The aim of this thesis is to study how the case company’s employees act as company advocates in social media. The thesis takes the employees’ perspective, studying specifically their experiences regarding social media, and thus contributes to the existing research. On a larger scale, the research offers insight on the changing role of the employees as communicators in organizations.

The research questions that guide the thesis are What is employee advocacy in social media by nature? and What drives employee advocacy in social media?

Many studies have in the past focused on the role of professionals and leaders as communicators, neglection the fact that communication takes place throughout the organization. However, due to the emergence of the new communication technologies, it can be said that organizational members now more than ever have the means and power to partake in organizational communication (Juholin et al. 2015). More insight on the employee perspective on the topic is needed, and this research aims at casting more light on the issue.

Furthermore, the current research agrees that social media seems to be top priority for many organizations, but there exists only a limited amount of information on the use of social media for organizational purposes (e.g. Landers & Callan 2014, Charoensukmongkol 2014). “Research on social media in organizations is in its infancy,” summarize Landers and Goldberg (2014, 298). In addition, it has remained undiscovered what employees do on social media and what drives their actions (Landers & Callan 2014, 628). The topic is of interest to the case company as they wish to harness more employees to be their online advocates in the future. Overall, the research is interesting to the research community as it is topical and offers insight of a very traditional industrial company and its employees.

The theoretical framework of the thesis consists of academic insight on organizational communication, employee advocacy, social media and employees’ usage of social media. Starting point to the research is organizational communication, as employees’ use of social media by definition implies organizational interference (Landers & Goldberg 2014, 302). Especially valuable to this study is the recent, specific research on employees’ use of social media in organizational context.

Empirical research consists of two parts, the first being a preliminary survey, which maps whether employee advocacy is a topical and valid research topic for the case company. The main research takes the form of twelve semi-structured interview. These interviews were analyzed using the means of thematic differentiation.

The results of the thesis indicate that employee advocacy in social media is largely voluntary of nature, and therefore incentives are not needed to endorse advocacy in social media. They also suggest that the advocates tend to be early adapters of the new communication technologies, and view them overall positively. The advocates operate in social media on a daily basis, and the advocacy is carried out in the most commonly used social media arenas such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. Additionally, employee advocacy was found to be associated with symmetrical two-way communication and positive employee organization-relationship. Lastly, the research unveiled that employee advocacy in social media is driven more by utilitarian than hedonistic drivers.
Employee advocacy in social media

- Case study of a Finnish listed company

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1. Introduction

Social media has had a revolutionary impact on our private and professional communication during the last decades (Dreher 2014, 344). The social media environment differs from traditional communication platforms, as it creates new possibilities for sharing ideas and content, and enables a more dialogic environment for discussions (Eren & Vardalier 2013, 852). Understanding the new communication landscape has also been the interest of the research community, which has studied it especially from individuals’ and organizations’ viewpoints (e.g. Zoonen et al. 2014, Lietsala & Sirkkunen 2008, Aula & Heinonen 2011, Landers & Callan 2014).

Social media has created a new set of rules for organizations (as studied by e.g. Aula 2010 and Fertik & Thompson 2010): as stakeholders are increasingly in non-mediated contact with the organizations, they demand more transparency and real-time communication. In this environment, employees are in a key role as communicators, having the possibility to improve their employer’s credibility. In addition, engaging and empowering the employees can be one of the best ways the organization can humanize and unify the company voice. (Weber Shandwick 2014\(^1\), 2.)

The aim of this thesis is to investigate what employee advocacy in social media is and what drives it. The research of the thesis takes the form of a case study; I study a specific company, which has in its communication strategy stated to wish to encourage all employees to act as communicators and has started to pay more attention to empowering employees to enter social media. Due to this, it can be predicted that the amount of employees partaking in online discussions and sharing content as the employer’s representatives is likely to grow in the future. Therefore, it is beneficial for the case company to know the roots of why employees choose to participate, how they do it, and what kind of implications this can have.

\(^1\) Weber Shandwick, which is a Public Relations consultancy, conducted in partnership with KRC Research a global online survey of 2,300 employees to study online employee activists
The researcher position in this study is as follows. I have often wondered in the past, what has made me want to support some employers in social media and not others. I currently work in the case company’s communication department, social media being a part of my work and personal interest. The topic of the research arose from my own experience of seeing that some of the case company’s employees work as social media advocates without any official encouragement from the company. My interest in the topic began to grow, and after discussions with the case company, it was agreed that this was a special topic they wanted to research closer.

1.1 Purpose of the study and research questions

The aim of this thesis is to study how the case company’s employees act as company advocates in social media. The thesis takes the employees’ perspective, studying specifically their experiences regarding social media, and thus contributes to the existing research. On a larger scale, the research offers insight on the changing role of the employees as communicators in organizations.

The theoretical framework of the thesis consists of academic insight on organizational communication, employee advocacy, social media and employees’ usage of social media. Starting point to the research is organizational communication, as employees’ use of social media by definition implies organizational interference (Landers & Goldberg 2014, 302). Especially valuable to this study is the recent, specific research on employees’ use of social media in organizational context, offered for instance by Leftheriotis and Giannakos (2014), Dreher (2014) and Miles and Mangold (2014).

Empirical research aims at amending this theoretical framework by increasing knowledge on the specific topic, therefore enhancing the discussion and findings. The research questions that guide the thesis are:

\textit{RQ1: What is employee advocacy in social media by nature?}

\textit{RQ2: What drives employee advocacy in social media?}
When looking at the causalities in the research, I adopt a *pragmatic* stand. The pragmatic approach includes an instrumental stance towards concepts and theories: they are important as they advance the study, but do not equate reality. I accept certain cause-effect relationships, as they help structure the phenomenon. (Aaltola & Valli 2001, 20.)

The philosophy of science I follow is *social construction of reality*, introduced by Berger and Luckmann (1966), which means that the way we construct and reconstruct our society and reality happens through social interaction. Therefore, when analyzing the interviews, I consider the speech revealing and maintaining the subjective reality of the interviewee. The interview data is considered important, and discussed in parallel with theoretical findings.

**1.2 Research gap**

Many studies have in the past focused on the role of professionals and leaders as communicators, neglecting the fact that communication takes place throughout the organization. However, due to the emergence of the new communication technologies, it can be said that organizational members now more than ever have the means and power to partake in organizational communication (Juholin et al. 2015). More insight on the employee perspective on the topic is needed, and this research aims at casting more light on the issue.

Recent contributions suggest that the employee perspective is gaining more ground in research (e.g. Nell & Moody 2014, Mangold & Miles 2007), and especially during the past years, employees’ use of social media gained new visibility in communication studies (e.g. Zoonen et al. 2014, Weber Shandwick 2015, Miles & Mangold 2014, Latib et al. 2014 and Leftheriotis & Giannakos 2014).

The current research agrees that social media seems to be top priority for many organizations, but there exists only a limited amount of information on the use of social
media for organizational purposes (e.g. Landers & Callan 2014, Charoensukmongkol 2014). “Research on social media in organizations is in its infancy,” summarize Landers and Goldberg (2014, 298). In addition, it has remained undiscovered what employees do on social media and what drives their actions (Landers & Callan 2014, 628). There is still a research gap, as noted by Zoonen et al. (2014, 850):

Although the key role of employees in influencing external perceptions of the organization has long been recognized, their role as online representatives of their organization through social media use has been overlooked. The voluntary nature of these messages, by knowledgeable employees, might result in a positive evaluation of the content they spread in terms of credibility and trustworthiness.

The topic is of interest to the case company as they wish to harness more employees to be their online advocates in the future. Overall, the research is interesting to the research community as it is topical and offers insight of a very traditional industrial company and its employees.

1.3 Key concepts

Next, I define the central concepts of the study briefly. I will return to the concepts and explain them in detail in also the upcoming chapters.

Terms organization and company are used in the study interchangeably and as synonyms. When conducting the case study, I use the case company’s name and refer to it also as employer when discussing with the interviewees. Dialogue is also one commonly referred concept, which is understood as people coming together, listening to each other's views and pursuing to come to a shared understanding (Juholin et. al 2015, 329).

Employee communication is one of the key concepts of the research. It is a facet of organizational communication, and also sometimes referred to as internal
communication. Employee communication is a central process through which employees make sense of the organization, diffuse information, connect, and construct a sense of belonging and a common culture (Men 2014, 256). However, largely due to the emergency new communication channels, boundaries of internal and external communications are breaking, and it might not be relevant any longer to separate the two, as I will introduce further in the thesis.

*Employee advocacy* is understood in this study as a behavior of employees, when they voluntarily support their employer and promote positive image external to the organization (Men 2014).

When discussing *social media*, I follow the view of Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) and refer to the external social networking tools such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram and blogs. Another term used parallel is the *social networking tools*. The case company does not have internal social media at use except for a company blog, which is not included in the study. Social media *arenas, platforms* and *sites* are used in the research as synonyms: they all mean the online social environments where content is exchanged in a two-way, dialogic stream.

With *employees' use of social media*, I refer to employees consuming or producing social media content, which has to do with their work, employer, or the products and services of the employer (Zoonen et al. 2014, 850). The employees can do this either at work or on their spare time. In any case, contributing to social media is not part of the job description of the employee – he/she uses it sincerely and voluntarily.

**1.4 Structure of the thesis**

The content of the thesis is divided into eight chapters. After introducing the topic and agenda in the first chapter, I will proceed to literature review of organizational and employee communications in the second chapter, and social media in organizational context in the third. Then, on the fourth part of the study, I will describe the case company and their communication approach. Fifth part of the study reports the
methodology used and sixth follows with findings and analysis of the research. On the seventh, I answer to the research question and evaluate the study, and on the eight, draw conclusions and give suggestions for further study based on the research and literature.

2. Organizational communication and employee perspective

In this chapter, I present the recent authors’ views on organizational communication, focusing on employee-centered communication perspective. The starting point to this chapter is the need for a wider approach of organizational communication, which results from the more dynamic public spheres, more uncertain environments to organizations and changes in working life (Juholin et al. 2015, 6). At the end of the chapter, I introduce the concept of employee advocacy, which will be central to the research at hand.

2.1 Outlining organizational communication theory

Organizational communication has been at the center of communication research for several decades (e.g. Shannon & Weaver 1954, Grunig 1975, McQuail & Windahl 1993, Carey 1989 & Miller 2014). By definition, organizational communication consists traditionally of internal communication, or employee communications, and external communication, which is sometimes referred to as public relations (Men 2014, 256). It is the voice of the organization, which affects how it is perceived by its stakeholders (Kalla 2005, 305).

Problem with defining organizational communication begins with the fact that it intertwines two complicated and large phenomena: organization and communication (Mumby 2013, 6). Miller (2014, 2) notes that nowhere today is the complexity of the world more apparent than in organizations: due to the global and virtual interconnections, and with the advanced communication technology, it is getting
increasingly difficult to determine organizational boundaries. However, Miller (ibid.) also suggests that organizational communication has an important role in disentangling these complexities.

Additionally, communication processes are getting more and more intricate. Whereas at first the S-M-C-R (source transmits a message through a channel to receiver) model by Shannon and Weaver (1954) was once seen as adequate, it is nowadays agreed that communication is more about intertwined networks, persuasion as well as creation of meaning, understanding and culture (Miller 2014, 12). In this system, the communication must flow in several, nonlinear directions (ibid.). Therefore, a modern approach of organizational communication considers it as strategic management of relationships and interactions between the organization’s stakeholders (Juholin et al. 2015, 1).

It is nowadays agreed, that most of the early models of organizational communication rose from relatively stable conditions and trusted in management’s power (Juholin et al. 2015, 7). The traditional theorists, like Shannon and Weaver (1954), suggested a one-way flow of organizational communication, hierarchical and top-down. From this perspective, organizational communication was about controlling the system and organizational life (Juholin et al. 2015, 4-5). As Grunig (1975, 99) noted: “commands should be clear and presented preferably in written form so that subordinates would have little difficulty understanding management wishes”.

From this starting point, the models of organizational communication have evolved through the ritual model (Carey 1989), understanding communication as creating and maintaining reality, to semiotics, where communication is perceived as encoding and decoding of meaning (Fiske 1990). Clearly, these models have acknowledged the role of communication professionals and management in organizational communication, but as Juholin et al. (2015, 1) suggest, “undermined the role of the others”, referring to the workforce in general.
In addition, what the traditional models of organizational communication lack, is acknowledging phenomena such as engagement, empowerment and flow as well as emotions and feelings. They are also weak in the sense that they make a division between “subjects” (management) and “objects” (employees) of communication, and disregard the role of the latter as important communicators. (Juholin et al. 2015, 6-7.)

One of the first models which addressed the individuals’ role in organizational communication was Osgood-Schramm’s (1954) circular model. The circular model challenged the traditional linear by noticing the individual’s active role in the communication (ibid.). However, the critics of the model assessed that it is more suitable for analyzing interpersonal communication than organizational communication in a broader sense. (McQuail & Windahl 1993.)

Craig’s (1999) constitutive model of communication is one of the most suitable models for today’s workplace. Craig proposes this “model of models” to help understand that it is possible to constitute communication in multiple ways. By adopting this view, it is accepted that organizational communication can be structured differently depending on the organization and its situation. (ibid.)

2.2 Employee-centered communication perspective

When reflecting to this background, it is no wonder that employees often perceive organizational communication as belonging to the communications function (Kalla 2005, 309). However, the recent literature suggests a shift in employees’ communicative role (Juholin et al. 2015, 3). For instance Kalla (2005, 309) reminds that it is important that workforce recognizes their communicative role, and that both the organization and the employees start embracing it. Also Grunig (1992) suggest that a participative communication climate, together with power symmetry and gender equality, is the key facilitator of successful organizational communication. Therefore, the starting point to this research is a shift towards employee-centered organizational communication.
Communication is the basis for employees for making sense of their organization. It has many functions, including building motivation, trust, identity, and engagement (Berger 2008). Roots to employee-centered communications lay in the research on *internal communication*. Internal communication, which is also sometimes called as *employee communications* or *internal relations*, can be defined as a way to describe and explain the operations of the organization to its workforce. It is therefore usually carried out in practice by the communications department of the organization. (Berger 2008.)

The current research (e.g. Juholin et al. 2015) suggests that due to the new communication technologies, time of separating internal communications from external communications is over. Therefore, it is more fruitful to talk about employee-centered communication when assessing the communicative role of employees. In this way, the active role of employees as communicators is taken better into consideration.

For long, there was not specific research or literature on employee-centered communication. Many authors (e.g. McQuail and Windahl 1993 & Miller 2014) discussed employees’ role as communicators, however, the main focus was in professional and managerial communication. Also Ruck and Welch (2012, 295) note how little emphasis both research and organizations in practice have given to what and how employees would like the employers to communicate.

One of the first to fully assess the communicative role of employees were Juholin et al. (2015). They suggest a shift during the 21st century in how employees are perceived in both organizational communication and reputation management study, by presenting that every individual of the workforce has a role as communicators. They note the shift towards seeing employees in strategically important communicative role arising from three premises, which are introduced next. (Juholin et al. 2015.)

First, Juholin et al. (2015) underline the increased importance organizational visioning and legitimization. This has been caused by the more dynamic relationship with the environment; the way that the organization operates needs to be more proactive than reactive, and the organization needs a clear purpose of being. This poses a new
challenge for organizational communication: all stakeholders must be kept engaged and informed of the operating environment. (Juholin et al. 2015, 2.)

Second, Juholin et al. (2015) highlight the effect that the new communication environment has had on communication. With this, they mean the emergence of internet and the social media, where everyone has the means to generate and publish content. Juholin et al. (2015, 2) refer to the framework proposed by Castells (2007), where everything in the communication landscape is of the “self” nowadays: self-generated content, self-directed emission and self-selected reception. In addition, they propose that internet has blurred the line between internal and external communication; if once, the organization could keep the information to itself, it is now easy for anyone to disseminate “internal” information to “external” audiences. On one side, this poses threats to the organization, but on the other, it offers a new platform for strategic employee communication. (Juholin et al. 2015.)

Juholin et al.’s (2015) third premise is that all employees are equally responsible for organizational communication. With this, they emphasize every organizational member’s role as communicators, which is something that the first organizational communication models were lacking. According to this premise, the organizational communication today should focus on finding new approaches to interaction and collaboration, and embrace employees’ roles as communicators. (Juholin et al. 2015)

As a modern approach to strategic employee communication, Juholin et al. (2015) suggest responsible dialogue, which extends the thinking of the previous communication approaches by highlighting the communicative potential of the workforce. Responsible dialogue, they say, is not a new paradigm but a refreshment of the old thinking. The strength of the view is its sensitivity towards change and possible crises and issues, which the organizations are facing increasingly in their operating environment. Framework of responsible dialogue also emphasizes aspects such as engagement, commitment and understanding, which the traditional models are lacking. However, Juholin et al. (2015, 13) themselves state that cross-cultural differences and organizational structure can have an effect on how the responsible dialogue is carried
out in practice in organizations. Also organizational culture has a significant role, as dialogue often depends on having the right kind of culture in place. (Juholin et al. 2015.)

Another conceptualization with similar emphasis is two-way symmetrical communication, introduced by Grunig et al. (2002). Basic premise of this approach is that organizational communication should be horizontal and employee-centered of nature, and favor collaboration, mutual understanding, consideration and negotiation. The effectiveness of this kind of communication lays in reinforcing positive behavioral outcomes. Likewise, the researchers suggest that two-way symmetrical communication nurtures quality employee-organization relationship, which has an effect on employee advocacy. (Grunig et al. 2002.)

Men (2014) amends the discussion by emphasizing the impact of employee-organization relationship on employee communication. When there is trust and commitment, the relationship improves, and affects positively to the employees’ communication behavior (Men 2014, 256). Organizational support plays a key role as well: when the employees perceive that the organization values their work, this may impact positively to employees’ communicative behavior (Ruck & Welch 2012, 296).

Ruck and Welch (2012, 295) assess that all exchange relationships within the organization affect the so-called in-role and extra-role performance of the employees. Communicative actions are both in-role, being part of every employee’s job, but for instance advocacy is extra-role, something additional to the everyday work assignments. Also organizational identification, the degree the employee feels connected to the organization, affects the extent of extra-role performance. (Ruck & Welch 2012, 295.)

Men (2014) notes that simultaneously with the shift towards seeing employees in strategically important communicative role, the view on leadership has evolved. Whereas traditionally leadership was perceived as hierarchical and one-way, transformational and dialogical leadership are the management styles of today. This
development has had an impact on the organizational communications systems, making them more interactive and dialogical of nature (Men 2014, 256). Grunig (1992) agrees and introduces that power and communication symmetry as well as more participative organizational culture are the key facilitators of successful organizational communication.

Overall, from these frameworks it can be seen that employee-centered communication perspective is gaining more ground in research. The presented frameworks are valuable, as they highlight each individual’s role as a communicator, and take into consideration the roots of the development and the more complex phenomenon, such as leadership and organizational relationships. From this starting point, the following chapter (2.2.1) will assess employees as communicators through the framework of employee voice.

2.2.1 Employee voice and new communication landscape

As established throughout this chapter, the workforce has a key communicative role in the organization. This is based on the thinking that communication is no longer a linear sequence between the sender and the receiver, but a social process where everyone has an important role. Like Mazzei (2014, 83) reflects: “Organizations come alive through communication and all individuals take part in the enactment of organizations.”

Researchers have for long argued for the importance of having feedback and voice mechanism in the organization. Previously, the emphasis was on the mandated techniques, such as employee surveys and interviews, and employee voice was seen as “one voice and opinion”, gathered through the official mechanism. However, when discussing employee voice today, the term refers to the voluntary expression of the self and is individual for each employee. Importantly, employees’ communicative participation’s beneficial impact has been acknowledged: it can lead to efficiency,

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2 Grunig’s Excellence study (1992) discovered that symmetry in communication is at the core of successful organizational communication. From this study arose i.e. two-way symmetrical model of public relations and a symmetrical system of internal communication.
creativity and enhanced quality work, as well as detecting problems before they escalate into crisis. (Dundon et al. 2004.)

Therefore, a modern approach to *employee voice* is to define it as employees expressing their thoughts and ideas to influence the organization and its stakeholders (Miles & Mangold 2014, 403). Through this complex exchange of meaning, employees can, for instance, contribute to the organization positively and also express their dissatisfaction (Dundon et al. 2004, 149). When discussing employee voice, one of the key things to consider is that the employee him/herself often makes the decision about the content, timing and channel of the communication (Miles & Mangold 2014, 403). Additionally, it is important that the employees’ experience that they have opportunities to express themselves, and that their insight is taken into consideration (Ruck & Welch 2012, 300).

Today, operating environments are increasingly complex and turbulent. In this climate, organizations should consider the employees as insiders, whose voice matters (Argenti 1998, 200). With the emergence of internet and social media, the official spokespersons are no longer the only source of information – employees are also a crucial source in giving sense to the organization and its actions through mass self-communication³ (Zoonen et al. 2014, 850). This technology is a new way in which the employee voice can be harnessed in a way that adds value to the organization (Miles & Mangold 2014, 402). Its opportunities are unlimited, and all employees, in spite of their time-zone and location, can join the discussion on their employer online (Mazzei 2014, 87).

Miles and Mangold (2014, 403) note that organizations who understand these new voice mechanisms can have a real competitive advantage. On the other side, organizations that ignore the new communication platforms may suffer from virtual bombs unleashed by the workforce. Miles and Mangold (2014) draw a link between understanding employee voice and the new mechanisms – when both are comprehended, organizations have a valuable resource that can reach to stakeholders of unprecedented proportions.

³ Mass self-communication refers to private senders being able to, through the digital channels, reach public or semi-public audience. It is self-communication because the content is generated by private person him/herself. An example of this could be a private tweet on Twitter, which can reach an unprecedented audience. However, it is noteworthy that mass self-communication does not replace the other identified ways of communication, such as interpersonal communication and mass communication - they coexist and complement each other. (Castells 2009.)
Mazzei (2014, 93) suggests that communicative actions by employees are at the root of a successful organization. The same researcher refers to “enabled employees” when discussing employees, who have means to partake in the conversations regarding the employer (ibid.). Miles and Mangold (2014, 403) amend this by saying that when the employee voice is managed and guided, employees can help the organization to enhance its stakeholder relationships. However, Miles and Mangold (2014) thus suggest that employee voice should be controlled, for instance by providing official channels for expression, in order for it to become an advantage for the organization.

Mazzei (2014, 83) reminds that by guaranteeing employees the possibilities to speak their mind, they can also leak sensitive information and damage how the company is perceived. Therefore, also Mazzei (2014) suggests that certain organizational guidance is in place when reinforcing employees’ communicative actions. However, to clarify what kind of guidance is needed and what kind of underlying processes there are, further research is needed (ibid).

Mangold and Miles (2007) introduce a typology of employee brand to help understand the different ways organizations can harness the employee voice. Employee brand refers to the image an organization projects towards its external stakeholders through its workforce. The researchers see the employee brand vital for any organization, given that the employees’ communicative actions can affect the company’s reputation to a great extent.

In the typology, All Star Organizations are employers whose workforce is aware and understands what kind of things the employer wishes to project to external stakeholders. Employees must first know what kind of company image they are expected to present, and they must be motivated to do so. In this kind of organization, the employees are motivated to promote the employer, and uphold the wanted image. In order to become an All Star, the organization must constantly empower the employees to project the wanted image both internally and externally, and communicate constantly about what is expected of them as communicators. (Miles & Mangold 2014, 406.)
Miles and Mangold (2014, 403) remind that when discussing employee voice, it is critical also to understand the organizational context. The context often helps understand the employees’ decisions to channel their voice either publicly or within a smaller audience, and in a positive or negative tone (ibid). Also Juholin et al. (2015) acknowledge that organizational culture and climate have a strong impact on how dialogue is carried out in practice, which again has an impact on employee communication.

In the next section, I will present and discuss one specific form of employee communication, employee advocacy.

2.3 Employee advocacy

One of the key concepts in the research at hand is employee advocacy. In the research on employee voice, employee advocacy is an area which has not yet been fully assessed. Nevertheless, employee advocacy is a way of employees expressing their viewpoint in organizational context, and as such, an important area to study from both organizational and personal viewpoints.

In general, advocacy refers to trying to influence the public opinion and outcome. One part of it is positive word-of-mouth (WOM), however, it differs from WOM as it includes a strong relationship with the target of advocacy (McConnell 2004, 26). Therefore, advocacy is usually longer lasting and more influential way of supporting a cause (Men 2014, 261-262).

Both individuals and organizations advocate, and the external stakeholders expect that organizational actions include advocacy (McConnell 2004, 25). When talking about advocacy in organizational context, it can be expressed both internally and externally (Men 2014, 261-262.). In organization’s early stages, it is usually a few individuals, who are perhaps in some other ways also active in the organization, who carry out advocacy (McConnell 2004, 29).
Literature points to certain elements that make for successful organizational advocacy. First is *standing*, meaning that the organization and its employees take a stand on certain issue through acts of advocacy. Second, it is important to have *real constituency* on the issue. This refers to advocacy being more effective when the organization’s members can share their own experiences relating to the topic. Thirdly, as advocacy is often a long-term process, having *passion* for the issue is of importance, as it guarantees sustainable advocacy. (McConnell 2004, 28.)

Although organizations or bigger groups can advocate, individuals are often the most powerful advocates. This results from the fact, that the individual can share their personal experiences and give a face to the issue at hand. Also, the individual advocate is often a relatable peer, which has been proven to be important in persuasion. (McConnell 2004, 27.)

Public relations research has for long recognized the role of employees as advocates and spokespersons (Dozier et al. 1995), and employees communicative power’s increase in recent years has truly made employee advocacy a buzzword in literature (Men 2014, 261-262). Also research on marketing and business has discussed the concept of *customer advocacy*, which includes similar behavior. However, from the academic perspective, employee advocacy and its relation to organizational communication have remained largely undiscovered. (Men 2014, 261-262.)

*Employee advocacy* is the behavior of employees when they proactively promote their employer or employer’s products and services in their own networks. This, often, extends the reach and effectiveness of the organizational messages. Compared to the organization’s voice, the external audiences often perceive the employees as more neutral and trustworthy source of information. Therefore, acts of employee advocacy can be an effective buffer against organizational crises and other issues affecting its reputation. (Men 2014, 261-262.)

When discussing employee advocacy, it is important to note that it is voluntary of nature and a behavioral construct. As such, it indicates relatively strong relationship and
loyalty between the organization and the employee – the employee is willing to act voluntarily for the employer. Organizations can try to reinforce the acts of advocacy, for instance, by showing respect, developing a positive company culture, and having a empowering approach towards the workforce on a continuous basis. (Men 2014, 261-262.)

Nowadays, as employee advocacy is gaining more popularity among both marketing and communication practitioners, there is some existing insight on the nature of employee advocacy. For instance, European employees are three times less likely to act as advocates compared to North American employees. Even when taking into consideration factors like the employees’ profession and the use of technology, the results remain the same. This indicates that cultural differences can affect the degree to which employee advocacy is carried out in practice. (Edelman Trust Barometer 2015.)

The research also unveils that employee advocacy is higher among those who are familiar with the new communication technologies; specifically social media, smartphones and internet in general. It also suggests that employees who are more optimistic about these new communication platforms are more likely to become organizational advocates. (Edelman Trust Barometer 2015.)

It can also be added that whilst advocacy has been discussed in relation to promoting the organization and what it produces, it might also have an effect to aspects such as considering the organization as a target of investment or potential partner. It can also affect the extent to which the existing and potential employees view the employer as attractive. Therefore, the reach of advocacy can be more extensive than the existing research suggests, and thus the weakness of the research is, that it has only begun to study this multifaceted phenomenon.
2.3.1 Symmetrical communication and advocacy

Two-way symmetrical communication, as presented by Grunig et al. (2002), has been proven to have a significant effect on employee-organization relationship, which increases the likelihood of employee advocacy (Men 2014, 256). Therefore, this chapter examines symmetrical communication, employee-organization relationship, and their impact on advocacy.

Men (2014, 256) introduces that employee-organization relationship is central when discussing advocacy. The relationship means the extent to which the organization and its workforce trust each other, have a shared understanding on who can speak on behalf of the organization, and show loyalty to one another (Men 2014, 261).

This notion is supported by many researchers. For instance, Rhee (2004) found that the employees who experience a positive relationship with the organization are likely to support and contribute to the success of the organization by acting as advocates. Kim (2007) noted that the employee-organization relationship affects how willing employees are to seek and share information as well as to support the organization externally.

Also Gruning et al.’s (2002) excellence study suggests that long-term, positive relationship may trigger advocacy, and on the other hand, hinder harmful behavior. In addition, Men (2014, 261) acknowledges the effects poor employee-organization relationship can have: it may lead to a situation where employees join the critics of the organization and disassociate themselves from their employer altogether.

Symmetrical internal communication is suggested by Men (2014) as the best way the organization can develop the relationship with the employees. Symmetrical internal communication refers to the organization upholding open, dialogic and responsive way of communicating. This means that the employees’ voice is taken strongly into consideration in order to have mutual understanding and shared culture. When communication is symmetrical of nature, employees often experience a positive
relationship with the employer, and have a stronger sense of ownership towards the organization. (Men 2014, 273.)

To summarize, the importance of symmetrical internal communication is that it can improve the positive employee-organization relationship in long-term. Employees who trust the organization and perceive its communication dialogic communication are more likely to become advocates, and promote and protect the organization in their networks. (Men 2014.)

2.4 Learning so far

Aim of this chapter was to provide an understanding of the development of organizational communication theory to employee-centered communication view, and described the phenomenon of employee advocacy. Key general finding is that in the dynamic operating environment that the organizations face today, the traditional organizational communication approaches are not adequate, and the more current frameworks offer more relevant insight.

Also, the recent literature (Juholin et al. 2015) suggested a shift in employees’ communicative role, and therefore, more research and literature with this special focus has emerged during the past few years. Understanding this background is essential when proceeding to the next chapter, social media in organizational context, and when answering to the research questions.

To answer to the first research question, *What is employee advocacy in social media by nature?*, employee advocacy was found in this chapter to be associated with symmetrical two-way communications and positive employee-organization relationship. Therefore, it can be said that these two are influencers of employee advocacy.
3. Social media in organizational context

In this chapter, I will start by introducing the concept of social media, and discuss it in relation to organizational communication and the public perception of organizations. These are highlighted as they are, in the context of this thesis, two of the key areas which social media has affected.

After this, I present how the current literature sees the relationship of social media and employees. At the end of the chapter, I will combine the previously discussed theoretical frameworks, and summarize the meaning of employee advocacy in social media.

3.1 Social media – general words

When evaluating social media from communications’ perspective, it becomes evident that it has many unique features: open access, almost non-existent publicity threshold, conversational and communal nature, as well as means to support networking and distribute content quickly and extensively through links (Lietsala & Sirkkunen 2008, 19-20). Social media environment differs from traditional communication platforms, as it creates new possibilities for sharing ideas and content, and enables more dialogic discussions (Eren & Vardalier 2013, 852).

Dreher (2014, 344) suggests that social media has “fundamentally changed people’s private and professional lives”. And to certain extent, it is true: with the technology utilized by social media, anyone can reach a wide audience and interact with other users around the world (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010). Lietsala and Sirkkunen (2008, 29) classify social networking services to six types: 1) content producing and publishing (blogs, podcasts), 2) content sharing (YouTube), 3) social networking (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn), 4) co-production content creating (Wikipedia), 5) virtual worlds (Habbo Hotel) and 6) Add on -services (Slide, RockYou). However, when discussing social
media only as sites and services, its most important quality, social and communal nature, is forgotten. Lietsala and Sirkkunen (2008, 22) note that it is more essential and fruitful to look at social media as a new culture and way of communicating.

Aula and Heinonen (2011, 98) describe social media as a communal public sphere, where users discuss, publish, network and share content. A good characterization of social media is also that its use is based on voluntary, mutual participation, as most of the social media content emerges from its users. Social media also demolishes the boundaries of geographical place and time, because the users are present in social media around-the-clock. (ibid., 97-99.)

### 3.2 Social media alters organizational communication

Ever since its emergence, social media has also been of interest to organizations. From their perspective, social media is a new environment for business, marketing and connecting with stakeholders; a global marketplace, where users are consumers and thus potential customers. The effectiveness of social media from an organization’s point of view lies in its ability to be in direct, non-mediated communication with the stakeholders. In social media, the key is to be open to constantly learning new and renewing old processes. (Aula 2010, 43-49.)

The recent authors (e.g. Aula 2010, Lietsala & Sirkkunen 2008) agree that it is inevitable for organizations to acknowledge social media: as a matter of fact, embracing it as early as possible maximizes the organization’s changes of adapting to the new communication landscape (Landers & Goldberg 2014, 292). Aula (2010) summarizes the development by stating that one of the biggest mistakes an organization can do is to disregard social media altogether. In addition, restricting the use of social media at today’s workplace is unrealistic, and only delays the unavoidable (Dreher 2014, 348).

Nevertheless, organizations have been relatively slow to start adapting to the new platforms provided by social media (Landers and Goldberg 2014 & Dreher 2014).
Landers and Goldberg (2014, 284) introduce that this is due to the shift in control caused by social media: when before, the big and powerful had the control over information, now, the average individual is equally empowered. According to the Landers and Goldberg (2014), this opposes the goal of the traditional organizational communication: regulating the flow of information.

There are also other reasons as to why organizations have had difficulties to adapt to social media. One of the prerequisites in social media is that the organization cannot fully control or monitor it. Once content goes public in social media, it is difficult to demolish, and can be freely accessed by important stakeholders. This poses new risks to the organization, such as message inconsistency, public relation crisis, exposure of confidential material, and security breaches. Social media crisis can also have much more wide-reaching effects compared to traditional media, and can quickly alter the reputation of the organization or an entire industry. (Dreher 2014, 346.)

As mentioned, social media was first perceived by the businesses as a way to interact with customers (Landers & Callan 2014, 628). However, in the dynamic and competitive environment that the businesses face today, organizations have started to pay increasing attention to making sure that they have their employees’ support – both offline and online (Mangold & Miles 2007, 423), and therefore, organizations see social media increasingly also as means of engaging with employees (Landers & Callan 2014, 629).

This development can bring a lot of benefits: research on the topic suggests that social media, when implemented effectively, can improve the workplace culture, because communication affects the workplace culture and social media offers means to more informal communication (Nagendra 2014, 207). Social media can also be used to connect individuals with needed expertise and improve the engagement of employees – although the key fear in the early stages in the emergence of social media in organizational context was that employees take too much advantage on this and spend their days networking and socializing instead of taking care of their other tasks. (Landers & Callan 2014, 629.)
With this evolution, expectations of employees are also changing. More and more people who have grown up with social networking tools are entering the workforce. They have expectations towards the online presence of the organization, and have pre-existing knowledge on social media, and how to use it (Landers & Goldberg 2014, 292-301). To respond to this demand, organizations have begun to use the social networking tools, and even created their own social media to provide the employees with a platform to interact and learn collaboratively across company borders. (ibid. 284.)

Similar to how social media changes the way of doing business, it also alters the way we work. Social media enables fast-paced communication despite physical and temporal boundaries, and therefore, changes the structure of work. This change forces organizations to re-consider the traditional meaning of workplace, teams, training and management. (Landers & Goldberg 2014, 292.)

3.3 Social media shaping the public perception

One definition of social media is creating a digital word of mouth, which affects how the organization is perceived (Nagendra 2014, 198). “Public perceptions of organizations and their reputation are shaped more and more by the content people encounter on social media,” crystallize Zoonen et al. (2014, 850).

The current research suggests that internet and digitalization have changed the rules of the “reputation game”: if once there was talk of reputation management, it can now be destroyed in just a few clicks. This is due to the qualities of the digital media – it forces the organization to be more visible to its audiences and therefore, it is more under radar (Dreher 2014, 345). Organizations should, therefore, acknowledge the impact social media has on how they are perceived. Even if they are not present in the discussions regarding them in social media, their employees, customers and other stakeholders are. (Fertik & Thompson 2010, 2.)
With the emergence of social media, the stakeholders of the organization have gained new power. For instance, customers can describe their experiences of questionable service, and employees can share their bad treatment at workplace with a global audience (Fertik & Thompson 2010, 10). Miles and Mangold (2014, 402) summarize, that employees’ coffee talk that used to be internal has a new outlet: the online platforms.

On the other hand, employees’ social media activities can also have a positive effect on the company reputation among the important stakeholders: they can be strong advocates of the organization and its leadership (Dreher 2014, 345). Also, people seem to trust the employees more than the company. This results from the fact that content created by the employees is voluntary of nature – it lacks corporate jargon and seems more credible. (Zoonen et al. 2014, 850.)

Therefore, employees’ participation in social media discussions is more important than ever (Dreher 2014, 345). By engaging employees as users of social media, organization can improve its credibility, extend the reach of its communication to a larger network, and enhance dialogue with its employees. These should be of the organizations’ interest, as they often help reach other organizational goals. (Latib et al. 2014, 290-294.)

According to Aula and Heinonen (2011, 97), it is important that the organization does not aim at controlling the social media content. Quite the contrary: they recommend embracing social media as an arena where the public perception is formed based on the stories the stakeholder community tells. The organization can join only this conversation with storytelling that strengthens the favorable perceptions (Aula et. al 2008, 212). However, in order to do so, the organization must first understand and internalize the technical and cultural aspects of social media (Fertik & Thompson 2010, 44).

Overall, based on the literature review, it is fair to state that internet and the social networking tools are one of the important arenas where the public perception of the organization is formed today, and that employees have newfound role in how the
3.4 Employees in social media

To date, academic research has focused mainly on individuals’ and organizations’ use of social media. Although the research recognizes the key role of employees in influencing public perceptions of the organization, the role of the employees as online representatives of their employers in social networking arenas has been disregarded (Zoonen et al. 2014, 850). However, it is inevitable that the employees will take part in the online discussion about their employers (Dreher 2014, 346).

Employees’ online usage can be defined as “consuming or producing social media content related to their work, organization, or its products and services” (Zoonen et al. 2014, 850). The new technology has opened an entirely new arena for employees to engage with customers, colleagues and other organizational stakeholders (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010, 402). For employees, social media provides an opportunity to represent their organization, manage relationships and engage in personal career branding (Zoonen et al. 2014, 850). Work-related benefits of social media include maintaining professional networks, strengthening the bonds with colleagues, as well as gathering and promoting work-related information (Leftheriotis & Giannakos 2014, 135).

Recent research varies in its estimation of how big share of the workforce utilizes social media. When one study suggests that approximately two out of three uses social networking tools occasionally in organizational context (Leftheriotis & Giannakos 2014, 138), other says that less than half of employees take advantage of social media (Ruck & Welch 2012, 298).

There is also disagreement on what the most commonly used social networking tools are in organizational context. According to Nagendra (2014, 197) Facebook and Wikipedia are the most visited pages, followed by YouTube and Skype. However, Ruck and Welch (2012, 298) suggest that online video is the most popularly used social
media (mentioned by 53% of the respondents), followed by blogs (52%), instant messaging (47%) and Facebook, Twitter and Yammer (38%). Nevertheless, employees appear to be using social media more as a communication than a marketing tool (Eagleman 2013, 488).

Literature also disagrees whether demographic factors differentiate which employees partake in social media the most. For instance, Leftheriotis and Giannakos (2014, 138) discovered that social media usage is the highest at work among 26-45-year-old employees, whereas Eagleman (2013, 494) argues that demographic factors such as level of employment, age, gender, race or the level of education are no longer a differentiating factor on who takes part in social media in organizational context (Eagleman 2013, 494). Overall, current research confirms that employees of all age utilize social media (Leftheriotis & Giannakos 2014, 134).

Recent research (Charoensukmongkol 2014 & Landers and Goldberg 2014) also suggests that social support at work plays an important role in determining how much employees are using social networking tools in organizational context. Especially employees, whose coworkers are supportive of social media, seem to use it more regularly (Charoensukmongkol 2014, 346). That said, the authors disagree on whether the participation and support of management has influence on the social media behavior of employees. Whereas Charoensukmongkol (2014, 346) argues that employees who experience that the management is favorable towards social media tend to be less attached to it, Landers and Goldberg (2014, 301) say that partake of management influences positively the extent to which employees partake in social media.

### 3.4.1 What drives employees in social media

Recent literature has focused its efforts to discovering what makes the employees adopt social networking tools relating to their work. This has been at the center of, for instance, research by Leftheriotis and Giannakos (2014), Landers and Callan (2014), Nagendra (2014) and Zoonen et al. (2014). The topic is important, as organizations need
to understand why employees want to participate and contribute in social media (Leftheriotis & Giannakos 2014, 135).

It has been suggested that the employees fulfill both their *hedonic*, pleasure-oriented, and *utilitarian*, productivity-oriented needs when operating in social media (Leftheriotis & Giannakos 2014, 139). Contrary to what the early literature introduced, employees do not use social media at work so much for personal needs: they are mostly supporting employer’s collective efforts (Zoonen et al. 2014, 851). Nevertheless, social media is a platform where employees voice feelings such as anger and joy (Dreher 2014, 346).

Through social media, employees can keep up with business news and insight, which can help them grow professionally. They can also build relations with key stakeholders and future talent, as well as demonstrate transparency and give their organization a character online. Through their networks, employees can also gain a vast reach to their and the organization’s messages. (Dreher 2014, 345-346.)

Leftheriotis and Giannakos (2014, 134-142) note that 60% of the employees use social media to monitor the business environment or competitors. Keeping in touch with existing customers follows with 51%. In addition, 44% of the employees tell that they are spending free time, and 43% report to be looking for new customers in social media. (ibid. 138.)

Landers and Goldberg (2014, 300) suggest that employees wish to use social media to grow their own networks for reasons such as advancing in one’s career. Hence, social media in organizational context not only strengthens the bonds in existing networks, but creates new ones (Leftheriotis & Giannakos 2014, 135). Nagendra (2014, 201) discovered that employees use social media for “the 5 Cs”: a) *content*: sharing and gathering of information, b) *conversation*: having discussions in the online environment, c) *collaboration*: joining forces with people with similar interest to solve problems, d) *community*: enhancing the sense of togetherness within company, e) *collective intelligence*: managing and retaining talent through social media.
Landers and Callan (2014, 631-632) contribute to the discussion by presenting taxonomy of work behaviors relating to social media. They agree with “the 5Cs” presented by Nagendra (2014) and add that information gathering is one of the most common uses of social media at work. They also agree with Leftheriotis and Giannakos (2014) and say that relaxation and leisure, taking a break from work to continue more effectively, is also one of the positive social media behaviors. (Landers & Callan 2014.)

Landers and Callan (2014) emphasize the role of social media as enabler of communication with existing clientele, new customer outreach, organizational reputation management, and technical assistance. With technical assistance, they refer to social media providing for instance tools to file transfer, and with organizational reputation management, behaviors when employees monitor social media for disturbing content. The latter was viewed by the participants of their study as an important way to maintain the reputation of the employer, and appear attractive to customers also in the future. (Landers & Callan 2014, 631-632.)

Also the study by Zoonen et al. (2014, 852) suggests that employees are aware of the effect they can potentially have on the employer’s reputation. The researchers also introduce that social media is seen by the employees as information gathering and dissemination vehicle, as well as a way to stay in touch and build relationships with colleagues and other stakeholders. Zoonen et al. (2014, 852) note that as working remotely becomes more common, social media has the power to help employees be in contact and have a feeling of community.

In addition to the findings above, Zoonen et al. (2014, 852) introduce the thought of organizational ambassadorship, explaining that the work-related social media use provides a platform to act as an ambassador for the employer. “Brand ambassadors have been around for many years,” notes Torres (2014), and amends by explaining that social media’s power in ambassadorship lies in its ability to create peer-to-peer conversations, which are the most powerful form of recommendation.
The findings of this chapter are summarized in Table 1. As one can notice, like Leftheriotis and Giannakos (2014, 139) suggest, employees fulfill both the hedonistic and utilitarian needs when operating in social media in organizational context. However, the literature review suggests that utilitarian needs are more common, as presented in the table.

Table 1: Why employees utilize social media as presented by the existing literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why employees utilize social media</th>
<th>Researcher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Utilitarian needs</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting with new stakeholders</td>
<td>Leftheriotis &amp; Giannakos 2014, Landers &amp; Callan 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information gathering and dissemination</td>
<td>Nagendra 2014, Zoonen et al. 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational reputation management</td>
<td>Landers &amp; Callan 2014, Zoonen et al. 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational ambassadorship</td>
<td>Zoonen et al. 2014, Torres 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring business environment and competitors</td>
<td>Leftheriotis &amp; Giannakos 2014, Dreher 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing talent</td>
<td>Nagendra 2014, Dreher 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical assistance</td>
<td>Landers &amp; Callan 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hedonistic needs</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure and relaxing</td>
<td>Leftheriotis &amp; Giannakos 2014, Landers &amp; Callan 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing feelings</td>
<td>Dreher 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanding own network</td>
<td>Landers &amp; Goldberg 2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.4.2 Implications of employees’ social media use

Next, it is important to assess what kind of implications employees’ use of social media in organizational context can have. Early reports stated that the use of social networking tools in resulted in loss of productivity, due to the fact that the employees were focused less on their work and more and social media (Leftheriotis & Giannakos 2014, 135), and employee productivity has remained as one of the most commonly addressed concerns in research (Lis 2013, Dreher 2014). However, the newer research has discovered that social media actually creates more favorable conditions for the employees to fulfill their work assignments instead of distracting employees and stealing time for work tasks (Kirchner & Karpinski, 2010 & Charoensukmongkol 2014). Still, the controversy around the productivity issues remains, and it can be often up to personal traits of the employee whether he/she utilizes social media in a way that benefits the work.

Another risk with employees using social media are security and bandwidth issues, and getting viruses and malicious software to computers, which can make the whole online environment of the company vulnerable to cyber-attacks (Lis 2013). If the business depends on having good online connection, this can cause real problems to the core income of the company.

Although social media is often considered equal and participatory, research has pointed out that there are several barriers to equal authorship: language, media literacy, insufficient competencies of using the digital tools, and so forth (Lietsala & Sirkkunen 2008, 167). Therefore, although it might be claimed that social media offers all employees an equal possibility for self-expression, in reality this might not always be the case.

Legal issues around using social media at work are also complex. Several employees have already been fired due to their “non-acceptable online behavior”, resulting in law
suits derived from both the employer and the employees. Although from a legal perspective, the same rules apply to social media than to other communication channels, placing limits to “acceptable” and “non-acceptable” social media behavior remains a challenge. (Greenhouse 2013.)

The non-acceptable behavior in social media has also caused termination of the work contracts in Finland. When the topic was studies from a legal perspective, some clarity to the issue was offered by the loyalty obligation – the employee has to show loyalty to the employer during both work and leisure time, and neglecting this was in legal terms seen as a reason enough to end the work relationship. (Rönkkö 2012.)

Also worth considering are the opportunities social media opens for workplace bullying and harassment. Employees can send negative messages to each other through social media sites, or publish other negative content in their own pages, resulting in tension at the workplace and inability to work together. It is often complicated for employer representatives to discover and intervene in these kinds of situations, which are on the boundary of whether they belong to the private or professional life. Nevertheless, online bullying can have a crucial effect on workplace wellbeing. The research has not yet pointed these out, but I draw these reflections based on my past working life.

However, as a result of increased knowledge on the topic, most of the latest researchers (Kirchner & Karpinski, 2010, Leftheriotis & Giannakos 2014, Eren & Vardalier 2013 & Charoensukmongkol 2014) agree that the results of employees’ usage of social media are in practice, very positive. One of the biggest effects is the change in the classical employer-employee relationship. Employees can follow their employer in a new forum, which can deepen and strengthen the relationship if the employer listens to and connects with the employees. Social media can also increase communication between colleagues, enhancing also the relationship they experience having with each other. However, using social media in work context has not been found to have an impact on employees’ sense of belonging to the organization (Eren & Vardalier 2013, 854-859), and although it was discovered that greater job satisfaction and absorbing information were connected with the use of social media at work, the satisfaction the employees expressed was directed
to their own work – not the organization they work for (Charoensukmongkol 2014, 346-347).

Lastly, if the employer is active on social networking sites, it can have a positive impact on employees’ commitment and motivation, and therefore, increase quality of their work (Eren & Vardalier 2013, 859). Employees’ use of social media was also found to correlate positively with good work performance (Leftheriotis & Giannakos 2014, 139, Charoensukmongkol 2014, 346). However, there does not yet exist enough evidence to draw conclusions; alternatively, is can be also the more productive employees who take on utilizing social media in the first place (Leftheriotis & Giannakos 2014, 139). For instance Landers and Callan (2014, 644) remind that just giving the employees social media access cannot be expected to improve job performance – the organization needs to invest resources into training and guiding the employees on the way to the use that is beneficial to the organization.

3.4.3 Employees as advocates in social media

As discussed throughout this chapter, employees are sharing information socially – and this happens increasingly online. The gap between work and personal use of social networking tools is becoming non-existent, and now the opportunity and challenge for organizations is to acknowledge this and grasp the reasons why employees decide to take part in promoting the employer online. (Weber Shandwick 2014, 7.)

With the emergence of social media, the ways of digital advocacy have gained more ground in general, and there is an increasing number of spokespersons for any organization. Weber Shandwick (2014, 1) calls these “change agents” because these advocates want to affect the business operations and have their voice heard. Therefore, they can be either organization’s best supporters or worst opponents.

Social media has been said to fuel employee advocacy because it provides the employees with multiple dialogic platforms, where they can share their insight and
discuss about the organization (Weber Shandwick 2014, 7). Capturing this opportunity can make employees a valuable asset: they know the organization and its mindset, and can therefore act as convincing representatives of the company. Thus, they have the power to shape the organization’s reputation with their online actions. (Dreher 2014, 344.)

Weber Shandwick’s (2014, 1) study discovered that 33% of organizations invite employees to utilize social media to spread information about them. Nevertheless, 56% of employees are independently, without encouragement from the employer, acting as advocates either online or offline, sharing positive news about the organization to their network. Therefore, it is fair to claim that employers are not fully aware of the advocacy carried out by employees in practice (ibid 4).

In the same study, it was also discovered that 50% of the employees publish content regarding their organization either often or occasionally. 39% of the respondents had acted as advocates, posting positively reinforcing content about the employer to social media, whereas only 16% had criticized employer in social media. Therefore, it is fair to claim that a vast number of employees are taking part in online discussions about the employer – and most of them doing so to advocate and positively influence. (id.)

Weber Shandwick (2014,10) also found out that the leadership and engagement can accelerate the willingness of the employees to act as online advocate. According to the study, leadership is the most important factor influencing employee advocacy, followed by engagement improving actions such as internal communications, employee development and Corporate Social Responsibility – including the wellbeing and development possibilities of the employees (ibid). Therefore, the study suggests that although many employees begin to act as advocates without encouragement, for sustainable advocacy, the organization should pay attention especially to leadership and engagement.

It is worth noticing that whereas the previous research (Charoensukmongkol 2014, 346 & Landers and Goldberg 2014, 301) disagreed whether management has effect on
whether employees utilize social media in general, Weber Shandwick (2014, 10) suggested that leadership is the most important factor affecting specifically employee advocacy in social media. From this example, it can be seen that the topic is still very novel, and controversies remain.

### 3.5 Learnings so far

To summarize, this chapter discussed the ways in which social media is used in organizational context, especially by employees. Its central findings are that social media has changed the nature of organizational communication, and by combining this insight with the findings of the previous chapter, it can be stated that the division between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ communication by the organization is truly gone.

This chapter also shed more light on how the new communication technology has empowered employees in their communicative roles, and continued answering to the research question *What is employee advocacy in social media by nature?*. It was found out that employee advocacy in social media is largely voluntary of nature and that more employees act as advocates than critics towards their employer in social media. Leadership and engagement can accelerate online advocacy, and employees’ social media usage can have a significant effect on how the organization is perceived due to the large reach and credibility of their messages.

To the second research question, *What drives employee advocacy in social media?*, this chapter disclosed that employees’ use of social media is a complex phenomenon, yet it can be said that driven more by organizational than personal aspirations. Therefore, according to the literature, it is the goals and needs of the organization which drive the social media behavior of employees. From this starting point, it is interesting to proceed to the research at hand.

Next sections of the thesis introduce the empirical part of the study. After presenting the case company (chapter 4), I will proceed to the methodology (chapter 5), presenting the
findings (chapter 6), concluding the findings and evaluating the study (chapter 7), and ending with a summary of the thesis and further discussion on the topic (chapter 8).

4. Case company

The case company is a business area of a Finnish listed company, which operates in the field of load handling. The listed company acts as a holding company, and has three business areas, which carry out the business operations. The thesis studies one of the business areas.

The case company under research, i.e. the business area, employs a total of 2,600 employees around the globe, most working in Sweden, the United States, Ireland, Poland, Finland, Spain and the United Kingdom. The business of the case company fluctuates around different industries such as warehousing, construction and forestry. Digitalization and globalization have also had a big impact on the way the case company works and develops its business.

4.1 Communications and social media

The case company, i.e. the business area of the listed company, has its communications department, which employs three communications professionals. It is responsible for the corporate communication, including media relations, public relations, internal communication and crisis communication. Its key target audiences are employees, media, dealers, partners and the public audience.

The case company’s communication strategy implies that communication is not regarded in the case company as a separate or isolated subject - it touches every aspect of the case company’s business. In addition, the strategy states: “Everybody in case company is responsible for their individual input as communicators”. The role of the communication department is to “provide, promote, guide and support for
communication actions, development and operations”. (Case company communication strategy 2015.)

Key internal objective of the communication in the case company is to ensure that it “has a culture where personnel feel safe to express their views and all employees recognize own role and responsibility for contributing to effective work community communication and are active communicators for their part.” The external objective is to establish the case company as an opinion leader within its industry. (Case company communication strategy 2015.)

Social media strategy was established at the case company in late 2014, and its implementation started in January 2015. Therefore, social media is very novel topic to the case company, and its employees have not been officially encouraged or trained to take part in the conversations of the social web (situation in April 2015). The strategy was developed in co-operation within the communication and marketing departments. It does not address or include the ways in which case company employees could act as online advocates – rather, it focuses on the centralized use of the specific social media channels. (Case company social media strategy 2015).

5. Methodology

In this chapter, I explain the research approach and methods by first discussing the case study, two different data collection phases (preliminary survey for target group and individual interviews), means of data analysis as well as validity and reliability. Starting point to the research was introducing the case company, which was done in chapter 4.

The research in this thesis takes the form of a qualitative case study, and is conducted by the means of semi-structured interviews in order to get in-depth information on employees’ experiences. The interviewees were chosen based on a preliminary survey, which maps out the case company’s employees’ use of social media also on a general level. Both quantitative and qualitative research approaches are present, as for instance
Dreher (2014, 354) suggests that this is needed in order to discover what motivates employees when discussing the employer in an online environment.

The research questions of the thesis are:

**RQ1:** What is employee advocacy in social media by nature?

**RQ2:** What drives employee advocacy in social media?

The theoretical review discovered as an answer to the first research question *What is employee advocacy in social media by nature?*, that employee advocacy in social media is largely voluntary of nature, and correlates positively with symmetrical internal communications and a good employee-organization relationship. Also leadership and engagement can have a positive effect to employees’ willingness to act as social media advocates. To the second research question, *What drives employee advocacy in social media?*, the theoretical review enclosed that it is mostly the organizational goals that drive the social media behavior of employees. The aim of the empirical evidence provided by the research is to amend these findings and, therefore, enhance the discussion.

In case study, the researcher aims at producing specific information regarding a certain case or small group of incidents that are in relation to each other. Case study is not a research method itself, but an approach to studying reality (Saarela-Kinnunen & Eskola 2010, 159). There are several ways in which the researcher can define the *case*, but most central is to clearly explain why this case has been chosen and what its boundaries are – what has been excluded from the study (ibid. 162). In this research, the boundaries to the case were the company, and therefore, the employees working only in this specific company.

Typical for the case study is to gather information using multiple methods (Saarela-Kinnunen & Eskola 2010, 159), like I did in this thesis by conducting both preliminary survey and individual interviews. Also distinctive is the strong role of theory, involvement of the researchers, as well as structural and historical linkages (ibid., 163).
The goal of the researcher is to explain a certain phenomenon in-depth by asking descriptive questions like ‘how’ and ‘why’ (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006, 22) – this can be seen in the formatting of questions that guided the interview (see appendix 6 for the interview body).

In spite of the strength of the case study to dig deep into one phenomenon, it can be criticized for the lack of its representativeness and generalizability. Therefore, it is was important in this research to ensure transparent reporting of the process, so the reader can estimate to what extent the results can be generalized (Saarela-Kinnunen & Eskola 2010, 162). Alasuutari (1999, 235) also notes that case studies’ primary goal is not to produce data with is generalizable to a large extent: they are valuable nevertheless.

5.1 Data collection, phase I: Preliminary survey for target group

At the first stage of the research, I conducted a preliminary survey to map the case company’s employees’ use of social media in work context, to discover if there are social media advocates in the case company. Another goal was to find appropriate interviewees for the main research. Conducting the preliminary survey was important as the topic of the study is relatively new both as a research topic in general but also specifically at the case company.

Benefits of a survey are that the researcher cannot influence the results to a large extent, like for instance when interviewing. Validity of the survey is per se relatively high, as all of the respondents receive the exact same questions. In addition, conducting the survey is quite easy, as barriers of time and space have no impact (Valli 2001, 101). This was a great advantage in the global case company.

There are important parts to the survey which needed to be taken into consideration to ensure its validity and reliability. First, the response percentages of surveys are often low. Second, it may difficult to get wanted results, as there is no way to control the respondent: he/she may leave questions unanswered or misunderstand them altogether
(Valli 2001, 102). To ensure valid and reliable survey results, the survey was pre-tested by three random volunteers from the case company before it was sent to the target group in order to avoid, for instance, too lengthy survey or misunderstanding of questions. Also clear instructions were included in the beginning of survey and all concepts/terminology explained.

In the preliminary survey, I used target population (Valli 2001, 105), which means that I utilized the already existing groups and structures inside the case company to determine the group which received the survey. The group was 170 office-working employees of the case company, who are located in over 30 different countries. Overall, the case company employs 2,600 people – however, most of them work in factories, where the use of social media is not possible during worktime. The group of 170 “white collars” was seen as a suitable target group for the preliminary survey, as they are working with computer in online environments, and are therefore more likely also to be using social networking tools (as indicated by Edelman Trust Barometer 2015).

When comprising the survey, Valli (2001, 100) emphasizes that the researcher must pay attention to the length and number of questions. In addition, the survey must proceed logically and be clear of appearance. Therefore, I located easier questions to the beginning of the survey, whereas more complex were at the end. By careful formulation of questions, I ensured that the questions were perceived in the same way – otherwise, the results would have become distorted.

The survey body was structured and consisted of both open-ended and closed questions to gain both quantitative and qualitative data for richness of results. The questions were unambiguous and put together based on the goals of the research. In this way, all essential questions were included (Valli 2001, 100). The survey was divided into two sections: First, the respondents answered to questions regarding their general approach to using social media in work related context. The second part to the survey addressed specifically if the employee has experienced to have acted as an advocate to the case company in social media (specific survey questions in appendix 2).
The preliminary survey was conducted with the means of SurveyMonkey online tool, which allowed creating the survey and distributing it via e-mail. The survey was sent via e-mail to 170 office-working employees with a letter (appendix 1), using a mailing list provided by the case company. Out of the 170 receivers of the survey, 82 responded to the survey, making the response rate 48.2 per cent. This can be estimated to be relatively good, as for instance Valli (2001) points out that response rates to surveys are often low. In addition, twelve employees expressed that they wish to partake to further interviews on the topic, which indicated relatively good support for the topic within the case company.

The deviations of the survey results are presented further in chapter 6.

5.2 Data collection, phase II: Interviews

The primary research of the thesis takes the form of interviews. Interviews often represent qualitative research, which aims at unveiling subjectively the phenomenon at hand - the objectivity in the qualitative research results from understanding the subjectivities within it. Typical for the qualitative research is to gather data, which is complex, multifaceted, and rich in it ways of expression (Alasuutari 1999, 84). The qualitative approach also offers the researcher a bit more freedom; however, it is more demanding for the researcher, highlighting the researcher’s role (Eskola & Suoranta 2003, 20-23).

Interview is one of the most used ways of collecting information (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2010, 34). Also with this thesis, I use the interviewing technique to collect empirical information on the topic. The purpose of the interview is to gain in-depth information on the interviewee’s experiences and thoughts (deMarrais & Lapan 2004, 53), and this is considered as the biggest strength of the interview also in this case.

Interviewing technique is beneficial also as it allows for deeper understanding of motives behind actions, and is also beneficial when examining a topic which is yet to be
fully discovered (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2010, 34-35). As overall the topic, as well as the concepts of employee advocacy and social media are relevantly new, it was important to gain deep understanding, and also offer the interviewees the possibility to freely express their thoughts and experiences, possibly unveiling also something new in regards to the topic.

However, there are also disadvantages to using the interviewing technique. Interviews are relatively time-consuming, and depend heavily on the interviewer’s capabilities. It is also often problematic to analyze the interview data, as there does not, in most cases, exist ready analysis patterns (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2010, 35). Hirsjärvi et al. (1997, 194) remind that although it is possible to generalize some results based on several interviews, one has to be careful, as it is both the interviewer and the interviewee who can impact the results.

However, as the advantages of using interviewing with this specific case were so strong, this research method was chosen – at the same time acknowledging the disadvantages. In order to have trustworthy results, I ensured from my behalf conditions for successful interviews by preparing myself and testing the interview conditions as well as the interview body in advance.

Single interviews were chosen instead of group interviews, as they are more convenient for the purposes of this case study – learning about each individual’s experiences can be beneficial when the topic is novel (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2010, 34-35). Also, in practical terms, arranging interviews when it best suits for a single individual was easier in a global corporation compared to setting up a group interview.

Due to the differences in locations of the interviewees, the interviews were conducted using Microsoft Office online conferencing tool LiveMeeting, which was familiar to both the researcher and interviewees from work praxis. This tool enabled recording of the interviews as well as showing video, audio and pictures during the sessions. The interviews were arranged between 23 June and 19 August 2015.
5.2.1 Semi-structured theme interviews

Semi-structured interviews are not pre-set or too detailed; they proceed according to certain themes. Although the themes are the same for all interviewees, the specific questions can vary (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2010, 48). Thus, the strength of semi-structured interviews is that it enables follow-up questions and specifications, unlike structured interviews or questionnaires, and is open to constant improvement (Hirsjärvi et al., 194). Rubin and Rubin (2005, 62) describe the process: ”what appears chaotic is merely a continuous redesign”.

In this study, the themes according to which the interview body was structured were: a) nature of employee advocacy, b) drivers of employees’ use of social media: communication, c) drivers of employees’ use of social media: social drivers, and e) drivers of employees’ use of social media: utilitarian and personal drivers. To see in detail how these themes derived from theory, see appendix 7. In addition, the interview started with more general questions to warm-up the conversation and ended with giving the interviewee the possibility to express broader issues relating to the topic.

The themes of the semi-structured interviews were derived from academic research, as suggested by deMarrais and Lapan (2004, 54) who state that the existing literature should have a role in the interviews. Interview questions are open-ended questions, as they help unveil the interviewees’ experiences. To see the interview body and the themes’ links to academic research, see appendices 5 and 6.

The role of the interviewer in semi-structured interviews is to guide the interview and make sure that the pre-set themes are discussed (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2010, 50). The interviewer can also choose which extent to intervene in the course of the interview. As the topic of the research is relatively new, I concluded that it is most suitable for me to take a role of a non-directive listener: to guide the interview to a certain extent, but let the interviewee to direct the more specific path of the interview. (deMarrais & Lapan 2004, 58.)
To keep the interview within approximately one hour, as recommended by Lounasmeri (2015), the initial amount of themes and supporting questions was kept small. Also deMarrais and Lapan (2004, 52) recommend this, saying that few open questions operate better compared to a big amount of closed-ended questions. Although the interview can float freely, Rubin and Rubin (2005, 151) point out that it is useful to have a few backgrounder questions in the beginning of the interview to provide the interviewee with a comfort level, and to pre-formulate follow-up questions and probes, which can help trigger the response.

5.2.2 Interviewees

This method of choosing the interviewees is criterion-based selection, which indicates that there is a specific criteria which associates the interviewees (deMarrais & Lapan 2004, 58). The volunteers were from different geographical locations, gender, age and position at case company – it is beneficial for the research when the candidates represent a variety like within the company itself. To view the interviewees profiles in detail, see appendix 5.

The interviewees were selected with the help of the preliminary survey: in the survey, the participants had the opportunity to volunteer for further interviews on the topic. Twelve employees of the case company volunteered, and after agreeing upon a good interviewing time, I sent them pre-information regarding the focus and themes of the interview (see appendix 3).

According to deMarrais and Lapan (2004, 61), the number of the interviewees is enough, when certain repeating themes will start to emerge from the interviews. This was noticed during the course of the interviews, and therefore, no further interviewees were contacted.
5.2.3 Data analysis

The logic of reasoning in analysis I follow is *deductive*. This means that I proceed from theory to practice by differentiating the phenomenon into sub-categories. In this way, I find from the empirical material the data that is relevant to the research at hand, and can reflect it also back the specific theory (Anttila 1998). The deductive reasoning can be seen, for instance, in the way I categorize the empirical data into smaller sections to be able to analyze and discuss the data further (see table 2).

The method of analyzing the theme interviews is thematic differentiation. Eskola and Suoranta (2003, 174) note that using themes to explain the data is useful, as it enables comparing the appearance of certain themes in the overall results. Rubin & Rubin (2005, 223) remind that especially the decision on what to code, and how to define the key concepts and themes needs special attention as it is important in order to complete the thematic analysis. It was useful that I had practiced this in a previous university class to know what stages are important.

Therefore, after transcribing the interview, I proceeded through several stages to analysis, as recommended by Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2010, 48). First, there is the differentiation and classification of data, which means in practical terms going through the transcribed interview and cutting and pasting the content under the selected themes. After classifying the raw data under four main themes, I created sub-categories to help categorize the data and discuss it in a more logical manner.
Table 2: Four main themes of thematic differentiation and their sub-themes

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<td>b. Who do the advocates communicate with in social media</td>
<td>b. Link between communication and social media use</td>
<td>b. Experienced relationship with the employer</td>
<td>b. Hedonistic drivers</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. How did the advocacy start?</td>
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<td>c. Drivers which overlap</td>
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<td>d. Has the employer encouraged advocacy?</td>
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<td>e. Has the advocate received or does he/she expect to receive incentives?</td>
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<td>f. Experience of being employer’s representative in social media</td>
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<td>g. Separating private and professional social media</td>
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<td>h. Negative aspects/threats</td>
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I went the content under each theme and sub-theme through several times to gain understanding of the overall picture, find patterns and form key findings. The final stage is introducing the topic from a new angle, which means reporting the results and having discussion around them, which I will do in chapter 6.
5.2.4 Validity and reliability

The concepts of validity and reliability are based on the ideal that the researcher can access the results in an objective, truthful way. The concepts are derived from the quantitative research tradition, and for their problematic nature, Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2010, 185) suggest that it would be beneficial to give up on these concepts altogether in qualitative research. However, they also point out that the concepts are beneficial when comparing qualitative studies and their quality (ibid.).

To assess the validity and reliability of the research in a contemporary way, I use the frameworks of Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2010) and Cho and Trent (2006). Reliability refers to being able to repeat the results of the research using the same method: when two or more researchers end up with the same result (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2010, 186). Reliability can be ensured in the research by keeping the questions consistent and building them on existing literature (Cho & Trent 2006, 330), which I paid special attention to when building the interview guide (see appendices 6 and 7).

Validity means that the research studied what it aimed and reflects the phenomenon it was supposed to (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2010, 187). Cho and Trent (2006, 329) perceive validity as a process, which should be considered throughout the research. They suggest that means to ensure validity include researcher’s critical self-evaluation, deep familiarization with data, considering the context of the results, and reporting about the results in a transparent way. To see critical evaluation of the research, see section 6.4.
6. Findings

In this chapter, I will first present the findings of the preliminary survey, followed by results of the interviews. The interview findings will form the main part of this chapter, and proceed according to the pre-set themes used in thematic differentiation:

1. Nature of employee advocacy in social media
2. Drivers of employee advocacy: communication
3. Drivers of employee advocacy: social factors
4. Drivers of employee advocacy: utilitarian and hedonistic

Additionally, the fifth section to the interview results is comprised of findings that were totally novel. At the end of this chapter, in the sixth section, I will summarize the findings and reply to the research questions using both empirical evidence as well as the literature presented in earlier parts of the thesis.

6.1 Survey results

The results of the preliminary survey indicated that social media is used within the case company quite extensively in work context – nearly three out of four respondents were taking advantage of its various uses. In addition, the survey revealed that a significant group of employees have supported case company or its products and services in social media, making the topic of the research purposeful for the case company. All results of the survey are presented in appendix 3.

More specifically, the preliminary survey results told that 74% of the respondents have used social media in relation to their work, mostly doing so on a weekly basis. LinkedIn was clearly the most used social medium, followed by YouTube and Facebook. Previous research varied in its estimation of how big share of the workforce utilizes social media. When one study suggests that approximately two out of three uses social
networking tools occasionally in organizational context (Leftheriotis & Giannakos 2014, 138), other says that less than half of employees take advantage of social media (Ruck & Welch 2012, 298). The preliminary survey results clearly support the former view of Leftheriotis and Giannakos (2014).

Social media is used amongst the case company respondents according to the survey for the easy access to information, training purposes, networking and sharing ideas as well as sharing updates on and increasing case company’s visibility. In addition, according to the respondents, social media offers possibilities to reach and listen to the customers directly, and learn what competitors do. The employees who have not used social media in work context said that they either do not see the need, they do not know how to use it and what they can share in social media, or that they have to prioritize and do not have the time to use social media.

59% of the respondents expressed to have supported case company in social media mostly on a weekly basis. LinkedIn is again mentioned by the respondents as the primary channel of advocacy, followed by Facebook and YouTube. Based on these results, it was justifiable to proceed to interviews dedicated to employee advocacy on social media.

6.2 Interview results

6.2.1 Nature of employee advocacy in social media

The interviews disclosed that employee advocates’ visits to social media sites, most prevalently to Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, happen on a daily basis. The same social networking sites were highlighted also by Nagendra (2014) and Ruck and Welch (2012), so it is justifiable to say that these most known social media forums are the most commonly used also among the employee advocates.
Several interviewees considered themselves early adopters, discovering social media themselves and starting to use it upon own interest or curiosity. This is a somewhat similar finding to Edelman Trust Barometer (2015), which found that employee advocacy is more common among those who are familiar with social media and smartphones in general, and more optimistic about the new communication channels. The interviewees’ trust and enthusiasm towards the new communication channels and mobile devices was evident throughout the interview, and helped explain to a large extent their interest towards the social networking channels.

*The future is with your mobile phone your smart pads your Facebooks your LinkedIns whatever the case may be.* (R3⁴)

Additionally, according to the interviewees, social media has also become part of their daily “rhythm” and communication behaviour, and this affects also their social media usage in work context.

*If you asked me 5–6 years ago would I have actually tried to communicate directly, through this kind of means, it wouldn’t have happened. It wasn’t part of my idea or my routine. Whereas today it’s part of my routine.* (R7)

Some interviewees were recommended to use social media by a colleague or someone else from professional network, and others had seen the positive impact on social media on private life, and wanted to try it in regards to professional life as well. Few interviewees pointed out that although the start to using social media in regards to work was independent, the usage has increased as the employer has become more active in social media.

To reflect this finding to the previous research, it noted that if the employer is active on social networking channels, it can have a positive impact on employees’ commitment and motivation (Eren & Vardalier 2013, 859), however, it did not identify the

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⁴ The R and number refers to the interviewee at hand, who said the comment. The total reference guide can be found from appendix 5.
connection between employer’s social media activity and employees’ social media advocacy.

The interviewees’ responses differed when asked whether they experience that the employer has in some way encouraged them to utilize social media. Several felt that the employer has encouraged them to use social media in regards to their work, however, not formally or heavily. According to the interviewees, this has happened in the forms of personal discussions or the topic of social media getting overall more coverage in employer’s communication.

Also commonly expressed by the interviewees was that the employer had not taken direct interest in their social media use. In this context, some interviewees recognized the impact of the previous restrictions to access social media channels from corporate network: they had started to operate in social media independently and did not seek for encouragements later on from their employer either. This finding supports the suggestion by Weber Shandwick’s (2014, 1), that more than half of employees are independently, without needing a particular encouragement from the employer, acting as advocates.

**Benefits of using social media**

What was prevalent in the interviews was that the interviewees experienced there to be many benefits when they were using social media in work context. Sharing and receiving information relating to the business, industry or own profession was one of the most frequently mentioned benefits, as also highlighted previously by Zoonen et al. (2014, 850). Interestingly, some employees also said that they also like to share information particularly about their own job to their networks using social media. This could relate on a larger scale to building one’s professional identity in social media, and is something that the previous research had not noted.
In addition, majority of the interviewees perceived that they can help the employer and its brands by being active on social media. They wanted to give the employer and its brands visibility in their own networks, and thus strengthen the positive developments that were ongoing. Eagleman (2013, 488) presented that employees appear to be using social media more as a communication than a marketing tool, and one finding of the research at hand was that overall, the interviewees tried to keep the information quite neutral and highlight their personal thoughts to avoid feeling of advertising.

An interviewee particularly expressed that it is the dialogue with professionals that is the biggest gain in using social media in relation to work, whereas too much sharing of marketing content can result in lack of interest towards the channels.

*In LinkedIn [...] you are lacking this interaction between professionals if it just becomes a commercial... news channel. And then I think that the interest will die.* (R2)

Networking with business associates and connecting with colleagues and management was also seen by many interviewees as an important reason to be utilizing social media in work context. This finding is similar to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, 402), who highlighted social media as the new arena for employees to engage with organizational stakeholders.

**Advocates by their will: genuine interest and loyalty**

Interestingly, the interviewees did not feel that they were operating in social media as employer’s agents or ambassadors, but rather emphasized operating as an employed person with own thoughts. Several described that operating in social media was just part of their work, and did not consciously consider themselves as advocates or carrying out extra-role performance.

However, some interviewees pointed out that they do feel relating to the “employer’s team” when supporting employer in social media. This also was reflected in the strong
consensus among the interviewees, that incentives are not needed to encourage the social media advocacy. Rather, they saw that the advocacy is something that needs to root from within the advocate.

*I would see it coming from not required by the employer, but coming from the sort of genuine interest and loyalty from... loyalty towards the employer.* (R5)

*I don’t expect anything, I don’t really do it for that scale, you know, and anyway, I can help out or do, I don’t expect anything for it, ’cause that’s not what I... but I mean, if they were to say, here’s an incentive, you know, that’s not a problem to me, but I don’t do it for money, to be honest, that’s not the way I am.* (R8)

This finding supports the previous research, which emphasizes that employee advocacy is voluntary, and indicates a strong relationship and loyalty between the organization and the employee (Men 2014). Nevertheless, it was also expressed that due to previous restrictions in access to social media channels from company network, a small incentive to utilize social media at work could help remove the threshold that there is according to the interviewee being when using social media during work hours.

**There are risks – also on a personal level**

In addition to identifying what kind of benefits social media can bring to work, the interviewees expressed to have considered the negative aspects relating to the use of social media in work context, even when it was not directly asked. On a company level, these included losing the credibility, security issues, rumor spreading, negative comments, or giving too much information to competition. These are similar to what previous research on the topic has discovered (e.g. Leftheriotis & Giannakos 2014, Lis 2013, Dreher 2014 & Greenhouse 2013).
Somewhat surprising notion that the interviewees brought up was the need to monitor social media and share common guidelines within the organization to avoid these threats. Although not directly expressed, the interviewees seemed to be saying that the guidelines could help both them, who are already active in social media, but also those who are just starting to utilize it.

*I think something that I have been maybe a bit missing [...] might be some kind of rule of thumbs what to do and what not to do.* (R5)

However, several interviewees also identified threats on a personal level, which the research on the topic of employee advocacy has not previously addressed. These encased not being able to trust the information received through social media, changed the length of the work day, and exposing oneself to other kinds of risks:

*Earlier it was another life coz you used to work from kind of 9 to 5, now it isn’t working really. You’re now working all the time, so it’s 24 hours in a day. It can be quite exhausting at times.* (R7)

*You expose yourself a lot, when you are sending tweets about your employer, and maybe you write something a competitor can take a spin off, to give an example.* (R4)

In addition, one interviewee pointed out that not everyone at the company has an equal access to social media, so they can be potentially left out of the communication loop in case something important is announced. Unequal access to social media has also been pointed out in previous research by, for instance, Lietsala and Sirkkunen (2008).

Interestingly, the interviewees did not perceive losing effectiveness or side-tracking from work-related issues as a risk, even though employee productivity is one of the most commonly addressed disadvantages in research (e.g. Lis 2013 and Dreher 2014).

To summarise the empirical findings so far, the empiricism provided more understanding of how often and where the advocacy takes place, which the previous literature had neglected. From the interviews, it could be learned that the advocacy
happens on a daily basis in the most popular social networking sites. The interviews also revealed that the advocates themselves have an understanding of the negative aspect or threats relating to their social media use, which the previous literature had not yet focused on.

The empiricism also supported many of the literature’s suggestions, like the fact that the advocates are early adaptors, who have taken up on using the social media out of their own interest, and perceive the new technology positively (Edelman Trust Barometer 2015), and that employee advocacy is voluntary of nature, and therefore incentives are not needed to support the advocates (Men 2014, Weber Shandwick 2014).

6.2.2 Drivers of employee advocacy: communication

When studying what kind of communication culture the case company had, the interviewees’ seemed to be referring to their overall impression of the nature of communication at case company, and whether two-way communication was taking place. To a certain extent, this can be seen similar to Men’s (2014) definition of symmetrical internal communication, which referred to the organization ensuring open, dialogic and responsive communication.

The interviewees’ views on communication culture varied, and the responses were polarized. On one side, it was perceived that communication culture in the organization is “underdeveloped”, “conservative”, and “passive” and that people are shy to share their thoughts even when offered the possibility. The interviewees also experienced that communication is largely dependent on one-way e-mailing, and that the employees do not always recognize their responsibility as communicators. According to the interviewees, this can be especially seen in the way that employees are not providing each other with feedback, as well as communicating and working in silos.

It was also acknowledged by the interviewees that the language issues in the multicultural organisation, using English as the main corporate language, can affect the extent to which people feel eager to have a dialogue. Additionally, from the way a few
of the interviewees described situations where they experienced dialogue, it can be noted that these were more in dyadic discussions or team discussions rather than on company level.

On the other hand, some interviewees saw that during the past year, positive change towards more dialogical communications has emerged. When discussing this, many interviewees named separate tools and channels, like the new website, internal blog, and a quarterly webcast. A researcher observation here was that many of the interviewees thought of and were focused on mechanisms through which dialogue can be produced when discussing dialogue, instead of a more general communication culture. However, this can be rooted from the fact that employees are in different location around the world and majority of the internal communication is enabled by different tools.

Interestingly, many interviewees noticed that even though there has been an attempt to more dialogic communications from the company level, not everyone is willing to have true two-way communication:

I don’t know why, but I have to say that I can also sense that people are not used to having you know dialogue. (R11)

I think there’s very much a request to have two-way communication. [...] That’s just very rare that anyone takes part in that and I don’t really know the reason for it. (R12)

An interesting notion by some of the interviewees was that the communication culture depends from the location, and the level in which one is in the organization; the respondents themselves experienced to have the opportunity to self-expression, but expressed that perhaps this is not the case for everyone in the organization.

What I can say I’ve never felt any hindrance. [...] I have the feeling that it differs country to country. I have had a lot of things to do with the people in factory and... there it’s very hieratic and... I feel that first layer so to
speak they are very seldom sharing their opinion with their managers or anything. (R2)

The interviewees’ thoughts also varied when asked whether the communication climate affects their social media behaviour. Some of the interviewees perceived that the communication climate, whether it was underdeveloped and one-way, or developed and dialogic, or somewhere in between, affects their behaviour on social media. This supports the notion of Men (2014) and Weber Shandwick (2014), who have in their previous research addressed that symmetrical communication increases the likelihood of employee advocacy.

A clear example of how the company’s approach towards social media affects the employees’ use was when the interviewees described their social media behaviour in work context during the time when the access was restricted.

Yeah it had a lot to do with the restrictions [...] I mean, we would follow instructions, be given instructions, that you could do this and couldn’t do this... You have to adhere to that, that’s the problem. I mean we work in the company, for the company, if they don’t want us to do it, when you don’t do it. (R1)

However, it was noted by the interviewees that not all levels of organisation are engaged in the organisational communication in a similar manner, due to for instance lack of computers. Therefore, the interviewees perceived that communication within the organization does not affect the social media behaviour of this group.

I see different levels, you go from management level, there’s much stronger hope regarding social media and communication, and if you go down to guys working on the shop floor manufacturing, they are a bit disconnected. (R7)

Additionally, some of the interviewees mentioned in this context that it is often the older generation of employees who are affected by the communication climate and
company’s approach towards social media compared to the younger ones, who are according to the interviewees more open-minded towards and eager to learn to use the new tools.

To conclude, the interviewees expressed polarized views on how the communication culture is like at the case company. Whereas some saw clear room for improvement, others expressed there to be relatively good two-way communication and dialogue in place. Nevertheless, the previous research was clear that the latter is needed in modern companies to manage in the more challenging environments that they are facing (e.g. Kalla 2005, Grunig et al. 2002 & Juholin et al. 2015). The interviews supported to a certain extent the notion by Men (2014) and Weber Shandwick (2014) that employee advocacy is linked with symmetrical two-way communication – however, in this case company, the interviewees noted that all employees are not equally engaged in organizational communication, and therefore, not affected to a similar extent.

6.2.3 Drivers of employee advocacy: social factors

As assessed in the previous research, all exchange relationships within the organization affect employees’ actions such as advocacy (Ruck & Welch 2012). Majority of the interviewees said that social media is largely not discussed in their teams, and even though some of their co-workers might be using social media, the interviewees felt that this does not affect their social media behaviour. Therefore, the research at hand contradicts the claim that employees whose co-workers are supportive of social media tend to use it more (Charoensukmongkol 2014).

A great deal of the interviewees expressed that the management’s support for and its visibility in social media has affected positively their social media behaviour. Several interviewees pointed out by name those members of the management who are present in social media channels, and used them as examples when explaining how they themselves have been encouraged to use social media at work-related tasks. They also
saw a clear division between the old and the new management, which has recognized social media as a business tool and led the use by example.

However, it seemed that the interviewees’ social media use was not directly dependent on the management support – it just showed a positive signal to the employees who were already active on social media to keep on doing what they were doing. According to the interviewees, management’s social media support and usage are, however, valuable as they help develop the communication culture and make the leaders more visible and approachable to the employees.

Previous literature has varied in its estimations on whether management influences employees’ social media behaviour: while Landers and Goldberg (2014) and Weber Shandwick (2014) agreed that leadership is an important factor affecting employees’ social media use and employee advocacy specifically on social media, Charoensukmongkol (2014) argued that the management’s approach does not trigger positively the social media behavior. When comparing the previous research to the findings of this study, it is fair to claim that although there is no direct link between management’s social media activities and employee advocacy, management’s approach to social media does trigger advocacy positively to a certain extent.

Something very clear and evident in the interviews was that the experienced relationship with the employer affects to a great extent how the employees discuss about employer in social media; majority of the interviewees said that the positive experience and especially pride in the company and its products is a major trigger of the positive picture they want to convey in social media.

*To be honest, I wouldn’t be supportive in social media if I would think that the company I work for is crap. [...] You need to have a sense of proudness in what you do and what the company represents. And you want to be there for the company also in social media. (R5)*

* [...] I’ve never consciously considered it, to be honest. I’m sure it does because if you have a negative view or didn’t have a positive view, then*
you certainly wouldn’t feel the need to interact or to talk about the organization in social media, so I think you need to have a positive view of the organization before you, or a positive engagement with the organization before you actively promote them on social media [...] (R12)

The proudness underlined many of the responses, and it appeared that it was one of the key driving forces behind the employees’ advocacy on social media. The proudness was expressed by both interviewees who have been in the case company for a long time, and also the newcomers to an equal extent.

This finding support the previous research, which introduced, that employees who experience a positive relationship with the organization are likely to support the organization by acting as advocates (Men 2014, Rhee 2004 & Kim 2007). The literature also suggested that social media can strengthen the relationship resulting, for instance, in greater job satisfaction (Charoensukmongkol 2014).

6.2.4 Drivers of employee advocacy: utilitarian and hedonistic

Utilitarian drivers, or work or productivity oriented drivers, that the interviewees expressed in relation to social media, included the ability to be in direct contact with business associates, helping in recruitment, and gaining inspiration to develop own leadership skills. Several stated that social media is a benefit when networking externally, and also internally, as it has made it easier to be in direct contact with people and keep the relationship active. LinkedIn was specifically recognized by some of the respondents to have helped them close business deals and improve own professionality efficiently through peer discussions.

Yeah I’m in connected to my work I’ve grown myself and that is also why I use this more…more personal approach in social media. I learn from these discussions, learn as much…as much as a learn in a training, one day training so to speak, so in that sense it’s also growing myself. (R2)
One of the most highlighted notions was gaining knowledge on the business, competitors, economy and own company through social media. An interesting notion that some of the interviewees experienced, was that through social media, it is possible to get “filtered” or “quality” responses, which helps when they search for work-related information and make decisions.

Knowledge, the knowledge that is gained: the more information about what’s going on in the world, about what’s going on with the economy, different currencies, different places. Gives me an understanding what’s gonna happen with our business. And I can actually make decisions based on the knowledge I gain from the social media. (R7)

A large number of respondents also explained that social media helps them to perceive how their work contributes to the company on a larger context, as many of them were from support functions of the organization. The interviewees also expressed that it is beneficial for everyone in the organization to see how the end products are being used through social media. Additionally, a topic that few of the interviewees discussed is getting information about the employer in a new, more informal way in social media. One interviewee analysed that this kind of content is more relatable, and therefore strengthens the relationship with the employer.

Many of the utilitarian drivers expressed by the interviewees can be found also from the literature. Keeping up with information, news and insight was also highlighted by Dreher (2014), Leftheriotis and Giannakos (2014), Nagendra (2014), Zoonen et al. (2014) and Landers and Callan (2014). Therefore, it is fair to state that there is strong indication that information gathering is one of the most popular drivers of employees’ use of social media.

Networking and building relations with key stakeholders was also supported by existing research (Dreher 2014, Nagendra 2014 & Leftheriotis, Zoonen et al. 2014 and Giannakos 2014), and peer support and collaboration was previously noticed as well (Nagendra 2014). There were also some utilitarian drivers which the interviewees did
not mention, like new customer outreach or technical assistance, that social media enables (Landers and Callan, 2014), as well as reputation management (Zoonen et al. 2014 & Landers and Callan 2014).

The hedonistic drivers expressed by the interviewees included enjoyment, connecting with people, keeping in touch with family during work day and work travels, and sense of belonging to a network. Zoonen et al. (2014) noted that as working remotely becomes more common, social media has the power to help employees be in contact and have a feeling of community, and this was visible also in the interviews: employees of the case company work in several different sites around the world, and rarely get a chance to see each other face-to-face.

Noteworthy here is the small amount of hedonistic drivers expressed by the interviewees compared to the utilitarian drivers. Therefore, it is fair to say that the research findings at hand support Zoonen et al.’s (2014) view, that the employees do not use social media at work so much for personal needs. Noticeable was also that the interviewees did not share the hedonistic drivers suggested by literature, such as relaxation and leisure (Leftheriotis and Giannakos 2014 & Landers and Callan, 2014), advancing one’s career (Landers and Goldberg 2014) and voicing feelings like anger and joy (Dreher 2014) in social media.

Interestingly, when analyzing the interviews, it became apparent that the clear division between hedonistic and utilitarian drivers that the literature presents is not often the case in practice. For instance when discussing networking and being connected to people on social media, this can relate to both personal gain, building up a personal career brand, but also enhancing professional network and therefore being of benefit to the employer. Gaining knowledge through social media is another overlapping driver: it can strengthen both personal and professional growth.

To summarize the findings above, the existing literature introduced that employees fulfill both their hedonic, pleasure-oriented, and utilitarian, productivity-oriented needs when operating in social media (Leftheriotis & Giannakos 2014), however, the latter
being the more dominant driver. The interviews supported this claim in two ways: firstly, the interviewees expressed the utilitarian drivers even without directly asked, and secondly, when asked, they discussed more utilitarian than hedonistic drivers. However, the interviews also disclosed that the division between hedonistic and utilitarian drivers is not as clear as the literature portrays.

6.2.5 Novel findings

In addition to discussing the themes above, the interviewees succeeded to reveal also some further information which the previous research had not yet unveiled on the topic: differentiation of the social media to private and professional, what kind of content the advocates share, and who they communicate with in social media.

Something that was prevalent in the interviews was that most of the interviewees made a conscious decision to use and differentiate the social media into private and professional channels. It was often so, that Facebook was considered as a channel to communicate with friends and family, whereas the others were used when communicating with professional networks.

*I have...two kind of relationships. But I separate actually the different social medias I’m using. If I start with Facebook, what is...I consider it as purely private [...] Whilst in LinkedIn...I operate...operate a little bit different.... that is so much more professional perspective. (R2)*

In several cases, the interviewees described that the advocacy had begun from being connected to the employer in social media channel and therefore, being exposed to the content shared by the employer. Liking the content in Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn was one of the most typical ways in which the interviewees expressed to have supported employer in social media, as well as commenting the content and sharing it with own networks. Roots to deciding what content to share to own networks came, according to the interviewees, from liking the content itself, and the fact that the social media content
often represented a different way of communication than official corporate communication – it was less formal and therefore more appealing to the advocates.

The interviewees were also quite confident to identify groups they communicate with in social media in relation to business. These were other employees or senior managers from the case company, customers, people within the same business or profession, or who have the same professional interests with. However, a few of the respondents expressed that social media advocacy is secondary when more pressing issues emerge, and is dependent on how busy the work days are otherwise. This is also an interesting notion, as it indicates that social media is used more when traveling or otherwise having more slow-paced workdays.
7. Answering to the research questions

In this chapter, I present the findings of the research, summarizing both the findings of the empiricism and the literature. I proceed by discussing one research question at a time, and in the last part of this chapter, I evaluate the results and the overall study in a critical manner.

7.1 What is employee advocacy in social media by nature?

To answer to the first research question, both empiricism and literature (Men 2014, Weber Shandwick 2014) supported the view that employee advocacy in social media is largely voluntary of nature. Empiricism amended the discussion by unveiling that employees take up on using the social networking tools largely out of their own interest, and the use stays voluntary also in further stages. Therefore, both empiricism and literature (Men 2014) also suggest that incentives are not needed to endorse advocacy in social media.

Existing literature (Edelman Trust Barometer 2015) introduced and the empiricism supported also the view that the advocates view the new communication technology positively. The benefits which the interviewees expressed with social media included sharing and receiving information and networking. Therefore, it seems fair to say that a key determinant of the advocates is that they are ‘early adaptors’ who have taken up using social media voluntarily, which helps understand why certain people are more likely to become employee advocates in social media.

Additionally, the empiricism amended findings of the previous research by introducing that the employee advocates do the advocacy daily in the most popularly known social media sites, like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. In addition to seeing the benefits that social media can bring to their work, they also have an understanding of what kind of negative aspects or risks there are when they operate in social media in a way that is
linked to their work. Interesting here was the notion that there are some risks on a personal level, and unequal access to the social media within the company.

Other interesting notions in the empiricism were that the interviewees expressed that operating in social media is not extra-role performance, that they use it more for communication than marketing purposes, and that they had divvied the social media into private and professional forums. The advocates communicated in social media with colleagues and senior managers, as well as external stakeholders such as customers and people they have similar professional interest with.

_Table 4: Summarizing the RQ1 findings from literature and empiricism_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>RQ1: What is employee advocacy in social media by nature?</strong></th>
<th><strong>Reference</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. Finding supported by both literature and empiricism</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocates are early adaptors and perceive the new technology positively</td>
<td>Edelman Trust Barometer 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee advocacy is voluntary of nature, and therefore incentives are not needed to support the advocates</td>
<td>Men 2014, Weber Shandwick 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B. Novel finding from empiricism</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy happens on a daily basis in the most popular social networking sites</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocates have an understanding of the negative aspect or threats relating to their social media use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy is not perceived as extra-role performance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocates use social media to communicate with both internal and external stakeholders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7.2 What drives employee advocacy in social media?

To answer to the second research question, employee advocacy was found in both the existing literature (Men 2014, Grunig et al. 2002, Rhee 2004 & Kim 2007), and to some extent also in the empiricism to be associated with symmetrical two-way communications and positive employee-organization relationship. The interviews additionally supported the previous research, which noted that employees who experience a positive relationship with the organization are likely to support the organization by acting as advocates (Men 2014, Rhee 2004 & Kim 2007). It should also be noted that the interviewees linked the relationship more strongly than the communication climate to affect their advocacy in social media. Of special character to this case study was the proudness towards the company and its products, which underlined many of the responses. It appeared that it was one of the key drivers of the case company employees’ advocacy on social media.

Managerial impact on employees’ social media use had differing thoughts in the existing literature. Whereas Landers and Goldberg (2014) and Weber Shandwick (2014) presented that it is an important factor, Charoensukmongkol (2014) noted that the management’s approach does not positively affect the social media behavior of employees. Several interviewees expressed that the management’s support for and its visibility in social media sites has affected positively their social media behaviour. Therefore it can be said, that controversy remains over the issue. The research at hand also opposed the notion by previous literature (Charoensukmongkol 2014) that employees whose co-workers are supportive of social media would use it more.

The literature also suggested that the employee advocacy in social media is driven more by organizational than personal aspirations (Leftheriotis & Giannakos 2014, Landers & Callan 2014, Nagendra 2014, Zoonen et al. 2014 & Dreher 2014). The empiricism supported this in a twofold way: first, the employees discussed altogether more utilitarian drivers, second, when directly asked, they expressed more utilitarian than hedonistic drivers. However, the interviews also unveiled that there are some cases
when the drivers are intertwined, such as networking and knowledge-gathering. Therefore, making such a clear division between the drivers is perhaps not advantageous.

Table 5: Summarizing the RQ2 findings from literature and empiricism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ2: What drives employee advocacy in social media?</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. Finding supported by both literature and empiricism</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees who experience a positive relationship with the organization are likely to support the organization by acting as advocates</td>
<td>Men 2014, Rhee 2004, Kim 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial and co-worker support remain controversial</td>
<td>Landers and Goldberg 2014, Weber Shandwick 2014, Charoensukmongkol 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee advocacy in social media is driven more by organizational than personal aspirations</td>
<td>Leftheriotis &amp; Giannakos 2014, Landers &amp; Callan 2014, Nagendra 2014, Zoonen et al. 2014, Dreher 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B. Novel finding from empiricism</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilitarian and hedonistic drivers are intertwined</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7.3 Evaluation of the research

The researcher position in the study had both advantages but also disadvantages. On one hand, I knew the terms and the names the interviewees referred to, so I could draw many connections which would have been impossible to an external researcher. Having the special researcher position meant also that organizing the interviews and conducting them was relatively easy, as I knew most of the participants in advance. However, this posed also some risks. Being familiar with the interviewees meant that it was challenging to “step away” from the friendly relationship, and for instance, not to support the views of the interviewees too much and drift into discussions of other topics, and keep the researcher position. This was challenging, and something I had to pay special attention to during the course of the interviews. I solved the situation by explaining in the beginning of the interview that I would take the interviewer position instead of a ‘co-worker position’.

Additionally, even though knowing the context of the interviewees and their responses was beneficial, I had to be careful not to over analyze the responses, and keep enough distance to maintain objectivity in the research. I did this in practice by working with the research most of the time from the University to distance myself physically from the organization, and by focusing to making conclusions based on things that the interviewees explicitly expressed.

Although I emphasized before going into the interviews that the interviewees should regard me as an external interviewer, it has to be acknowledged that the interviews were conducted in all possible ways in a work environment. Both myself, the interviewer and the tool used in interviews and the overall environment were familiar to the interviewees from work praxis. Therefore, it can be questioned whether this had an effect to the responses during the interviews. For instance, perhaps in the work environment the interviewees tended to shape their responses so that they would appear more beneficial to the employer instead of their individual goals. One specific topic this could have affected to a large extent was when the utilitarian and hedonistic drivers
were discussed. On the other hand, it is common in interviews in general that the interviewee polishes the responses and wants to please the interviewer. Likewise, many of the findings of the research would have not been gained with other methods, so the use of the interviewing technique was still overall beneficial.

The interviewees volunteered to the study, which perhaps affected their willingness to discuss and openness towards the topic. The voluntariness possibly also had an effect to the content of the responses – as the interviewees wanted to discuss the topic themselves, they possibly had some pre-existing opinions or thoughts they wanted to express. The group of interviewees consisted of a variety of nationalities and people of different positions, which reflects well the case company in total. Only two of the twelve interviewees were women, which is not a desirable rate. However, there are overall more men in the case company, so conducting the interview with this ratio was justifiable.

Conducting the interviews with online tools was also both advantageous but also challenging. On one hand, it enabled having interviewees from different parts of the world, which would not have been possible without the tool. On the other, the interviews were not face-to-face, and the online interview created a different kind of atmosphere. However, web cameras were used to disclose nonverbal communication, which helped create a feeling of closeness. As the voice was transmitted through the internet, there were occasional breaks in the audio tape, which caused distress when transcribing the interviews. Not being a native English speaker myself also made it difficult time to time to transcribe the interview data, which consisted of different dialects and accents.

Language was one of the main issues affecting the interview results, even though I paid special attention to formulating the questions prior and using clear language during the interviews. Although English is used within the company as the corporate language, it became apparent that the richness of the responses by native speakers was slightly better than that of the non-natives. This was for two reasons. First, the native English-speakers seemed to understand the questions slightly better and thus, provide a more direct
answer to the specific question. Second, they were more likely to open up the topic and the response in a more detailed level, describing more personal experiences and thoughts, making the response itself richer. Although many of the non-natives also provided good and direct answers, some had clear difficulties when more complex phenomenon such as relationship with employer or communication culture were discussed.

One important notion was also that the concept of communication is not perhaps so clear for those who are not directly involved with communication department or tools. Some interviewees confused communication with marketing, and this can have affected the results to a small extent. Whereas some interviewees discussed communication on company level, some clearly focused more on communication that is carried out on team levels, which plausibly had an effect to their replies. It was also evident that term like ‘communication culture’ was not self-explanatory to many interviewees, and had to be opened up separately.

8. Conclusions and discussion

In this last chapter, I conclude the contributions of this thesis and assess potential areas for further research. Overall, this study has helped explain a complex and novel phenomenon, employee advocacy in social media, from the employee perspective. Thus, it has increased understanding of what employee advocacy is, and what drives it from the employee point of view. It should be acknowledged, however, that the phenomenon has existed also previously, simply not in social media arenas; employees have always talked about their employer, spreading the positive picture for instance at their free time. However, in social media, the reach of employees’ communication is more extensive, and therefore, more research on the topic is needed to unveil what kind of impacts this can have.
As the thesis focused on looking at the topic from an organizational viewpoint, it also discussed the changing nature of organizational communications, which included considering employees increasingly as important communicators. When reflected to the case company, it can be noticed that this is seen in practice as well; the case company has in its communication strategy underlined the communicative role of each employee.

The main contribution of this thesis was explaining specifically the nature of employee advocacy in social media and examining what are its main drivers. The core conclusions were that employee advocacy is voluntary of nature and driven by, for instance proudness that the advocate experiences towards the employer as well as a positive employee-organization relationship. In the light of these findings, it feels justifiable to ask what are the things that the organization can do or affect in order to drive employee advocacy. Firstly, the leadership was found to have certain effect to the employee advocacy, so one recommendation would be for the leadership to articulate more clearly their approach to social media and show it in their actions. Secondly, employee advocacy in social media was found to be linked to a certain extent with symmetrical two-way communication, so focusing to develop this is one way in which the organization can effect employee’s communicative actions in social media.

The research conducted for this thesis also succeeded to give new dimensions to how social media is used in work context. Interestingly, the interviewees compared the knowledge gained through social media to other training sessions, and described this information to give support to the decisions they make at work. Therefore, it can be suggested that social media is now offering the kind of information that has traditionally come from within the organization. Additionally, the interviewees experienced to have gained a better and broader understanding of the organization as a whole though social media, which can be very beneficial for both the employees and the organization.

Something that was evident in the interviews was also the interviewees’ search of community in social media. In the more dynamic environments that the organizations are facing, it seems that social media is one of the newer, more stable environments to which the employees turn to find communality both within the company but also with
professionals that are their peers from other companies. This community can offer the support they need, for instance, for professional growth.

All in all, the interviews supported to a certain extent the pre-existing literature but also presented some new findings. As the research took the form of a case study, it is up to the reader to evaluate whether these are applicable to other scenarios, or whether they should be considered reflecting the subjective reality of the case organization and its employees.

8.1 Suggestions for further research

To conclude the thesis, I present some suggestions for further research. As the topic is overall very novel, there are many fruitful directions to take. It would be interesting to study further the way that the advocacy starts and develops over time. This could be studied again from the employees’ viewpoint, contrasting the findings to the overall developments going on at the organization to see whether they have an effect on the way the advocacy develops in social media.

Additionally, more research is needed on advocacy, gamification, and incentives. An increasing number of companies are offering game-like platforms for organizations to encourage their employees to become advocates. In these environments, the employees are trying to reach certain ‘levels’ by being more active advocates to gain better incentives. As this study as well as the previous research contradicted the need to incentivize employee advocacy in social media, it feels that more research is needed to unveil the way in which the incentives are can be beneficial.

As the employees emphasized also the communal dimensions of their social media use, it would be worth further investigation to see how of professional relationships are built in social media, and what kind of professional communities are established. The dynamics within these communities could be worth looking into, too, as well as
investigating how employees build their professional identities in social media on a personal level.

Another interesting aspect to study would be the impact that internal social networking tools have to employees’ use of external social media. As this study was limited to studying only the external channels, and the case company did not have social media yet to a large extent in internal use, this correlation could not be studied in this thesis. However, as social networking tools provided by the organizations become increasingly popular, it would be interesting to see whether their implementation and use correlates with employees’ approach towards external social media.

To conclude, there are yet many aspects to employee advocacy in social media that either needs further investigation, or that are yet to be discovered. Therefore, I recommend all researchers interested in the topic to bravely dive into this multidimensional phenomenon.
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Letter sent to survey respondents

Dear case company team mate,

As you may have noticed, we at case company are developing our social media approach, and you are one of the key stakeholders whose opinion we would like to hear. By answering to the survey, you provide us with important insight. The survey takes less no more than 5 minutes to complete. Please respond to the survey by 29 May.

The survey is anonymous and all answers will be processed confidentially. If you wish to continue discussion on the topic, please leave your e-mail address to the field provided in the survey. The short interview will be arranged during the summer when it best suits your schedule.

Click here to go to the survey

This research will be used both in my Master’s Thesis for the University of Helsinki, and for case company’s internal social media development work. If you have any questions on the topic, feel free to contact me.

Thank you already in advance for sharing your insight!

Warm regards,
Tuuli Ekman

+358406350156
tuuli.ekman@gmail.com
Appendix 2: Survey body

Social media survey

Information: Before submitting your replies, please read the questions carefully. You can only complete the survey once. If you have any questions relating to the survey, please contact Tuuli Ekman. Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey!

Part 1: Social media at work

1. Do you use social media in relation to your work?
   This means, for instance:
   - Searching work-related information from social media
   - Sharing work-related information with colleagues in social media
   - Connecting with colleagues and other work-related stakeholders in social media
   - Supporting case company or its products and services in social media

   With social media, I refer to channels such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and YouTube.

   a) Yes
   b) No
   c) Other, please specify

2. If you responded “yes”, how often do you use social media in relation to your work? (Please leave empty if your response was “no” in question 1)
   a) Daily
   b) Weekly
   c) Monthly
   d) Yearly
   e) Other, please specify
3. If you responded “yes”, which social media do you use in relation to your work? (Please leave empty if your response was “no” in question 1)
   a) Facebook
   b) Twitter
   c) YouTube
   d) Instagram
   e) LinkedIn
   f) Wikipedia
   g) Other, please specify

4. If you responded “yes”, what do you think are the biggest benefits of using social media in work context? (Please leave empty if your response was “no” in question 1)
   Open field

5. If you responded “no”, can you explain why you have not used social media in relation to your work?
   Open field

6. Which area do you work with? Please choose one.
   a) Marketing
   b) HR
   c) Communications
   d) Sales
   e) R&D
   f) Finance
   g) Legal
   h) Sourcing, Supply and Logistics
   i) Other

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**Part 2: Your communication at social media**

1. Would you say that you have supported case company as a company or its products and services in social media?
a) Yes
b) No
c) Other, please specify

2. If you responded “yes”, how often have you done so?
   a) Daily
   b) Weekly
   c) Monthly
   d) Yearly
   e) Other, please specify

3. If you responded “yes”, in which social media have you supported *case company* or its products and services?
   a) Facebook
   b) Twitter
   c) YouTube
   d) Instagram
   e) LinkedIn
   f) Other, please specify

4. If you replied “no”, can you tell why you have not supported *case company* or its products and services in social media?
   *Open field*

5. If you have supported for *case company* in social media and wish to be interviewed, please leave your email:
   *Open field*

**Part 3:**

Thanks for completing the survey! If you left your e-mail, I will be in contact with you soon.

Best regards,
Tuuli Ekman
# Appendix 3: Survey results (N=82)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Do you use social media in relation to your work?</td>
<td>Yes – 74% No – 22% Other, please specify – 4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. If you responded “yes”, how often do you use social media in work context?</td>
<td>Daily – 19% Weekly – 53% Monthly – 28% Yearly – 0% Other, please specify – 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. If you responded “yes”, which social media do you use in work context?</td>
<td>Facebook – 41% Twitter – 14% YouTube – 53% Instagram – 11% LinkedIn – 77% Wikipedia – 22% Other, please specify – 5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. If you responded “yes”, what do you think are the biggest benefits of using social media in work context?</td>
<td>Summary of findings: -It is simple, fast -I can easily share and distribute information and updates on our business -It offers access to latest trends -Enables networking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. If you responded “no”, can you explain why you have not used social media in relation to your work?</td>
<td>Summary of findings: -Do not see the need -I am not familiar with it -Lack of time -I do not like all parts of social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Which area do you work with?</td>
<td>Marketing – 9% Communications – 1% HR – 6% Sales – 25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R&amp;D – 4%</td>
<td>Finance – 8%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Would you say that you have supported <em>case company</em> as a company or its products and services in social media?</td>
<td>Yes – 59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. If you responded “yes”, how often have you done so?</td>
<td>Daily – 10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. If you responded “yes”, in which social media have you supported <em>case company</em> or its products and services?</td>
<td>Facebook – 54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. If you responded “no”, can you explain why you have not supported <em>case company</em> or its products and services in social media?</td>
<td>Summary of findings:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I am not familiar / I am not sure how to do so</td>
<td>- I do not use social media at all</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4: Info sent to interviewees

Hi X (name inserted),

Thanks for agreeing to take part in the social media interviews.

The interview will be all about your experiences and thoughts regarding use of social media at work. Although I am working at case company, I hope that you can share your thoughts openly and honestly.

The interview will be divided into five sections:

1. Backgrounder: what kind of relationship you have with social media?
2. Being in social media – what do you do there, when did you start, who do you communicate with, and why?
3. Communication at case company: What is the communication climate like? Does it affect your actions in social media?
4. What drives your social media use in work context? Does it benefit your work?
5. Concluding remarks: Has social media changed the way you work? Do you see any negative aspects to it?

You can prepare for the interview by reflecting on these topics if you want, but it is not required. We have plenty of time to discuss the topics during the interview 😊

If you have any questions prior to or after the interview, don’t hesitate to contact me!

Warm regards,
Tuuli
### Appendix 5: Interviewee profiles and reference guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of interviewees</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviewees’ references and interview length</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R1: Manager (59 min)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2: Senior Manager (45 min)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>R3: Manager (43 min)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R4: President (38 min)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R5: Senior Manager (59 min)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R6: Manager (52 min)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R7: Director (39 min)</td>
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<tr>
<td>R8: Staff (43 min)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R9: Department Head (51 min)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>R10: Senior Manager (57 min)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R11: Director (1 h 5 min)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R12: Department Head (44 min)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nationality</strong></td>
<td>Swedish (4) British (3) Irish (2) Finnish (1) French (1) Dutch (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td>Male (10) Female (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 6: Interview guide

Part 1: Background

- Can you explain briefly what you do at Case company?
- What do you think about social media in general? What kind of relationship do you have with social media?
- Can you describe what kind of things you do in social media?
- Do you use social media with respect to your work? Can you elaborate what you do in social media that has to do with your work?
- What about in your spare time?
- Which social media channels do you typically use, and how often?

Part 2: Nature of social media actions

- Would you say that you support or have supported Case company or its products and services in social media? Could you describe how you have done so?
  - Follow-ups: Can you give examples? Can you elaborate a bit more what you have been doing in social media X? Was it something that had to do with your work, some specific products, or the company in general? Do you identify yourself as Case company’s representative in social media?
- Can you recall when you started doing so?
- Is it possible for you to explain why you started supporting Case company in social media in the first place?
  - Follow-ups: In what situation did it happen? Was it voluntary? A habit you learned in earlier positions or workplace? Example of co-workers or superiors?
- In which channels have you been supporting Case company? How often?
- Is it possible for you to identify who do you usually communicate with in social media?
- Have you realized yourself prior to this that you have been supporting Case company in social media?
- Do you feel like Case company, in some way, has encouraged you to use social media?
• Do you experience that social media gives you opportunity to speak on behalf of Case company and its other employees?

• Do you know if your co-workers are using social media?

• Do you know what your manager thinks about social media?
  o Follow-ups: Is he/she using it as well?

• If no-one at the office was supporting your employer in social media, do you think you would still do it?

• Do you think it somehow benefits your work that you are using social media?

• Do you feel like you gain something personally for using social media as your employer’s ambassador?

• Have you received or do you expect some incentives or rewards from working in social media?

Part 3: Communication at workplace

• In your view, what kind of communication culture does Case company have? Could you describe it with some qualities or attributes?

• In your opinion, is two-way communication or dialogue embraced at Case company?

• How well can everyone express themselves at Case company? / Do you think Case company is encouraging all employees to communicate?

• Do you think that you have an important role as Case company employee to communicate within the organization?

• Do you think that you have an important role as Case company employee to communicate external to the organization?

• Do you think Case company’s communication culture influences its approach towards social media?

• Do you think it affects your social media use?

• Have you co-operation or common rules for social media at workplace?

Part 4: Drivers of social media use

• How would you describe your relationship with your employer?
  o Follow-ups: Do you experience some kind of a bond? Is there any attribute or adjective that would describe the relationship?

• Do you think this has an effect on how you talk about your employer in social media?

Part 5: Ending
• In general, what kind of experiences do you have on being in social media?
• Has social media changed the way you work? If, how?
• Can you see any negative aspects or threats relating to social media?
• Have you any fears, hesitations or negative feelings towards social media?
• Anything else you would like to add or say in regards to the topic?
Appendix 7: Theoretical frameworks to interview guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Interview guide</th>
<th>Theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. What is employee advocacy in social media by nature? | Nature of employee advocacy | • Would you say that you support or have supported *case company* or offering in social media?  
• Could you describe how you have supported *case company* in social media?  
• Can you recall when you started doing so?  
• Is it possible for you to explain why you started supporting *case company* in social media in the first place?  
• In which channels have you been supporting *case company*?  
• How often do you usually do so?  
• Have you realized yourself prior to this that you have been supporting *case company* in social media?  
• Do you feel like *case company*, in some way, has encouraged you to use social media? | a) Employee advocacy is voluntary of nature and a behavioral construct (Men 2014)  
b) 56% of employees are independently, without encouragement from the employer, acting as advocates for their employer (Weber Shandwick 2014)  
c) Employees who are familiar and optimistic about new communication channels are more likely to become organizational advocates. (Edelman Trust Barometer 2015) |
2. What drives employees who advocate their employer in social media? | Communication | a) Employee-organization relationship affects employees’ communication behavior positively - employee advocacy indicates strong relationship and loyalty between the organization and the employee (Men 2014)

| In your view, what kind of communication climate does the case company have? |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| What do you think the chances are for everyone at case company to express themselves and their views? |
| Do you think case company is encouraging all employees to communicate? |
| In your opinion, does the case company provide means to two-way communication or dialogue? |
| Do you think that you have an important role as case company employee to communicate internally in the organization? |
| Do you think that you have an important role as case company employee to communicate external to the organization? |
| Do you think communication climate or culture affects employee-organization relationship? |

b) Symmetrical internal communication reinforces positive behavioral outcomes and nurtures quality employee-organization relationship, which has an effects willingness to act as an employee advocate (Grunig et al. 2002)

c) Leadership and engagement can accelerate the willingness of the employees to act as online advocates (Weber Shandwick 2014)

d) Research disagrees in estimates whether leadership affects employees’ use of social media and advocacy. Whereas Weber Shandwick (2014) it is the most important factor
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social factors</th>
<th>at case company influences its approach towards social media?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you think it affects your social media use regards to your work?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How would you describe your relationship with your employer?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Do you think this has an effect on how you talk about your employer in social media?</td>
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<td>Do you know if your co-workers are using social media?</td>
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<td>Do you know what your manager thinks about social media?</td>
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<td>If no-one at the office was supporting your employer in social media, do you think you would still do it?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Utilitarian and hedonistic drivers</td>
<td>Do you think it somehow benefits your work that you are using social media?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Do you feel like you gain something personally for using social media as your employer’s influencing employee advocacy, followed by internal communications. Other research (Charoensukmongkol 2014, 346 &amp; Landers and Goldberg 2014, 301) says management does not affect on whether employees utilize social media</td>
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<td></td>
<td>E) All exchange relationships within the organization affect the extra-role performance of the employees (Ruck and Welch 2012)</td>
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<td>F) Employees, whose coworkers are supportive of social media, use it more regularly (Charoensukmongkol 2014</td>
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<td></td>
<td>G) Employees fulfill both their hedonic, pleasure-oriented, and utilitarian, productivity-oriented needs when operating in social media (Leftheriotis &amp; Giannakos 2014)</td>
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<tr>
<td>h) Work-related, <em>utilitarian</em>, benefits of social media include maintaining professional networks, strengthening the bonds with colleagues, as well as gathering and promoting work-related information (Leftheriotis &amp; Giannakos 2014)</td>
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<tr>
<td>i) <em>Hedonistic</em> gains include leisure and relaxing, expressing feelings, and expanding own network (Landers &amp; Goldberg 2014, Dreher 2014 and Leftheriotis &amp; Giabbakos 2014)</td>
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