group of people in the organizations and their opinions can be of great value in this research (See figure 6).

### FIRST SEGMENT:

In the first segment of the survey, the respondents were asked simple questions about their involvement in social media and their perception of the companies in social media. The questions and the results are discussed in the order they were presented.

Q1. Do you use these social media platforms for personal use, professional use or both?

In the first question, a multiple choice grid was used. Various social media were listed in the row and four options – Personal, professional, both and I don't use it, were listed in the column. Thus the respondents could pick one option for each social media usage. The idea of the question was to figure out which social media our prospects are using the most and if they tally with the social me-

dia that the company actively uses. As social media matures and more and more social media channels emerge, people have started to be selective about the platform where they want to portray the personal or the professional image. Some people like to keep their personal and professional image separate while others like to merge both. Some believe that LinkedIn can be used for professional connections whereas Facebook is only for personal use. With the array of the selected most popular social medias, this question will let us know where the participants are more active and if the company is active in the same channels or not. It will also show how they are profiling their personal and professional images. For the list of social media, the mainstream social Medias, question-answer forums and few internationally popular social networks were selected. And the respondents were allowed to mention if there was any other SM that they were using (See figure 7).

Do you use these social media platforms for personal use, professional use or both?

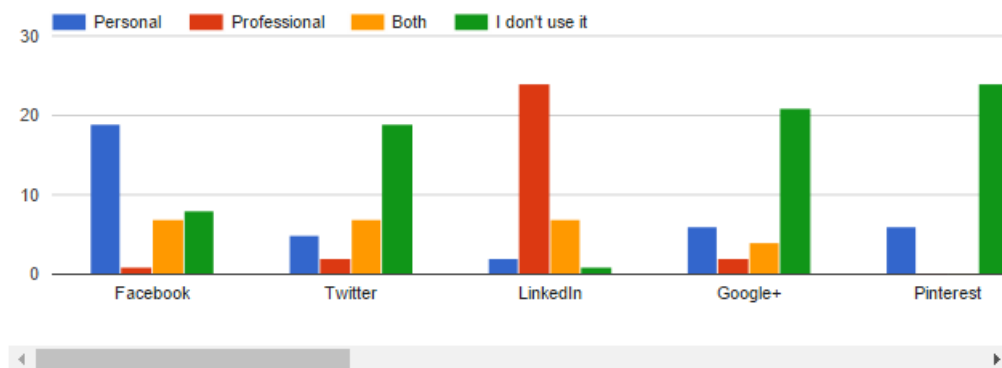


FIGURE 7. Social media usage (Survey result)

Do you use these social media platforms for personal use, professional use or both?

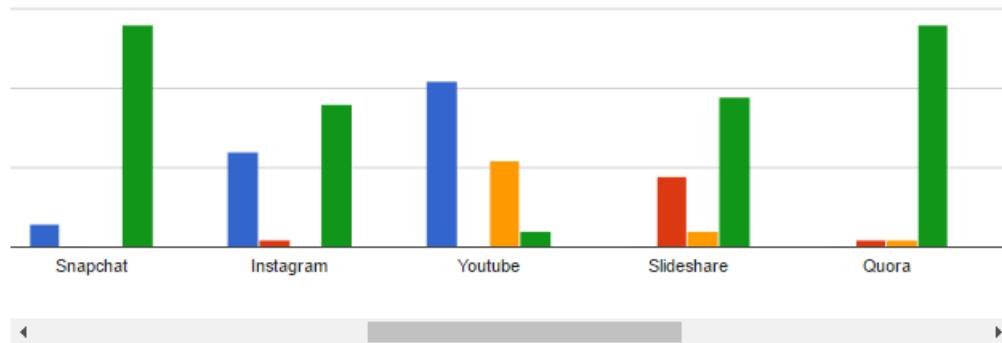


FIGURE 8. Social Media usage (Survey result)

Do you use these social media platforms for personal use, professional use or both?

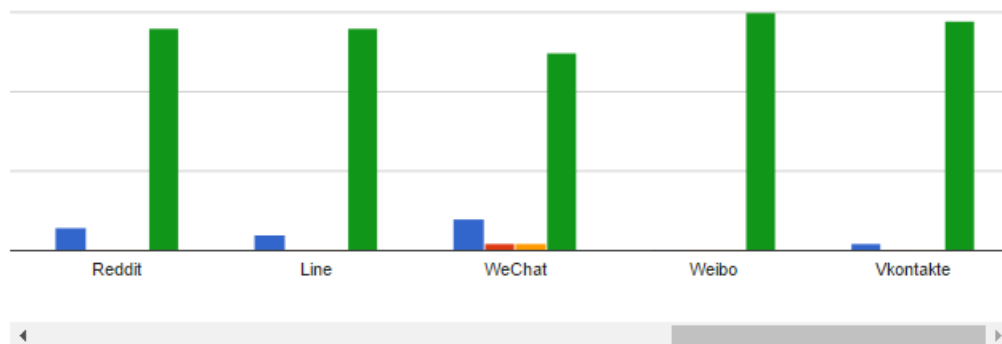


FIGURE 9. Social media usage

The survey showed that majority of the population uses YouTube (21) for personal use followed by Facebook (19) and Instagram (12). Without any doubt LinkedIn (24) stood as a number one social media for professional usage followed by Slideshare (9). When it came to mixing platforms for personal and professional usage, surprisingly YouTube (11) appeared as the number one channel followed by Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn sharing a same position. Talking about other social channels, especially the international ones, the result was mostly 'I don't use it' or few personal usages. This might be the result of not being able to reach the population among whom social media is popularly used.

From this result we can say that the choice of social media in use is perfect but more focus can be given towards YouTube as more people have claimed to use it both at a personal and a professional level.

As people were allowed to share if they were using any other social channels, there were few mentioned like WhatsApp, Skype, Connect and Viber. This was quite interesting as there is still a conflict whether to or not to call them social media. They can indeed form some social network but they are more like messaging or chat applications.

Q2. Do you use these blogging networks?

After understanding the importance of blogging for B2B companies in the lead generation and customer acquisition, it was sensible to explore if our prospects were hanging around in the well-known blogging networks. Even though there is a BLOG segment in the company's website, joining blogging platforms could definitely expand the horizon. Keeping this in mind, the respondents were asked if they are using the popular blogging networks like Medium, Tumblr or WordPress.

Do you follow these blogging networks?

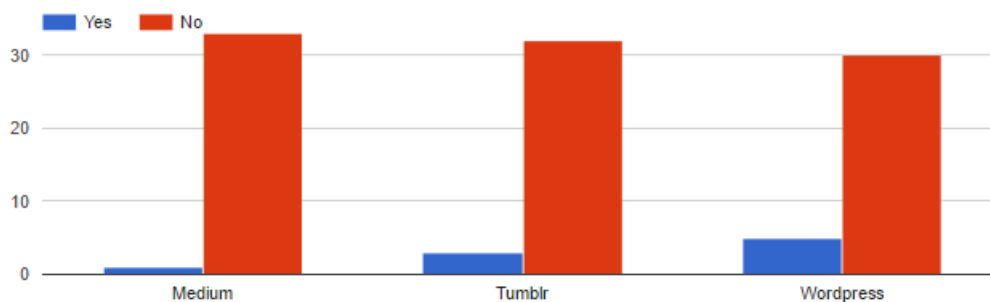


FIGURE 10. Blogging networks (Survey result)

Surprisingly, only nine respondents said that they use the blogging networks – 5 were using WordPress, 3 were using Tumblr and only one was using Medium (See figure 10). This shows that the idea of using blogging platforms can be reconsidered, researching a suitable blogging network for company like Uros

Ltd. To ensure the benefits it can bring to the company. A guest blogging on a relevant site can be another efficient idea for building authority in the industry and building backlinks to the company's website.

### Q3. What kind of content shared in social media do you value the most?

It is vital to know the direction buyers are heading when they are looking to access the content. The research (Demand Gen Report, 2014) shows that the demand for visual content is growing thus, video and infographics have become powerful tools for communicating with the readers. Thus, we asked the respondents what kind of content shared in social media they value the most. This will show us the path that we can follow in the future for creating content for our followers.

#### What kind of content shared in social media do you value the most?

(33 responses)

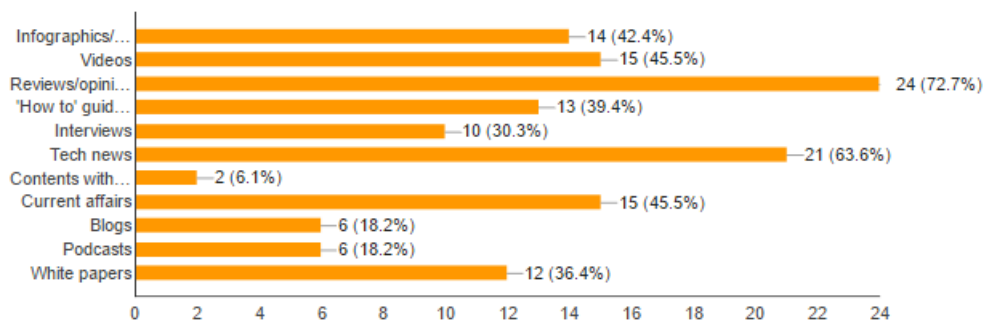


FIGURE 11. Preferred Content (Survey result)

72.7% of the respondents said that they value the contents containing reviews and opinions which are shared on social media. This proves the importance of social recommendations in shaping people's perception about any product or company. The second preferred content was Tech news (63.6%). This might be the outcome of the specific industry selected for the survey. 45.5% of the people have voted for videos and current affairs as the valued content closely followed by infographics (42.4%) (See figure 11). Consumers are likely to treat a different type of content in a different way. It is good to give a variety in the con-



tent that we serve. Some kind of content is bound to drive more traffic than the others (Patel, 2014).

This survey result shows the consumer preference on content that can be utilized for increasing the likelihood of being shared.

Q4. What are the most important reasons for you to follow companies in social media?

Another vital thing to understand as a B2B company is the reason why B2B buyers connect with companies on social media.

What are the most important reasons for you to follow companies in social media?

(32 responses)

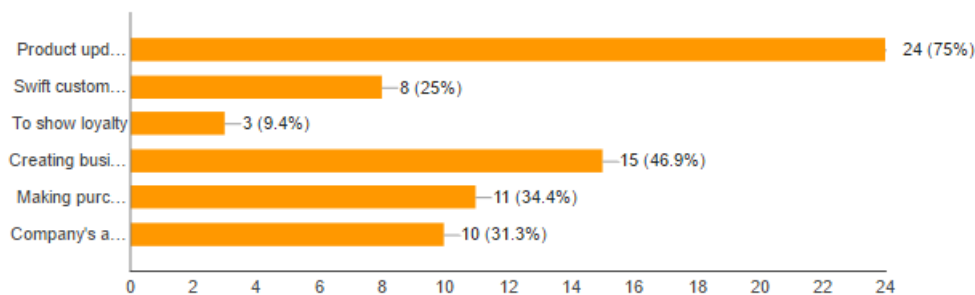


FIGURE 12. Reason to follow companies in social media (Survey result)

75% of the respondents said that they follow companies on social media for getting product updates and 46.9% of them said that they follow companies in social media in the hope of creating business opportunities. 34.4% of the respondents follow companies for making purchase decisions and 31.3% of them follow companies for checking company's authenticity (See figure 12). This shows the importance of being present on social channels when the prospects come looking for you.

Other reasons mentioned by the respondents were – for company news, market insights, market trends and more information. Thus it is important to share and update company news on social media for keeping the customers well informed.

### Q5. Social Media shapes perception of an organization or a company

Social media has a power to influence on what people think about your company. How would someone perceive your company if they see your social feed? Would they buy from you or look for a better option? It is possible that companies might be passing wrong company attributes through social media.

Social media shapes perception of an organization or a company. (35 responses)

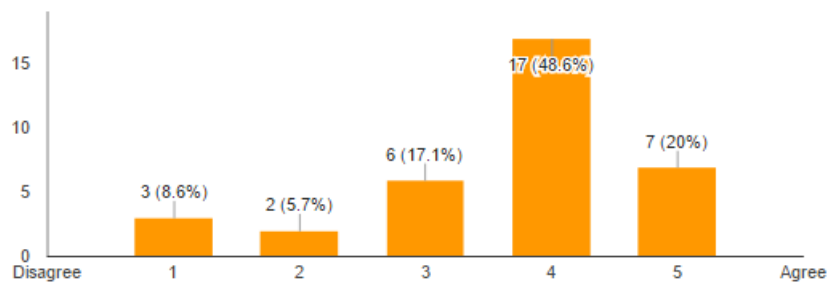
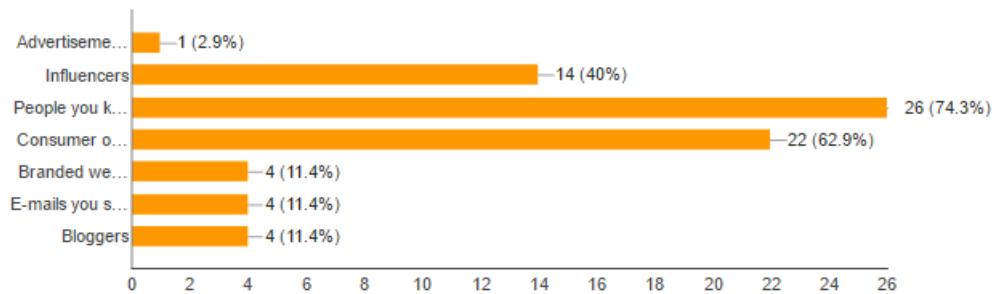


FIGURE 13. Social media and company image (Survey result)

The Likert scale or the linear scale was used while asking if the respondents agree or not with the theory that social media shapes the perception of an organization or a company. They had to rate this question at the scale of 1 to 5, 1 being disagree and 5 being agree. 48.6% of the people gave 4 and 20% of them gave 5, which means that the majority believed that social media plays an important role in deciding what they really think of the company. Thus, it is essential for the companies to make an attempt to change people's perception through better social practices like interacting, offering incentives, not just blabbering about the company but also listening to the customers and responding to all sorts of feedback and queries. A positive review and recommendations spread in social channels also have a direct effect on how the other party will deal with you. Thus, it is crucial to address all the issues that are mentioned in the social network, both good and bad.

Q6. Whom do you trust the most for information gathering and recommendation?

### Whom do you trust the most for information gathering and recommendation? (35 responses)



*FIGURE 14. Important information source (Survey result)*

When asked whom the prospects trust the most when it comes to information gathering and recommendation, 74.3% of them said that they trust word-of-mouth recommendation from the people they know like their friends, family and colleagues the most. Following closely 62.9% of people indicated that they trust consumer opinions posted online and 40% of them said that they trust the influencers (See figure 14). This shows that the growing importance of online reviews in purchase decisions is nearly as trustworthy as traditional personal recommendations these days. We can proactively ask or encourage our happy customers to leave reviews online and if possible, add a section in the company's website where people can leave reviews. And at the same time, the company should be prepared to deal with the negative comments or reviews. Ignoring bad comments can pass on a negative message.

Respondents also mentioned some other sources like independent articles and high quality magazines.

### **SECOND SEGMENT** (As a company representative):

Q7. Your company owns a social media account

Your company owns any social media account: (34 responses)

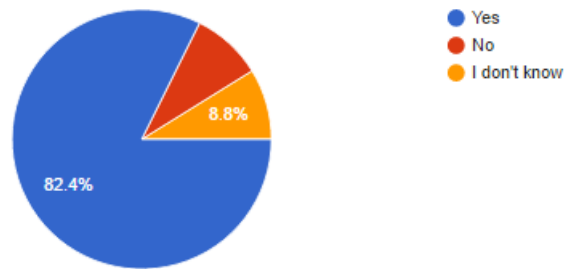


FIGURE 15. Company social media account (Survey result)

Respondents were asked if their company owns a social media account or not. 82.4% of the respondents said that their company is using one or more social media account (See figure 15). This shows how the social media trend has penetrated this industry, too. It would not be a thoughtful act to ignore SM activities when clearly, the fellow companies and competitors are participating in the SM race.

Q8. Select top five social media for your company.

Select top five social media for your company: (33 responses)

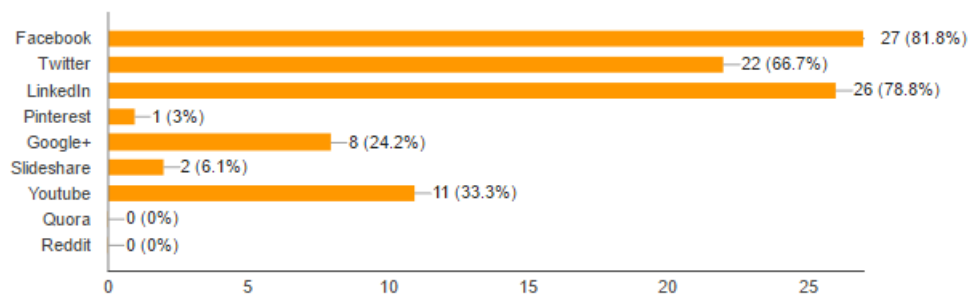


FIGURE 16. Top five social media (Survey result)

From the figure 16 above, top five social media can be distinctively seen:

1. Facebook
2. LinkedIn
3. Twitter
4. YouTube

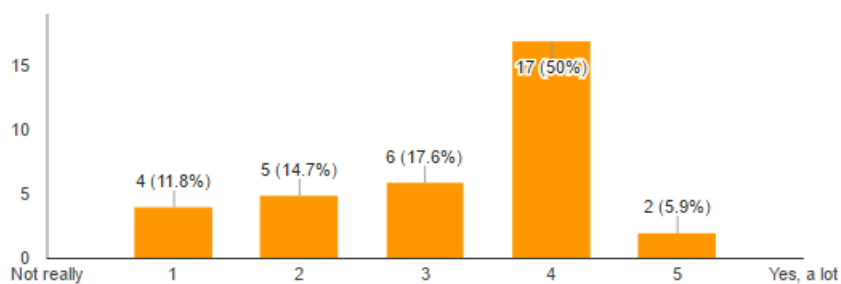
## 5. Google+

The idea was to gain insight into what SM our prospects find the most important. Unsurprisingly, the most popular and mainstream social media were filtered as the top social media channels.

Few other SM channels mentioned were Instagram, Yammer (corporate-friendly social media) and Loop (social polling app).

Q9. Social media activities bring value to our company B2B relationships.

Social media activities bring value to our company B2B relationships:  
(34 responses)

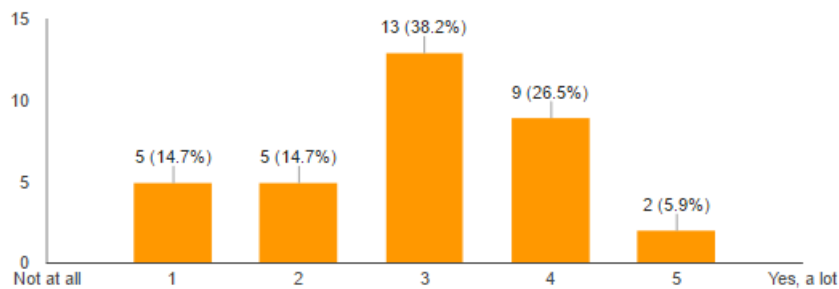


*FIGURE 17. Social media in B2B relations (Survey result)*

50% of the respondents agreed that social media brings value to the company's B2B relationships and 5.9% of them agreed with that a lot, giving 5 on the linear scale. Even though 17.6% of the respondents were neutral in this matter, the weight is clearly heavy towards the positive side meaning that the companies believe social media is important for retaining and building B2B relationships (See figure 17).

Q10. If you were making business decisions for your company, the other party's social media activities would influence your decision making.

If you were making business decisions for your company, the other party's social media activities would influence your decision making.  
(34 responses)



*FIGURE 18. Social media in decision making (Survey result)*

38.2% of the people chose to remain neutral in stating that social media activities influence their decision making while making business decisions for a company. 26.5% of them were positive about SM influencing their decision and 14.7% of them did not think that SM has anything to do with their business decision. This can mean that SM somewhat influences the final decision making but as it is for the company that the decision is being made, there will be more people involved and along with examining the other party's SM account there can be many other factors that need to be considered. Social media is not yet ready to be the sole medium to be considered for making the final business deal even though 54% of the sales representatives in a survey (Gianco & Keenan, 2012) claimed to seal a deal as the direct influence of SM.

#### **LAST SEGMENT:**

Q11. Have you come across UROS (Goodspeed) information through any of these medium?

This was a bonus question asked from the respondents to learn about the company awareness in that segment.

Have you come across UROS (Goodspeed) information through any of these medium?

(25 responses)

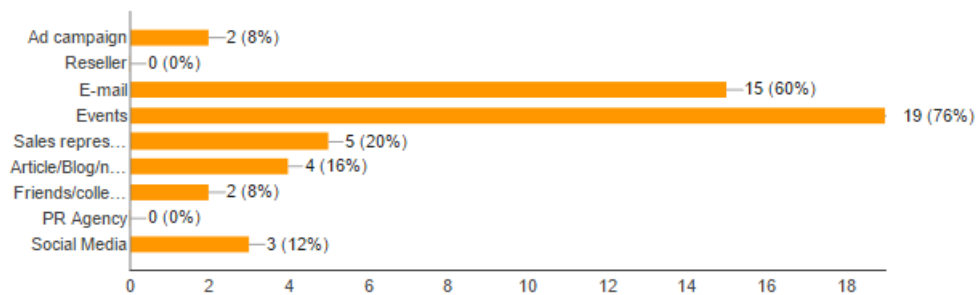


FIGURE 19. Goodspeed awareness (Survey result)

The majority of the participants (76%) stated that they have come across Uros Ltd. while participating in various events. It was expected in a way considering the number of events that Uros Ltd. attends annually for networking, business opportunities and deal-making. 60% of the respondents said that they came to know Uros Ltd. through an e-mail campaign and 20% of them gave credit to the sales representatives. Sadly, only 12% of the respondents said that they had come across UROS through social media. From this it is clear that the sales process and relation building is still driven by the conventional methods of networking and marketing for Uros Ltd. This clearly calls out for a need to boost social media campaigns.

The survey conclusion:

Overall, the survey was satisfactory. As the response rate was way lower than anticipated, the survey result cannot be used to form any theory or used for providing a statistical significance. But that was not the idea of the survey in the first place. The low survey rate does not necessarily mean a bad quality survey result. And the choice of the sample is expected to ensure avoiding the biases. The survey has served the purpose correctly in determining the behaviour of the prospects in SM and gaining insight into the way Uros Ltd. needs to head for formulating its SM tactics well.

## **9 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

### **9.1 Conclusion**

Even though B2B spending on social media is increasing, the majority of B2B companies still fail to integrate social media in their business practices. This paper was able to dig out the reasons behind this hesitation. Studying and analysing the pre-existing research papers and web contents, it was able to determine that implementation of social media can be highly beneficial in the B2B context, too. While the traditional marketing strategies still work, social media is not to be neglected as it opens up another door for the prospects to see you and reach out to your company and vice versa. Ignoring the contemporary marketing tool may cost a company a huge opportunity.

Despite B2C companies' success stories in adoption of social media, failing to notice the potential of social media has posed as a major roadblock in unleashing its advantages and exploiting its benefits for B2B groups. And that has resulted in a lack of encouraging stories for urging the companies towards striving social media goals. The lack of top management support, no fit with product offering and no clear financial benefits were seen as the three main barriers to integrate with social media. Along with that, a challenge is also seen in selecting a good analytics tool to measure and monitor social media activities. In the same way, even though the companies have actually started adopting social media practices, they have not yet been able to integrate them in achieving a remarkable goal with the lack of a written social media strategy.

Despite the prevalence of few barricades, if we weigh them with the benefits that social media can bring to your business, the difference will be huge, obviously benefits outweighing the barricades. On the basis of the research and the survey, I have summed up the most important reasons why it is important for the B2B organizations to adopt social media practices.



### Wide audience and global awareness (Be where your audience is):

The foremost reason why businesses should be active in social media is the increasing number of audiences they can reach online as an active participation in social networking sites has seen a tremendous growth in the recent years (Kemp, 2016). We can take an example of LinkedIn whose recent report states that there are 414 million users (2015). It has become easier for the companies to deliver their message in the emerging market which could not have been a swift process with the traditional methods. As social media has created a global community, it has increased the reachability around the globe. As social networks are expanding to more and more countries and because of their sharing capabilities, social media becomes a window to the world providing easy access to information and increasing competitive intelligence. It not only gives a company visibility but it also provides a company an opportunity to keep an eye on the competitors, global market space and customers. Using social media as a listening tool, a company can turn this into an advantage by actually involving customers in the development process by tailoring the service according to their needs. Creating a strong social media presence can help a company to showcase its business and build the company's reputation, which in turn increases the company's trustworthiness. And with the enhancement in the web presence, SEO will be boosted, too.

### Emotion and promotion:

“Emotional connection is the key to brand loyalty. And the easiest way to create emotional connections with our audience and our community is through social media.” (Kaplan, 2015). It is a well-known fact that a B2B relation demands more emotional touchpoint as compared to B2C relations. The research conducted by Google showed that emotions and branding are closely related. It means that when a B2B buyer is emotionally connected with the company, it is more likely that they will buy from the company and that they also will be ready to pay more. It was also seen that B2B buyers and C-level executives use social media for making purchase decisions. This clearly demonstrates the significance of not just being present in social media but also exhibiting a good social

impression following the social media etiquettes. It is a challenge for social media managers to be present in all the platforms where their prospects are hanging in order to properly educate them about their product as business buyers are forming perceptions and studying technical specifications before actually contacting the suppliers.

### Content is king:

The vice president of BuzzFeed motion pictures Jonathan Perelman (2014) said, "Content is king, but distribution is queen. And she wears the pants." Hootsuite's strategic consultant Kemp Edmonds stated "B2B sales (versus B2C sales) most often require more human resources and content to build relationships and establish the value proposition" (Sorokina, 2015).

B2B buyers are characterised by the behaviour of conducting multiple researches before reaching the purchase or other decision making point. In Ec-colo media study (2014), IT buyers said that they consume two to eight assets (articles, e-books, whitepapers, blogs and videos) before making a purchase. A content is the best way for the companies to introduce themselves to the audience without spending much. Creating a content enables businesses to educate prospects, engage with customers, share company based information, gain trust and ultimately generate leads. In addition, a quality content can attract a right audience, evoke an emotional response and increase virality. Social media can be the best medium to promote and share contents and drive visitors to the website increasing traffic. Social media and content go hand in hand. It is very important to produce a well-researched, relevant and unique content. If the content reaches the right eyes and readers love what they read, then they share it in their own social networking sites increasing the reach to the larger population. If the content gets noticed by the influencers or the interested business group, it can generate business leads. Thus, B2B marketers need to focus more on a quality content as content is the king in the B2B marketing scenario. The content is after all the fuel required for an effective social media campaign. And a social media strategy should be drafted efficiently for the content distribution. And as the web presence enhances, the SEO is boosted.

## 9.2 Recommendation

After all the researches, studies and survey, I have come to a conclusion that social media can bring a real value to B2B businesses. It has been now clear that B2B buyers do not make purchase decisions without checking the companies online. Thus, it seems sensible for the companies to be present there in order to make the product accessible and attractive.

Of course, there is the company website. But if we talk about the ways to get people to your website, what can be a better option than social media? Social media acts as an important element in connecting and engaging with the customers. In addition to that, social media acts as an established distribution channel for company's content, ideas and contents.

As stated by Jonathan Wichmann (2016), one thing is clear: The world is moving faster and faster, and those who fail to adapt to the changes will not survive. It is important to integrate social media in the business strategy and in a right way. Not putting enough effort on planning social media strategies and expecting to see the immediate result are few things to name that steal the social media benefits away. I am not saying that social media is capable of single handedly taking care of the company's growth. It will be a huge mistake to shift all the traditional marketing efforts and budget to social media. But they should go hand in hand by integrating social media in traditional marketing practices for the most efficient result.

From the survey analysis, we can get the idea about social media preferences that the client company's target audience possess and we have already discussed what that means for the company. The result from the survey can be helpful in plotting the social media plan for the company. After getting the overview of the SM status for B2B organizations, observing Uros Ltd's own SM outcome and exploring consumer preferences, I have been able to build the following recommendations for Uros Ltd. as a B2B organization:

### Plan and write down the objectives:

It is now certain that just being present on social media is not enough but pre-meditation and plotting a social media strategy beforehand is crucial for creating company awareness and achieving social media goals. First of all, the company needs to have a clear idea about what it wants to accomplish from social media practices. Does it simply want to create a general awareness, drive traffic towards its website or generate leads and create business opportunities? It is good to think S.M.A.R.T (Specific, measurable, Relevant and Timely) while setting the goal which is meaningful as well as attainable. Creating effective objectives and goals requires the whole marketing and sales team's effort and managerial support rather than an individual's push. And only developing a concrete plan can guide a company's social media actions and makes it possible to add metrics to measure it. Without a defined goal, it is not possible to say if you have succeeded or failed. For making the social media objective more effective, it is better to have it written and create a strategic document.

### Engage with the audience:

As it is said: Be where your audience is. First of all, we need to determine where the target audience is hanging online and how likely it is that they check the company's social media for making purchase decisions or creating other business opportunities. From the conducted survey we can see that the interest group for the client company is participating in one or many social media platforms and their purchase decisions are significantly affected by the company's social media presence. Social media is not only about reaching out to new people but it is also a good way to keep and nurture the existing relationships by maintaining engagement. Since B2B has a small audience to start with, it is not the best idea to focus on numbers but it is rather recommended to work on maintaining the current relations. From time to time, social media contests, quizzes or polls can be organized for engaging and growing the amount of audience.

### Focus on Content:

Being a B2B company, i.e. a company that provides services to other companies, it is essential that the company provides a place or platform where other companies can go in order to find answers to their questions regarding the company, product and service. Creating a content is the best way to feed relevant, valuable and well-timed information to your customers or prospects. Thus, it is very important to have a great content on the website. The content can be in various forms like blogs, video, infographics, whitepaper, guides and podcasts. In addition to writing about the company and its products, customer stories can be shared. The company needs to create a variety of things what it can offer to its audience still maintaining the value of the information shared. A visual content has become a powerful tool to interact with the customers; therefore the company also needs to give some attention to video contents. The conducted survey also showed that people are using YouTube in a both personal and professional way. In addition, an editorial calendar can be used to control the publications.

### Monitor and Measure:

After putting so much effort in social media campaigns, it is sensible to monitor and measure the outcome. Measuring the strategy is a good practice for proving whether the social media efforts are really working or the company is just shooting aimlessly. It enables the company to see if the social media goals and strategy are mixing well, if the social media practices are really working on the company's favour and if the company is really gaining a quality audience. Moreover, it allows the company to see where the effort can be improved and it helps the company to change the goal as needed. Analytics tools like Google analytics and buffer analytics are already in use but they can be used more effectively to measure, after determining goals and creating metrics.

## 10 DISCUSSION AND LIMITATIONS

In this chapter I intend to cover the matters that would have otherwise left unmentioned. Social media is a huge topic in itself. It consists of a lot of branches and sub-sections, which cannot be left unaddressed and at the same time it is not possible to incorporate everything in a single thesis. Thus, I tried to keep my track focusing on the B2B aspect of social media touching the matters that required to be discussed in order to build the understanding of the issue. When working for Uros Ltd. and managing the contents for company's social networking sites, it was interesting to dig deeper into the subject matter and to resolve the question about the workability of social media in B2B environment. The research work made me familiar with various concerns regarding the matter in question and helped me gain insight into what actually is the situation with other companies and organizations similar to Uros Ltd.

There were two questions to be tackled in the research paper. First, to find out if social media works in the B2B context just like it has proved right for the B2C market. And secondly, to use the findings as a reference in determining if it works for UROS Ltd. as a B2B company, too. A literature review was the best way to discover and enlighten one about the whole social media and the B2B scenario by studying what kind of outcome had been resulted from the previous researches as there have been a lot of studies conducted already. And for determining the social media usage for Uros Ltd. at first, it was planned to perform a competitor analysis in order to figure out how Uros Ltd's competitors are using social media in their communication and marketing plans. But unfortunately this method was not implemented. Instead, it was decided to perform a research survey targeting the group of people from the similar industry who were as well the interest group of the client company.

The respondents were approached both as a person and as a company representative. The survey intended to get their opinion as a customer on how they would perceive any companies on social media and secondly, as a professional representing a company on how they perceived social media as a communica-

tion tool for reaching out other companies. The survey was conducted in a small segment of individuals with a similar industrial background thus, the result cannot be generalised but it gives the company some idea about the opinion of their interest group concerning the use of social media as a communication channel.

The thing that could be done for a better result in my opinion was framing the real social media strategy for the company and testing it in order to be able to give a concrete answer to what kind of social strategy really works for UROS Ltd. as a B2B organization, which could not be achieved in this study due to time constraints.

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## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1: Social media in B2B Relations online survey invitation e-mail

Appendix 2: Social Media in B2B Relations Survey



## Appendix 1: Social media in B2B Relations online survey invitation e-mail

Hi First Name,

With social media's increasing influence on B2B scenario, some companies have already embraced it as an emerging marketing and communication tool while others are struggling to keep up. This survey is done in order to explore the social media's practicality in B2B communication in the mobile industry. It is part of my bachelor's degree thesis work carried out jointly for Oulu University of Applied Sciences and UROS Ltd.

As a fellow GSMA member, you have been invited to participate in the survey. You will be asked simple questions about your involvement in social media personally and professionally when it comes to connecting with businesses online.

It will take approximately 5 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The survey is anonymous and I assure that your response will only be used for thesis purpose and kept in strict confidentiality. Your opinions and input are highly appreciated.

If you have any concerns regarding the survey, feel free to send your queries to me [atchandani.thapa@uros.com](mailto:atchandani.thapa@uros.com).

Thank you very much for your precious time!

Best regards,

Chandani Thapa Magar

Marketing Associate, UROS – Uni-fi Roaming Solutions

Mobile: 00358-401806716

e-mail: [chandani.thapa@uros.com](mailto:chandani.thapa@uros.com)

You can start the survey by clicking the button below.

Appendix 2: Social Media in B2B Relations Survey

## Social Media in B2B Relations

**\* Required**

**Gender \***

Male

Female

**Age Group \***

Below 25

26-35

36-45

46-55

56 and above

**Country \***

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

**Industry \***

Choose ▾

**Seniority Level \***

Choose ▾

**NEXT**

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# Social Media in B2B Relations

Do you use these social media platforms for personal use, professional use or both?

	Personal	Professional	Both	I don't use it
Facebook	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
LinkedIn	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Google+	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pinterest	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Snapchat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instagram	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Youtube	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Slideshare	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quora	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reddit	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Line	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
WeChat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Weibo	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Vkontakte	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Mention if you use any other social media:

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

Do you follow these blogging networks?

	Yes	No
Medium	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tumblr	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wordpress	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What kind of content shared in social media do you value the most?

- Infographics/Meme
- Videos
- Reviews/opinions
- 'How to' guides/Lists
- Interviews
- Tech news
- Contents with emotional value
- Current affairs
- Blogs
- Podcasts
- White papers

Mention if any other:

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

What are the most important reasons for you to follow companies in social media?

- Product updates
- Swift customer service
- To show loyalty
- Creating business opportunities
- Making purchase decisions
- Company's authenticity

Mention if any other:

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

Social media shapes perception of an organization or a company.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Agree

Whom do you trust the most for information gathering and recommendation?

- Advertisement on TV or newspapers
- Influencers
- People you know (friends, family, colleagues)
- Consumer opinions posted online
- Branded websites
- E-mails you signed up for
- Bloggers

Mention if any other:

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

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## Social Media in B2B Relations

### As a company representative

Your company owns any social media account:

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Select top five social media for your company:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- Pinterest
- Google+
- Slideshare
- Youtube
- Quora
- Reddit

Mention if any other

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

Social media activities bring value to our company B2B relationships:

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not really	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Yes, a lot

If you were making business decisions for your company, the other party's social media activities would influence your decision making.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Yes, a lot

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## Social Media in B2B Relations

**Finally one more question about our own awareness:**

Have you come across UROS (Goodspeed) information through any of these medium?

- Ad campaign
- Reseller
- E-mail
- Events
- Sales representative
- Article/Blog/news
- Friends/colleagues
- PR Agency
- Social Media

**Mention if any other:**

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

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# Social Media in B2B Relations

Thank you for your participation!

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SUBMIT

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