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Doctor of Philosophy

by

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The Role of Social Media
in Business-to-business (B2B) Relationship Marketing

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Dedications

For my father, mother, and siblings
who have always encouraged me to reach for my dreams.

“The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams”

(Eleanor Roosevelt)
Acknowledgements

“People come into your life for a moment, a day, or a lifetime. It matters not the time they spent with you but how they impacted your life in that time”

(Anonymous)

This stepping stone which signifies a shift in my life has made me remember all the special people who have been part in making this dream come true. In this instance, I wish to express my deepest gratitude for these people for their endless encouragement and motivation and for which they deserve my sincere appreciation and acknowledgement.

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A special appreciation to him who has been waiting patiently for me to come home.

Most of all, I thank God for giving me the health, stamina, and ability to strive up to this level.
Statement of Originality and Authorship

I hereby declare that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis entitled AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS RELATIONSHIP MARKETING is my own original work. The work contained in this thesis has not been previously been submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. Due acknowledgement to each significant contribution to, and quotation in this thesis from the work, or works of other people has been made through the proper use of citations and references.

December 2015

.................................
Nur Amalina Mohamad Zaki
Conferences, Poster Presentations and Publications

Conferences

1) Third Malaysian Postgraduate Conference (MPC) 2013 in Sydney

2) 2nd International Conference on Business Innovation, Economics, Law, Social Science & Humanities (ICBELSH) 2014 in Kuala Lumpur
   - Best Presenter/Paper

3) Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy of Conference (ANZMAC) 2014

4) The 3rd International Conference on Technology, Science, Social Sciences and Humanities (ICTeSSHI) 2014 in Dubai
   - Best Presenter/Paper

5) 4th International Conference on Advances in Social Sciences (ICASS) 2014 in Kuala Lumpur

Poster Presentations

1) Griffith University 2014 Three Minute Thesis Competition, Griffith Business School Qualifying Heat

2) 2nd International Conference on Business Innovation, Economics, Law, Social Science & Humanities (ICBELSH) 2014 in Kuala Lumpur
   - Best Presenter
3) 4th International Conference on Advances in Social Sciences (ICASS) 2014 in Kuala Lumpur

Publications


   - Best Presenter/Paper


   - Best Presenter/Paper

Abstract

Traditionally, consumers used social media — such as blogs, social networking sites, and video sharing sites — to share their experiences of a product or service. Increasingly, however, consumers are utilising these platforms to not only interact with consumers, but to better engage with companies. This represents the social media phenomenon, which can now significantly impact a company’s strategy, sales, and even survival. Yet, many companies ignore or abstain from using this form of media largely due to a lack of understanding what social media entails and what benefits it can provide to both consumers and business in general.

This research aims to provide a better understanding of the utilisation of social media within a business context. Prior research over the last decade has tended to heavily invest in understanding social media from a business-to-consumer (B2C) perspective, largely overlooking the question of how businesses can best utilise social media to market (and interact) with other businesses (B2B). Although a few studies have touted the importance of improving our understanding the role of social media in the B2B environment (particularly in the context of relationship development) (e.g. Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), to date, there has been a lack of empirical academic research investigating the role and value of social media in relationship marketing within a B2B perspective. This study aims to address the evident research gap through exploring the role of social media in B2B relationship marketing.

In this inductive research, Malaysia serves as the country of context for a number of noteworthy reasons. In particular, Malaysia has shown high growth in relationship marketing and social media, 2) has a high number of internet users and concomitantly high rates in internet penetration, and 3) has witnessed considerable growth in social media usage in recent years. Given the paucity of prior research in this area, a qualitative approach was undertaken to gather in-depth information in order to better understand this nature (and nuances) of this phenomenon. A two-phased semi-structured interviewing technique was implemented with participants who currently work in corporate relationship marketing fields. A total of 27 interviewees from seller companies and 15 interviewees from buyer companies were consulted in this research. Leximancer software was used to analyse collected data, due to its ability identify emergent concepts and provide thematic maps, clearly relate concept associations and reduce biases through objective contextual analysis.

The key findings from this research reveal that there are several reasons underlying why B2B companies utilise social media, which include information sharing, communication, relationship development, and improving exchange efficiencies. A primary reason that companies tended to utilise social media in B2B relationship marketing is to assist in information sharing, which appears somewhat contrary to the conventional wisdom that the companies use social media for relationship purposes (i.e. developing relationships with the prospects, and maintaining or enhancing existing B2B
relationships). This research also identifies exchange efficiencies as an important reason for B2B companies to use social media, although this appears an important consideration for buyer companies, rather than seller companies in adopting an active social media strategy.

The results of this research have broad implications for both research and practice. The study provides original research identifying social media platforms, frequently used hardware, and social media supportive measure of B2B companies, and extends current theoretical perspectives on the use of social media in dyadic marketing channel exchange. In particular, this research provides a framework for future research particularly in evaluating whether the findings of this research holds true in other situations such as for B2B companies which utilise mobile-based social media. In relation to contributions to practice, the findings of the study demonstrate variation in how B2B companies provide social media supportive measures (several companies provide no supportive measures, many companies provide at least one, and some companies provide all three supportive measures), despite most sellers and buyers of B2B companies utilise the same social media platform, that is, social networking sites especially the Facebook. The findings also illustrate that the most portable and small sized devices (like smartphones and tablets) are the most commonly used devices by both, the sellers and buyers, when compared to other devices like laptops and desktops. Additionally, this research suggests B2B companies to truly comprehend the potential benefits of social media (not only for their companies, but also for their sellers and buyers utilise social media) because each seller and buyer may have different reasons for using social media, depending on the seller-buyer relationship.

In summary, this research is the first to explore the nature and role of social media in B2B relationship marketing and it provides a solid framework for future research in this area. Specifically, this research has made a valuable contribution in:

- being the first to identify a host of factors influencing the use (and successful adoption) of social media in a B2B context
- being the first to utilise research design that captures perspectives from two sides of the marketing channel dyad (seller and buyer)
- investigating the social media phenomenon in a developing country context so as to provide comparative perspectives of social media adoption to traditional perspectives couched in western economies

In conclusion, although this original and comprehensive research has found that information sharing serves as the most important reason for both seller and buyer companies to invest in social media, the results present something of an enigma in social media utilisation in business. In particular, most B2B companies appear to lack a structured and informed basis for their social media usage. The resultant ad hoc approach to social media utilisation is worrisome and this research provides an initial framework for companies to better understand the nature, relevance and value of social media relationship marketing and business exchange.
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2C</td>
<td>Business-to-consumer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CME</td>
<td>Computer Mediated Environment</td>
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“*The last thing that we find in making a book is to know what we must put first.*”

*(Blaise Pascal)*

1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This study consists of five chapters: 1) Introduction, 2) Literature Review, 3) Methodology, 4) Findings, and 5) Discussion and Conclusion. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief introduction to the research. This chapter is divided into nine sections, as illustrated in Figure 1.1. Following this introduction, Section 1.2 discusses the research background and is followed by Section 1.3, which presents the research problem, research objective, research question, and research subquestions. Next, Section 1.4 justifies the context of the research. Section 1.5 describes the research approach applied in this research, while Section 1.6 outlines the justification and contribution of the study. Section 1.7 then presents the definitions of key terms and is followed by Section 1.8, which describes the structure of this thesis. Section 1.9 offers concluding remarks.
1.2 Research Background

Traditionally, the interactions and personal relationships between sales representatives and customers have been highlighted by business-to-business (B2B) marketers (Huotari, Ulkuniemi, Saraniemi, Mäläskä, & Karjaluoto). In recent years, B2B marketers have used Internet applications more widely (Leek, Turnbull, & Naude, 2003), and an extensive body of knowledge pertaining the use of web-based marketing has accumulated. The web has undergone further innovations as the one-way computer-mediated environment (CME) has evolved to social media platforms, or what have been termed Web 2.0 applications. Accordingly, many social media technologies, such as blogs, social networking sites, virtual worlds, collaborative projects, content communities, and virtual game worlds, are gaining popularity and increasing the number of social media users (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Hassan & Pfaff, 2006; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009; Stenmark, 2008).
Knowledge about the role of social media in the B2B environment is considered important especially for the purpose of developing relationships (Enders, Hugenberg, Denker, & Mauch, 2008; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). For instance, a business can use social media, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, to interact with other businesses, develop relationships and trust, and identify prospective partners (Shih, 2009). The impact of these media has been to change the way individuals and groups interact, communicate, and work with each other (Hirschheim & Klein, 2010; Majchrzak, 2009; Stenmark, 2008), and for businesses the adoption of these media has enabled and encouraged new forms of communication (Curtis et al., 2010; Gentry, 2009; Greenberg, 2009) and collaborative practices (Andriole, 2010; Majchrzak, 2006; Stenmark, 2008; Wagner & Majchrzak, 2007; Yates, Wagner, & Majchrzak, 2010).

Social media are thus becoming an important aspect of B2B marketing (Huotari et al., 2015). However, technology itself is not the ultimate reason for the popularity of social media applications such as Twitter and Facebook (Huotari et al., 2015). Rather, social media are becoming popular because users desire to be more social and open in sharing their experiences with others (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick, Mayer, & Johnston, 2009). Hence, the evolution of technology underlies fundamental changes that challenge researchers to rethink and refine earlier theories of relationship marketing and assumptions of social media. Specifically, the evolution of social media involves transformative technological advancements (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Yates et al., 2010) that give rise to the need to understand the role of social media in B2B relationship marketing.

1.3 Problem Statement

Originally, social media were used more often and more extensively by B2C companies than by B2B companies (Katona & Sarvary, 2014). However, as social media have increased in importance, the number of B2B companies employing social media has risen. However, studies of social media consider the B2C relationship to a much greater extent than the B2B relationship, possibly because B2B companies have been slower to adopt social media (Michaelidou, Siamagka, & Christodoulides, 2011). The Google time-line trends shows a growing B2C interest in social media beginning in 2004, whilst the interest in B2B social media started to emerge only in 2010 (Google,
Consistently, according to Katona and Sarvary (2014), traditionally social media has been used more often and more extensively by B2C companies than B2B companies. Thus, the overall problem to be addressed in this research is:

**What is the role of social media in B2B relationship marketing in organisations that use social media?**

As of 2015, many popular social media platforms exist, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube. Although businesses have begun to penetrate online social networks and offer direct links from corporate websites to social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), little is known about the use of social media for B2B relationship marketing. Even though the use of social media in the B2B environment grew by almost 10% in 2012 (Moorman, 2015), knowledge pertaining to how businesses utilise social media for the purpose of B2B relationship marketing remains in its infancy. However, the amount of time users spend on social media is expected to keep growing (Nielsen, 2012).

Among the reasons for slow social media adoption by B2B companies (Michaelidou et al., 2011) are the lack of evidence of similar cases using social media, difficulties in adopting new mental models and practices discerning the use of social media, and lack of understanding of the possibilities of social media (Kärkkäinen, Jussila, & Väisänen, 2010). Nevertheless, prior studies show that businesses use social media in internal functions and in external functions such as information sharing, public relations, and collaborative work (Gordon, 2009). Even though research shows that companies use social media less actively for internal purposes than for collaboration with other businesses or partners (e.g. Kärkkäinen, Jussila, & Väisänen, 2010), still little is known about why B2B companies use social media in relationship marketing.

To date, how B2B sellers and buyers perceive engagement with social media is unclear, and practitioner articles relating to social media illustrate that no agreement prevails regarding the best social media practices. However, B2B consumerism power seems to be shifting from sellers to buyers (Baer, 2010), although presently the differences and similarities in the way B2B sellers and buyers engage social media for relationship marketing remain unknown.
1.3.1 Research Question and Research Subquestions

The research problem presented earlier reveals the need to understand the role of social media in B2B relationship marketing. Specifically, how and for what purpose do businesses use social media in B2B relationship marketing, and how consistent are the perceptions of sellers and buyers engaging with social media in B2B relationship marketing? Hence, the objective of this research is to investigate the role of social media in the B2B environment for both sides of the marketing channel dyad—sellers and buyers. The findings of this research should provide insight into several critical areas for business researchers and B2B companies.

Given that the main purpose of this research is to explore the role of social media in the area of B2B relationship marketing in organisations that use social media, the following overarching research question is:

**What is the role of social media in B2B relationship marketing in organisations that use social media?**

From this overarching research question, three research subquestions have been derived:

- **RQ1:** How do businesses operationalise social media in B2B relationship marketing?
- **RQ2:** For what purpose do businesses use social media in B2B relationship marketing?
- **RQ3:** How consistent are the perceptions of sellers and buyers engaging with social media in B2B relationship marketing?

1.4 Context of the Study

In this exploratory research, Malaysia served as the country of context, because Malaysia has 1) a steadily growing interest in relationship marketing and social media, 2) a high number of Internet users, 3) a high rate of Internet penetration, and 4) considerable growth in social media use. Google time-line trends show that Malaysia has one of the highest rates of growth in relationship marketing and social media (Google, 2013). Additionally, within the Asian region, Malaysia
has one of the highest numbers of Internet users and the highest rate of Internet penetration. Finally, statistics shows that the level of Internet adoption among Malaysians has been high every year since 2008, with more than 50% of the population described as Internet users (Internet World Stats, 2010). Among these Internet users, nearly 90% have access to social media (ComScore.com, 2011) and more than 50% have an active social media profile (We Are Social, 2012). In Malaysia, online activities are prominently represented by social media, with social networking activities accounting for more than 70% of online activities and nearly 80% of users’ time spent online (Nielsen.com, 2011). Therefore, Malaysia is an appropriate country of context for this study.

1.5 Research Approach

Given that this area is new and under-researched, the interpretivist approach is appropriate for this study because it enables the researcher to interpret respondents’ points of view, background, and experiences (Creswell, 2003) and gain insight into the phenomenon of interest. The methodology seeks to observe the real world primarily using a qualitative approach (Guba & Lincoln, 1994)—an inductive research method generally adopted to investigate and understand unexplored phenomena (Carson & Coviello, 1996), especially when research areas are deficient in theory (Parkhe, 1993; Perry, 1998b). Qualitative research allows the researcher to attain rich and deep information and come to a good comprehension of issues being studied (Patton, 2002). Additionally, qualitative research can improve the validity and efficiency of quantitative research (Proctor, 2005). Even though qualitative research does not identify small differences quite as well as large-scale quantitative research, qualitative research can detect minor problems that may not be observable in large-scale quantitative studies (Patton, 2002; Proctor, 2005). Qualitative research is especially appropriate for this study, as the role of social media in B2B relationship marketing is a new and emerging research area (Brennan & Croft, 2012).

The data collection for qualitative research can be performed using various methods, including in-depth interviews, observations, and case studies. For this research, the in-depth interviewing technique was chosen because this method allows the researcher to get closer to participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), who in this case are users of social media for the purpose of B2B relationship marketing. Specifically,
two phases of in-depth semi-structured interviewing were implemented for this research. Each phase entailed pilot testing and actual data collection.

**Phase 1:** The first phase of the interviews was undertaken with employees who work in the relationship marketing field within a range of organisations. The purpose of the first-phase interviews—with sellers—was to explore the role of social media as a means of B2B relationship marketing from the perspective of seller who uses social media.

**Phase 2:** The second phase of the interviews involved interviewing buyers from companies that were examined in the first-phase interviews. In other words, the participants for the second-phase interviews were employees of companies that had relationships with the companies from the first-phase interviews. Results from the second-phase interviews were used to verify the first-phase information from the buyer perspective.

The interview transcriptions from both phases were analysed through semi-structured thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006) by employing the qualitative software Leximancer 4.0 (Smith, 2011). Leximancer was chosen not only to increase the depth and objectivity of the findings, but also to address issues of trustworthiness regarding the data (Smith & Humphreys, 2006). Leximancer does not require manual coding of the data for the user to generate key concepts and themes (Cretchly, Gallois, Chenery, & Smith, 2010), hence reducing researcher bias (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977).

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), qualitative studies should be assessed differently from quantitative research especially when addressing the issues of trustworthiness, which include the dependability, credibility, and transferability of this research. For this study, the operational and structural dependability of the data was ensured through probing and the use of interview guides in the semi-structured interviews. Importantly, in qualitative research the aim is not to eliminate inconsistencies in the data but to comprehend inconsistencies as they occur (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The use of two phases of interviews supported the credibility of this
study, and transferability issues were addressed by obtaining detailed descriptions of the interviewees’ background, including (but not limited to) their ages, the location of their companies, and the industry types. An overview of research approach of this study is presented in Figure 1.2.

### Figure 1.2: An Overview of the Research Approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIRST-PHASE INTERVIEW: FROM SELLER PERSPECTIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DATA COLLECTION</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Face-to-face interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ With 19 sellers who utilise Social Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Sellers then suggested companies to be interviewed for second phase interviews)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DATA ANALYSIS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Analysed using Leximancer 4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Coded using thematic analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Addressed the issues of trustworthiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RESEARCH FINDINGS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• From seller perspective: Addressed research questions one and two (RQ1 and RQ2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECOND-PHASE INTERVIEW: FROM BUYER PERSPECTIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DATA COLLECTION</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Face-to-face interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ With 12 buyers who utilise Social Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(All buyers have had relationships with sellers of first phase interviews)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DATA ANALYSIS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Analysed using Leximancer 4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Coded using thematic analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Addressed the issues of trustworthiness</td>
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<td><strong>RESEARCH FINDINGS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• From buyer perspective: Addressed research questions one and two (RQ1 and RQ2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Developed for this research.

### 1.6 Justification and Contribution of the Study

Four reasons justify this thesis. Firstly, from a managerial perspective, the research findings are expected to provide useful information as to why and how
businesses utilise social media for the purpose of B2B relationship marketing. Specifically, the study examines whether sellers and buyers differ in their perception of the role of social media role in relationship marketing. This study is potentially unique, as it investigates the role of social media in B2B relationship marketing from two perspectives, that is, from the sellers to their buyers and from the buyers to their sellers. Many previous studies (e.g. Gilin & Schwartzman, 2011; Stelzner, 2009; Lehtimäki, 2009; Carabiner, 2009) have focused primarily on the perspective of a company with respect to its individual customers. The findings from this research are predicted to benefit not only the sellers but also the buyers in terms of B2B relationship marketing.

Secondly, this research is expected to demonstrate the significant contributions of social media to B2B relationship marketing from a macro perspective. Prior literature reveals that studies relating to social media activities are segmented into specific areas, such as social media classifications (e.g. Kaplan, 2010) or tools and applications (e.g. Trainor, Andzulis, Rapp, & Agnihotri, 2014), with less emphasis on the broader aspect of the role of social media. Additionally, many previous studies on the use of social media focus solely on social networking sites (Dwyer, Hiltz, & Passerini, 2007), with only limited research examining social media overall. In addition to social networking sites, there are many other platforms of social media such as blog, micro-blogs, virtual game worlds, collaborative projects, feedback dedicated sites, content community sites, and virtual social worlds (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2007), with each social media platform belongs to different category depending on its levels of media richness and/or self-presentation (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kietzmann, et al., 2011; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Studying social networking sites alone gives little contribution to the social media, but also to the relationship marketing research and practice. Of the studies that take a macro perspective (that is, social media), only a few integrate the research with other broad research areas such as relationship marketing and very few are analysed from the B2B point of view. Hence, this study is anticipated to contribute to the nascent stream of research on social media in the B2B environment.

Thirdly, this exploratory study is anticipated to expand the knowledge of relationship marketing in the B2B environment. The existing literature focuses primarily on the sales and marketing perspective, without considering implications of social media for B2B companies. Most customer relationship management studies have
concentrated on the B2C customers, that is, individual customers (e.g. Prahalad, 2000, 2004; Rowley et al., 2007; Payne, 2008; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2009; Greenberg, 2010). This study is expected to be one of the few studies on the use of social media for relationship management from the B2B viewpoint.

A further contribution of this study relates to the methodology undertaken for this research. To date, little academically robust research has examined social media issues utilising an inductive (in-depth interview) approach so as to accommodate the inherent complexity of these issues within a B2B context. This research is expected to make an important contribution, as it investigated the role of social media from a dual perspective in a systematic way. Prior academic studies have not considered the buyer perspective separately. Additionally, the methodology used for this research is expected to reduce researcher bias during the analysing process (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977) by drawing on the Leximancer software. In short, the research approach taken for this research is predicted to contribute to a more thorough understanding of the use of social media for B2B relationship marketing.

1.7 Definitions of Key Terms

To facilitate a better understanding of this research, the important key terms are defined in Table 1.1. Each of these terms is further elaborated in Chapter 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Marketing</td>
<td>An ongoing process that involves the development and leveraging of market in intelligence for the purpose of building and maintaining a profit-maximizing portfolio of customer relationships (Zablah, Bellenger, &amp; Johnston, 2004, p. 480).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table continues...
### Key Term | Definition
--- | ---
Web 2.0 | The new approach or platform for consumers and software developers in which its applications and contents are not created or published by selected individuals but are continuously modified by everyone in a self-participatory and collaborative manner (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; O'Reilly, 2007).

Social Media | A set of Internet-based applications that build on both ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, enabling the creation and modification of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61).

*Source: Developed for this research.*

### 1.8 The Structure of the Thesis

This thesis follows the standard approach of presenting a thesis (Perry, 1998a), with the figures, tables, and citations consistent with the format the American Psychological Association (2010). Figure 1.3 illustrates the five chapters included in this thesis. Following this figure, a summary of each chapter is presented.
Chapter 2

The purpose of this chapter is to define the research problem by presenting the extant literature and by discussing the research question and three research subquestions. This chapter discusses the two parent disciplines of relationship marketing and social media. The chapter begins by outlining the literature pertaining to relationship marketing, the history and definitions of relationship marketing, and relationship marketing in the B2B context. The chapter then explores another stream of literature relating to the evolution of social media, the emergence of the Internet and Web 2.0, users’ attitudes toward social media, and the use of social media in the business-to-consumer (B2C) environment. This chapter ends with conclusion of the overall chapter.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 outlines the research paradigm, methodology, and methods undertaken in this research. This chapter introduces interpretivism as the preferred research paradigm and reviews the qualitative research methodology used in this
research. The in-depth semi-structured interviewing technique adopted in this research is then presented. The chapter concludes with a summary of the research paradigm, methodology, and methods chosen for the research.

**Chapter 4**

The objective of Chapter 4 is to present the findings that are in line with the research objectives, research question, and research subquestions. This chapter begins with a descriptive analysis of the interviewees’ backgrounds from the first- and second-phase interviews. The chapter then outlines the findings of the first and second research subquestions (RQ1 and RQ2). The chapter concludes with a summary of the chapter.

**Chapter 5**

This chapter presents an additional synthesis of the research subquestions, answers the main research question, and addresses the research objective. The chapter begins by outlining the research findings that answer the second and third research subquestions (RQ2 and RQ3). The chapter then answers the main research question and addresses the objective of this study. Next, the conclusions drawn from the current research are presented, followed by a discussion of implications of the research from both theoretical and managerial perspectives. Chapter 5 concludes with limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

**1.9 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an overview of the research. After beginning with a broad introduction of the research topic, the chapter presented the research problem, research objective, research question, and associated research subquestions, followed by a description of the research approach and a statement of the justification for and contribution of the study. Definitions of key terms utilised for this research and the structure of the thesis were also presented. The following chapter will provide a detailed review of the literature relating to relationship marketing and social media.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

“The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing.”

(Socrates)

2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the research by describing the research background, research problem, research objective, research question, research subquestions, methodology, definitions of terms, and structure of the research. The purpose of this chapter is to refine the research problem by presenting the extant literature and by discussing the research question and three research subquestions. This chapter comprises seven sections, as shown in Figure 2.1. Following this introduction, Section 2.2 outlines the literature pertaining to relationship marketing. The review is organised conceptually, beginning broadly with the history and definitions of relationship marketing. In Section 2.3, the focus then narrows to relationship marketing in the B2B context. Section 2.4 explores another major stream of literature relating to the evolution of social media. Like Section 2.2, Section 2.4 commences broadly with the emergence of the internet and web 2.0. The section then discusses users’ attitudes toward social media. Section 2.4 provides a foundation for understanding Section 2.5, relating to the use of social media in the business-to-consumer (B2C) environment.
Section 2.6 discusses the main research question and three research subquestions, and Section 2.7 concludes the chapter.

**Figure 2.1**: Outline of Chapter 2

### 2.2 Relationship Marketing

The discussion of relationship marketing includes two sections: 1) history of relationship marketing, and 2) definitions of relationship marketing.

#### 2.2.1 History of Relationship Marketing

In the mid-1990s, researchers observed that the orientation of the marketing field was undergoing a transition from transactional marketing to relationship marketing (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995). The concept of relationship marketing was no longer limited to the idea of marketing exchange, but instead placed more emphasis on emotional bonding. Businesses that understood and appreciated each other’s constraints and needs were more likely to foster good relationships (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995).

The shift in this marketing paradigm is apparent when the importance of relational bonding between traders prior to the 1950s is examined (Egan, 2011). The 1950s were the era of consumer marketing (Christopher, Payne, & Ballantyne, 1991)
and represented a turning point in marketing thought (Egan, 2011; Shåklén, Fellesson, & Fougère, 2005). During this decade, the marketing paradigm was mostly associated with the concepts of brand marketing and corporate manufacturers. Marketers were concerned with developing trust, encouraging repeat purchases, retaining customers, and acquiring future customers. Sellers often established direct relationships with their buyers and developed permanent relationships to sell goods daily in the marketplace (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995).

During the 1960s, marketing research was mostly focused on industrial marketing (Christopher et al., 1991; Egan, 2011). In this industrial era, most marketing practices were highly customised and relationship-oriented (Aaltonen, 2004). The relationship between sellers and buyers was important during this era because buyers depended greatly on sellers to provide products that met their expectations and specifications (Aaltonen, 2004). The level of commitment and trustworthiness of seller-buyer relationships was also critical to ensuring buyers’ willingness to purchase from the existing sellers (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995).

The 1970s represented a period in which the focus of marketing was on the nonprofit and societal sectors, and the 1980s were the decade when attention turned to the services sector. Each of these developments had a direct and indirect influence on the relational marketing paradigm in the 1990s and beyond. Indeed, Egan (2011) suggests that in the 1970s marketing thinking focused not only on products and services, but also on places, ideas, and people. Several new topics, including "network marketing", emerged in the 1970s. Between the late 1970s and early 1990s, many studies relating to the extension of the 4Ps were conducted, including studies on public relations and politics (Kotler, 1986), preservation (Le Doux, 1991), people (Judd, 1987), and physical evidence and processes (Booms & Bitner, 1981). Unlike the initial 4Ps model of the marketing mix (McCarthy, 1960), which serves as a basis of modern transactional marketing (Ajjo, 1996; Kotler, 1992), the extensions of the 4Ps relate more closely to the concept of relationship marketing.

From the 1990s onwards, “relationship marketing” has become one of the most repeated phrases in business publications and scholarly marketing journals (Egan, 2011). Practice and research during the previous twenty years have aimed specifically at the importance of interactions, networks, and relationships (Aaltonen, 2004).
However, the literature mainly focuses on specific issues of relationship marketing, such as call centres, rewards clubs, and databases for direct marketing (Gummesson, 2008). As a concept, relationship marketing has expanded in the recently changing environment (Gummesson, 2008; Ha, 1998). One similarity among the many descriptions of relationship marketing is that relationship marketing is commonly associated with an organisation’s attempts to build long-term relationships with consumers (Nevin, 1995). According to (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), partnerships provide companies with relationship benefits that include consumer satisfaction, product profitability, commitment, and product performance, suggesting that building a long-term seller-buyer relationship is beneficial for both parties.

Currently, relationship marketing focuses more on multiple issues, such as building and retaining customers, rather than on a single issue. According to Aalton (2004), an organisation’s profitability tends to rise as the customer retention rate increases, and the retention rate tends to rise as consumer satisfaction increases. A study of more than 100 organisations in 24 industries demonstrated a high correlation between an organisation’s profitability and its buyer retention rate. For example, a 5% reduction in the buyer defection rate may result in a profit increase of 25% to 85% (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990). Another analysis found that a decrease of the seller defection rate from 20% to 10% might double the average buyer relationship length from 5 to 10 years (Payne, 1995). This pattern appeared to be the same across various industries (Gummesson, 2008): the longer a seller retains its buyers, the higher the level of profitability the seller tends to achieve (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990).

Although the general picture of relationship marketing is becoming clearer, debate continues as to how the term "relationship marketing" should be defined (Grönroos, 1996). Despite increasing scholarly studies and stronger practitioner interests, relationship marketing may still be considered a concept with many variations instead of a cohesive theoretical construct (Egan, 2011).

2.2.2 Toward a Definition of Relationship Marketing

The term relationship marketing can be conceptualised from a number of perspectives. To facilitate in-depth understanding of the conceptualisation of the topic,
this section discusses the three divergent yet complementary perspectives of relationship marketing.

2.2.2.1 Divergence of Relationship Marketing Perspectives

Marketing scholars and practitioners have proposed numerous definitions of relationship marketing. Despite the similarity of some of the conceptualisations, consensus is limited as to how this emerging concept should be defined. An analysis of scholarly literature reveals that relationship marketing has been conceptualised as a 1) philosophy (Fairhurst, 2001; Hasan, 2003; Piccoli, O'Connor, Capaccioli, & Alvarez, 2003), 2) strategy (Adenbajo, 2003; Croteau & Li, 2003; Kracklauer, Passenheim, & Seifert, 2001; Tan, Yen, & Fang, 2002), and 3) technological tool (Gefen & Ridings, 2002; Shoemaker, 2001). The following analysis of each of these perspectives will highlight the key points of the nature, characteristics, and purpose of relationship marketing.

i. Relationship Marketing as a Philosophy

“[Relationship marketing] is not a discrete project – it is a business philosophy aimed at achieving customer centricity for the company” (Hasan, 2003, p. 16).

A strong link exists between customer loyalty and an organisation’s profitability (Reichheld, 1996). When defined from a philosophical perspective, relationship marketing is often referred to in terms of loyalty, which can be achieved by developing, maintaining, and improving long-term relationships with buyers. Instead of treating recurring interactions between sellers and buyers as separate occasions, the philosophical perspective on relationship marketing emphasises that buyer loyalty to sellers will be attained only if the interactions are seen as an ongoing relationship (Piccoli et al., 2003). As a business philosophy, relationship marketing is closely related to the marketing exchange concept (Hasan, 2003), which emphasises that sellers should take into account their buyers’ changing needs (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990). This viewpoint recognises that sellers’ development of profitable and long-term relationships requires their strategy to be driven by a strong comprehension of buyers’ changing needs (Rigby, Reichheld, & Scheftter, 2002; H. Wilson, Daniel, & McDonald, 2002).
The initial philosophical viewpoint of relationship marketing began in 1983 when the term *relationship marketing* was first introduced into the marketing literature. According to Berry (1983), relationship marketing consists of five distinct elements: the business itself, customisation, augmentation, price, and internal marketing. The first element, the core business itself, is essential for a seller, especially in developing relationships with his or her consumers. The business itself is important to the customisation of consumer relationships, such as by offering extra, augmenting benefits over and above the benefits offered by competitors. The next element, the seller’s pricing strategy, is important to relationship marketing because pricing strategy contributes to consumer loyalty. Finally, a marketing orientation within a seller’s organisation is essential for the business to better serve and ensure good relationships with its consumers. However, these five elements of relationship marketing philosophy are not discrete. Rather, relationship marketing can utilise several elements or a combination of all five elements simultaneously (Berry, 1993).

As technology evolves, businesses are now provided with more marketing opportunities to create relationships with their counterparts (Mihalcea & Săvulescu, 2013). Previous literature studies state that the creation of a relationship is one of the most discussed augmented benefits of a social media platform (Shih, 2009; Levy, 2010; Zandt, 2010; Russell, 2011). Initially, social media was predominantly centred around developing relationships among its users, but today social media has become more friendly and open to businesses (Mihalcea & Săvulescu, 2013). Social media not only functions as a connection platform among users who know each other, but also with new users who may be potential prospects for businesses (Mihalcea & Săvulescu, 2013). For instance, by suggesting users based on the similarities of their profile, Facebook increases the probability of developing relationships online. The News Feed technological tool of Facebook also allows users insights into another users’ activities. As such, technological advancement, such as a social media platform, provides business with augmenting benefits (improve seller-buyer interactions and fulfil buyer changing needs), hence improve long-term relationships with its buyers.

### ii. Relationship Marketing as a Strategy

“[Relationship marketing enables sellers to] invest in the customers that are (potentially) valuable for the company, but also minimize their investments in non-valuable customers” (Verhoef & Donkers, 2001, p. 189).
The strategic perspective of relationship marketing stresses that resources intended for developing, retaining, or enhancing a relationship should be distributed on the basis of the buyer’s value to the sellers (Kracklauer et al., 2001; Tan et al., 2002). In particular, this view recognises that as not all buyers are equally valuable, maximum profitability can only be achieved when resources are invested in relationships with a potentially good level of return (Ryals, 2003). Researchers who describe relationship marketing as a strategy tend to stress that relationship marketing enables sellers to develop the “right” type of relationship with sellers, which in certain cases means not to develop any relationship at all (Kracklauer et al., 2001; Verhoef & Donkers, 2001). The emphasis of this relationship marketing perspective is not on the development and maintenance of a relationship, but more on the selection of the “right” relationships with the “right” buyers at the “right” time. According to Gummesson (1990), the “right” relationships, “right” buyers, and “right” time can significantly enhance positive relationships as well as positively affect the buyer’s profitability.

Similarly, Kim, Suh, and Hwang (2003) offer another strategic perspective of relationship marketing through a four-level relationship marketing strategy. The four levels comprise collecting data, integrating marketing strategy, achieving consumer satisfaction, and creating business values. This perspective recognises that relationship marketing is a step-by-step strategy that sellers can implement to establish valuable relationships with their customers. For instance, a seller can obtain customers’ information by using technology applications, such as data mining functions, and integrate the information into its marketing strategy. The seller can then categorise customers on the basis of their levels of loyalty, making it easier for the seller to satisfy customers. Finally, the seller can attain business values by developing relationships with his or her new or potential consumers, and by maintaining or enhancing relationships with existing profitable customers. According to Kim et al. (2003), a business must develop good relationship marketing strategies because the success of the business depends greatly on its ability to develop and maintain valued and loyal customer relationships. Therefore, the relationship marketing concept suggests that sellers should treat buyers like most other investments or assets that need to be correctly managed to achieve maximum profits (Plakoyiannaki & Tzokas, 2002; Ryals, 2003; Ryals & Knox, 2001).
One of the platforms which businesses may invest their time in is social media—as a means for targeting the “right” buyers for the “right” relationships when the time is “right”. This is because, according to Salo, Lehtimäki, Simula, Mäntymäki (2013), social media such as YouTube, Vimeo, Flickr, and social networking sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Yammer and ITtoolbox, has provided business with new way to reach their target customers. Unfortunately, whilst the majority of the businesses have experimented with social media and/or run social media trial campaigns, businesses are still reluctant to fully adopt and utilise social media (Salo et al., 2013). Mihalcea and Săvulescu (2013) suggest that as new online marketing platforms appear and buyers are given more options to voice their opinions, businesses should start developing and maintaining their reputations online. Although the use of the Internet no longer offers an augmenting benefit for businesses, not having any online presence may lead to competitive disadvantages (Samiee, 2008). With the Internet as an exchange and interaction platform, the role of a business has changed—it is no longer a broadcaster who pushes out messages to an aggregator who pulls together information and collaborates with buyers (Weber, 2007). The Internet, especially social media, is the “right” platform to target the “right” buyers for the “right relationships” at the “right” time.

### iii. Relationship Marketing Beyond a Technological Tool

“[Relationship marketing] is the technology used to blend sales, marketing, and service information systems to build partnerships with customers” (Shoemaker, 2001, p. 178).

While the evolution of technology has helped to enhance the relationship marketing concept (Winer, 2001), few (if any) relationship marketers would agree that relationship marketing is solely a technological tool to bridge relationships between sellers and buyers. Indeed, one of the most popular beliefs examined in the literature is that relationship marketing is more than a technological tool (Chen & Popovich, 2003; Fairhurst, 2001; Kotorov, 2003). According to Shoemaker (2001), relationship marketing enables sellers to use technology as a key strategic resource to implement the quality and type of desired seller-buyer relationships. By drawing on the advancement of technology, sellers should better comprehend their buyers’ needs, such as buyers’ preferences regarding the relationship (Shoemaker, 2001). Technology not only affects
the implementation of current relationships (Luck & Lancaster, 2003), but also the organisation’s long-term relationships (Zineldin, 2000). Technological developments, including online functions, can assist organisations in better integrating relationship marketing with technology (Luck & Lancaster, 2003). According to Zineldin (2000), technological advancements such as the internet and business-owned websites are the most important factors in developing and enhancing relationships. However, organisations that do not adapt to these technological changes may fall behind competitors who have adopted the latest technologies early (Zineldin, 2000).

A review of the literature on internet implementation and applications shows that organisations adopt website functions to various degrees in order to provide different capabilities to consumers (Dooling, Burgess, & Cooper, 2002; Hanson, 2000). Organisations use websites for many purposes, including 1) communicating with consumers and providing them with information (Buhalis, 1998; Dooling et al., 2002; Lexhagen, 2005; Sharma, 2002; Subramanian, Shaw, & Gardner, 2000); 2) selling directly to consumers (Dooling et al., 2002; Lexhagen, 2005; Sharma, 2002; Subramanian et al., 2000); and 3) post-transactional communication such as for customer support or customer service (Buhalis, 1998; Dooling et al., 2002; Lexhagen, 2005; Sharma, 2002).

An organisation’s internet presence evolves through several stages, beginning with the information stage and continuing through the stages of knowledge, communication, relationship marketing, and e-commerce (Sharma, 2002). These five stages illustrate an increase in the complexity of internet processes and an increase in the organisation’s values regarding its consumers. As Figure 2.2 shows, even though the level of complexity of internet processes during the relationship marketing stage is lower than that during the e-commerce stage, the relationship marketing stage’s complexity level of internet processes is higher than that of the information, or communication stage. According to Sharma (2002), as the internet processes become more complex, the organisation’s values regarding its customers will increase. Thus, compared to the internet processes of information or communication, the internet processes of relationship marketing provide an organisation with greater value regarding its consumers.
Although relationship marketing can be conceptualised as a philosophy, strategy, and technological tool, for the purpose of this study, relationship marketing is mainly conceptualised beyond a technological tool.

### 2.2.2.2 Relationship Marketing Definition

Overall, the main aim of relationship marketing is to develop and maintain committed buyers who are profitable for sellers (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2000) and, concurrently, to reduce the effort and time the organisation spends on buyers who are less profitable. From the technological perspective and the practitioner’s viewpoint, relationship marketing enables sellers to use technology (Shoemaker, 2001) as one of key strategic resources to improve relationships with buyers (Berry, 2002) – that is, by allocating seller resources to better enhance the depth of both potential as well as existing relationships and to further increase the profitable business transactions with buyers (Kracklauer et al., 2001; Verhoef & Donkers, 2001). This perspective sees relationship marketing as bridging the marketing exchange concept (Hasan, 2003), creating a strong need for sellers to fulfil buyers’ needs (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990). This perspective also recognises that loyal buyers can only be satisfied if the seller-buyer interactions are viewed within the context of an ongoing relationship instead of as one transaction (Piccoli et al., 2003). Moreover, instead of treating the relationship

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*Source: Adopted from Sharma (2002).*

**Figure 2.2:** Evolution of Internet Presence.
marketing construct as separate elements, businesses can apply a mixture of several elements or a combination of all elements simultaneously (Berry, 1983).

Therefore, for the purpose of this research, relationship marketing is defined as “an ongoing process that involves the development and leveraging of marketing intelligence for the purpose of building and maintaining a profit-maximizing portfolio of customer relationships” (Zablah et al., 2004, p. 480). When viewed as an ongoing process, relationship marketing can be defined in two levels that comprise macro and micro elements. The macro level of relationship marketing includes business activities undertaken for the purpose of developing durable, mutually beneficial, and profitable buyer relationships (e.g. Plakoyiannaki & Tzokas, 2002; Reinartz, Krafft, & Hoyer, 2004; Srivasta, Shervani, & Fahey, 1999). From a micro level perspective, relationship marketing is an ongoing process relating to managing specific interactions for the purpose of developing and maintaining long-term yet profitable relationships (e.g. Day & Van den Bulte, 2002; Galbreath & Rogers, 1999; Kohli & Jaworski, 1990). Without having profitability as one of the aspects of interaction, the seller-buyer relationship could easily unravel. Hence, it is essential that sellers appreciate the value of each buyer and focus on buyers who give a high potential return.

Relationship marketing comes in many different forms (Egan, 2011). In general, relationship marketing can be divided into activities that occur in either 1) business-to-consumer (B2C) relationships associated with consumer goods and services, or 2) business-to-business (B2B) relationships often related to the supply chain (Egan, 2011). Correspondingly, Möller and Halinen (2000) argue that relationship marketing theories are of two types, which relate to 1) market-based relationship marketing, and 2) network-based relationship marketing. A comparative analysis of relationship marketing research reveals that to discuss a single relationship marketing perspective without reference to the fundamental differences is misleading. The distinction between the two types of relationship marketing theories is that market-based relationship marketing is more consumer-oriented (B2C) and network-based relationship marketing is more interorganisationally oriented (B2B). The former involves comparatively simple exchange relationships and presumes a consumer market context, whereas, the latter concerns complex relationships and presumes a network-like business context. Table 2.1 details the fundamental differences between these two perspectives.

Table 2.1
## Assumptions Concerning Consumer Market-based Relationships

**Versus Interorganisational Relationships – Focused Research Traditions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consumer Relationships: Market Perspective</th>
<th>Interorganisational Relationships: Network/Systemic Perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The many potential customers form a market of potential “relationships”.</td>
<td>Potential partners are limited in number. Interdependence based on resource heterogeneity forces the actors to cooperate; network environments emerge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many customers/marketers and relatively homogeneous resources lead to atomised markets characterised by low interdependence.</td>
<td>Relationships are embedded in networks and the channel system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The S-O-R* view emphasises customers' response profiles and how they react to marketers' activities.</td>
<td>Mutuality and history are essential to understanding episodes, relationships, and the network context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Markets can be segmented on the basis of response profiles; the ultimate level is individual segments.</td>
<td>Network relationships comprise several levels (supplier, supplier's supplier, buyer, buyer's buyer).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The market is generally taken as a given model of competition and it forms the context of exchange relationships.</td>
<td>Competition and cooperation are the primary forces shaping relationships and networks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The market is a resource allocation mechanism.</td>
<td>Relationships are important in coordinating and creating resources, not only in allocation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational exchanges of working partnerships prevail, as in channels of distribution.</td>
<td>Relationships shape networks; network dynamism is relevant.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Summary of Response (S-O-R).*

*Source: Adopted from Möller & Halinen (2000).*

This research focuses on relationship marketing in the context of business-to-business (B2B) organisations. Therefore, for the purpose of this research, a network-based relationship marketing perspective is utilised.
2.3 Relationship Marketing in Business-to-business (B2B) Context

Hakansson and Snehota (1989, p. 187) state that particularly in the B2B context, “no business is an island”. In other words, most businesses in the B2B market are interdependent. Webster (1992) argues that businesses have moved toward relational exchanges in order to achieve and maintain competitive advantages. For instance, a buyer’s loyalty (and hence a seller’s level of profitability) can be attained through developing, maintaining, or improving long-term relationships between a seller and its buyers (Kracklauer et al., 2001; Ryals, 2003). Relational marketing may exist in various types of B2B relationships, including long-term relationships, partnerships, strategic alliances, network organisations, or vertical integration with buyers (Webster, 1992). However, sellers’ willingness to enter marketing relationships with buyers depends on sellers’ expectation that the relationships will create or add value to the sellers (Day, 2000).

To better describe the types of B2B marketing relationships, the differences between pure transactional and pure relational marketing are outlined in Table 2.2. The concept of relationship marketing was introduced to demonstrate a different perspective to transactional marketing (Berry, 1995).

Table 2.2 Comparison between Pure Transactional and Pure Relationship Marketing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transactional Marketing</th>
<th>Relationship Marketing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus on a single sale</td>
<td>Focus on customer retention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oriented to products or services features</td>
<td>Oriented to customer values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short time scale</td>
<td>Long time scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little emphasis on customer service</td>
<td>High customer service emphasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited customer commitment</td>
<td>Goal is to increase customer loyalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate customer contact</td>
<td>High customer contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality is primarily a concern of production</td>
<td>Quality is the concern of all</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Webster (1992) developed a range of marketing relationships from discrete transactions to vertical integration, reflecting the perspective that as businesses (and their relationships) move along the continuum, they have less market control based upon price but more administrative and bureaucratic controls. Figure 2.3 shows this continuum.

Figure 2.3: The Range of Marketing Relationships.

As Figure 2.3 shows, discrete transactional exchange is the simplest form of relationships (Webster, 1992). Discrete transactional exchange involves money, which is an easy form of commodity (Coase, 1937). Each event in discrete transactional exchange is treated independently because price itself guides the exchange. Price is determined by the marketplace and there is no past or anticipated future transaction between seller and buyer. In discrete transactional exchange, a service or product is a commodity for which “there is no brand name, no recognition of the customer by the seller, no credit extension, no preference, no loyalty, and no differentiation of one producer’s output from that of another” (Webster, 1992, p. 6). The discrete transactional exchange is more challenging than other relationship exchanges because both sellers and buyers strive to achieve an optimal competitive advantage (Hamel & Prahalad, 1990; Webster, 1992).

Even though true discrete transactional exchanges are definable in theory, pure discrete transactional exchange is less common than repeated transactional exchanges and other relational exchanges. Repeated transactional exchanges include at least one previous exchange between seller and buyer (Webster, 1992), and other relational exchanges encompass business exchanges whereby each transaction is a component of
past and future transactions (MacNeil, 1980). Between these transactional and relational exchange extremes lie increases in time, history, power of one party over the other, and implicit trust, contractual agreement, joint planning, involvement of multiple parties, and seller-buyer communication and participation (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987).

Realising that success of businesses in the B2B market depends on collaboration and cooperation between sellers and buyers, many businesses are moving beyond discrete transactional exchanges. The current competitive B2B environment has also encouraged businesses to move toward a relationship-oriented approach (Grönroos, 1994). Even though Webster’s (1992) continuum does not clearly identify where relationship marketing should commence and end, it implies that relational exchange businesses stretch from long-term relationships to vertical integration (see Figure 2.3). Therefore relational exchanges include long-term relationships, buyer-seller partnerships, strategic alliances, network organisations, and vertical integration. Table 2.3 gives the explanation of each type of relational exchange.

Table 2.3
Explanations of Relational Exchanges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Relational Exchange</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Long-term Relationships     | • Develop when a buyer is satisfied with a service or product received from repeated transactions with a seller (Grönroos, 1991).  
• Can be successful for sellers and buyers as long as both parties continuously obtain benefits from their relationship (Houston & Gassenheimer, 1987).  
• The characteristics include sharing a corporate culture, connecting closely to one another, and investing idiosyncratically (Ouchi, 1980).  
• The incentives or the outcomes include increasing performance, increasing support, and decreasing costs (Han, Wilson, & Dant, 1993). |
Table 2.3
Explanations of Relational Exchanges – Cont’d

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Relational Exchange</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Buyer-seller Partnerships   | • Refer to collaboration between a seller and a buyer (Spekman, 1988).  
                              • As long as the interactions between a seller and a buyer are balanced and the desired outcomes of the partnerships are achieved, the seller and the buyer will invest in their partnerships (Wilson & Mummalaneni, 1986).  
                              • The collaboration may help both parties develop high levels of cooperation and trust (Spekman, 1988).  
                              • Success depends on various collaboration aspects such as planning, coordination, communication (Spekman & Strauss, 1986), accommodation, degree of sharing, and competitiveness (Perdue, Day, & Michaels, 1986). |
| Strategic Alliances         | • Refer to businesses that make a significant investment in developing a long-term collaboration and achieving individual as well as mutually strategic goals (Cunningham & Roger Pyatt, 1989; Hamel, Doz, & Prahalad, 1989).  
                              • Cover both formal and informal joint ventures (Aaker, 1998). According to Wilson and Möller (1992) strategic alliances derive from synergistic combinations of the entities’ investments in resources, efforts, and time.  
                              • Often characterised by strategic advantages (Aaker, 1998), compatibility of goals (Malecki, Tootle, & Young, 1995), communication, work coordination, planning, conflict resolution (Spekman, 1988), commitment and interdependence (Wilson & Mummalaneni, 1986). |
### Table 2.3
**Explanations of Relational Exchanges – Cont’d**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Relational Exchange</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Network Organisations**   | • Refer to two or more organisations that participate in long-term relationships.  
• The level of networks depends greatly on the quality, quantity, and the type of interactions between businesses (Thorelli, 1986).  
• A tight network is often characterised by a formal joint venture, whereas a loose network is usually characterised by an informal agreement (Aaker, 1998).  
• Factors that determine the position of an organisation in a network include the organisation’s power, domain, and position in other networks.  
• Direct competition exists when the organisation domains overlap completely (Thorelli, 1986). |
| **Vertical Integration**     | • Refer to a type of diversification that combines business lines in a way that allows a business to use the outputs of a business line as inputs for another business line (D’Aveni & Ilinitch, 1992).  
• Also defined as the total internalisation of technologically distinct processes by a single business (Michael E. Porter, 1990).  
• Forward integration relates to a business that sets up its own distribution channel whereas backward integration describes a business that relies on other independently owned businesses (El-Ansary & Stern, 1992).  
• Benefits include risk reduction (Mead, 1978) and increase organisation’s value-added margins (Harrigan, 1985). |

*Source: Developed for this research.*
Besides the listed types of B2B relational exchanges, relationship marketing can also manifest in other types of relational exchanges, as illustrated in Table 2.4, although this list is not exhaustive.

**Table 2.4**

**Review of Relational Exchanges in the Literature**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relational Exchanges</th>
<th>Representative Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partnering between manufacturers and suppliers</td>
<td>Frazier, Spekman and O’Neal (1988)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>O’Neal (1989)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service provider and clients</td>
<td>Beltramini and Pitta (1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moorman, Zaltman and Deshpandé (1992)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic alliances and competitors</td>
<td>Buckling and Sengupta (1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Day (2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nueno and Ooserveld (1988)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ohmae (1989)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Varadarajan and Rajaratnam (1986)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliances between the firm and non-profit organisations</td>
<td>Steckel and Simons (1992)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership for joint research and development with other firms and governments</td>
<td>Comer, O’Keefe and Chilankas (1980)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term relationships between firm and customers</td>
<td>Dwyer, et al. (1987)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational exchanges of working partnerships as in channels of distribution</td>
<td>Anderson and Narus (1990)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MacNeil (1980)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchanges between a firm and its employees</td>
<td>Arndt (1983)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Berry and Parasuraman (1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within-firm relational exchanges involving business units such as subsidiaries,</td>
<td>Porter (1980)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>divisions, or strategic business units</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Adopted from Morgan and Hunt (1994).*
Relationship marketing not only comes in various forms (Egan, 2011) but also in three implementation levels that have various impacts on sellers’ competitive advantages (L. Berry, 1995). The higher the level of relationship marketing a seller practices, the higher the level of sustainable competitive advantage the seller will attain. To further illustrate this point, the first level of relationship marketing depends greatly on pricing strategies, such as pricing incentives for ensuring a buyer’s loyalty. However, the possibility that the seller will develop a competitive advantage with a pricing strategy is low, as price is the most easily imitated element of the marketing mix. At the next level, relationship marketing depends mostly on social bonds formed through the personalisation and customisation of the relationships. In addition to providing a seller with a competitive advantage, social bonds can also secure the buyer’s loyalty, which is especially important when the seller’s competitive advantages are weak. However, an aggressive pricing strategy may still be an important element in the second-level framework. The final level of relationship marketing depends greatly on delivering solutions to the buyer’s fundamental problems. When a seller can offer target buyers value-adding benefits that are more expensive or difficult to obtain elsewhere, the seller will develop a strong foundation in maintaining and enhancing relationships with its buyers (Berry, 1995).

In sum, relationship marketing comes in many forms, types, and levels (Berry, 1995; Egan, 2011). With respect to B2B organisations, relationship marketing exists through long-term relationships, partnerships, strategic alliances, network organisations, or vertical integration (Webster, 1992). Relationship marketing also comes with different levels of complexity (Berry, 1995). As the type of relational exchange moves up the continuum or as the level of relationship marketing increases, 1) the less important the price becomes for the buyer (Berry, 1995; Webster, 1992), 2) the greater the seller’s competitive advantage (Berry, 1995; Webster, 1992), and 3) the stronger are the social bonds, such as personalisation, customisation, seller-buyer participation, and seller-buyer communication (Berry, 1995; Dwyer, et al., 1987).
According to L’Etang (2012), some relationships are developed through face-to-face communication and some are mediated through various technologies, such as the telephone, email, and text message. As communication technology continues to evolve, businesses must change and adapt their communication strategies to better develop, maintain, or enhance relationships with their stakeholders. Pitt, Van der Merwe, Berthon, Salehi-Sangari and Caruana (2006) have stated that the internet is becoming the most important medium for B2B commerce, and marketers in B2B companies have started to utilise the web as one of the value-adding strategies (Sharma, 2002; Walters, 2008).

To further illustrate, Figure 2.4 and Figure 2.5 demonstrate the comparison between typical or traditional communication processes and Internet-based information platforms. As shown in Figure 2.4, according to Sharma (2002), traditional communication processes utilise transactional marketing among departments within a company and among other B2B companies. On the other hand, as shown Figure 2.5, with the existence of e-commerce platforms, B2B companies (which include all departments within the company, suppliers, and buyers) can have access to the same information platform. This information platform not only increases relationship effectiveness, but also relationship efficiency among B2B companies, for example by reducing cost and cycle time (Sharma, 2002), hence may improve seller-buyer satisfaction and loyalty.
2.3.1 Comparison between the Traditional Communication Practices and the Internet-based Information Platform In the B2B Marketing Environment

Source: Adopted from Sharma (2002).

Figure 2.4: Traditional or Typical Communication Patterns

Source: Adopted from Sharma (2002).

Figure 2.5: Common Internet-based Information Platform
Today, the use of social media has greatly changed the way companies run their businesses. The use of social media provides a platform for user participation and user-supplied contents (Waters, 2007), and gathers together users who have similar passions in activities and interests through online networks (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Harden & Heyman, 2009). Compared to traditional media, social media has already demonstrated its ability to provide greater opportunities due to its abilities in enhancing interaction, collaboration and communication among B2B companies, thus bringing significant benefits to the B2B environment (Jussila et al., 2011). Despite the increasing number of studies (e.g. Salo, et al., 2013) pertaining to the role of the web in building B2B relationships, presently the role of social media is not well understood, especially in the area of B2B relationship marketing. The degree to which businesses use social media, especially in B2B marketing relationships, is also not understood in a comprehensive way. Therefore, the following discussion aims to explicate the role of social media in B2B relationship marketing.

2.4 Social Media

This section discusses elements in the literature relating to social media. The discussion includes three sections: 1) background of social media, 2) evolution of social media, and 3) users’ attitudes toward social media.

2.4.1 Background of Social Media

Computer-networked communication began with the launch of electronic mail (e-mail) in 1971 (Howard & Jones, 2004), many years after the development of relationship marketing concept. Forty years after the arrival of e-mail, computer-mediated environments (CME) emerged, allowing rapid communication within users’ networks in various forms such as text, pictures, and video (The Economist, 2010). CME is defined as a dynamic distributed network, together with associated software and hardware, which consumers and businesses use to 1) interactively access and provide content such as “machine interactivity”, and 2) communicate through “person interactivity” (Hoffman & Novak, 1996). Social media represent a sub-division of CME. Social media rely on web-based and mobile-based technologies of highly interactive platforms where individuals, communities, and businesses discuss, share,
co-create, or modify user-generated content (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011).

As individuals and businesses become increasingly technology-savvy, social media sites such as social networking sites have become some of the most visited sites on the internet (Weinberg, 2009). In addition to social networking sites, a variety of social media online platforms exist, including blogs, moblogs (websites containing images, photographs, digital audio or movies), company-sponsored chat rooms or discussion boards, and product or service ratings websites. Millions of users have now integrated social media into their daily practices (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Social media initially attained popularity among users for various reasons, including entertainment, information seeking, and communication (Armstrong & Hagel, 1996), but have become effective in reaching other users, promoting a particular topic, and enhancing communication strategies (Curtis et al., 2010). Grunig (2009) described the new digital social media as revolutionary forces that change the way people think about relationship practices. According to Weinberg (2009), through social media users with similar interests throughout the world communicate using technological tools such as wikis, forums, blogs, user-generated sites, video sharing sites, pictures, and podcasts. The many forms of social media are shown in Table 2.5.

Table 2.5
Examples of Social Media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example of Social Media</th>
<th>Representative Sites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Networking Sites</td>
<td>Facebook, Twitter, Faceparty, MySpace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity Work-sharing Sites</td>
<td>Youtube (Video), Flickr (Photo), Jamendo.com (Music), Piczo.com (Content sharing combined with assistance), Creative Commons (General intellectual property-sharing sites)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table continues...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example of Social Media</th>
<th>Representative Sites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>User-sponsored blogs /micro-blogs</td>
<td>The Unofficial Apple Weblog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cnet.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company-sponsored websites/blogs</td>
<td>Apple.com, P&amp;G’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vocalpoint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company-sponsored cause/help sites</td>
<td>Dove’s Campaign for Real Beauty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Click2quite.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invitation-only social networks</td>
<td>ASmallWorld.net</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business networking sites</td>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative websites</td>
<td>Wikipedia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual worlds</td>
<td>Second Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual game worlds</td>
<td>World of Warcraft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podcasts</td>
<td>“For Immediate Release: The Hobson and Holtz Report”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News delivery sites</td>
<td>Current TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational materials sharing sites</td>
<td>MIT OpenCourseWare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MERLOT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open source software communities</td>
<td>Mozilla’s spreadfirefox.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Linux.org</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social bookmarking sites</td>
<td>Digg,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(allowing users to recommend online news</td>
<td>del.icio.us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stories, music, videos, etc.)</td>
<td>Newsvine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mixxx it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reddit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Adapted from Kaplan & Haenlein (2010); Kietzmann, et al., (2011), Mangold & Faulds (2009).*
These various types of social media can be further classified in terms of 1) social presence or media richness and 2) self-presentation or self-disclosure (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), as shown in Table 2.6.

**Table 2.6**

**Classification of Social Media**

by Social Presence/Media Richness and Self-presentation/Self-disclosure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Presence/Media Richness</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Presentation / Self-disclosure</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>- User-sponsored Blogs /Micro-blogs</td>
<td>- Social Networking Sites</td>
<td>- Virtual Social Worlds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Company-sponsored Websites /Blogs</td>
<td>- Invitation-only Social Networking Sites</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Company-sponsored Cause /Help Sites</td>
<td>- Business Networking Sites</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- News Delivery Sites</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>- Collaborative Websites</td>
<td>- Creativity Work Sharing Sites</td>
<td>- Virtual Game Worlds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Social Bookmarking Sites</td>
<td>- Open Source of Software Communities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Creative Work Sharing Sites</td>
<td>- Podcasts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Educational Materials Sharing</td>
<td>- Open Source of Software Communities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Podcasts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Educational Materials Sharing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Adapted from Kaplan & Haenlein (2010); Kietzmann, et al., (2011); Mangold & Faulds (2009).*

With respect to social presence and media richness, social media such as user-sponsored blogs and micro-blogs, company-sponsored websites and blogs, company-sponsored cause and help sites, news delivery sites, collaborative website, and social bookmarking sites score the lowest, as these types of social media are often text-based and thus allow for a comparatively simple exchange. At the next level are social networking sites, invitation-only social networking sites, business, networking sites, creativity work-sharing sites, open source software communities, podcasts, and educational material sharing sites. These types of social media enable the sharing of
pictures, videos, and other forms of media in addition to text-based communication. On the highest level are virtual social worlds and virtual game worlds, social media that replicate three-dimensional face-to-face interactions in a virtual environment (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). From the perspective of self-presentation and self-disclosure, user-sponsored blogs and micro-blogs, company-sponsored websites and blogs, company-sponsored cause and help sites, and news delivery sites often score higher than collaborative websites and social bookmarking sites, as collaborative websites and social bookmarking sites tend to be focused more on specific content domains. In the same vein, social networking sites, invitation-only social networking sites, and business networking sites allow for more self-disclosure than creativity work-sharing sites, open source software communities, podcasts, and educational material sharing sites. Finally, virtual social worlds require a higher level of self-disclosure than do virtual game worlds, as virtual game worlds are bound by strict guidelines restraining users from behaving in certain ways (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The descriptions of each type of social media appear in Table 2.7.

**Table 2.7**

**Descriptions of Social Media Types**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Social Media</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- User-sponsored Blogs</td>
<td>Blogs are websites that allow a writer to share personal experiences as well as insights on a particular topic and interact with readers through logs and comments (Kaplan &amp; Haenlein, 2010; O'Connor, 2008).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Micro-blogs</td>
<td>Micro-blogs are usually text-based and limit the content to a specific number of characters (O'Connor, 2008).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Company-sponsored Websites</td>
<td>Comments and logs could take the form of text, image, audio or video (Kaplan &amp; Haenlein, 2010; Wunsch-Vincent &amp; Vickery, 2007).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Blogs</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Blogs</td>
<td>Blogs are websites that allow a writer to share personal experiences as well as insights on a particular topic and interact with readers through logs and comments (Kaplan &amp; Haenlein, 2010; O'Connor, 2008).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Micro-blogs</td>
<td>Micro-blogs are usually text-based and limit the content to a specific number of characters (O'Connor, 2008).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Comments and logs could</td>
<td>Comments and logs could take the form of text, image, audio or video (Kaplan &amp; Haenlein, 2010; Wunsch-Vincent &amp; Vickery, 2007).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table continues...
Table 2.7
Descriptions of Social Media Types – Cont’d

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Social Media</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| - Company-sponsored Cause/Help Sites       | • Includes websites that allow users to share, post, read, respond, review, and discuss experiences, opinions, and thoughts on various topics (Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2007).  
• Online websites and forums dedicated for product or service reviews are the two most common forms (Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2007). |
| - Social Networking Sites                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| - Invitation-only Social Networking Sites   | • Refer to websites that allow users to create a profile page, meet virtually, connect, share information, communicate, and develop relationships with other users whom they might or might not know in the real world (Feldner & D'Urso, 2007; O'Connor, 2008; Reuben, 2008; Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2007).  
• Built with particular orientations for a specific group of users (Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2007).  
• Some researchers view all social media sites as social networking sites with features such as video or photo-sharing features (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). |
| - Business Networking Sites                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| - Virtual Game Worlds                       | • Virtual game worlds are online applications that resemble the real world in 3D form (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).  
• Bound only by the game rules, users can create, interact or have their own possessions with others in the virtual game worlds by using a picture or a personalised human-like character (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009; Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2007). |

Table continues...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Social Media</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| - Collaborative Websites                 | • Social bookmarking sites are websites that help people manage and store collections of links. Users can share these bookmarks with other users using the links stored online (Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2007).  
• Collaborative websites such as wikis are open content sites that allow users to continuously edit and modify. In wikis, users interact during the process of content collaboration (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; O'Connor, 2008; Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2007). |
| - Social Bookmarking Sites               |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| - Creativity Work-sharing Sites          | • Refer to websites that allow users to share materials modified from pre-existing work (Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2007).  
• Typical media content shared includes text-based, photo-based, video-based, and slide-based (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).  
• Unlike social networking sites, the creation of a profile page is not a requirement (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). |
| - Open Source Software Communities       |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| - Podcasts                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| - Educational Materials Sharing          |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| - Virtual Social Worlds                  | • Similar to virtual game worlds, where both types of social media replicate a three-dimensional environment (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).  
• No rules restrain users from the range of possible interactions (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).  
• Exceptions to the rules are only for basic physical laws such as gravity (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). |

Source: Developed for this research.
Marken (2008) stresses the importance of social media as technological tools where users with similar interests gather to exchange problems, ideas, and information relating to professional, personal, and business matters. Since the advent of social media, technological advancements have constantly influenced business relationships. Many businesses have now started to use social media to connect, engage, and develop relationships with prospects, clients, and referral sources (Gentry, 2009). Social media have also become increasingly important communication tools for businesses (Curtis et al., 2010). For instance, businesses can now use social media to gain exposure and opportunities through valuable and meaningful communication (Gentry, 2009) as well as through immediacy and transparency of communication with other businesses (Greenberg, 2009).

2.4.2 Evolution of Social Media

2.4.2.1 Evolution of the Internet

Given the tremendous developments of social media today, it would seem that the world is in a new communication era (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Fifteen years ago, people have not heard of the internet and today, the internet is part of everyone’s daily activities (Small, 2001). The internet has become a mass communication channel – the number two source of media for consumers at home and number one source of media at work (Rashtchy, Kessler, Bieber, Shindler, & Tzeng, 2007). The internet has also become a popular topic in scholarly literature (Small, 2001). One area investigated by scholars is how the internet differs from communication media that preceded it (e.g. Small, 2001; Davis, 1999). Research shows that the characteristics of the internet are different from the characteristics of traditional media in many ways (Small, 2001), as shown in Table 2.8.
Table 2.8
Characteristics of Traditional Media versus New Media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distinct Media</th>
<th>Integration of Media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traditional Media</strong></td>
<td><strong>New Media</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Newspapers and books utilise text features, radio and the telephone use an audio component, and television combines both audio and visual components.</td>
<td>- The internet is a multifaceted medium that combines audio and visual components with text features.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Newspapers, the main source of information especially during the peak time in 1984, circulated more than 63 million units (in the United States alone).</td>
<td>- The internet integrates the features of all the communications media (i.e. television, radio, newspaper, and books) that preceded it. It can also display all communications media at the same time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- With the existence of the hard-disk-based digital video recorder (HDR), users can skip commercials more easily than with video and digital recorders (VCR).</td>
<td>- The integration of communications media provides new opportunities for the elements of communication (text, sound or visual) to contribute to the information content of a message (Selnow, 1998).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Push Communication</strong></th>
<th><strong>Pull Communication</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traditional Media</strong></td>
<td><strong>New Media</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Print ads, radio and television are delivered to the receivers, who receive them passively (Rash Jr, 1997).</td>
<td>- The internet and the web are described as “pull communication” (McKeown &amp; Plowman, 1999). To gain access, users must actively search for information on the Web, where an enormous amount of information is stored.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Attracting people is more difficult with traditional broadcast media because receivers have to actively search for the materials (Rash Jr, 1997). Instead of simply viewing a favourite show, television viewers receive information on areas they did not actively search for, local weather, commercial products, and sports scores.</td>
<td>- The internet requires considerable active effort by its users, unlike radio and television that communicate to passive users.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- To gain wide coverage, material must be available in multiple venues such as in newspapers and on television.</td>
<td>- A comparatively low level of residual information is transmitted on the internet.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table continues...*
Table 2.8  
Characteristics of Traditional Media versus New Media—Cont’d

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centralised Media</th>
<th>Decentralised Media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traditional Media</strong></td>
<td><strong>New Media</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Whilst enormous numbers of newspapers, radio stations and television channels are available, many traditional media are owned by corporate conglomerates, which often dictate news reporting practices.</td>
<td>• The internet is decentralised in terms of ownership and power. No one owns or controls the internet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Traditional media are relatively influential intermediaries. Yet, the power of traditional media is lessened by the internet.</td>
<td>• The internet is known as a decentralised medium because of its inclusiveness. A popular saying is that “nobody knows you’re a dog on the Internet” (Browning, 1996, p. 77).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The centralised traditional media tend to filter out harmful or dangerous information, giving control over unsavoury information that may be harmful especially to children or under-age users.</td>
<td>• The internet provides a new platform that allows voices to be heard. Groups not heard via traditional media may speak out in cyberspace. The decentralised nature of the internet allows any view to be heard regardless of how novel or extreme the view is.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Mediated</strong></th>
<th><strong>Unmediated</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traditional Media</strong></td>
<td><strong>New Media</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unlike the internet, traditional media are subject to a mediation process. Publishers of traditional mass media are often large corporations such as CNN.</td>
<td>• The internet is known as a publication space (Hill &amp; Hughes, 1998), where everyone can share information and create a web page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Traditional media contain less misinformation because material is reviewed and filtered to ensure credibility and accuracy of the content.</td>
<td>• On the internet, the distinctions between receivers and transmitter are increasingly being reduced (Davis, 1999), because the medium allows for a vast amount of publishing and self-broadcasting by its users. The internet allows users to take greater control of what is being published and provide a great deal of information to others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• With the emergence of the internet, journalists’ role as communication intermediaries is becoming less significant.</td>
<td>• Cyberspace is very different from broadcast space. The key to better comprehension of cyberspace is grasping its unmediated nature (Hill &amp; Hughes, 1998, p. 135).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table continues...*
Table 2.8
Characteristics of Traditional Media versus New Media– Cont’d

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broadcasting</th>
<th>Narrowcasting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traditional Media</strong></td>
<td><strong>New Media</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Broadcast media include television, radio and even print journalism. Broadcast media are commercialised in that publication costs are paid through advertisements that seek to promote products to as many people as possible.</td>
<td>• Narrowcasting refers to targeting communication media to specific audience groups (Dutton, 1999), and the internet is described as the main narrowcast medium. Even though the internet has hundreds of millions of users, the internet is not concentrated on mass users but on specific individuals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• It is harder for broadcast media to provide content to a specific niche in society. For these media to appeal to everyone, the broadcaster needs to create programmes that appeal to the lowest common denominator (Rowland, 1999). Broadcast media must also accumulate mass audiences to be successful.</td>
<td>• Personalisation and narrowcasting are empowering features of the internet, allowing users to “exercise more control over the flow of information” (Shapiro, 1999, p. 43).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Without the use of recording devices, most television viewers have to view the whole programme from the beginning to the end when the programme is aired by the network broadcaster.</td>
<td>• On the internet, narrowcasting occurs in many ways. First, as the internet is not anchored to a specific time, users do not have to conform to a predetermined schedule (Rowland, 1999). Second, internet users may personalise their website, for example by choosing headlines from favourite newspapers and offering the weather forecast for the city they live in.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Table 2.8

### Characteristics of Traditional Media versus New Media – Cont’d

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unilateral Communication</th>
<th>Bilateral Communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traditional Media</strong></td>
<td><strong>New Media</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Most traditional media use unilateral communication, whereby information flows in one direction from a transmitter to the receivers (Rowland, 1999). Newspapers allow receivers to read, radio allows receivers to listen, and television allows receivers to watch and listen. Little interaction is required between the transmitters and receivers. Technologies such as the fax and the telephone permit bilateral communication between transmitters and receivers. However, the interactivity, speed, and ease of feedback are greatly enhanced on the Web.</td>
<td>- The internet uses bilateral communication in that information can be transmitted in both directions in relatively equal volumes. The internet’s greatest strength is considered to be its interactive capabilities (Browning, 1996; Morris, 1999). No other mass medium (i.e. newspapers, radio, or television) has the capacity to transmit instantaneous and direct feedback between the transmitter and the receiver. The interactive capabilities of the internet make the internet an interpersonal medium. Even if millions of other users are viewing a specific web page, one-to-one relationships can still be sustained on the internet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low Efficiency</strong></td>
<td><strong>High Efficiency</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traditional Media</strong></td>
<td><strong>New Media</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Although traditional media take many forms, information from most traditional media is not available all the time. Unlike the internet, users cannot return as many times as they wish without the use of recording devices. The time of radio and television programmes is always determined by the broadcasters, leading to the likelihood that the programmes of interest may be missed. Postal service, newspaper, radio, television, telephone, and fax may take from a few hours to a few days to deliver a message. With most traditional media, users have to wait for the airing time.</td>
<td>- The internet extends beyond geographical proximity (Bimber, 1999). On the internet, distance and geographical locations have little meaning to users, as all users can communicate with each other in cyberspace. The internet is the only communication medium that can be used to communicate with hundreds of millions of users for less than $100 (Tapscott, 1999). The production costs for the internet are far below the production costs for a television show or a magazine advertisement. Cyberspace is available regardless of the time of the day. The internet is asynchronous, making information accessible online at any time. The asynchronicity of the internet makes information retrieval very flexible for the users. The internet can reduce the time it takes to transmit information. E-mail takes seconds to be delivered.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The seven characteristics of the new media depict the internet as a new means of communication. Even though some characteristics also characterise other technologies (e.g. bilateral communication, which is also a characteristic of the telephone), the combination of the seven characteristics differentiates the internet from other communication media. Research shows that consumers consistently demand greater control over their consumption of media (Rashtchy et al., 2007; Vollmer & Precourt, 2008). Consumers are turning away from traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, radio and television and demand immediate access to information at their own time of convenience (Rashtchy et al., 2007; Vollmer & Precourt, 2008). To conduct their information searches, consumers now are moving toward social media (Lempert, 2006; Vollmer & Precourt, 2008), which they perceive to be more trustworthy than most company-sponsored traditional media (Foux, 2006).

2.4.2.2 Evolution of Web 2.0

Social media represent an evolution of web technologies. Web 2.0 refers to the new generation of the web, which is a more social, participative, and open environment (Ravenscroft, 2009). Web 1.0 is usually described as a controlled environment with only few administrators who understand or have knowledge about the web mechanism, and many others who have limited roles in its management or creation (Miles-Board & Carr, 2003). Web 2.0, on the other hand, is defined as having an architecture of participation (O'Reilly, 2007). The term “Web 2.0” was introduced to illustrate the new approach or platform for consumers and software developers in which its applications and contents are not created or published by select individuals but are continuously modified by everyone in a self-participatory and collaborative manner (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; O'Reilly, 2007). Web 2.0 comprises social networking, tagging, virtual worlds, wikis, and many other applications (Majchrzak, 2009).

Stenmark (2008) stated that Web 2.0 offers three categories of technological tool enhancement: authoring, structuring, and awareness technological tools. The authoring tool enables end-users to express freely and participate flexibly among each other on the web. This tool relates closely to the description of Web 2.0 as having an architecture of participation (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Examples of authoring technologies include blogs and wikis (Stenmark, 2008). Another technological tool
associated with the development of Web 2.0 is structuring technology, which enables users to organise data and information on the web. Tagging is one example of the structuring features that allow end-users to collaboratively describe and group information (Stenmark, 2008). This structuring approach facilitates other processes, including filtering, searching, and navigation (Golder & Huberman, 2006). Finally, Web 2.0 differs from Web 1.0 in terms of the awareness technological tool, which allows end-users to follow up with large amounts of shared information on the web. An example of the awareness technological tool is the rich site summary (RSS), also known as really simple syndication (Summer, 2006). The tool often refers to the aggregation of news and feeds from many channels into one channel simultaneously (Stenmark, 2008).

### 2.4.3 Users’ Attitudes toward Social Media

According to Tredinnick (2006) and Anderson (2007), Web 2.0 is not only about technology. The researchers argued that the emergence of Web 2.0 also relates to users’ attitudes toward social media. From this perspective, users’ attitudes toward Web 2.0 fall into two categories: 1) attitude toward information ownership, and 2) attitude toward efficiency versus creativity.

Through social media, information can be formed through interactions of end-users (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Tredinnick, 2006). Users’ attitude toward information ownership is considered to be one of the most important effects of social media, and Web 2.0 gives users ownership and control over information and thus breaks away from central control by administrators (Stenmark, 2008). Building on Ciborra’s (2000) belief that information within organisations is often tightly controlled by upper management, Stenmark (2008) concludes that information needs to be centrally administered in order to be valuable to the organisation. Social media, however, are based on entirely different norms through which they build on trust in users’ ability to self-control (Stenmark, 2008). Thus, social media enable users to create information (Tredinnick, 2006), and hence users can own the information (Stenmark, 2008).

Users’ attitude toward information ownership is closely related to users’ attitude toward efficiency versus creativity. The capability of businesses to keep information up to date through social interactions among sellers and buyers can assist businesses in
adapting to changing environments (Andriole, 2010). While early adopters of information technology were able to increase their efficiency and thus achieve competitive advantages, today the ultimate driving force for business is not efficiency but creativity (Stenmark, 2008). That is, the competitiveness of a business does not depend on its ability to exploit old concepts, but on its ability to continuously adapt to the dynamic environment, create innovative ideas, and develop new products (Kay, 1993). The evolution of Web 2.0 technologies and social media has prompted businesses to strive not only for efficiency but also for creativity and innovation (Andriole, 2010). As a further illustration, by using blogs and wiki technology, businesses are now able to crowdsourcing, or gather information from many users within and outside their boundaries (Andriole, 2010).

In sum, Web 2.0 offers a platform for the development of social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). From this perspective, social media are defined as a set of internet-based applications that build on both the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, enabling the creation and modification of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Gruber (2008) described social media as a group of websites and applications in which participation among users is the main driver of value. In general, social media, which constitute the social web, comprise social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook, media-sharing sites such as YouTube, virtual worlds such as Second Life, and collaborative sites such as Wikipedia. All of these sites depend on user-generated technological applications where the content, whether in the form of text or media, is developed, shared, and administered by end-users. In brief, the development of the newer generation of the web and the emergence of social media signify a fundamental change in virtual content sharing (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) and in people’s ways of communicating and collaborating (Hirschheim & Klein, 2010).

2.5 Social Media’s Role in the Business-to-Consumer (B2C) Environment

The emergence of Web 2.0 and social media technological tools has led to growth in the number of social media on the internet. The phenomenon not only transformed the interaction or social networking of individuals, but also that of organisations. As noted earlier, social media are similar to relationship marketing in the
sense that both come in many different forms. Social media exist as blog, micro-blogs, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, collaborative projects, feedback dedicated sites, content community sites, and virtual social worlds (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Wunsch-Vincent & Vickery, 2007). Examples include CywordRyze, LunarStorm, and Wikipedia. In 2001, Friendster, sky blog, and fotolog emerged and in 2003, LinkedIn, MySpace, tribe.net, Hi5.net, and lastFM were launched. During 2004, popular sites like Dogster, Mixi, and Facebook appeared, and in 2005, more big names like YouTube, Yahoo!360, BlackPlanet, and Cyword emerged (Junco, Heiberget, & Loken, 2011). As of 2009, social networking sites alone numbered more than 150 sites on the web (NielsenWire, 2010), and of all of the social media users, 85% believe that businesses should interact with their consumers through social networking sites (Cone, 2008).

The evolution of social media has provided a means for businesses to leverage support for their marketing efforts (Gretzel, 2006). Businesses can now use the vast amount of information about their services and products, often communicated on social media by their individual consumers to other consumers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Rashtchy et al., 2007; Vollmer & Precourt, 2008). Businesses can also take advantage of other information available on social media that may affect their consumer behaviour, such as expression of dissatisfaction and satisfaction during acquiring, purchasing, and post-purchasing their services or products (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). To guide consumers in purchasing decisions, Mangold and Faulds (2009) suggest that businesses should now communicate to their consumers via social media instead of communicating at their consumers through traditional media, because consumers now are moving away from advertising, which utilises traditional media, and are relying more on social media (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Rashtchy et al., 2007; Vollmer & Precourt, 2008). Social media’s influence in the business-to-consumer (B2C) environment is tremendous, as illustrated in Table 2.9.
Table 2.9
Explanations of Social Media’s Role in the B2C Environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media’s Role</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Provide Networking Platforms**    | • Social media sites provide various types of information, along with opportunities for interaction through message boards, forums, and chat rooms (e.g. Michigansmoms.com, Baby-Zone.com, Kentuckianamoms.com). Companies can benefit from communicating with consumers and have their employees contribute to the conversations. Readers can respond to each blog by posting their own observations and insights.  
  • Consumers like to network with people who have interests and desires that are similar to their own. Organisations can leverage this desire by creating communities of like-minded individuals (such as Unilever’s “Campaign for Real Beauty”) that focus on shared interests and values.  
  • Many networking opportunities are intertwined with opportunities for consumers to experience the companies’ products, as well as to get to know the consumers who use them. Such experiences can also be mediated by companies by linking the company’s corporate website with its consumers’ blogs (e.g. Toyota FJ Cruise). |

*Table continues...*
## Table 2.9
Explanations of Social Media’s Role in the B2C Environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media’s Role</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Customer Engagement** | • Social media such as the company’s blog extend beyond customers to include other bloggers, journalists, consumers, and even competitors (e.g. Toyota).  
• Often, customer engagement with products and organisations develops when consumers are able to submit instantaneous feedback online. The feedback comes in several forms, including suggestions, accolades, and criticism. This feedback develops a sense of community in which open, honest communications and customer engagement are highly encouraged (e.g. Toyata’s “Open Road Blog”).  
• Customers may also submit feedback through a poll in which they respond to several questions posed by administrators on the social media platforms. Social media sites also enable and encourage fans to review songs, albums, and/or concerts, as well as to submit photographs and/or various forms of visual art to the companies (e.g. Roadrunner Records website). |
| **Promoting** | • Some companies encourage customers to submit photos or recorded footage of the product (e.g. Procter and Gamble). Enabling customers to see how others use the product not only can communicate product benefits but also can engage and entertain the existing customers (e.g. www.bmw.com).  
• People are more likely to communicate through social media when they are engaged with the product, service, and/or idea. This engagement can be creatively stimulated for products and/or services that generate less psychological involvement of customers (e.g. Pepsi’s Loyalty Program).  
• Online voting stimulates a sense of ownership among social media users while online gaming provides a natural and obvious platform for engagement and entertainment (e.g. Mattel). |

*Table continues...*
Table 2.9
Explanations of Social Media’s Role in the B2C Environment – Cont’d

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media’s Role</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Information Sharing                  | • Companies may encourage information sharing among customers by providing detailed information on various subjects that may be of interest to the customers (e.g. Procter and Gamble’s “Ask Julia” section). Consumers tend to discuss products and companies that they are familiar with (e.g. Mattel’s “Grown-Ups & Parents” section).  
  • Companies may also share research and development efforts or the scientific foundations of their products (e.g. Procter and Gamble’s “Science Behind the Brand” section).  
  • Often on social media, users tell others about things to which they are emotionally connected. Companies may leverage emotional connections by embracing one or more causes that are important to their customers (e.g. Ben & Jerry’s). |
| Meeting Customers’ Perceived Needs   | • Companies may meet their customers’ perceived needs by offering information, products, and special deals on social media that are available exclusively to a subset of consumers, such as weekly e-newsletters (e.g. Roadrunner).  
  • To stimulate social media-based conversations, products and services may be designed with talking points in mind. Products more likely to stimulate conversation among users are those that are highly visible, fun, easy to use, and intriguing, and those that engage the emotions (e.g. JetBlue Airlines).  
  • Companies may undertake product design and promotion efforts with a desired customer self-image in mind. Customers are more likely to discuss products when those products support their desired self-image and the way they want others to perceive them (e.g. iPhone and BMW). |

Source: Adapted from Mangold and Faulds (2009).
2.6 Social Media’s Role in the Business-to-Business (B2B) Environment

Despite an enormous amount of research on social media’s role in the B2C environment, studies are limited regarding social media’s role in the B2B environment, especially in the area of B2B relationship marketing. Previous studies illustrate that the B2B environment is different to the B2C environment in the sense that B2C companies are generally more transactional than that of B2B companies whereas B2B companies are likely to be more relational than that of B2C companies (Webster, 1992), making social media a more relevant area of B2B relationship marketing study.

Based on recent research on social media marketing by Salo et al. (2013), the role of social media for B2B companies (as illustrated in Table 2.10), includes building brand, creating knowledge, collecting feedback, promoting products, and for recruiting purposes. However, most of the recent social media studies were undertaken in the “whole picture” of B2B marketing, and very limited studies were performed on social media in the B2B relationship marketing especially those which focus on social media overall as opposed to studies on the specific type of social media (e.g. corporate blogs, social networking sites, and virtual worlds).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Social Media</th>
<th>Role of Social Media in Marketing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blogs</td>
<td>• Brand building. Blogs can bring out the professionalism or other characteristics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A more personal communication tool and therefore might be more convincing in customers’ eyes. Customer communication, mainly for existing customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Creating awareness about the firm and its products.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Creating highly effective WOM by engaging opinion leaders with the firm’s blogs and so perhaps gaining more attention among the target group.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.10 Social Media Marketing in B2B Environment

Table continues...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Social Media</th>
<th>Role of Social Media in Marketing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social networks</td>
<td>• Creating highly effective WOM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To show the network and one’s know how, serving to provide a reference. Enhancing internal networking and communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Enhancing extranet based social networks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online communities</td>
<td>• Creating direct contacts with potential customers already interested in the firm or its products. Networking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Tool for enhancing customer relationships through increased interaction and additional services. Being present in communities in order to be remembered by customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Collecting customer feedback and responding to it. Creating highly effective WOM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Creating awareness of the firm and its products.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Targeted marketing. It is easy to find people with similar interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Brand building.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Knowledge creation and sharing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content communities</td>
<td>• Creating interest, making the firm more recognizable and WOM.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Strengthening relationships between the firm and the members of a community. Offering additional services to existing customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Content sharing for training purposes. Brand building and product promotion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Could be integrated with firm’s website and then be used for more targeted marketing. Sharing already existing materials with a larger audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Directing traffic to the firm’s websites. Increasing the firm’s SE results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• For recruiting purposes. Brand building.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To enhance knowledge sharing and creating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content aggregators</td>
<td>• Targeted marketing e.g. with RSS feeds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sharing findings and experiences e.g. by social bookmarking.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Salo, Lehtimäki, Simula, Mäntymäki (2013).

Therefore, the focus of this study is on the exploration of social media in the B2B relationship marketing. The following section further explores businesses’ use of social media in the context of B2B exchange, specifically in developing, maintaining, or enhancing marketing relationships among businesses.
According to Michaelidou, Siamagka, and Chritodouliides (2011), anecdotal studies indicate that social media are important for B2B companies. Additionally, 93% of social media users think that businesses should at least have a social media presence (Cone, 2008). Business can use social media such as Facebook and LinkedIn to interact with other businesses, develop relationships and trust, and identify prospective partners (Shih, 2009). Given that the potential impact of social media in a corporate environment is considerable, knowledge about social media’s role in the B2B context is important for developing relationships among businesses (Enders et al., 2008; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). However, studies of social media are very limited, and consider the B2C relationship to a much greater extent than the B2B relationship. A possible reason for this limitation is that B2B companies have been slower than consumers to adopt social media. The Google time-line shows that consumer interest in social media began in 2004, whilst the B2B interest in social media started to emerge only in 2010 (Michaelidou et al., 2011). Therefore, the main objective of this research is to explore the role of social media in the area of B2B relationship marketing in organisations that use social media. The following research question is then presented.

**What is the role of social media in B2B relationship marketing in organisations that use social media?**

Research by Moorman (2015) shows that, from 2014 to 2015, the average size of overall digital audiences increased by 22%, with an increment by 1% of desktop digital audiences and 41% of mobile (smartphone and tablet) audiences. The amount of time users spend on social media is expected to grow (Nielsen, 2012). In 2015, many popular social media platforms exist such as MySpace, LinkedIn, Youtube, Twitter, and Facebook, just to name a few. Although traditionally social media have been used more often and more extensively by B2C companies than B2B companies (Katona & Sarvary, 2014), as social media become increasingly important, the number of B2B companies utilising social media is increasing. CMO Survey illustrates that the use of social media in the B2B environment grew by almost 10% in 2012. Even though businesses have now started to penetrate the online social networks and offer direct links from corporate websites to social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), little is known about how social media businesses use for B2B relationship marketing. Thus, the following research subquestion is presented.
RQ1: How do businesses operationalise social media in B2B relationship marketing?

Social media are used to various degrees in different business functions, such as branding, information sharing, public relations, understanding customers, lead generation, collaborative work, internal communication, and sales support (Gordon, 2009). Research shows that information sharing, public relations, and collaborative work are among the business functions that are used more actively than the internal communication functions (Gordon, 2009). In other words, companies use social media less for internal purposes and more for collaboration with other businesses or partners. Yet, according to (Kärkkäinen et al., 2010), the adoption of social media among companies, especially B2B companies, remains in its infancy. Compared to B2C companies, B2B companies use social media less despite the fact that social media was allowed more often in B2B companies (Kärkkäinen et al., 2010). The reasons for slow social media adoption by B2B companies (Michaelidou et al., 2011) include lack of understanding of the possibilities of social media, difficulties in assessing the financial gains from social media, difficulties in adopting new mental models and practices needed for the adoption, and lack of evidence of similar cases using social media (Kärkkäinen et al., 2010). Even though studies suggest many possible reasons for slow social media adoption among B2B companies, to date limited studies have investigated the reasons businesses use social media in B2B relationship marketing. Hence, the following research subquestion is presented.

RQ2: For what purpose do businesses use social media in B2B relationship marketing?

Social media can offer realistic and transparent communication because of the ability to communicate issues among users, reducing rumours and negative talk and encouraging individual consumers to speak to others on behalf of the business (Hollier, 2009). Research shows that the major challenge for social media users is not damage control, but rather ensuring use as a reliable communication source (Edosomwan, Prakasan, Kouame, Watson, & Seymour, 2011). However, studies relating to the consistency of perceptions among B2B users (sellers and buyers) engaging with social
media remain in their infancy. Forrester Research suggests that B2B social media decision makers can be categorised as spectators, critics, and creators. The majority of these social media users (98%) are spectators (who read blogs and view videos), many of them (75%) are critics (who comment on blogs and post reviews and ratings), and more than half (56%) are creators (who upload and publish media). These B2B social media users include industry experts, employees of companies, customers, and other general consumers (Forrester, 2009). To date, little is known regarding the differences between the seller and buyer users as to how they engage with social media for relationship marketing purposes. On the basis of the proceeding discussion, the following research sub-question is proposed.

**RQ3: How consistent are the perceptions of sellers and buyers engaging with social media in B2B relationship marketing?**

### 2.8 Conclusion of Chapter 2

This chapter has provided an overview of the literature and developed research questions to assist in addressing the research problem. The chapter began with a broad discussion of relationship marketing, setting the stage for a review of relationship marketing in the business-to-business context. The chapter then explored the topic of Web 2.0 and social media by discussing aspects pertaining to the evolution of the web and users’ attitudes toward social media. These two principal streams of literature regarding relationship marketing and social media laid a foundation for understanding the use of social media in B2B relationship marketing. The next chapter will describe and justify the methodology and methods used for this research.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

“I did then what I knew how to do. Now that I know better, I do better.”

(Maya Angelou)

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 discussed the two parent disciplines of relationship marketing and social media and, to address the research problem and achieve the research objectives, it also presented a research question and associated subquestions. This chapter describes the research paradigm, methodology, and methods adopted in this research. Following this introduction, Section 3.2 introduces interpretivism as the preferred research paradigm, and Section 3.3 reviews the qualitative research methodology used in this research. Then, in Section 3.4, the stages of the in-depth semi-structured interviewing technique adopted in this research are described. The chapter concludes with a summary of the research paradigm, methodology, and methods chosen for the research. Figure 3.1 offers an outline of this chapter.
Choosing a suitable paradigm is essential to provide a system that helps guide researchers in conducting research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), as the credibility of the research depends on the degree to which the researchers have followed explicit paradigm rules and standards when conducting the research activities (Kuhn, 1996). The basic beliefs that define a research paradigm fall into three fundamental areas of inquiry regarding the development of knowledge: ontological, epistemological, and methodological (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Relatedly, with the continued growth in social science studies, various research paradigms have emerged relating to the philosophy of inquiry, including positivism, interpretivism, critical theory, and post-positivism.

Two most commonly used research paradigms are positivism and interpretivism (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). Positivism is based on an objective world view where facts can be obtained, represented, and measured to predict and explain relationships among identified variables (Dash, 2005). Although the positivist research paradigm has
become one of the main institutional forms in social studies, the paradigm has been increasingly criticised, especially by interpretive constructionists (Gephart, 1999). These criticisms often suggest that positivism omits interpretations of the data collected (Gephart, 1999) and narrows the context of meanings when developing quantified measures (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The interpretive research paradigm, on the other hand, is concerned with understanding human experiences (Cohen & Manion, 1994). The world view of interpretivism proposes that reality is socially constructed, as this research paradigm tends to rely on the points of view, background, and experiences of the research participants (Creswell, 2003). Consequently, since the knowledge and meanings derived from this paradigm depend on the researcher’s interpretations, no objective knowledge exists independent from human thinking or reasoning (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006).

Lying between these two extremes are the critical theory and post-positivism paradigms. The critical theory paradigm is a synthesis of alternative paradigms that share a particular set of basic beliefs, such as materialism, feminism, and neo-Marxism (Plack, 2005). The reality of the critical theory paradigm is formulated over time by cultural, economic, ethnic, gender, social, and political forces. Thus, the core knowledge of the paradigm is established through interactions between participants and researchers (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Post-positivism, also known as realism, assumes that the objective world does not exist beyond the human mind. Realists argue that reality is presumed and can be influenced by points of view (Schulze, 2003). In other words, in post-positivist thought, reality reflects the viewpoint of participants as well as of researchers. Each of these paradigms (positivism, interpretivism, critical theory, and post-positivism) is characterised by the three fundamental areas of inquiry:—ontology, epistemology, and methodology—as illustrated in Table 3.1.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principles</th>
<th>Interpretivism</th>
<th>Critical Theory</th>
<th>Post-Positivism</th>
<th>Positivism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ontology</strong> (The nature of reality)</td>
<td>Multiple local and specific constructed realities, which often do not exist, are constructed by human beings.</td>
<td>Historical realism where reality is formulated over time by social, political, cultural economic, ethnic, and gender forces.</td>
<td>Reality can never be fully apprehended, and an objective, ‘real’ world does not exist beyond the human mind.</td>
<td>Objective real world, driven by universal laws.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Epistemology</strong> (The nature of the relationship between the researcher and the reality)</td>
<td>The critical inquirer cannot be distant from the subject of the investigations since the nature of the inquiry is completely value-determined.</td>
<td>Subjectivist co-created findings; transactional.</td>
<td>Knowledge of an existing world can be approached through probable statistics; modified dualist.</td>
<td>Dualist, objectivist findings are true; objectivity of the researcher is essential; participants should be distant observers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methodology</strong> (How the researcher finds the reality)</td>
<td>Gathering details and utilising inductive reasoning to develop hypotheses, theories and concepts. Primarily qualitative, but can include descriptive quantitative methods.</td>
<td>Dialectic dialogue, primarily qualitative methods including observation, grounded theory, and case studies.</td>
<td>Experimental and quasi-experimental designs, manipulations, interventions, and verification of hypotheses. Can include both qualitative and quantitative methods. Case studies, interviews.</td>
<td>Experimental and quasi-experimental designs, manipulations, interventions, and verification of hypotheses rely essentially on quantitative methods.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As this research explores a new and under-researched area in which there are limited (tested) measures, interpretivism provides the most appropriate paradigm, as it seeks to observe the real world using a qualitative approach. For this study, a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews explored the role of social media in business-to-business (B2B) relationship marketing among businesses that utilise social media, and by following the interpretivist paradigm the researcher is able to interpret the respondents’ points of view, background, and experiences (Creswell, 2003). The next section addresses the qualitative methodology that was used for this research.

### 3.3 Research Methodology

For the reasons outlined above, this research followed a qualitative approach, which is an inductive research method generally adopted to investigate and understand unexplored phenomena (Carson & Coviello, 1996) and/or areas that are deficient in theory (Parkhe, 1993; Perry, 1998b). The main strength of qualitative research techniques is the ability to identify and clarify emergent problems. The flexibility and open structure of qualitative methods allow researchers to explore and gather information that cannot be uncovered through the use of structured survey-based techniques (Aaker, Kumar, Day, Lawley, & Stewart, 2007). Further, a qualitative approach is most appropriate in research that is not subject to findings, quantitative analysis, or quantification (Proctor, 2005). Table 3.2 outlines the key differences between qualitative and quantitative research.

### Table 3.2
**Comparisons of Qualitative and Quantitative Research**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison Dimensions</th>
<th>Qualitative Method</th>
<th>Quantitative Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>To gain a qualitative understanding of the underlying reasons and motivations</td>
<td>To quantify the data and generalise the results from the sample to the population of interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of research</td>
<td>Exploratory</td>
<td>Descriptive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Examining the breadth and depth of the phenomena</td>
<td>Testing specific hypotheses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table continues...*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison Dimensions</th>
<th>Qualitative Method</th>
<th>Quantitative Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nature of reality</td>
<td>Multiple realities; subjective, personal, and socially constructed</td>
<td>One reality; objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasoning</td>
<td>Inductive</td>
<td>Deductive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of questions</td>
<td>Probing</td>
<td>Non-probing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature review</td>
<td>May be done as study progresses or afterwards</td>
<td>Must be completed early in the study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher requirements</td>
<td>Training to develop relevant skill sets</td>
<td>Structured administration of method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher involvement</td>
<td>Part of the process</td>
<td>Independent of the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypotheses / Propositions</td>
<td>Generation</td>
<td>Testing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measurement</td>
<td>Researcher as instrument, ‘insider view’</td>
<td>Psychological/physiological instruments, ‘outsider view’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach</td>
<td>Flexible; natural setting (process-oriented)</td>
<td>Highly controlled; experimental setting (outcome-oriented)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>Unstructured or semi-structured</td>
<td>Structured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>Purposive (evolving); small sample size</td>
<td>Statistical (predetermined); large sample size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information per respondent</td>
<td>Large amount</td>
<td>Varying amount</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>Non-statistical, coding, categories, themes; basic element of analysis is words/ideas</td>
<td>Statistical inference/statistical estimation; basic element of analysis is numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>Develop an initial understanding</td>
<td>Recommend a final course of action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qualitative research has been criticised because it uses small sample sizes, prohibiting the formulation of generalisations about the whole population (Easter-Smith, Thorpe, & Lowe, 2002), and because of the potential for bias stemming from the interpretation and subjectivity of the researchers (Proctor, 2005). However, qualitative research has remained popular, as it allows researchers to make an in-depth assessment of issues being studied (Patton, 2002) and can improve the efficiency of subsequent quantitative research (Proctor, 2005). Although a qualitative study does not identify small differences or large-scale quantitative issues, it is able to detect problems that may not be observable in a quantitative study (Patton, 2002; Proctor, 2005).

3.4 Research Methods

Data collection for a qualitative study can employ various methods, including in-depth interviews, observations, and case studies. The in-depth interview is an open-ended discovery method (Lee, 1999) that allows researchers to obtain detailed information about a particular topic by exploring respondents’ points of view, experiences, feelings, and perspectives (Patton, 2002). Alternatively, observation gathers information from real situations (Patton, 2002; Proctor, 2005) through normal, controlled, structured or unstructured study (Proctor, 2005), while the case study examines in detail a particular context for the factors under investigation.

Even though observation and interviewing have different objectives, in practice the two approaches are often fully integrated (Patton, 2002). For instance, a skilled observer requires interviewing skills such as sensitivity to research settings, interactions, and relationships, while a skilled interviewer needs observational skills such as the ability to read nonverbal messages. In comparison to the in-depth interview and observation methods, a case-study method adopts a more standardised approach to data collection and analysis and requires adherence to more rigorous procedures (Carson, Gilmore, Perry, & Grounhaug, 2001). In general, the case-study method is inappropriate for new or under-researched areas (Yin, 2003). Table 3.3 compares these three methods in detail.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Qualitative Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In-depth Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Case Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type/Content</strong></td>
<td>Structured, semi-structured, unstructured individual and group interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Normal, controlled, structured, and unstructured conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standardised and rigorous procedures; structured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objective</strong></td>
<td>To extract detailed information from interviewees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To obtain information by observing activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Used in exploratory theory building or explanatory theory verification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of prior theory requirement</strong></td>
<td>Low or high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low or high depending on the types of observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prior knowledge is highly recommended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interview process</strong></td>
<td>Flexible, unstructured, semi-structured and structured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flexible, unstructured, semi-structured and structured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Structured and standardised procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Probing questions in interview</strong></td>
<td>High use of probing questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low or high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mainly focused on the interviewer-directed questions derived from the literature. However, questions are treated as open research issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emphasis</strong></td>
<td>Explore new under-researched topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Explore new under-researched topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Building theories and substantial prior knowledge component, that is, inductive and deductive components</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strengths</strong></td>
<td>Depth of understanding and the ability to replicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to observe real situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Structure and replication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Limitations</strong></td>
<td>Interviewer bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observer bias and observer effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The requirement of prior knowledge makes this technique inappropriate for new and under-researched areas of inquiry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Requirements</strong></td>
<td>Non-expert interviewer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expert observer, expert interviewer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expert interviewer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For this research, an in-depth interviewing technique was chosen. A paucity of prior research has examined social media in B2B relationship marketing (Brennan & Croft, 2012), and in-depth interviewing permits the researcher to get closer to the participants so as to elicit detailed information (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Researchers are able to move beyond surface appearances and gain greater sensitivity to the meaning of contexts surrounding informant responses and expressions (Lee, 1999).

To achieve greater impact, this research engaged in a two-phase, in-depth, semi-structured interviewing approach to explore participants’ points of view, experiences, and perspectives regarding the use of social media in their companies. The first phase of the interviews focused on employees who work in the relationship marketing field in a range of organisations. The second phase of the interviews involved interviewing customers of the companies that were examined in the first phase of the interviews. That is, the participants for the second-phase interviews were employees of companies that had relationships with the companies in the first interviews.

The first-phase interviews obtained detailed information from seller’s perspective on the use of social media for B2B relationship marketing. The second-phase interviews were then used to verify that information from the buyer’s perspective. Both phases of the interviews employed five steps: a) developing the sampling strategy; b) writing an interview guide; c) conducting the interviews; d) analyzing data; and e) addressing issues of trustworthiness, as shown in Figure 3.2.

| 3.4.1 Developing Sampling Strategy | ↓ |
| 3.4.2 Writing Interview Guide | ↓ |
| 3.4.3 Conducting Interviews | ↓ |
| 3.4.4 Analysing Data | ↓ |
| 3.4.5 Addressing Issues of Trustworthiness |

Source: Adapted from Creswell (2009) and Bloomberg and Volpe (2012).

**Figure 3.2:** Steps of In-depth Interviews.
3.4.1 Developing a Sampling Strategy

The success of a qualitative study depends on the ability of the researcher to interview suitable participants (Bédard & Gendron, 2004), and often sourcing appropriate field respondents is the most difficult part of the research journey (Bédard & Gendron, 2004). This research used chain referral sampling, which operates much like snowball sampling (Penrod, Preston, Cain, & Starks, 2003) in that it yields a sample through referrals by participants who know others with similar characteristics that are of research interest (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). However, unlike snowball sampling, chain referral sampling strategically accesses multiple networks to expand the scope of exploration beyond one social network (Penrod et al., 2003).

For the first phase of interviews, the researcher initially approached 30 potential interviewees (20 through personal contacts and 10 through companies). Of the 30 potential interviewees, 12 agreed to be interviewed. These 12 interviewees were then asked to recommend additional potential participants and another 8 people agreed to be interviewed. The process was repeated until 19 participants had been interviewed, at which point data saturation was achieved. The interviewees were from various industries, including finance, oil and gas, sales and marketing, e-commerce, and health care. The interviewees were chosen from a range of industries because this study is exploratory in nature, and investigating responses from a range of industry types and sizes will add depth to the investigation. A heterogeneous sample increases the scope of exploration beyond one social network (Penrod et al., 2003).

For the second-phase interviews, the researcher again relied on chain referral sampling. Participants in the second-phase interviews were recommended by the 19 interviewees of the first-phase interviews, resulting in 36 potential interviewees for the second-phase interviews. Fifteen interviews were conducted during the second phase, with data saturation reached after the twelfth interview. Because the first-phase interviewees came from a range of industries, the second-phase interviewees naturally came from a variety of industries. For instance, a first-phase interviewee, who is from an e-commerce industry, recommended several other interviewees for second-phase interviews who are from various other industries such as fashion, design and technology, food and beverages, and electronics. Additionally, participants in this study came from a range of company sizes and different market focuses, both domestic and
international. Even though criteria for choosing participants were not specified in terms of company size, market focus, or industry, this information was collected and evaluated during the data analysis.

As the context of the research is Malaysia, the interviewees were chosen either through companies in Malaysia or through personal contacts. In the former case, an invitation letter (see Appendix 1) and an information sheet (see Appendix 2) were sent to the companies. For other cases, such as where interviewees were secured through personal contacts or referral sampling, the invitation letter and the information sheet were sent directly to the potential interviewees. The interviewees were selected on the basis of their knowledge, ability, and willingness to communicate about the issues being examined (Kumar, Stern, & Anderson, 1993). The interviewees were asked to discuss prompting questions regarding the role of social media in their organisation, and specifically in terms of B2B relationship marketing. The next subsection outlines the interview guides used in the study.

3.4.2 Writing the Interview Guides

To ensure that the research questions were properly addressed, two semi-structured interview guides (see Appendix 3 and Appendix 4) were used as a basis for discussion. The interview guides were developed through a combination of three means. Firstly, the interview guides were developed based on the literature. Based on previous literature, little is known about social media in the B2B environment (Jussila et al., 2011), especially on what type of social media do B2B companies utilise for relationship marketing, how and why it is used. Hence, the interview guides were developed based on these areas. Secondly, the interview guides were developed based on the researcher’s personal experience and knowledge in this research area. As suggested by Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), the researcher’s role in qualitative research includes adopting an insider (emic) point-of-view, acknowledging their own personal values, and bringing their experiences to bear on the study. Finally, the interview guides were also developed through unstructured discussions with colleagues and friends who have personal experience in the marketing field, B2B environment, and social media. According to Penrod et al. (2003), diverse sources of information may increase the scope of exploration beyond one social network.

These interview guides began with a few broad questions relating to the
interviewee’s general knowledge about social media before posing specific questions to ascertain how interviewees use social media in their companies. As an example, the opening question was, “What is the first word that comes to mind when you think about social media?” The rationale for using interview guides, which comprise a list of questions, is to ensure the comparability of data across the interviews. Although the interview questions in semi-structured interview guides are fixed and are delivered in a specific order to each interviewee (Harrell & Bradley, 2009), during this research, probing questions are used to clarify information from the interviewee.

i. Interview Guide for First-Phase Interviews

As mentioned earlier, the objective for performing the first-phase interviews was to obtain detailed information about whether the companies use social media as a means of relationship marketing among companies. Hence, for the first-phase interviews, the interview guide (see Appendix 3) included questions to elicit respondents’ information, respondents’ company information, general information relating to their companies’ use of social media, information on what social media the companies currently use, information on how and why the companies use social media, and additional comments about social media. The interview guide was revised five times by three experts in the marketing and social media fields.

In order to ensure that the sellers addressed the interview questions in their “seller” status and not as buyers, background research about the companies was performed prior to interviewing the sellers (see Appendix 3). For some sellers, the information online (i.e. from their corporate website) enabled the researcher to know the names of their buyers. For those sellers who had limited background information online, interviewees were asked to share and explain who their buyers are (prior to interviewing session). However, in order to maintain the confidentiality of sellers and buyers, organisation names were not mentioned during the interviewing sessions. Instead, during the interviews, each seller was referred to as “this company”, each buyer was referred to as “that company”, a group of buyer companies were referred as “those companies”, and the relationship between each seller and its buyers was referred to as the “relationship between the companies”. Additionally, sellers were constantly probed with questions such as, “Does this happen when selling to / interacting with that
company?”, during the interview session to ensure that sellers addressed the interview questions from the seller perspective.

The first section, Section A, consisted of broad questions about the respondent’s working experience. Specifically, participants were asked questions on their years of experience in their current department, current company, and other companies. This information is important to ensure that the interviewees have the relevant experience in the area of the research.

The next section, Section B, consisted of a series of questions regarding the respondent’s company. Prior to the interview, the respondent’s company information was obtained from the company’s website, and the questions in this section were intended to verify the information with respondents and to obtain additional information if the company’s website did not provide the necessary information. The questions related to the number of employees and their ages as well as company locations, turnover rate, position in the industry, and market focus. These questions helped to discern whether the attributes of companies affect the role of social media.

Section C contained a series of general information questions relating to social media. The interviewees were asked to state the first word that came to mind when considering social media. They were also asked to comment on the nature and use of social media in their company, such as whether their companies use social media, who gets to use social media, the frequency of social media use, and the duration of social media use by their companies. If their companies were currently not using social media, the interviewing session for those interviewees ended with this section and they were not asked any question from the following sections. All interviewees whose companies were currently using social media proceeded to following section, which concerned what social media the company uses.

Section D obtained information relating to what social media the companies use, specifically in B2B relationship marketing. Particularly, participants were asked to give an example of social media the companies were currently using and discuss the functions of social media for the company, how long the company had been using social media, in what stage of a relationship the company normally uses social media, who (the company itself or other companies) initiates the use of social media, who (the
company itself or other companies) is more active in using social media, and how successful the use of social media is.

Section E consisted of interview questions that elicited information on how and why the interviewees’ companies use social media specifically for B2B relationship marketing. The interviewees were asked how their companies use social media, such as about the hardware associated with the use of social media. Interviewees were also asked questions on the importance of social media to the companies, as well as the benefits and disadvantages of using social media for the companies’ B2B relationship marketing. Additionally, questions in this section asked about the companies’ training, policies and/or templates relating to the company’s use of social media.

Finally, Section F closed out the interview. In this section, interviewees were given opportunities to provide additional comments on social media in general as well as comments on their companies’ use of social media.

ii. Interview Guide for Second-Phase Interviews

The objective of the second-phase interviews was to verify information received from the first-phase interviews. To ensure the credibility of data across both phases of interviews, the findings from the first-phase interviews provided the basis for creating the semi-structured interview guide for the second-phase interviews (see Appendix 4). The interview guide for the second phase of interviews included questions pertaining to respondents' demographic information, respondents’ company information, general information relating to social media, information about the company’s relationships with other companies (identified in the first-phase interviews), information on what social media the company uses, information on why and how the company uses social media and at what stages of the relationship the company uses social media, and additional comments on social media. Like the first-phase interview guide, this interview guide (which comprised Section A to Section I) was revised on five separate occasions by three experts from the marketing and social media fields.

In order to ensure that the buyers addressed the interview questions in their “buyer” status and not as sellers, background research about the companies was performed prior to interviewing the buyers (see Appendix 4). For some buyers, the
information online (i.e. from their corporate website) enabled the researcher to know the names of their sellers. However, in order to maintain the confidentiality of buyers and sellers, organisation names were not mentioned during the interview sessions. Instead, during the interviews, each buyer was referred to as “this company”, each seller was referred to as “that company”, and the relationship between each buyer and its seller was referred to as the “relationship between the companies”. Additionally, sellers were constantly probed with questions such as, “Does this happen when buying from / interacting with that company?”, during the interview session to ensure that buyers addressed the interview questions from the buyer perspective.

Section A of the second-phase interview was similar to Section A of the first-phase interview guide. This section comprised several general questions relating to the respondent’s amount of working experience. To ensure that the interviewees had relevant information in the area of research, they were asked about their years of experience, specifically about the amount of work experience with their current department, current company, and previous companies.

Section B was also similar to Section B of the first-phase interview guide. This section gathered information regarding the respondent’s company. As basic information on the respondent’s company had already been obtained from the first-phase interviews, the reason for asking questions pertaining to the respondent’s company was to verify the information with the respondents and to verify that the respondents from the first-phase interviews had provided the required information. Like the first-phase interview guide, the second-phase interview guide included questions on the company’s number of employees, ages, locations, turnover rate, position in the industry, and market focus. The rationale for asking these questions was to better understand whether the company’s differences have an impact on the role of social media.

Section C contained two general questions relating to social media. In this section, the interviewees were asked whether they had heard the term social media. If they had, they were then asked to state the first word that came to mind when thinking about social media. These questions aimed at understanding the interviewees’ general knowledge about social media. If their definition of social media was inaccurate, the correct definition of social media was briefly explained.
Section D was designed to obtain information about the relationship between the respondent’s company and another company (the company from the first-phase interviews). The questions in this section related to how long the company has been in the relationship, the interviewee’s level of satisfaction with the current business relationship, how the company uses social media in the relationship, and how long the company has been using social media in that relationship.

Section E sought to understand what types of social media the respondent’s company has been using in its relationship with another company. Particularly, the interviewees were asked to give an example of social media the company uses in its business relationship and state whether the company uses any other social media in the relationship. They were also asked to discuss the company’s social media use for the business relationship and whether social media use adds value to the relationship.

Section F consisted of interview questions to elicit information on why the interviewees’ companies use social media in the current business relationship, how important social media are to the company for the purpose of the current business relationship, what methods the company uses other than social media in the relationship, whether social media are better than any other communication method when interacting in the relationship, and whether social media offer the best way to interact in the relationship. The interviewees were also asked to discuss whether the business relationship enjoys any other benefit from using social media and whether the use of social media for the relationship has any downside.

Section G consisted of questions aimed at gathering information on how the company uses social media in its current business relationship. The questions included asking the interviewees to elaborate on the devices the company uses and whether the company provides any device such as desktops, laptops, tablets, or smartphones for interacting in the business relationship through social media. The interviewees were also asked whether the company uses any other device and whether the company supports the use of social media for business relationships.

Section H explored at what stages of the relationship the company uses social media. The questions in this section queried the frequency of social media use in the
relationship, whether the company had developed the relationship prior to using the social media for interacting in the relationship, and whether now is the best time for the company to use social media in the relationship.

Finally, Section I served as the closing section of the second-phase interview. Interviewees were given opportunities to provide additional comments about the use of social media for the current business relationship and the use of social media in their company. They also had opportunities to provide any comments relating to social media in general.

3.4.3 Conducting Interviews

For both phases, the face-to-face interviews were conducted in the interviewees’ companies in Malaysia. Malaysia was chosen as the context for the study because Malaysia’s internet penetration and social media use have grown considerably in recent years. Since 2008, more than 50% of the population have been internet users (Internet World Stats, 2010), with 90% having access to Facebook (ComScore.com, 2011), over 50% having an active YouTube profile (We Are Social, 2012), and almost 70% viewing YouTube videos (ComScore.com, 2011). Social networking activities account for more than 70% of online activities and nearly 80% of users’ time spent online (Nielsen.com, 2011). These characteristics make Malaysia an appropriate country of context for this study.

Prior to conducting the interviews, the researcher sought ethical clearances in accordance with the Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Guidelines. An approval for the HREC ethical clearance was granted (GU Ref No: MKT/23/13/HREC) on 17 September 2013 (see Appendix 5) for the first-phase interviews and another approval was granted (GU Ref No: MKT/07/14/HREC) on 29 April 2014 for the second-phase interviews (see Appendix 6). Prior to executing the interviews, the researcher revised the interview guides with the help of supervisors, who played the role of devil’s advocate during the revision process. Necessary changes were made to the interview guides, and the researcher then ran five pre-test interviews prior to each phase of actual interviews. The pre-tests were executed with a heterogeneous sample of colleagues and friends who had different backgrounds in the area of study—
that is, those with marketing and social media backgrounds. A heterogeneous sample increases the scope of exploration beyond one social network (Penrod et al., 2003).

The research also complies with Australia’s National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). For this research, the researcher obtained both written and verbal consent prior to conducting interviews. The interviewees were given the ethics consent form (see Appendix 7) to read and sign and were also asked to verbally state their willingness to participate in the research. For both phases, the researcher addressed issues of privacy and confidentiality (Zikmund, 2003), stating the right to withdraw at any stage of the interview and obtaining permission to record the interview. The rationale for recording the interview conversation was explained in detail, and the interviewees were advised that the audio recordings would be erased following transcription and that all data will be kept private and confidential for a period of 5 years, after which it will be destroyed (Shaw, 2003).

The interviews for both phases were between 30 and 60 minutes in duration. The interviewing process began with a few broad questions to ensure a more natural conversational style and to establish rapport between the researcher and the interviewee. After the introduction, the researcher posed more focused questions to invite the interviewees to explore the role of social media in B2B relationship marketing. During the interviews, the interviewees were given as little guidance as possible in framing their answers to the questions. However, when extended periods of silence occurred, the interviewer asked the interviewees additional questions. Prompting questions included “You said that…. Could you elaborate even more?”, “Such as?…. Could you give the example?” or “What did you mean exactly?” During the interview process, the interviewee’s answers were reflected back to the interview guides to make certain that both interviewee and interviewer were clear on a particular viewpoint and expressed meanings (Bogdan & Taylor, 1989).

The interviews were conducted in either English or Malay, depending on the participant’s choice. The options were offered to ensure that the interviewees felt comfortable to freely answer the interview questions as well as to provide richer information by expressing themselves in their chosen language. The researcher also discussed with the interviewees the nature of the interviewing process in which the interviewer plays a role as a passive participant and active listener. To elicit important
information, the researcher encouraged the interviewees to provide specific examples. Consistent with recommendations of experts (Carson et al., 2001; Dick, 1990), probing questions were used only to clarify information during the interviews. The probing questions were generally initiated by why?, what?, and how? (Yin, 1984).

The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. To ensure accuracy of the content, the transcription process was done by professional transcribers from the International Languages Teacher Training Institute of Malaysia. Interviews conducted in the Malay language were subsequently translated into English, by language experts also from the International Languages Teacher Training Institute of Malaysia. Data from the interviews were then analysed using qualitative thematic analysis software, as discussed in the following subsection.

3.4.4 Analysing Data

The interview transcriptions from both phases were analysed using structured thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006) through the qualitative software Leximancer 4.0 (Smith, 2011), an analytic tool used for content analysis of textual data such as interview transcriptions (Smith, 2011). Thematic analysis is a flexible and useful research tool for qualitative data analysis as it provides rich and detailed results (Braun & Clarke, 2006) through an encoding process that offers “a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Under this method, themes can be generated either inductively or deductively (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). An inductive approach identifies themes without reference to a specific theoretical interest, as it is a data-driven analysis in which the process of coding does not attempt to fit the codes into a pre-existing coding frame or the researcher’s analytic presumption (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In contrast, a deductive or theoretical analysis tends to be driven by the researcher’s analytic or theoretical interest (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). This research employs thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis identifies themes within the data at two levels (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The first level is an explicit or semantic level, in which themes reflect the explicit or surface meaning of the data. The second level is an interpretive or latent level, in which the researcher looks at the underlying aspect or ideas under observation and identifies the themes (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke,
This research employed the first level in the hope that the data would reveal explicit meanings. The first or semantic level is also more suitable for this study because, since this research is in a new and under-researched area, the analysis may not require underlying observations when identifying the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In sum, the research employed the inductive and semantic approaches offered by thematic analysis for analysing the in-depth, structured interview data.

The use of Leximancer software for analysing the semi-structured in-depth interview data not only increased the depth and objectivity of the findings but also allowed the researcher to address the issues of validity and reliability of the data (Smith & Humphreys, 2006). Another advantage of Leximancer is that its use reduces researcher bias (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977) because it does not require manual coding of the data to generate key concepts and themes (Cretchly, Gallois, et al., 2010).

The automatic concept extraction of Leximancer software provides the researcher with objective, unbiased, and automatic discovery while maintaining the researcher’s control over data exploration (Smith & Humphreys, 2006). The software allows researchers to map out themes, concepts, and associated relationships from the body of interview transcripts into visually compelling concept maps (Cretchly, Rooney, & Gallois, 2010). In the mapping process, Leximancer seeks words that emerge frequently in the text and groups them together to form concepts (Smith, 2011). Concepts that are closely located to one another within a cluster of text are regarded as having a strong relationship and can be grouped to form themes (Smith, 2011). Unlike other text analytic tools, such as NVIVO (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2014), Leximancer uses an exploratory approach, allowing the user to discover a wide range of relationships of significant concepts (Crofts & Bisman, 2010).

The use of Leximancer improves the validity of qualitative research (Smith & Humphreys, 2006) and addresses the issue of reliability (Alexa & Zuell, 2000). The Leximancer analysis is rooted in the text, as the software categorises words into concepts before it groups them into themes (Cretchly, Gallois, et al., 2010; Smith & Humphreys, 2006). The software consistently detects the relationships between each of the concepts and themes (Cretchly, Gallois, et al., 2010; Smith & Humphreys, 2006), providing the research findings with validity and reliability. Leximancer not only has satisfactory face validity and reliability (Smith, Grech, & Hoberry, 2002), but also
maintains stability when generating findings. Findings derived from Leximancer produce similar concept maps for similar semantics and different concepts for text with different semantics (Smith & Humphreys, 2006).

During analysis, Leximancer 4.0 discards words such as “the” and “a” because these words do not add meaning to the research questions. In addition, terms with similar meanings, such as “organisation” and “company,” are merged to avoid the emergence of different concepts with similar meanings. On the resulting two-dimensional concept map, themes are displayed as circles and are located close to one another. The most important themes emerging from Leximancer concept maps appear in hot colours such as red and orange, with the intensity of the colour decreasing with a decline in the theme’s importance (Smith, 2011). The size of the thematic circles denotes their connectedness to other themes, and themes that are strongly connected to other themes will be larger on the concept map and overlap with other themes (Smith, 2011).

Because Leximancer is an automated concept extraction software which limits researcher’s date exploration (Smith, 2011), the researcher did not rely solely on the Leximancer software when analysing the data. Instead, the researcher made many decisions regarding the analysis and the data. In addition to using Leximancer software for analysis, the researcher manually went through all the interview transcriptions to analyse whether or not the concepts and themes suggested by Leximancer software were relevant for the research context. The researcher then manually searched for quotes which supported each of the concepts and themes that appeared on the Leximancer concept map. Finally, the researcher investigated whether or not there was any additional theme or concept that was important but was not automatically discovered by the software.

Depending on the text or data sets, a concept map may consists of overlapping concepts (concepts which belong to more than one theme). Smith and Humphreys (2006) stated that semantics contained within the text or data sets are partial, hence successful interpretation of the semantics also relies on other semantics common to reader and author. This is particularly true in intelligence analysis, as is stated in Lefebvre (2004), who cites from Katter, Montgomery, and Thompson (1979): “In other words, analysts never have a perfect information situation and ‘information from memory provides the
sole basis for hypothesizing relationships among data available for interpretation and for classifying various data as relevant, redundant, present, absent, or crucial for the interpretative task’’ (p. 241). Nonetheless, in order to better address the issues of overlapping concepts, the researcher decided to perform another stage of analysis, that is, manual coding for concepts which belong to several themes.

3.4.5 Addressing the Issues of Trustworthiness

All research, whether qualitative or quantitative, is subject to concerns regarding its credibility or trustworthiness. Any efforts by researchers to address the more traditional quantitative issues of reliability (the consistency with which the data are measured over time) and validity (the degree to which the research measures what it purports to measure) relate to the issue of trustworthiness (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). However, qualitative studies should be assessed differently from quantitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), especially with respect to issues of trustworthiness. According to Smith (1984), reliability and validity of qualitative research are more difficult to achieve than for quantitative research because measures are difficult to calculate statistically and interpretations are subject to the individual’s perceptions. Terms often associated with the trustworthiness of a qualitative study include dependability, credibility, and transferability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). For this study, each of these features was given close attention throughout the study to ensure that trustworthiness was achieved.

Dependability (or reliability) refers to the ability to achieve similar findings if the research process is repeated (Emory & Cooper, 1991; Sekaran, 2003). For this study, operational and structural procedures ensured the dependability of the data. The researcher used interview guides during the two phases of semi-structured interviews, and strict adherence to recording, transcribing, translating, analysing, and interpreting the interview data fostered the dependability of research findings (Armstrong, 1985; Dick, 1990). Importantly, in qualitative research the aim is not to eliminate inconsistencies in the data but to comprehend inconsistencies as they occur (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

The aspect of credibility (or validity) suggests whether the findings are accurate and credible from the standpoint of the researcher, the participants, and the reader
In qualitative research, the term validity is often associated with authenticity and plausibility, hence ensuring defensibility of the research findings (Johnson, 1997; Miles & Huberman, 1994). To achieve credibility for this study, this research used two phases of interviews, one from the perspective of the seller and one from the perspective of the buyer. Performing two phases of interviews allowed better verification of the findings, as research data are reflected in the interviewee’s “viewpoints, thoughts, feelings, intentions and experiences” (Johnson, 1997, p. 285). Even though some inferences were made during the interpretation process, the researcher maintained a low level of inferences by using Leximancer software to analyse the interview data, thus increasing the depth and objectivity of the research findings (Smith, 2011).

In addition to dependability and credibility, transferability (rather than generalisability) is a criterion of trustworthiness of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability refers to how the reader determines 1) whether the study is transferable to another context, and if so, 2) to what extent. For this study, the researcher addressed the transferability issues by outlining detailed descriptions of the interviewees’ background, including (but not limited to) their ages, the location of their companies, and the industry types. The detailed descriptions provide the basis of the study’s relevancy to a broader context (Schram, 2003). In sum, this section details how the study’s trustworthiness—which involves dependability, credibility, and transferability of the research—was achieved through the research design as well as the operational and structured procedures.

### 3.5 Conclusion

This study took a two-phased approach to in-depth semi-structured interviews of participants regarding the use of social media in B2B relationship marketing in Malaysia. The nature of the topic of this investigation makes this approach appropriate for gathering information from the perspective of the company itself and that of other businesses that have a relationship with the company.

This chapter introduced and discussed the proposed research paradigm, methodology, and methods applied to resolve the research problem and the research question together with three research subquestions. Interpretivism served as the research paradigm and a qualitative research approach functioned as the methodology.
The research method relied on a two-phase in-depth semi-structured interviewing technique that included five steps: a) developing a sampling strategy, b) writing an interview guide, c) conducting interviews, d) analysing interview data, and e) addressing the issues of trustworthiness. The next chapter presents the study’s findings.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

"Nothing is particularly hard if you divide it into small jobs."

(Henry Ford)

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 discussed the research paradigm, methodology, and methods adopted for the research. This chapter presents the findings that are in line with the research objectives, research question, and research subquestions. Following this introduction, Section 4.2 offers a descriptive analysis of the interviewees’ backgrounds. Section 4.3 outlines the findings relating to the first research subquestion, and Sections 4.4 and 4.5 present the findings relating to the second subquestion. Section 4.4 is based on the first-phase interviews while Section 4.5 is based on the second-phase interviews. Finally, Section 4.6 concludes with a summary of the chapter. Figure 4.1 shows the chapter’s outline.
4.2 Analysis of the Interviewees

Two sets of data emerged from the two phases of in-depth semi-structured interviews with employees who work in relationship marketing in Malaysia. The first data set was derived from information provided by 19 interviewees and the second data set was derived from information provided by 15 interviewees whose companies are currently using social media for B2B relationship marketing purposes. All interviews were conducted face-to-face at the interviewees’ company. To achieve heterogeneity, the interviewees were selected from different industries, industry types, industry sizes, company locations, interviewee positions, and age groups. The data collected in the first-phase interviews (labelled as Seller 1 to Seller 19) and in the second-phase interviews (labelled as Buyer 1 to Buyer 15) came from a wide variety of B2B companies, thus helping to broaden the current understanding of the role of social media for B2B relationship marketing in Malaysia.
### Table 4.1
Summary of Interviewee Backgrounds
(Sellers from First-phase Interviews)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee*</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Company Size**</th>
<th>Company Type</th>
<th>Company Location</th>
<th>Interviewee Position</th>
<th>Interviewee Age***</th>
<th>Theme(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seller 1</td>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Throughout Malaysia</td>
<td>Service Manager</td>
<td>26 to 35</td>
<td>Bilateral Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 2</td>
<td>Packaging</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Central Malaysian Peninsula</td>
<td>Sales Executive</td>
<td>26 to 35</td>
<td>Relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 3</td>
<td>Investment</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Throughout Malaysia</td>
<td>Sales Agent</td>
<td>&lt; 26</td>
<td>Bilateral Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 4</td>
<td>Fashion</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Central Malaysian Peninsula</td>
<td>Founder</td>
<td>26 to 35</td>
<td>Relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 5</td>
<td>Paint</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Central Malaysian Peninsula</td>
<td>Project Executive</td>
<td>26 to 35</td>
<td>Social Media Enigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 6</td>
<td>Oil and Gas</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Government Linked</td>
<td>Central, Northern and Eastern Malaysian Peninsular, East Coast of Malaysia</td>
<td>Government and Media Relationship Officer for East Coast Region (Group of Corporate Affairs)</td>
<td>36 to 45</td>
<td>Unilateral Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 7</td>
<td>E-commerce</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Central Malaysian Peninsula</td>
<td>Graphic Designer and IT Trainer</td>
<td>26 to 35</td>
<td>Bilateral Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 8</td>
<td>Fashion</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Central Malaysian Peninsula</td>
<td>Production Manager</td>
<td>&lt; 26</td>
<td>Social Media Enigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 9</td>
<td>Oil and Gas (Equipment)</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>USA, Central, Eastern and Southern Malaysian Peninsular</td>
<td>Territory Sales Manager</td>
<td>36 to 45</td>
<td>Relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 10</td>
<td>Oil and Gas</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Government Linked</td>
<td>Central, Northern and Eastern Malaysian Peninsular, East Coast of Malaysia</td>
<td>Strategic Communication Officer (Group of Corporate Affairs)</td>
<td>26 to 35</td>
<td>Unilateral Communication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table continues...*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee*</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Company</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seller 11</td>
<td>Fashion</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 12</td>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 13</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Small</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seller 14</td>
<td>Sales and Marketing</td>
<td>Small</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seller 15</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 16</td>
<td>Photography</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 17</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 18</td>
<td>Broadcasting</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 19</td>
<td>Graphic Design</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*To protect participants’ identities, participants were labelled as Seller 1–Seller 19.

** Small: Company with fewer than 500 employees, Large: Company with 500 and more employees (Rothwell and Zegveld, 1982).

*** Group 1: < 26, Group 2: 26 to 35, Group 3: 36 to 45, Group 4: > 45.

Source: Developed for this research.
Table 4.2
Summary of Interviewee Backgrounds
(Buyers from Second-phase Interview)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee*</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Company Size**</th>
<th>Type of Company</th>
<th>Location of Company</th>
<th>Interviewee’s Position</th>
<th>Interviewee Age***</th>
<th>Theme(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 1</td>
<td>Fashion</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Central Malaysian Peninsula</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>26 to 35</td>
<td>Unilateral Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 2</td>
<td>Fashion</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Throughout Peninsula</td>
<td>Co-director</td>
<td>36 to 45</td>
<td>Unilateral Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 3</td>
<td>Design and Technology</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Central Malaysian Peninsula</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>26 to 35</td>
<td>Unilateral Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 4</td>
<td>Food and Beverages</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Central Malaysian Peninsula</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>&gt; 45</td>
<td>Unilateral Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 5</td>
<td>Paint</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Central and Southern Malaysian Peninsula</td>
<td>Senior Marketing Executive</td>
<td>36 to 45</td>
<td>Social Media Enigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 6</td>
<td>Graphic Design</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Central Malaysian Peninsula</td>
<td>Owner / Director</td>
<td>26 to 35</td>
<td>Unilateral Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 7</td>
<td>Illustration</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Central Malaysian Peninsula</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>&lt; 26</td>
<td>Unilateral Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 8</td>
<td>Cosmetics</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Central Malaysian Peninsula</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>&lt; 26</td>
<td>Unilateral Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 9</td>
<td>Fashion</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Central Malaysian Peninsula</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>&lt; 26</td>
<td>Unilateral Communication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table continues...
### Table 4.2

**Summary of Interviewee Backgrounds**

*(Buyers from Second-phase Interview) – Cont’d*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee*</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Company Size**</th>
<th>Type of Company</th>
<th>Location of Company</th>
<th>Interviewee’s Position</th>
<th>Interviewee Age***</th>
<th>Theme(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 10</td>
<td>Broadcasting</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Central Malaysian Peninsula</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>26 to 35</td>
<td>Unilateral Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 11</td>
<td>Electronics</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Central Malaysian Peninsula</td>
<td>Owner / Director</td>
<td>36 to 45</td>
<td>Unilateral Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 12</td>
<td>Apparel Merchandise, Service for Event Management and Creative Design</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Central and Southern Malaysian Peninsula</td>
<td>Co-owner</td>
<td>26 to 35</td>
<td>Unilateral Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 13</td>
<td>Investment</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Throughout Malaysia</td>
<td>Sales Agent</td>
<td>&lt; 26</td>
<td>Unilateral Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 14</td>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Central Malaysian Peninsula</td>
<td>Tour Manager</td>
<td>26 to 35</td>
<td>Bilateral Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 15</td>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Throughout Malaysia</td>
<td>Marketing Manager</td>
<td>36 to 45</td>
<td>Bilateral Communication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*To protect participants’ identities, participants were labelled as Buyer 1–Buyer 15.

** Small: Company with fewer than 500 employees, Large: Company with 500 and more employees (Rothwell and Zegveld, 1982).

*** Group 1: < 26, Group 2: 26 to 35, Group 3: 36 to 45, Group 4: > 45.

*Source: Developed for this research.*
As Table 4.1 shows, the first-phase interviewees represented 15 industries located throughout the country—financial, packaging, investment, fashion, paint, oil and gas, e-commerce, oil and gas equipment, health, sales and marketing, agriculture, photography, education, broadcasting, and graphic design—all of varying size (small and large) and type (private and government-linked companies). Whilst the interviewees held various positions at both the operational and managerial levels, strong relational and technological backgrounds are among the interviewees’ criteria. They were between 26 to 45 years of age.

Table 4.2 shows the background of the second-phase interviewees, who came from 13 industries: fashion, design and technology, food and beverages, paint, graphic design, illustration, cosmetics, broadcasting, electronics, apparel merchandise and event management/creative design services, investment, tourism, and entertainment. Like the companies in the first-phase interviews, the companies for the second-phase interviews varied in size. All are private companies located in central Peninsular Malaysia, southern Peninsular Malaysia, and elsewhere throughout Malaysia. The second-phase interviewees were also chosen from various career positions, ranging from those at operational levels to those within managerial levels. They were also 26 to 45 years of age. For B2B relationship marketing, all 15 companies are currently adopting social media.

As detailed in Chapter 2, this study intended to explore the role of social media in B2B relationship marketing. This research consists of one primary research question and three research subquestions.

**Primary research question**: What is the role of social media in B2B relationship marketing in organisations that use social media?

RQ1: How do businesses operationalise social media in B2B relationship marketing?

RQ2: For what purpose do businesses use social media in B2B relationship marketing?

RQ3: How consistent are the perceptions of sellers and buyers engaging with social media in B2B relationship marketing?
This chapter presents the findings for RQ1 and RQ2. Detailed analysis on RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3 will be presented in Chapter 5.

4.3 Findings of How Businesses Operationalise Social Media

Figure 4.2 illustrates the findings of social media platforms used by companies in the first-phase interviews. As the figure illustrates, companies in the first-phase interviews (sellers) use Facebook more often than they use other social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, LinkedIn or blogs. Out of 19 sellers interviewed, all (19) sellers use Facebook for B2B relationship marketing, whereas approximately one-third of the sellers use Twitter and/or Instagram. The figure also illustrates that some sellers use other social media platforms (such as blog, Youtube, LinkedIn). A detailed illustration of the other social media platforms used by sellers is presented in Table 4.3.

![Figure 4.2: Column Chart of Findings regarding Social Media Platforms. Sellers that Currently Use Social Media.](image-url)
As illustrated by Figure 4.2, a total of 19 sellers use Facebook, 7 sellers use Twitter, 6 sellers use Instagram, and 6 sellers use other social media platforms when interacting with their buyer companies. Table 4.3 illustrates the findings of social media platforms used by each of the sellers interviewed in the first-phase interviews. While the findings show that all sellers use Facebook for B2B interaction with their buyers, the overall social media use varies with the seller. Some sellers rely solely on Facebook as a social media platform while other sellers use more than one platform.

Table 4.3

Findings regarding Social Media Platforms
(Sellers from First-phase Interviews)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Companies</th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>Twitter</th>
<th>Instagram</th>
<th>Other(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seller 1</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Blog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 2</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 3</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 4</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 5</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 6</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 7</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Blog, Youtube</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 8</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Youtube</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 9</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Linx (Internal Social Media)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 10</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 11</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 12</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 13</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 14</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 15</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 16</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 17</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 18</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 19</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*√ denotes company with the supportive measure.
*x denotes company without the supportive measure.

Source: Developed for this research.
The findings in Table 4.3 also show that in addition to the publicly known social media platforms (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, LinkedIn), another social media platform, “Linx”, is used by one seller (Seller 9). An employee from the oil and gas equipment industry stated that the company has its own internal social medium, “Linx”, which is a platform the company uses to interact with its joint ventures. According to the employee, “Linx” is a closed platform for employees of the company and the employees of the joint ventured companies only. Examples of how seller companies use each of the social media platforms are illustrated in Table 4.4.

### Table 4.4

**Interview Quotes relating to Social Media Platforms**

*(First-phase Interviews: Sellers that Currently Use Social Media)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Platforms</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>[We] started with Facebook. [Now], [we] are using Facebook, and Twitter. But, mostly Facebook because it’s easier to draw down competitive [advantages] for the consumers, [such as] using Facebook to [inform about] products and services of the bank. [We use Twitter] but not much because it’s more [suitable for] individual basis. [To] communicate with a company using Twitter, it’s a bit different because it’s very general and it’s very huge. For example, if [we] want to communicate via Twitter, [we] can say there’s a marketing or promotion plan, that’s all. [We] just give one tagline. But the terms and conditions, [we] still need to [use] Facebook, to [share] the terms condition. So, basically, Twitter is just a tagline, to attract the attention!</td>
<td>Seller 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>In the beginning we used Facebook, Twitter, and blog. From time to time, there was no staff to update the blog. So now, we focus [mainly] on Facebook.</td>
<td>Seller 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>[Currently, we use] Facebook. We used to use Twitter, but we don’t use it for B2B much anymore. People find [that] Twitter attracts photographers, Twitter does not attract photography customers. We used Instagram, [but] we also find it’s not as effective as Facebook. We use Facebook the most now.</td>
<td>Seller 16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table continues…*
### Table 4.4

**Interview Quotes relating to Social Media Platforms**

*(First-phase Interviews: Sellers that Currently Use Social Media) – Cont’d*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Platforms</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Twitter</strong></td>
<td>[We use] Twitter. We also have Facebook. That’s the only two that [we use] now.</td>
<td>Seller 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>So far, we [use] Facebook, Instagram, [and] Twitter.</td>
<td>Seller 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instagram</strong></td>
<td>The most well-known is Facebook. We also use Instagram. We spread around words, advertisements, [and] pictures.</td>
<td>Seller 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Every single day, we’re using Instagram [and] Facebook. We inform all our customers [about] the new scarves and hijabs that we are selling, the prices etc. Facebook and Instagram are to announce or to promote our scarves from our company to our buyers. For purchasing [purposes], they need to go to our website to purchase. We don’t [accept] any purchase [via] Instagram or Facebook. Those are basically platforms for marketing and promotions only.</td>
<td>Seller 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>So far, we mainly use Instagram, Twitter and Facebook to connect with the customers. We [use Facebook] but not as much as others. Now, our main medium is Instagram, [followed by] Twitter, and then Youtube. When we have promotion [like] soft launch [or] teaser, we [use] Youtube.</td>
<td>Seller 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Others</strong></td>
<td>[For] communicating, our CEO has his own blog... if he wants to communicate with [other B2B companies], he can simply connect [to the blog].</td>
<td>Seller 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Developed for this research.

**Figure 4.3** illustrates the findings relating to social media platforms used by companies of the second-phase interviews (buyers). The findings in **Figure 4.3** are similar to the findings in **Figure 4.2** and show that like sellers, all buyers use Facebook as their social media platform. Out of 15 buyers interviewed, all (15) buyers use Facebook for B2B interaction with their sellers, whereas slightly more than one-third of
the buyers use Twitter and/or Instagram. Another similarity of the findings relating to social media platforms is that for both buyers and sellers, after Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are the two most commonly used social media by the companies in the B2B relationship environment. Like Figure 4.2, Figure 4.3 also illustrates that some buyers use other social media platforms (such as blog). The findings illustrating how each buyer (the second-phase interviewees) utilise social media platforms are presented in Table 4.5.

![Bar Chart](image)

**Figure 4.3:** Column Chart of Findings regarding Social Media Platforms. Buyers that Currently Use Social Media.

As illustrated in Figure 4.3, a total of 15 buyers use Facebook, 6 buyers use Twitter, 6 buyers use Instagram, and 4 buyers use other social media platforms (other than Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) when interacting with their seller companies in the B2B environment. The findings for each buyer (the second-phase interviewees) are presented in Table 4.5. Table 4.5 shows that some buyers only use Facebook as a social
media platform for B2B interaction with their sellers, whereas other buyers use other social media platforms (i.e. Twitter, Instagram, and blogs) in addition to Facebook.

### Table 4.5

**Findings regarding Social Media Platforms**

*(Buyers from Second-phase Interviews)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Companies</th>
<th>Social Media Platforms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 1</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 2</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 3</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 4</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 5</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 6</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 7</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 8</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 9</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 10</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 11</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 12</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 13</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 14</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 15</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>√</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*√ denotes company with the supportive measure.*

*x denotes company without the supportive measure.*

*Source: Developed for this research.*
Examples of how buyer companies use each of the social media platforms are illustrated in Table 4.6.

### Table 4.6
**Interview Quotes relating to Social Media Platforms**
*(Second-phase Interviews: Buyers that Currently Use Social Media)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Platforms</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>Mostly, we use Facebook because on Facebook, we can put more elaboration and post pictures. But when we use other methods such as Twitter or Instagram, the space is quite limited. I think Facebook has the biggest space for publishing and giving information.</td>
<td>Buyer 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[We] already have Instagram and Facebook accounts. [We] started using them early before the product appearance. [It’s the] company’s Facebook [account], not the personal [account]. For interacting [purposes], [we use] Facebook. For other purpose, [we use] Instagram. [We] don’t personally discuss problems on Instagram, [but] on Facebook.</td>
<td>Buyer 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[We are] using only one, Facebook. Since [we]’ve been using the service from [seller], a lot of interaction that happen with [seller] is for getting the information in more detail, [such as] about techniques in using the service that [the seller] provides. Every time [we] have problems, [we] use social media [like] Facebook for asking and getting answers from the [seller] itself. Since [seller’s] Facebook has other users whom also using service from [the seller], we use Facebook to share [our] problems. There were times when other users gave their feedback on [our] problems and there were times when the [seller] itself gave the feedback, and there were also times when other users had problems. [We also] shared [our] company’s strategies.</td>
<td>Buyer 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table continues...*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Platforms</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>About 90% [of the transaction between this company and the seller is] via social media. Social media is used more [often] for sharing information. If [we] want to upload story on the online portal, [we] will share [on our] Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. At the same time, [the seller] will share [on its] social media too. Same goes if [the seller] shares information on [its] social media, [we] will retweet it. [For] Instagram, [we] will repost [it]. For Facebook [we] will reload pictures, [and share] news and event of [the seller’s] company. [It’s] more for helping [the seller] to promote products and launchings.</td>
<td>Buyer 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>In Malaysia right now the most popular social media definitely Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. We are using these social media platforms.</td>
<td>Buyer 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have been using Facebook, because [of] how [popular] it’s been used nowadays. [But, based on] the interface, Instagram is much easier to scroll. Facebook has more buttons, [are] more complicated, [and] has hashtag. [Although] Instagram also has hashtag, people are more likely to search [for] hashtag on Instagram than on Facebook.</td>
<td>Buyer 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We use Facebook and Instagram to promote the company’s product. We had all the details [on] Facebook and customers can contact the owner of the company if they have further queries. [We] don’t use Twitter because [our] product and the [seller’s] product are more [suitable to] use pictures for promotion [purposes]. It is a bit difficult for us to use Twitter, [we] prefer Facebook and Instagram.</td>
<td>Buyer 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>I think that [the seller] already has many customers, so [the company] is not very prompt in answering [our] questions [on Facebook]. [We] usually go to the specific FAQ [on its blog]. The blog is quite useful because information is already there. There are FAQs from other customers asking certain questions. [Based on] the questions, we can learn, we can also know what we can do with the [e-commerce] website, created for us [by the seller]. I would say I learned from [the FAQs].</td>
<td>Buyer 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Developed for this research.
Figure 4.4 illustrates the findings regarding the hardware frequently used for social media purposes by companies in the first-phase interviews. As the figure illustrates, many companies in the first-phase interviews (sellers) use a smartphone as the most frequently used hardware, compared to other devices such as desktop, laptop, or tablet. Out of the 19 sellers interviewed, approximately half of the sellers (9 sellers) use smartphone the most when interacting with their buyer companies, whereas approximately a quarter of the sellers use a desktop or laptop the most; 5 sellers use a desktop the most and 4 sellers use a laptop the most. Among all the sellers interviewed, no sellers (0 seller) use a tablet as the most frequently used hardware for interacting with the buyer in the B2B environment. In addition to the mostly used hardware, the figure also illustrates the number of sellers that use the hardware (smartphone, desktop, laptop, and tablet) either frequently, seldom or the least.

**Figure 4.4: Column Chart of Frequently Used Hardware for Social Media Purposes.**

Sellers that Currently Use Social Media.

As illustrated in Figure 4.4, the hardware that the seller companies frequently use for social media purposes in the B2B relationship environment is the smartphone, followed by the desktop, laptop, and tablet. Consistently, the least used hardware by the
seller companies are the tablet, followed by the laptop, desktop and smartphone. A detailed illustration of how each seller uses its hardware (based on the most, frequent, seldom, or least used) is presented in Table 4.7. As illustrated in Table 4.7, some sellers use all (four) types of hardware for B2B interaction with their buyers, whereas other sellers use either one, two, or three types of hardware. Table 4.7 also shows that there is seller who weighted different hardware equally (i.e. Seller 2 uses both a desktop and tablet frequently).

**Table 4.7**

*Frequently Used Hardware for Social Media Purposes*  
*(Sellers from First-phase Interviews)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Companies</th>
<th>Desktop</th>
<th>Laptop</th>
<th>Tablet</th>
<th>Smartphone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seller 1</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 2</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 3</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 4</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 5</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 6</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 7</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 8</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 9</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 10</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 11</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 12</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 13</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 14</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 15</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 16</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 17</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 18</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 19</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*I being the most frequently used hardware, and IV being the least frequently used hardware.  
*x denotes hardware which is not used by the company.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Usage</th>
<th>Desktop</th>
<th>Laptop</th>
<th>Tablet</th>
<th>Smartphone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Used the most</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently used</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seldom used</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used the least</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Developed for this research.*
Examples of how seller companies use each of the devices (desktop, laptop, tablet, and smartphone) for social media purposes are presented in Table 4.8.

### Table 4.8

**Interview Quotes relating to Frequently Used Hardware for Social Media Purposes**

*(First-phase Interviews: Sellers that Currently Use Social Media)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hardware Used</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desktop</td>
<td>For now, we only use desktop... for social media purposes.</td>
<td>Seller 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We frequently use desktops and laptops. We never communicate using tablets or phones. Desktop [is being used the most]. Each person in this company has their own desktop.</td>
<td>Seller 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[We] use desktop, laptop, smartphone [but] less likely to use tablet because… everyone finds smartphone to be [easier] than tablet. Between desktop and laptop... I believe equal amount of usage because some departments use laptop [and] some other departments use desktop.</td>
<td>Seller 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laptop</td>
<td>Laptop [is the most commonly used]. We do have desktop in our office, [but] all of [us] have [our] own personal laptops. We don’t use much Androids or all of those kinds of hand phones, but most of us communicate much [using] our laptops and desktop. [We don’t use much smartphone] unless it’s [for] Instagram, we just upload [pictures] only once a day. So, smartphone is only for Instagram, Facebook, and mass emails. [We] don’t use tablet much.</td>
<td>Seller 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[We use] all [but], we use laptop the most, followed by desktop. The least is tablet.</td>
<td>Seller 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Laptop [is the commonly used]. But, if the staff have hand phones, they use theirs. Sometimes desktops are also used. [Tablet]... that one depends on the staff. If the staff have their own and they want to use it, then they will. But, normally, most staff will use laptop and desktop.</td>
<td>Seller 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 4.8

**Interview Quotes relating to Frequently Used Hardware for Social Media Purposes**

*(First-phase Interviews: Sellers that Currently Use Social Media) – Cont’d*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hardware Used</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tablet</td>
<td>Sometime we use tablet and sometime we use desktop. We don’t use laptop or smartphone.</td>
<td>Seller 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We often use laptop, tablet and iPhone. I mean smartphone. [Desktop] is the least frequent one. In order to connect with each other, I think smartphone [is the most frequent]. Then we use tablet and lastly laptop.</td>
<td>Seller 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smartphone</td>
<td>Mostly smart phone. As a Service Manager, the Head Office gave [an] I phone to communicate... because it’s easy, easy to share information.</td>
<td>Seller 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In my company, most of us have... laptop and we also use smartphone, our own smartphone [in order] to get access to social media. Laptop and smart phone [are frequently used but] I think smartphone [is the most frequently used]. Desktop is less frequently used, followed by desktop.</td>
<td>Seller 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We, mostly, use all. Our top managers have smartphones, everyone has a desktop and the managers have laptops and tablets. Smart phone [are the most common and] tablets [are the least]. [Compared to laptops] more common would be desktop. Those who are travelling, they use laptops. Smart phone, [pause] desktop, laptop, tablet, yes.</td>
<td>Seller 15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Developed for this research.*

Figure 4.5 illustrates the findings of hardware frequently used for social media purposes by buyer companies interviewed in the second-phase interviews. Like Figure 4.4, many companies in the second-phase interviews (buyers) use a smartphone most frequently, compared to other devices such as a desktop, laptop, or tablet. Out of 15 buyers interviewed, two-thirds of the buyers (10 buyers) use a smartphone the most when interacting with their B2B sellers, whereas less than one-third of the buyers (4 buyers) use a laptop the most. Among all the 15 buyers interviewed, only one buyer uses a desktop and another one buyer uses a tablet as the most frequently used hardware in the B2B environment. Like Figure 4.4, in addition to the mostly used hardware, the
Figure 4.5 also illustrates the number of sellers which use these hardware types (smartphone, desktop, laptop, and tablet) either frequently, seldom or the least.

![Figure 4.5: Column Chart of Frequently Used Hardware for Social Media Purposes. Buyers that Currently Use Social Media.](image)

Figure 4.5 shows that the hardware most frequently used for social media purposes by the buyer companies is the smartphone, followed by the laptop. As mentioned earlier, only one buyer uses a desktop and only one buyer uses a tablet as the most frequently used hardware for B2B interaction with their sellers. However, Figure 4.5 illustrates that the least used hardware type by the buyer companies is the laptop, followed by the desktop. Only one buyer uses a tablet and only one buyer uses a smartphone for B2B interaction with the seller companies. Hence, in order to better understand how buyers utilise their hardware when interacting with the seller companies in the B2B environment, detailed illustrations of how each buyer uses each hardware type (based on the most, frequently, seldom, or least used) are presented in Table 4.9.

Like Table 4.7, some buyers use all (four) hardware types for B2B interaction with their buyers, whereas other buyers use either two or three hardware types. Unlike
Table 4.7, Table 4.9 illustrates that, among all the buyers interviewed in the second phase, none uses only one hardware type for interacting in the B2B environment. Table 4.9 is also similar to Table 4.7 in that both tables show that there are businesses which weighted different hardware equally (i.e., Buyer 4 uses both a smartphone and desktop as most frequently). Based on Table 4.9, the most frequently used hardware by buyer companies for interaction with their sellers in the B2B environment is the smartphone, followed by the desktop, tablet and laptop.

**Table 4.9**

**Frequently Used Hardware**
*(Buyers from Second-phase Interviews)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Companies</th>
<th>Hardware Used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Desktop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 1</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 2</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 3</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 4</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 5</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 6</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 7</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 8</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 9</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 10</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 11</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 12</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 13</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 14</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 15</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*I being the most frequently used hardware, and IV being the least frequently used hardware.

*x denotes hardware which is not used by the company.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Usage</th>
<th>Desktop</th>
<th>Laptop</th>
<th>Tablet</th>
<th>Smartphone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Used the most</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently used</td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seldom used</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used the least</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Developed for this research.*
Examples of how buyer companies use each of the devices (desktop, laptop, tablet, smartphone) for social media purposes are presented in Table 4.10.

**Table 4.10**

*Interview Quotes relating to Frequently Used Hardware for Social Media Purposes*

*(Second-phase Interviews: Buyers that Currently Use Social Media)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hardware Used</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desktop</td>
<td>We use desktop and... smartphone. We use [tablet and laptop] too but... not for social media. For tab and laptop, we use when we present, go for event, [have] talk, [or anything that is] not related with online and the store business. [We use] both desktop and smartphone [equally]. During retail hours, we use desktops because they are static in our shop, and [we use] mobile phones [because] we can bring [them] anywhere.</td>
<td>Buyer 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I prefer hand phone. We do have desktop, but not tablet. My company uses desktop and smartphone as the devices for social media. For the time being only 2 devices. Only smartphone and desktop.</td>
<td>Buyer 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laptop</td>
<td>I use laptop [which is] Mac, tablet [which is] Ipad, and smartphone. [For] smartphone, I use Android. I [also use] Windows phone sponsored by [the] company... I have to use both. These are plenty sometimes. I don’t use desktop because I arrive home at 11 [pm] or midnight. The earliest maybe 8 or 9, so I don’t have time to use desktop. It’s better for me to use laptop [because] I can take it anywhere [and] I can do work at any place. To upload story I use laptop... I use tablet when [I'm] outstation. When I’m outstation, I will leave the laptop at [the] hotel, [and] bring smartphone and tablet. I use smartphone often because it is easy to update [information]. [But] laptop [is being used the most].</td>
<td>Buyer 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For the social media... the usage more towards the laptop. There is also smartphone but it can be said that the main use is the laptop. There are usage for tablets and desktops but the usage are very minimal, it is more towards the laptop, and then second, it will only be the smartphone. If there are desktop as well as the tablet, it can be assumed as the final option, last option. I think I am more to the tablet. Laptop, smartphone, tablet and the last one would be the desktop. No other devices being used.</td>
<td>Buyer 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table continues...*
### Table 4.10

**Interview Quotes relating to Frequently Used Hardware for Social Media Purposes – Cont’d**

*(Second-phase Interviews: Buyers that Currently Use Social Media)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hardware Used</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Laptop – Cont’d</strong></td>
<td>When updating [about] the product, it’s easier to use laptop. But when the orders come in, it’s easier to use smartphone. I can just browse right away. Desktop [is the least commonly used] because I don’t own a desktop. I don’t use tablet. Smartphone being the [the most commonly used] depending on the function. When update [the information], I use laptop. But, [when] browsing, then I use a smartphone.</td>
<td>Buyer 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tablet</strong></td>
<td>[I use] all four. I would say tablet [is the most commonly used]. Next is desktop. When I upload the pictures [tablet] would make a faster and more powerful device. Smartphone [ranks the least], mainly due to the smallest screen size.</td>
<td>Buyer 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>[We use] smartphone, laptop and tablet. Desktop is for work [and not for social media]. Tablet and smartphone [are being used more frequent than] laptop.</strong></td>
<td>Buyer 11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Smartphone</strong></td>
<td>Most of the times we [use] our smartphones. In the company, we have laptops for each one of us. We can use anywhere we go. We don’t use desktop or tablet, maybe some of us do. We mostly use [smartphone and laptop], followed by tablet then desktop. Desktop will be the last choice. We use smartphones the most.</td>
<td>Buyer 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think smartphone [is the most frequently used because] it is the most common [among employees] and easy [to use]. We [also] use desktop. No laptop or tablet.</td>
<td>Buyer 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For my company, I use everything that [I] could... desktop, laptop, tablet, and smartphone... all [that] can connect to the internet. Smartphone is being used the most. The least is, laptop. Company’s laptop. If at the office, of course [we use] desktop, [but] usually more [with] smartphone and tablet if [those are] available. If not in the office, I use tablet or smartphone, but mostly smartphone. If I’m outside, there are two options – tablet or smartphone. I use laptop but [only] few times.</td>
<td>Buyer 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To foster a better understanding of how companies operationalise social media in B2B relationship marketing, Figure 4.6 illustrates the findings of social media supportive measures of companies in the first-phase interviews. As the figure illustrates, social media supportive measures include aspects such as 1) training, 2) policies/rules, and 3) templates/standards/scripts for their employees. Out of 19 sellers interviewed, 11 sellers provide policies and/or rules, 8 sellers provide training, and 8 sellers provide templates, standards, and/or scripts relating to social media for their employees.

Based on Figure 4.6, the findings illustrate that sellers give more priority to policies and/or rules, as compared to other supportive measure such as 1) training, and 2) templates, standards and/or scripts. Table 4.11 presents details of how each seller provides supportive measures to their employees. Table 4.11 shows that several companies provide no supportive measures in regard to social media use, many

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**Figure 4.6:** Column Chart of Social Media Supportive Measure Provided. Sellers that Currently Use Social Media.

---
companies provide at least one of the supportive measures, and some companies provide all three supportive measures.

Table 4.11
Social Media Supportive Measures Provided

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Companies</th>
<th>Supportive Measures</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trainings</td>
<td>Policy/Rule</td>
<td>Template / Standard / Script</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 1</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 2</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 3</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 4</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 5</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 6</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 7</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 8</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 9</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 10</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 11</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 12</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 13</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 14</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 15</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 16</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 17</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 18</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 19</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*√ denotes company with the supportive measure.
*x denotes company without the supportive measure.

Source: Developed for this research.

Table 4.12 presents examples of how each of the social media supportive measures are provided by seller companies to their employees.
### Table 4.12

**Interview Quotes relating to Social Media Supportive Measures Provided**

*(First-phase Interviews: Sellers that Currently Use Social Media)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supportive Measure</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trainings</td>
<td>Yes, [we do have training], like how to manage the social media, get information and send the information on social media. [The training is] once only, once for the whole company. No [we don’t have any policy nor template].</td>
<td>Seller 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The management only limit to two [or] three courses per employee in a year. Only limited to those who are in the strategic and media relation department.</td>
<td>Seller 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy / Rule</td>
<td>Yes, there are [trainings], once a month or two months once. [We] send staff for training to update them on social media because [our] business is online. They need to keep themselves updated... The training is all outsourced. It’s either I send my staff to [attend training with] web-developer or government. I’ve sent one of my employees to [attend] IT training by the government. I just started last month. I believe this training will be every 2 months. The training is [for] helping them to get updated. Now there’s a lot of scams, so I need to get them prepared if in [the] future we gonna go through these kinds of scenarios. For those kind of trainings is [for] communicating with other company. It’s not within my company.</td>
<td>Seller 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes, of course we have a lot of trainings. The moment when [we] started to join the company, [the company] gave [us] one-month training [about] the guidelines of the bank. And [during] the guideline [training], social media [training] is included. [The training is] yearly basis. I think [we] have these [trainings] because social media is very new, that’s a lot of regulations that [are] changing. The company... provides us the correct trainings so that we are aware of the law of social media. [The training] is quite often. When [we first] entered the company, that’s the first one. What I can say is [the training is] every six months or every eight months. It depends on the regulations. But on the yearly basis, we do have a refresh course on social media and on our compliance also. [The training] is for everyone because our organisation is quite huge. Everyone has to be aware of these trainings.</td>
<td>Seller 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table continues...*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supportive Measure</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy / Rule – Cont’d</td>
<td>Yes, [we do have policy]. Policy of the company [which] is related to data protection [such as] how we make [the data] confidential and not to expose [it] on social media. [Basically] the restriction of using [social media]!</td>
<td>Seller 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy / Rule – Cont’d</td>
<td>Oh, yes, yes there are [policies]. Everyone has their own job scope. Of course [the staff] have the limitations in exploring social media. Social media is very important. One bad thing can destroy [the] whole company. So, they have limitations. The policy, I created my own. It is based [on] certain regulations from my previous job. I enhance and make it more short and simple.</td>
<td>Seller 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Template / Standard / Script</td>
<td>For [other employees] who are not related to [the company’s] Facebook and Twitter, they are not allowed to use Facebook or Twitter during office hour.</td>
<td>Seller 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Template / Standard / Script</td>
<td>Yes, there is. Of course there is. There is, but our scripts and our templates are all guided by our compliance unit. Before we come out with any social media, we need to get the approval from the compliance, so that the company that we are working will be guided by the laws and regulations of Malaysian Constituency.</td>
<td>Seller 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Template / Standard / Script</td>
<td>Yes. I have a template email, I’ve a template monthly email. I have a template email on how to get the enquiry. But if you see [on our] social media page, you can guess it’s quite uniform. Every entry [is] similar and it’s very consistent [post]. [But for] B2B, [it] is not very important to use social media. Not yet. We are ready! We are not using it yet because the potential customers, companies are not ready.</td>
<td>Seller 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Template / Standard / Script</td>
<td>No, [we don’t have script specifically for social media] but we have [general] script that we use whether online [or offline]. Some of us [use] it on social media.</td>
<td>Seller 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Developed for this research.

The following section presents the findings relating to the second research subquestion (RQ2).
4.4 Findings regarding the Purpose of Social Media for (First-phase Interviews)

The second research question asked for what purpose businesses use social media in B2B relationship marketing. Through the use of Leximancer 4.0, a concept map emerged from the transcription of the first-phase interviews. The map reflected several themes, including “relationship”, “social media enigma”, “bilateral communication”, “unilateral communication”, and “information sharing”. Hot colours such as red or orange indicate the most relevant concepts or themes, while cool colours such as blue or green indicate the least relevant concepts or themes. The Leximancer colour-heat map, the most relevant theme appeared to be “bilateral communication” followed by “relationship” indicates that “social media enigma”, “unilateral communication”, and “information sharing”. These findings suggest that the reasons for the companies’ adoption of social media for B2B relationship marketing are for bilateral communication, relationship purposes, social media enigma, unilateral communication, and information sharing.

Source: Developed for this research.

Figure 4.7: Concept Map from First-phase Interviews. Sellers that Currently Use Social Media.
i. Unilateral and Bilateral Communication

In this concept map, the most salient theme in relation to the research questions is “bilateral communication”, represented in pale red. Besides social media, other concepts appearing in this theme are interact, communicate, promote, and connect. This theme indicates that the main reason for the companies’ use of social media for B2B relationship marketing is for bilateral communication, which includes interacting, communicating, connecting, and promoting. In relation to the concept interact, Seller 7 remarked: “It is quite good to train the staff on how to interact with the customers online, using social media. Perhaps the staff themselves can improve on how to communicate or to attract the customers through social media”. Other interviewees commented as follows:

What we are practising now is [that when] any of us go to social media [for] promoting, we use some of the scripts we have been taught to attract clients and to interact with other companies. These are not standardised (Seller 3).

The training has only been given to the executives, including me. The training taught us the Facebook layout and the use of it. For example, we can use Facebook to interact one-on-one or one-to-many. [The training] taught us how to upload photos and videos, and many more (Seller 9).

The next salient concept that appears in the “bilateral communication” theme is communicate. The concept suggests that companies use social media to communicate with other businesses for the purpose of B2B relationship marketing, as Seller 16 noted: “We always try to promote communicating with social media. [But] It depends on the level of [relationship] comfort with the [buyer]”. Another example provided by Seller 2:

I think [the reason] the company is using social media for communicating [purposes] is to give information as quickly as possible. Compared to emails or phone calls, social media is [a] more effective way because most people nowadays are using social media at all times (Seller 2).

The third concept in the “bilateral communication” theme is connect, which indicates that companies also use social media as a tool to be connected with other businesses. For instance, Seller 3 stated that “We want to develop our connections....
We usually use social media to share information and knowledge.” Another interviewee connected via Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook:

So far, we mainly use Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. Yes, these are the mediums that we use to connect with the [buyers]. [We] rarely use Youtube. When we have a promotion, or maybe a soft-launch or teaser, we [use] Youtube (Seller 8).

The last concept in the “bilateral communication” theme is promote, which implies that companies use social media for promotional purposes. In relation to this concept, Seller 2 mentioned that “mostly, the sales and marketing manager get to use social media because [the company] needs to market the product. I think the employees get the chance to use social media as well to promote the product of the company”. Seller 3 stated, “We need social media to promote and to expand our [relationships]. [This will] put us in the place where people [will] see us. So, I think [social media] is helpful”. Seller 18 echoed the purpose:

The company uses [social media] mainly [as a] marketing tool [which] we use to promote our channel.... When we approach the bloggers, we need them to follow our channel... we need them to promote it. We [either] use our social media [or] put our information on the bloggers’ blogs.... With our suppliers, we broadcast all the programs we buy from TV stations in Indonesia.... We promote them in Malaysia, so people in Malaysia will know that [we] have the special [channels from] Indonesia (Seller 18).

Table 4.13 provides a summary of the interviewee quotes regarding all the concepts in the “bilateral communication” theme.
Table 4.13
Summary of Interview Quotes relating to the “Bilateral Communication” Theme
(First-phase Interviews: Sellers that Currently Use Social Media)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>interact</td>
<td>It is quite good to train the staff on how to interact with the customers online, using social media. Perhaps the staff themselves can improve on how to communicate or to attract the customers through social media.</td>
<td>Seller 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What we are practising now is [that when] any of us go to social media [for] promoting, we use some of the scripts we have been taught to attract clients and to interact with other companies.</td>
<td>Seller 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The training has only been given to the executives, including me. The training taught us the Facebook layout and the use of it. For example, we can use Facebook to interact one-on-one or one-to-many. [The training] taught us how to upload photos and videos, and many more.</td>
<td>Seller 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communicate</td>
<td>We always try to promote communicating with social media. [But] It depends on the level of [relationship] comfort with the [buyer].</td>
<td>Seller 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think [the reason why] the company is using social media for communicating [purposes] is to give information as quickly as possible. Compared to emails or phone calls, social media is [a] more effective way because most people nowadays are using social media at all times.</td>
<td>Seller 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>connect</td>
<td>We want to develop our connections… We usually use social media to share information and knowledge.</td>
<td>Seller 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>So far, we mainly use Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. Yes, these are the mediums that we use to connect with the customers. [We] rarely use Youtube. When we have a promotion, or maybe a soft-launch or teaser, we [use] Youtube.</td>
<td>Seller 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### ii. Relationship

Following the theme of “bilateral communication” is the theme “relationship”. In the concept map (Figure 4.2), the “relationship” theme is represented with a pale gold circle. On the basis of the colour heat, relationship appears to be the second most important reason companies use social media as a B2B medium. For instance, Seller 2 stated, “I think [the reason we] want to use social media [is] to enhance the relationship with another company”. Seller 11 illustrated how companies use social media for B2B relationship marketing:

I think the benefit [of using social media] is [that] it can strengthen the relationships not only for the purpose of business negotiation, but also [for] getting to know [other companies]. [Social media] is also not limited to the company that we are dealing with, but [extends to] other competitors (Seller 9).
The concept map (Figure 4.2) indicates that the companies have been using social media during different stages of relationship. For example, the companies used social media when developing relationships with other businesses. Seller 14 mentioned that “[we] did not [start using social media] recently. [It has been] awhile [since] we were setting up the company…. [The purpose of using social media] is to develop a relationship”. Other examples emerged, as shown in the following excerpts:

[The best time for using Facebook is when] starting [a relationship]. [After the relationship is established], we are supposed to maintain the relationship by improving it continuously via Facebook (Seller 7).

[Using social media for developing a relationship] is not the main thing but it does help. We do marketing [and] developing relationships with other companies or other people [via] face-to-face. But I do think that social networking helps us in connecting with more people, more companies [and] our prospective client (Seller 3).

From the relationship perspective, the following comments indicate that the use of social media plays a role not only in developing B2B relationships, but also in maintaining and enhancing the relationships:

[We use social media] more on maintaining and enhancing relationships. When we want to start the relationship, we still need to meet up physically because we cannot [communicate via] social media, not knowing the [customers] in person. So, the first meeting is [face-to-face], and then in order to sustain and enhance, we can use social media [to] get this done…. Is it the best time? For me, of course yes. Because I don’t have any choice, I cannot be travelling every month, I need to stay here. So, for me, that’s the best choice right now, [to use social media] when maintaining and enhancing [relationships] (Seller 4).

I think [that the best time to use social media] is in the enhancing level [because] the companies can interact, socialise and exchange opinions with each other. So, we can give more suggestions through social media. More ideas can be generated from various companies and more agreement can be discussed ( Seller 9).

[We use social media for] developing and maintaining a relationship. I can say it is suitable but more [as] an unofficial type of communication…. I think the company [also] uses social media to enhance the communication with the customer, in terms of [how] to increase the communication between companies (Seller 2).
Table 4.14 summarises interviewee quotes reflecting the concepts in the “relationship” theme.

**Table 4.14**

*Summary of Interview Quotes relating to the “Relationship” Theme*

*(First-phase Interviews: Sellers that Currently Use Social Media)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>relationship</td>
<td>I think [the reason we] want to use social media [is] to enhance the relationship with another company.</td>
<td>Seller 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think the benefit [of using social media] is [that] it can strengthen the relationships not only for the purpose of business negotiation, but also [for] getting to know [other companies]. [Social media] is also not limited to the company that we are dealing with, but also [extends to] other competitors</td>
<td>Seller 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>developing</td>
<td>[We] did not [start using social media] recently. [It has been] awhile [since] we were setting up the company... [The purpose of using social media] is to develop a relationship.</td>
<td>Seller 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[The best time for using Facebook is when] starting [a relationship]. [After the relationship is established], we are supposed to maintain the relationship by improving it continuously via Facebook</td>
<td>Seller 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[Using social media for developing a relationship] is not the main thing but it does help. We do marketing [and] developing relationships with other companies or other people [via] face-to-face. But I do think that social networking helps us in connecting with more people, more companies [and] our prospective client.</td>
<td>Seller 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maintaining and enhancing</td>
<td>[We use social media] more on maintaining and enhancing relationships. When we want to start the relationship, we still need to meet up physically because we cannot [communicate via] social media, not knowing the [customers] in person. So, the first meeting is [face-to-face], and then in order to sustain and enhance, we can use social media [to] get this done... Is it the best time? For me, of course yes. Because I don’t have any choice, I cannot be travelling every month, I need to stay here. So, for me, that’s the best choice right now, [to use social media] when maintaining and enhancing [relationships].</td>
<td>Seller 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 4.14

**Summary of Interview Quotes relating to the “Relationship” Theme – Cont’d**  
*(First-phase Interviews: Sellers that Currently Use Social Media)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>maintaining and enhancing – cont’d</td>
<td>I think [that the best time to use social media] is in the enhancing level [because] the companies can interact, socialise and exchange opinions with each other. So, we can give more suggestions through social media. More ideas can be generated from various companies and more agreement can be discussed.</td>
<td>Seller 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[We use social media for] developing and maintaining a relationship. I can say it is suitable but more [as] an unofficial type of communication... I think the company [also] uses social media to enhance the communication with the customer, in terms of [how] to increase the communication between companies.</td>
<td>Seller 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Developed for this research.*

### iii. Social Media Enigma

The next salient theme for the role of social media in B2B relationship marketing is “social media enigma”, represented with the largest circle in pale green (Figure 4.2). The theme “social media enigma” reflects ambiguity surrounding the reasons companies use social media when interacting with other businesses. In other words, companies use social media because they believe they need to do so, but the main reasons for using social media for B2B relationship marketing are not clear. The colour heat indicates that “social media enigma” is the third most important theme. However, the location of “social media enigma” appears to lie between the two most important themes—“bilateral communication” and “relationship”—indicating that even though companies use social media for bilateral communication and for relationship with other businesses, understanding the role of social media in B2B relationship marketing is enigmatic. The theme “social media enigma” consists of three concepts: *perceived need to use, attract and promote*. The theme “social media enigma” is appropriate for the *perceived need to use* concept because often, sellers use social media

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*Enigma is a person or thing that is mysterious or difficult to understand (English Oxford Living Dictionary, 2016).*
believing that such use is necessary, as in the case of connecting with potential buyers, although sellers’ reasons for using social media are not well understood by the sellers themselves. The following excerpts illustrate how companies use social media owing to their perceived need to use:

[The reason we are using social media is] because we are attracting clients and shareholders, we need to connect with more people, even more than other [companies do].... If we want to have [a face-to-face] meeting [with] other companies, we have to interact with the [employees] in the company. If we want to go and meet them one by one, just to gather and/or to send information that, it is going to take time. [Using] social networking [sites] is going to help us in connecting [with] each other; we save more time [because] we can just connect anywhere. It is better than [face-to-face] (Seller 3).

We [use social media] because our suppliers are mainly not in Malaysia. They are all over the world, so we [use] Facebook [or] any kind of social media to get through [to] them. If we call them, it will be very costly for us. We communicate via Facebook message; it is easier and the message reaches quite fast too (Seller 4).

The next concept that exists in the “social media enigma” theme is attract, which implies that companies use social media with the perception that its use could attract other companies. Some seller companies perceive social media as an episode of “cute” promotional activity, whereas social media may in fact be utilized as a mass marketing strategy or integrated marketing plan throughout the seller-buyer relationship. For instance, Seller 17 mentioned that “people find [that] Twitter attracts photographers, [but] it does not attract photography customers.” Other interviewees mentioned the following:

[From] what I have seen, the benefit the company gets from using social media is [that the company] can use social media without extra cost [for] promoting the business [or] the product, [and] attracting the customer or client to come and do business with the company (Seller 2).

I think [the company uses social media in] between the beginning and [the] middle stage where we are trying to attract the consumers and companies. We are trying to get the new companies to join us and to sustain the relationships with the companies that already co-operate with us (Seller 9).

[We also use Twitter] but not that much because it [functions] more on [an] individual basis. [When we] communicate with a company using Twitter, it is a bit different.
because [the medium] is very general [and] very huge. For example, if [we] want to communicate via Twitter, [we post that] “there is a marketing or promotion plan”, [and] that is all. [We] just give one tagline. But [for] the terms and conditions, [we] still need to go through the Facebook or the website, to see what the terms [and] condition. So basically, Twitter is just a tagline to attract attention (Seller 12).

The third concept that emerged in the “social media enigma” theme is promote, which appears not only in the “social media enigma” theme but also in the “bilateral communication” theme. The concept reflects that whilst sellers are making an effort to promote the business to a group of audiences, understanding the interaction role of social media from seller companies for promoting the businesses is enigmatic. For instance, little effort is made by sellers to maintain the interaction or bilateral communication with their viewers, including their buyers. Table 4.15 presents a summary of interviewee quotes based on the concepts in the “social media enigma” theme.

Table 4.15
Summary of Interview Quotes relating to the “Social Media Enigma” Theme
(First-phase Interviews: Sellers that Currently Use Social Media)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>perceived need to use</td>
<td>[The reason we are using social media is] because we are attracting clients and shareholders, we need to connect with more people, even more than other [companies do]... If we want to have [a face-to-face] meeting [with] other companies, we have to interact with the [employees] in the company. If we want to go and meet them one by one, just to gather and / or to send information that, it is going to take time. [Using] social networking [sites] is going to help us in connecting [with] each other; we save more time [because] we can just connect anywhere. It is better than [face-to-face].</td>
<td>Seller 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We [use social media] because our suppliers are mainly not in Malaysia. They are all over the world, so we [use] Facebook [or] any kind of social media to get through [to] them. If we call them, it will be very costly for us. We communicate via Facebook message; it is easier and the message reaches [sic] quite fast too.</td>
<td>Seller 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table continues...
Table 4.15

Summary of Interview Quotes relating to the “Social Media Enigma” Theme
(First-phase Interviews: Sellers that Currently Use Social Media) – Cont’d

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>attract</td>
<td>People find [that] Twitter attracts photographers, [but] it does not attract photography customers.</td>
<td>Seller 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[From] what I have seen, the benefit the company gets from using social media is [the company] can use social media without extra cost [for] promoting the business [or] the product, [and] attracting the customer or client to come and do business with the company.</td>
<td>Seller 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think [the company uses social media in] between the beginning and [the] middle stage where we are trying to attract the consumers and companies. We are trying to get the new companies to join us and to sustain the relationships with the companies that already co-operate with us.</td>
<td>Seller 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[We also use Twitter] but not that much because it functions more on [an] individual basis. [When we] communicate with a company using Twitter, it is a bit different because [the medium] is very general [and] very huge. For example, if [we] want to communicate via Twitter, [we post that] “there is a marketing or promotion plan”, [and] that is all. [We] just give one tagline. But [for] the terms and conditions, [we] still need to go through the Facebook or the website, to see what the terms [and] condition. So basically, Twitter is just a tagline to attract attention.</td>
<td>Seller 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>promote</td>
<td>Mostly, the sales and marketing manager get to use social media because [the company] needs to market the product. I think the employees get the chance to use social media as well to promote the product of the company.</td>
<td>Seller 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We need social media to promote and to expand our [relationships]. [This will] put us in the place where people [will] see us. So, I think [social media] is helpful.</td>
<td>Seller 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table continues...
Table 4.15
Summary of Interview Quotes relating to the “Social Media Enigma” Theme
(First-phase Interviews: Sellers that Currently Use Social Media) – Cont’d

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>promote – cont’d (the concept also belongs to ‘bilateral communication’ theme)</td>
<td>The company uses [social media] mainly [as a] marketing tool [which] we use to promote our channel... When we approach the bloggers, we need them to follow our channel... we need them to promote it. We [either] use our social media [or] put our information on the bloggers’ blogs... With our suppliers, we broadcast all the programs we buy from TV stations in Indonesia... We promote them in Malaysia, so people in Malaysia will know that [we] have the special [channels from] Indonesia.</td>
<td>Seller 18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Developed for this research.

iv. Unilateral Communication

A fourth theme generated on the concept map is “unilateral communication”, represented in light blue. Compared to most themes on the concept map, “unilateral communication” is located relatively closer to the concept of social media, illustrating the theme’s level of importance toward the latter. This positioning suggests that for B2B relationship marketing, unilateral communication is also an important role of the social media. The colour heat indicates that “unilateral communication” is the fourth salient theme in terms of its relevance to the research question.

The “unilateral communication” theme consists of four concepts: spread, fast, reach, and news. These four concepts suggest that companies use social media for one-way communication such as to forward updates and to reach consumers in a timely manner. They may also use social media to upload photos, or to convey messages as noted in the following excerpt:

“All the workers can get access to it, but there are three people who [are] in charge of it [including me]. For this company, I think almost every day I check if we [have received] any messages [and almost] weekly I upload pictures and spread the latest updates through Facebook (Seller 9).”

The second concept appearing in the “unilateral communication” theme is fast, suggesting that speed is one of the reasons companies use social media as a unilateral
communication medium. From this perspective, companies use social media for two reasons: to deliver the message quickly to consumers and to ensure the message is received quickly by consumers. For instance, Seller 2 stated that “My company uses social media to promote [and] to give out information as fast as [we] can” and Seller 18 mentioned that “I think social media can create long term relationships with other companies. Social media can spread news fast.” Another example is the following:

We get the things done quite fast and precisely. For example, if the orders that we get from the customers need to be followed up, it can be done [by] forwarding the [relevant] number. Everyone can check and get things done quite fast and precisely.... I use social media because I can get things fast and understand[ably]. Sometimes, there are language barriers. For example, if I speak Malay language and the Indonesian speak the Indonesian language, there are some words which I [might] understand differently and they [might] understand differently too.... [We] just want to get things done fast and correct the first time. We use social media so that we can get the message delivered fast and precisely (Seller 4).

The third concept in the “unilateral communication” theme is reach. This concept reflects that companies use social media to reach other companies, as pointed out in the following comments:

In my opinion, social media is for establishing liaison. Normally [we use] Facebook [to] introduce our products [to the customers]. If they are interested in the products, they will try to reach us. So using social media is a process of establishing the liaison. [However, when] maintaining our liaison, we [do so] by making calls (Seller 5).

The company’s social media is open for all public to see. It is a Facebook page not a Facebook account. The objective is very clear [which is] to reach consumers [via] Facebook [and] to [attract] consumers to our website. Our website is the full breadth of our work (Seller 16).

Social media is advantageous. It gives [us the ability] to reach [customers] speedily via sharing.... It is the speed of [delivering] the content [that is] faster and [allows us] to reach more people. The best thing about it is [that we] can analyse the data. Before this, [when] we used conventional media, [we] could not analyse the data. [We] did not know whether [we were doing right or wrong. Now, [we] can know whether [our] content is either good or bad based on the response. So yes, it makes sense to use social media (Seller 10).
Finally, the fourth concept that appears in “unilateral communication” is *news*. This concept suggests that companies use social media for one-way communication that spreads news to users, as mentioned in the following comments:

[Via] social media we [can provide] graphics to show to other companies [such as] our successful events and our upcoming events. It would be easier to communicate this way, compared to normal dry call or via text message because I think that people are more into the news updates and visuals (Seller 14).

Nowadays, using social media is one of the important mediums for any company especially in [the] broadcasting [industry]. Social media can spread the news faster than any other medium.... I think [social media] is really important to [communicate] with other companies [such as] our subscribers. We [use] all the social media [and] we have followers. We can improve our channel through word-of-mouth. [It is] like a circle. When [customers] know about our program, [they will leave] feedback about it, and then [other customers] will follow us. And, the news will [travel] continuously (Seller 18).

Table 4.16 provides a summary of interviewee quotes based on all the concepts in the “unilateral communication” theme.

**Table 4.16**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>spread</td>
<td>Looking from the point of marketing, we are going have to use [social media] on [an] everyday basis. The best known [social media we use] is Facebook. We also use Instagram.</td>
<td>Seller 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All the workers can get access to it, but there are three people who [are] in charge of it [including me]. For this company, I think almost every day I check if we [have received] any messages [and almost] weekly I upload pictures and spread the latest updates through Facebook.</td>
<td>Seller 9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table continues...*
Table 4.16
Summary of Interview Quotes relating to the “Unilateral Communication” Theme
(First-phase Interviews: Sellers that Currently Use Social Media) – Cont’d

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fast</td>
<td>My company uses social media to promote [and] to give out information as fast as [we] can.</td>
<td>Seller 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think social media can create long term relationships with other companies. Social media can spread news fast.</td>
<td>Seller 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We get the things done quite fast and precisely. For example, if the orders that we get from the customers need to be followed up, it can be done [by] forwarding the [relevant] number. Everyone can check and get things done quite fast and precisely... I use social media because I can get things fast and understand[able]. Sometimes, there are language barriers. For example, if I speaks Malay language and the Indonesian speak the Indonesian language, there are some words which I [might] understand differently and they [might] understand differently too... [we] just want to get things done fast and correct the first time. We use social media so that we can get the message delivered fast and precisely.</td>
<td>Seller 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reach</td>
<td>In my opinion, social media is for establishing liason. Normally [we use] Facebook [to] introduce our products [to the customers]. If they are interested in the products, they will try to reach us. So using social media is a process of establishing the liason. [However, when] maintaining our liason, we [do so] by making calls.</td>
<td>Seller 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The company’s social media is open for all public to see. It is a Facebook page not a Facebook account. The objective is very clear [which is] to reach consumers [via] Facebook [and] to [attract] consumers to our website. Our website is the full breadth of our work.</td>
<td>Seller 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social media is advantageous. It gives [us the ability] to reach [customers] speedily via sharing... It is the speed of [delivering] the content [that is] faster and [allows us] to reach more people. The best thing about it is [that we] can analyse the data. Before this, [when] we used conventional media, [we] could not analyse the data. [We] did not know whether [we were doing right or wrong. Now, [we] can know whether [our] content is either good or bad based on the response. So yes, it makes sense to use social media</td>
<td>Seller 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.16
Summary of Interview Quotes relating to the “Unilateral Communication” Theme
(First-phase Interviews: Sellers that Currently Use Social Media) – Cont’d

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>news</td>
<td>[Via] social media we [can provide] graphics to show to other companies [such as] our successful events and our upcoming events. It would be easier to communicate this way, compared to normal dry call or via text message because I think that people are more into the news updates and visuals.</td>
<td>Seller 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nowadays, using social media is one of the important mediums for any company especially in [the] broadcasting [industry]. Social media can spread the news faster than any other medium... I think [social media] is really important to [communicate] with other companies [such as] our subscribers. We [use] all the social media [and] we have followers. We can improve our channel through word-of-mouth. [It is] like a circle. When [customers] know about our program, [they will leave] feedback about it, and then [other customers] will follow us. And, the news will [travel] continuously.</td>
<td>Seller 18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Developed for this research.

v. Information Sharing

A final theme that appeared on the concept map is “information sharing”, represented by a dark blue circle (Figure 4.2). The colour heat shows the “information sharing” theme to be the least relevant to the research question, but the theme suggests that information sharing is one of five roles of social media in B2B relationship marketing. The theme consists of two concepts: information and share. In relation to the concept of information, Seller 12 stated, “I myself use [social media] like sending bulletins to my colleagues, sharing information, communicating updates with my superiors and other colleagues”. Other interviewees gave their insights on this matter:

Of course we benefit. We get to prolong the relationship. We can get things done very fast. For example, if I communicate with another company using social media, [such as] to place orders, I can just get it done today and they can deliver to me the next day. So, I get [information] quite fast. It is very effective (Seller 4).
[Social media is] effective. When it comes to sharing information, social media is a very good [medium]. Nowadays if we want to [go online via] Facebook, we can [do so at] anytime [and] get the information [from there]. Sometimes we do not know about something, but when someone shares then we get to know the information (Seller 1).

We use Facebook to send messages, pictures, and much more. [For] every information we want to share, we do that through Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.... I do not know how to put this into words but social media plays a vital role in my company. If we do not use it, it will be very difficult for me to communicate with the customers. It plays a big role. Without it, I can collapse at anytime because I will not be able to provide information to the clients (Seller 8).

The other concept that appears in the “information sharing” theme—share—illustrates that besides sharing information, companies also use social media to share updates and knowledge with other companies, as exemplified in the following comments:

Usually we use social media to connect with the company itself, the employees, and how we support each other, or share other information and knowledge with each other. That’s how we use it. I think it’s going well, very well, very good because we can interact at anytime, and then we can share information and knowledge or anything, any tip to enhance our skills of marketing. I think [information] is just, at the finger tips. So using social media is going to be very easy and accessible for all employees (Seller 3).

Usually we will use social media to share the latest update.... In the beginning we used Facebook. We also used Twitter and blog as well.... We use Youtube. When we have training, we record and preview [the training to be shared] with our potential customers (Seller 7).

I think for this company, the benefits are that everything we have updated will always be there. Everyone can share, thus the possibility of losing the data is nearly none. We can access it anywhere. Even if we lost our phone, the information is still there. That is why we choose to use social media because we can get access to the information either by using laptop or tablet. So, the benefit is we will not lose the data. We can change the gadget, but the data is still there (Seller 8).
Table 4.17 presents a summary of interviewee quotes based on the all the concepts in the “information sharing” theme. Table 4.18 provides a summary of all the themes and concepts derived from first-phase interviews with sellers that currently use social media.

**Table 4.17**

**Summary of Interview Quotes relating to the “Information Sharing” Theme**

*(First-phase Interviews: Sellers that Currently Use Social Media)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I myself use [social media] like sending bulletins to my colleagues, sharing information, communicating updates with my superiors and other colleagues.</td>
<td>Seller 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Of course we benefit. We get to prolong the relationship. We can get things done very fast. For example, if I communicate with another company using social media, [such as] to place orders, I can just get it done today and they can deliver to me the next day. So, I get [information] quite fast. It is very effective.</td>
<td>Seller 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>information</td>
<td>[Social media is] effective. When it comes to sharing information, social media is a very good [medium]. Nowadays if [we] want to [go online via] Facebook, [we] can [do so at] anytime [and] get the information [from there]. Sometimes [we] do not know about something, but when someone shares then [we get to] know [the information].</td>
<td>Seller 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We use Facebook to send messages, pictures, and much more. [For] every information [we want to share], we do that through Facebook, Instagram and Twitter... I do not know how to put this into words but social media plays a vital role in my company. If we do not use it, it will be very difficult for me to communicate with the customers. It [does] plays a big role. Without it, I can collapse [at] anytime because I will not be able to provide information to the clients.</td>
<td>Seller 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table continues…*
### Table 4.17

**Summary of Interview Quotes relating to the “Information Sharing” Theme**

(First-phase Interviews: Sellers that Currently Use Social Media) – Cont’d

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>share</td>
<td>Usually we use social media to connect with the company itself, the employees, and how [we] support each other, or share other information and knowledge with each other. That’s how we use it. I think it's going well, very well, very good because we can interact at anytime, and then we can share information and knowledge or anything, any tip to enhance our skills of marketing. I think [information] is just, at [the] finger tips. So [using social media] going to be very easy and accessible for all employees.</td>
<td>Seller 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Usually we will use social media to share the latest update... In the beginning we used Facebook. [We] also [used] Twitter [and] blog as well... We [also] use Youtube. When we have training, we record [and] preview [the training to be shared] with our potential customers.</td>
<td>Seller 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I think for this company, the benefits are [that everything] we have updated will always be there. Everyone can share, [thus] the possibility of losing the data is nearly none. We can access it anywhere. Even if we lost our phone, the information is still there. That is why we choose to use social media because we can get access [to] the information either by using laptop or tablet. So, the benefit is we will not lose the data. We can change the gadget, but the data is still there.</td>
<td>Seller 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Developed for this research.*
Table 4.18
Summary of Themes and Concepts
(First-phase Interviews: Sellers that Currently Use Social Media)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bilateral Communication</td>
<td>• Interact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• communicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• connect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• promote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>• relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• developing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• maintaining and enhancing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media Enigma</td>
<td>• perceived need to use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• attract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• promote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unilateral Communication</td>
<td>• fast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• reach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• news</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Sharing</td>
<td>• information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• sharing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Developed for this research.

4.5 Findings regarding Businesses’ Purpose in Using Social Media (Second-phase Interviews)

To verify the findings of the first-phase interview and to gain a better understanding of the roles of social media for B2B relationship marketing, another phase of interviews was performed with selected companies in Malaysia. The second-phase interviews were conducted with companies that have relationships with the companies from the first-phase interviews. The purpose of the second stage was to understand relationship marketing from the buyers’ perspective, and to differentiate the buyers’ perspective of the roles of social media from the perspective of the seller businesses.

From the interview transcriptions of the second-phase interviews, another concept map was generated using Leximancer 4.0. Figure 4.4 shows the concept map, which produced the themes “efficiency”, “social media enigma”, “relationship”, “unilateral and bilateral communication”, and “information sharing”. Hot colours such as red indicate the most relevant theme, while cool colours such as blue indicate the
least relevant theme. The most relevant theme was “unilateral and bilateral communication”, followed by “information sharing”, “social media enigma”, “relationship”, and “efficiency”.

**Figure 4.8**: Concept Map of Second-phase Interviews.

Buyers that Currently Use Social Media.

### i. Unilateral and Bilateral Communication

In this concept map, the most salient theme, represented by the red circle, was “unilateral and bilateral communication”. Besides the concept of social media, other concepts appear in this theme are interact, promote, discuss, dealing, fast, and contact. This theme indicates that from the consumers’ perspective, the main reason for the companies’ adoption of social media for B2B relationship marketing is for one-way and two-way communication, which include contacting, discussing, promoting, dealing, or
interacting with other companies in a timely manner. The most important concept in “unilateral and bilateral communication” is interact because of its proximity to the social media concept compared to other concepts. The concept reflects that the companies have been using social media to interact with other businesses. The following excerpts illustrate how this measure was taken:

[My company is] very supportive because through social media we can interact with each other. If there is no social media [and] we live apart, there [will be] no interaction.... [We use] mostly Facebook because Facebook have private message. We can share photos [and] video there. For interacting [purposes], [we] just [use] Facebook. For other purposes, [we use] Instagram and others. I do not personally use [it] to discuss problems on Instagram, only through Facebook (Buyer 8).

Another concept derived in the “unilateral and bilateral communication” theme is discuss. This concept also belongs to another theme—“information sharing” (Figure 4.4)—suggesting that the companies have been using social media with other businesses not only for communication purposes but also for information sharing, as stated by Buyer 8: “[Social media] make things simplify. [Social media simplifies] communication, when we [are] far from each other; sharing pictures [or] videos and discussing through [social media]”. Another interviewee suggested:

[The reason we are using social media is] because we can collaborate and we can know if this way is not working, we will try another means. If the viewers or [number of] “likes” are low, we can try [something else], maybe people want other kind of thing. So from that, we can discuss [on social media]. We can add value (Buyer 10).

The findings derived from the concept map in Figure 4.4 illustrate that, in addition to interact and discuss, the concept of promote also appears in the “unilateral and bilateral communication” theme. Like discuss, promote also belongs to “information sharing”. The position of promote is closer to the centre of the “unilateral and bilateral communication” theme than that of the “information sharing” theme, implying that through social media, companies are promoting mainly for communication rather than for information sharing. One such example is provided by Buyer 6 which illustrates how a company promotes through social media mainly for communication purposes:
In fact, it is a must for us to have Facebook and Instagram to promote [our] company [to the seller]. It is important. But I would say Instagram is more useful to promote the company because it is easily handled compared to Facebook, because [Facebook’s] interface is disorganised (Buyer 6).

The following comment given by Buyer 1 and Buyer 10 illustrate how companies promote through social media for information sharing:

Social media is very useful for small online retailers and maybe the big ones as well in order to promote [and] to make aware of all the product [or] services offerings… But [we have to] make sure that all information there must be accurate even though we can change it later [because] sometimes people do print screen for dispute later. With all businesses as well, we must be clear upfront or in transparent in order to do business. Online business is based on trust since viewers cannot see the product upfront. Social media does help, we can put all information and pictures there (Buyer 1).

Social media is used more for sharing information. If I want to upload story on the online portal, I will share them to my Facebook, on my Twitter and Instagram. At the same time, they will share [on] their social media too. Same goes if they share things on their social media and then I will re-tweet them on Twitter, I will re-post them on Instagram and I will re-load the picture on Facebook. News and event for that company. I am more like helping them to promote the products and their launchings (Buyer 10).

The fourth concept that appears in the “unilateral and bilateral communication” theme is dealing. The concept reflects that in addition to discussing, interacting, and promoting, companies also use social media for dealing with other companies. As Buyer 9 stated, “[We use] social media from the start, start dealing with them”. Other examples relating to the concept of dealing are:

My comment is [that social media] is a new thing, and it’s a future way of communicating. If before this, we were more towards face-to-face, more towards a conventional way, but now, everyone has smartphones, everyone has their own tablets. Everywhere, now, [there are] Wi-Fi and access to internet. With all of this, I think it is convenient for me, to deal with [customers] and do my work. Social media is a way of communicating for now and for the future (Buyer 10).
[Social media] is important since we deal based on social media. [We only use] social media and website, just those [two]. We do not do roadshow or anything else. All products, we post [them] on Facebook and Instagram (Buyer 11).

Another concept in the “unilateral and bilateral communication” theme is fast. This concept exists in two themes—“unilateral and bilateral communication” and “social media enigma”—suggesting that speed is one reason companies use social media as a communication medium and that speed reflects ambiguity in understanding the role of social media in B2B relationship marketing. Companies use social media for two reasons: for fast delivery of a message to consumers and for fast receipt of the message by consumers. Examples can be gauged from the following comments:

[Social media] is actually a knowledge management tool. A knowledge repository where everything is there but [with] less human interaction. It saves time, [we] do not have to wait. [For example] if I send an email, it [could] take two weeks for them to reply. The questions that I have are not available online. If it is available online, then it is pretty fast. I like [social media] very much because everything is there (Buyer 4).

[If] we were to have problems, [with social media] they would know fast and they would attend to my problem fast as well. Also, because of the social media, we can know the trails of previous inquiries and much more. Almost all information can be received from social media. [The company not only] have comments, [but also] notes, [and a] FAQ page on their social media…. I would say, it’s good for both of us, for both sides, to have social media to communicate and to relay information. It’s fast, it’s clean and also easy to retrieve at a later date, if we need to (Buyer 1).

The final concept that appears in “unilateral and bilateral communication” is contact. Like the concept of fast, contact also appears in more than one theme, as it belongs to both “social media enigma” and “relationship”. The concept implies that the companies have been using social media because of their perception that social media is essential for contacting other businesses, as mentioned by Buyer 6: “We [receive] many orders during festive seasons. Most of the time, [the sales] depend on what we post on our social media. If the [viewers] are interested with our package, they will contact us.” Contact also reflects that the companies have been contacting other businesses via social media for communication and relationship purposes. One such example is through emails, as explained by Buyer 11: “Sometimes [that company] sent email if
there is any promotion regarding the service. If we like it, then we will contact [the company] via social media”. Other interviewees also noted this practice:

Sometimes we do use Facebook and Instagram. For instance, I use Facebook and Instagram to promote the [seller] company’s product. If there are [viewers who are interested], they can [also] contact me. We have all the details on Facebook and they can contact the owner of the company if they have further queries (Buyer 6).

Normally, we agree to communicate at night. That is when we discuss our point of views of the companies, my company and the other company. If the company gets a project, it will contact me first. If my company get a project and the project involves printing, then I will contact [the company] (Buyer 7).

Table 4.19 presents a summary of interviewee quotes based on all the concepts in the “unilateral and bilateral communication” theme.

**Table 4.19**

**Summary of Interview Quotes relating to the “Unilateral and Bilateral Communication” Theme (Second-phase Interviews: Buyers that Currently Use Social Media)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>interact</td>
<td>[My company is] very supportive because through social media we can interact with each other. If there is no social media [and] we live apart, there [will be] no interaction... [We use] mostly Facebook because Facebook have private message. We can share photos [and] video there. For interacting [purposes], [we] just [use] Facebook. For other purposes, [we use] Instagram and others. I do not personally use [it] to discuss problems on Instagram, only through Facebook.</td>
<td>Buyer 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discuss</td>
<td>[Social media] make things simplify. Simplify in communication, when we [are] far from each other; sharing pictures [or] videos and discussing through [social media].</td>
<td>Buyer 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[The reason we are using social media] because we can collaborate and we can know if this way is not working, we will try another means. If the viewers or [number of] ‘likes’ are low, we can try [something else], maybe people want other kind of thing. So from that, we can discuss [on social media]. We can add value.</td>
<td>Buyer 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table continues...*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>promote – cont’d</td>
<td>In fact, it is a must for us to have Facebook and Instagram to promote [our] company [to the seller]. It is important. But I would say Instagram is more useful to promote the company because it is easily handled compared to Facebook, because [the Facebook’s] interface is disorganised.</td>
<td>Buyer 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(the concept also belongs to ‘information sharing’ theme)</td>
<td>Social media is very useful for small online retailers and maybe the big ones as well in order to promote [and] to make aware of all the product [or] services offerings. But [we have to] make sure that all information there must be accurate even though we can change it later [because] sometimes people do print screen for dispute later. With all businesses as well, we must be clear upfront or in transparent in order to do business. Online business is based on trust since viewers cannot see the product upfront. Social media does help, we can put all information and pictures there.</td>
<td>Buyer 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social media is used more for sharing information. If I want to upload story on the online portal, I will share them to my Facebook, on my Twitter and Instagram. At the same time, they will share [on] their social media too. Same goes if they share things on their social media and then I will retweet them on Twitter, I will repost them on Instagram and I will reload the picture on Facebook. News and event for that company. I am more like helping them to promote the products and their launchings.</td>
<td>Buyer 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dealing</td>
<td>[We use] social media from the start, start dealing with them.</td>
<td>Buyer 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My comment is [that social media] is a new thing, and it’s a future way of communicating. If before this, we were more towards face-to-face, more towards a conventional way, but now, everyone has smartphones, everyone has their own tablets. Everywhere, now, [there are] Wi-Fi and access to internet. With all of this, I think it is convenient for me, to deal with [customers] and do my work. Social media is a way of communicating for now and for the future.</td>
<td>Buyer 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table continues...*
## Table 4.19
### Summary of Interview Quotes relating to the “Unilateral and Bilateral Communication” Theme (Second-phase Interviews: Buyers that Currently Use Social Media) – Cont’d

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dealing – cont’d</td>
<td>[Social media] is important since we deals based on social media. [we only use] social media and website, just those [two]. We do not do roadshow or any else. All products, we post [them] on Facebook and Instagram.</td>
<td>Buyer 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fast</td>
<td>[Social media] is actually a knowledge management tool. A knowledge repository where everything is there but [with] less human interaction. It saves time, [we] do not have to wait. [For example] if I send an email, it [could] take two weeks for them to reply. The questions that I have are not available online. If it is available online, then it is pretty fast. I like it very much because everything is there.</td>
<td>Buyer 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contact</td>
<td>Sometimes [that company] sent email if there is any promotion regarding the service. If we like it, then we will contact [the company] via social media. Normally, we agree to communicate at night. That is when we discuss our point of views of the companies, my company and the other company. If the company gets a project, it will contact me first. If my company get a project and the project involves printing, then I will contact [the company]. Sometimes we do use Facebook and Instagram. For instance, I use Facebook and Instagram to promote the company’s product. If there are [viewers who are interested], they can contact me. We have all the details on Facebook and they can [also] contact the owner of the [seller] company if they have further queries… We [receive] many orders during festive seasons. Most of the time, [the sales] depend on what we post on our social media. If the [viewers] are interested with our package, they will contact us.</td>
<td>Buyer 11 Buyer 7 Buyer 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Developed for this research.*
ii. Information Sharing

The second important theme to emerge on the concept map is “information sharing”, represented by the pale gold circle in Figure 4.4. With six concepts (information, share, discuss, promote, communicate, and directly), this theme implies that from the consumers’ perspective, information sharing is one role of social media for B2B relationship marketing. The theme suggests that companies share information directly with other businesses through discussing, promoting, or communicating. Buyer 5 explained how companies use social media for information purposes: “I think social media is very important because most of the customers [including] the end users always try to gain the information using social media”. Other comments relating to the concept of information further explained its importance:

Other staffs can access the company’s Instagram and Facebook. We have two divisions; For Instagram, there are staffs that are in charged, and the same goes to Facebook. [They are] staffs [who] handle Facebook. But, the information on Facebook and Instagram is just the same. We do not want the customer to get different information. Usually, we upload on Instagram first, and will copy the picture or information and share [on] Facebook (Buyer 6).

[Social media is] the best way, as for my company. [When] I have information about my product, I can send them on Facebook [via] private message to them or through Whatsapp as well. So I [use] both ways, there [are] two options. If there is problem with Whatsapp, I can send it through Facebook. If Facebook has problem, I use Whatsapp (Buyer 8).

[Social media] help a lot and not just for both parties, but for other customers as well because all information can be read there.... Social media does help, we can put all information and pictures there.... Almost all information can be gotten from social media (Buyer 1).

The second concept to emerge in the “information sharing” theme is share. Buyer 9 in particular claimed that the action of sharing is essential for companies, especially when imparting information to other businesses: “I think it is very good in terms of promoting, keeping in touch, sharing [information, and] communicating. I think it is convenient to use social media”. Another interviewee provided additional examples:
Usually we use it to highlight the new products. We will directly share on social media like Facebook, in groups [messages] or pages by spreading about our new products. [Social media] is for promotion purpose. We utilise their service. We share it through Facebook, directly (Buyer 11).

Besides sharing information with other businesses, companies also share photos, videos, and even followers. Buyer 8 and Buyer 9 described how such conveyance was performed through private messages on Facebook:

[We use] mostly Facebook because Facebook have private message. We can share photos [and] video there. For interacting [purposes, we] just [use] Facebook. For other purposes, [we use] Instagram and others. I do not personally use [it] to discuss problems on Instagram, only through Facebook (Buyer 8).

It cuts the cost, rather than paying for television [advertisement]. The company has more followers than mine. From its followers, I get mine. Not [to] take away its followers, but [to] share the same followers. We [sell] different products, so I can use its followers to help grow my company (Buyer 6).

The third and the fourth concepts that emerged in the “information sharing” theme are *discuss* and *promote*, which appear not only in the “information sharing” theme but also in the “unilateral and bilateral communication” theme.

Besides *information, share, discuss, and promote*, the concept of *communicate* also appears in the “information sharing”. The presence of *communicate* implies that the companies have been using social media to share information or communicate with other businesses, as suggested in the following comments:

Like I said, [social media is beneficial] if I have information [or] if I want to send pictures or videos. For example [with] Facebook, the benefit is when we communicate the information I have shared, they can keep them on their desktop or smartphone. So, [social media] is important (Buyer 8).

The good thing about social media is [that] we can communicate easily and can upload anywhere [or anytime] within 24 hours. We do not have to wait for tomorrow. It [can be done] with just a smartphone (Buyer 10).

I think every service provider [and] their consumers should communicate this way, should have this option to communicate other than call centre or emails. I use social
media mainly to communicate with my customers when they [have] inquiries; whether or not I have stock, have this particular design and have shipped their order and many more... [Social media is] self-sufficient for customers. I would say that social media is the easiest way to communicate and fastest [way] as well (Buyer 1).

The final concept to emerge in the “information sharing” theme is directly, which suggests that the companies have been going directly to social media when sharing information with other businesses, such as information relating to sales items, as the following comments imply:

Usually we use [social media] to highlight the new products. We will directly share on social media like Facebook, in groups [messages] or pages to spread about our new products. The [reasons] are for promotion purposes [and] utilising their service. We just share it through Facebook, directly (Buyer 11).

There is this company [which] posted its product, but cannot interact [with] buyers [and] had difficulty to interact with the seller via the [e-commerce] page. [The company] have to go through another application like Whatsapp, Instagram and others. But, [social media like] Carousell is different. Buyers can interact directly through the picture posted, comment directly, ask directly regarding the product. For interacting, [we] mostly [use] Facebook because Facebook have private message, so it’s private. From there we can share photos [and] video (Buyer 8).

Table 4.20 presents a summary of interviewee quotes based on all the concepts in “information sharing”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>information</td>
<td>I think social media is very important because most of the customers [including] the end users always try to gain the information using social media.</td>
<td>Buyer 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.20
Summary of Interview Quotes relating to “Information Sharing” Theme
(Second-phase Interviews: Buyers that Currently Use Social Media)
### Table 4.20
Summary of Interview Quotes relating to “Information Sharing” Theme
(Second-phase Interviews: Buyers that Currently Use Social Media) – Cont’d

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Other staffs can access [our] company’s Instagram and Facebook. We have two divisions; For Instagram, there are staffs that are in charged, and the same goes to Facebook. [There are] staff [who] handle Facebook. But, the information on Facebook and Instagram is just the same. We do not want the customer to get different information. Usually, we upload on Instagram first, and will copy the picture or information and share [on] Facebook.</td>
<td>Buyer 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cont’d</td>
<td>[Social media is] the best way, as for my company. [When] I have information about my product, I can send them on Facebook [via] private message to them or through Whatsapp [application] as well. So I [use] both ways, there [are] two options. If the is problem with Whatsapp [application], I can send it through Facebook. If Facebook has problem, I use Whatsapp [application].</td>
<td>Buyer 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[Social media] help a lot and not just for both parties, but for other customers as well because all information can be read there... Social media does help, we can put all information and pictures there... Almost all information can be gotten from social media.</td>
<td>Buyer 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share</td>
<td>I think it is very good in terms of promoting, keeping in touch, sharing [information, and] communicating. I think it is convenient to use social media.</td>
<td>Buyer 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Usually we use it to highlight the new products. We will directly share on social media like Facebook, in groups [messages] or pages by spreading about our new products. [Social media] is for promotion purpose. We utilise their service. We share it through Facebook, directly.</td>
<td>Buyer 11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table continues...*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>share – cont’d</td>
<td>[We use] mostly Facebook because Facebook have private message. We can share photos [and] video there. For interacting [putposes, we] just [use] Facebook. For other purposes, [we use] Instagram and others. I do not personally use [it] to discuss problems on Instagram, only through Facebook.</td>
<td>Buyer 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It cuts the cost, rather than paying for television [advertisement]. The company has more followers than [my company]. From its followers, I get mine. Not [to] take away its followers, but [to] share the same followers. We [sell] different products, so I can use its followers to help grow my company.</td>
<td>Buyer 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discuss (the concept also belongs to ‘unilateral and bilateral communication’ theme)</td>
<td>[Social media] make things simplify. Simplify in communication, when we [are] far from each other; sharing pictures [or] videos and discussing through [social media].</td>
<td>Buyer 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[The reason we are using social media] because we can collaborate and we can know if this way is not working, we will try another means. If the viewers or [number of] ‘likes’ are low, we can try [something else], maybe people want other kind of thing. So from that, we can discuss [on social media]. We can add value.</td>
<td>Buyer 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>promote (the concept also belongs to ‘unilateral and bilateral communication’ theme)</td>
<td>In fact, it is a must for us to have Facebook and Instagram to promote [our] company [to the seller]. It is important. But I would say Instagram is more useful to promote the company because it is easily handled compared to Facebook, because [the Facebook’s] interface is disorganised.</td>
<td>Buyer 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept</td>
<td>Quotes</td>
<td>Interviewee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>promote – cont’d (the concept also belongs to ‘unilateral and bilateral communication’ theme)</td>
<td>Social media is very useful for small online retailers and maybe the big ones as well in order to promote [and] to make aware of all the product [or] services offerings. But [we have to] make sure that all information there must be accurate even though we can change it later [because] sometimes people do print screen for dispute later. With all businesses as well, we must be clear upfront or in transparent in order to do business. Online business is based on trust since viewers cannot see the product upfront. Social media does help, we can put all information and pictures there.</td>
<td>Buyer 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communicate</td>
<td>Social media is used more for sharing information. If I want to upload story on the online portal, I will share them to my Facebook, on my Twitter and Instagram. At the same time, they will share [on] their social media too. Same goes if they share things on their social media and then I will retweet them on Twitter, I will repost them on Instagram and I will reload the picture on Facebook. News and event for that company. I am more like helping them to promote the products and their launchings.</td>
<td>Buyer 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Like I said, [social media is beneficial] if I have information [or] if I want to send pictures or videos. For example [with] Facebook, the benefit is when we communicate the information I have shared, they can keep them on their desktop or smartphone. So, [social media] is important.</td>
<td>Buyer 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The good thing about social media is [that] we can communicate easily and can upload anywhere [or anytime] within 24 hours. We do not have to wait for tomorrow. It [can be done] with just a smartphone.</td>
<td>Buyer 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 4.20

**Summary of Interview Quotes relating to “Information Sharing” Theme**

*(Second-phase Interviews: Buyers that are Currently Using Social Media) – Cont’d*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>communicate – cont’d</td>
<td>I would say, it is good for both sides to have social media to communicate and then to relay information. It is fast, it is clean and also easy to retrieve [information at] a later date if we need to. I think every service provider [and] their consumers should communicate this way, should have this option to communicate other than call center or emails. I use social media mainly to communicate with my customers when they [have] inquiries; whether or not I have stock, have this particular design and have shipped their order and many more... [Social media is] self-sufficient for customers. I would say that social media is the easiest way to communicate and fastest [way] as well.</td>
<td>Buyer 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>directly</td>
<td>Usually we use [social media] to highlight the new products. We will directly share on social media like Facebook, in groups [messages] or pages to spread about our new products. The [reasons] are for promotion purposes [and] utilising their service. We just share it through Facebook, directly.</td>
<td>Buyer 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>direct</td>
<td>There is this company [which] posted its product, but cannot interact [with] buyers [and] had difficulty to interact with the seller via the [e-commerce] page. [The company] have to go through another application like Whatsapp, Instagram and others. But, [social media like] Carousell is different. Buyers can interact directly through the picture posted, comment directly, ask directly regarding the product. For interacting, [we] mostly [use] Facebook because Facebook have private message, so it’s private. From there we can share photos [and] video.</td>
<td>Buyer 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Developed for this research.*

### iii. Social Media Enigma

The next salient theme for the role of social media in B2B relationship marketing is “social media enigma”, represented by the green circle in Figure 4.4. Like the third salient theme in the preceding concept map (Figure 4.3), the “social media enigma” theme reflects that companies do not fully understand their reasons for using social media for B2B relationships. Companies believe that using social media is important, but the precise reasons for use remain unclear. The difference between
“social media enigma” in Figure 4.3 and that in Figure 4.4 is that the former reflects the role of social media from the sellers’ perspective whereas the latter illustrates from the buyers’ perspective.

The colour heat of “social media enigma” indicates that it is the third most important theme among all the themes in Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4. However, even though “social media enigma” appears to be the third most salient theme in both concept maps, the size of “social media enigma” in Figure 4.3 is larger than that in Figure 4.4. Additionally, about half of the “social media enigma” theme circle in Figure 4.4 overlaps with other themes’ circles, whereas only small percentage of the “social media enigma” theme circle in Figure 4.3 overlaps with other themes’ circles. These differences indicate that ambiguity surrounding the reasons for using social media in B2B relationship marketing is greater when viewed from the sellers’ perspective. The theme “social media enigma” in Figure 4.4 consists of three concepts: fast, perceived need to use, and contact.

The first concept that emerges in the “social media enigma” theme is that of perceived need to use. This concept indicates that buyers believe that there are strong needs for using social media, such as to keep up with the latest trends or as a contingency platform, even though they have yet to fully understand the reasons for social media use. The following excerpts illustrate how the companies have been using social media owing to a perceived need to use:

There are [other] things that I need to do with my hands, and at the same time I need to update [on social media]. Yes, every time. Even a selfie\textsuperscript{2} is a work. We need that. We need that to show that this company is active. People would see how active you are. [Customers may question] whether this company is still alive, [or] whether other companies stopped because sometimes they start and they stop. It is a challenge to update and update and update. I tried my very best to attract [other companies] to use the [social media] (Buyer 4).

The frequency [of using social media] depends on where I am. If I am close to [the company and its employees] then I will not using it. If I am far from them, and there is something I need to tell them, [then] it will be frequent. [Also, it] depends on the

\textsuperscript{2} A selfie is a photograph that you take of yourself, usually with a mobile phone. Selfies are often published using social media (Cambridge University Press, 2015).
problem. If there are certain things I need to clear up with them, I [may] be using it the whole week (Buyer 8).

[The reason we are using social media] is because it is trending. This is one of the biggest platform, [we] can sell [our] product, [and we] can increase [our] sales. In Malaysia right now, everybody [has] smartphones.... Most of them [have] their own social media account.... Recently, like two years ago, Malaysians slowly [began to accept] buying product online. They slowly trust the companies who do online business (Buyer 12).

The second and the third concepts in the theme of “social media enigma” are fast and contact. As mentioned, these concepts appear in more than one theme. The fast concept not only appears in “social media enigma” but also in “unilateral and bilateral communication”, indicating that speed is one of the reasons companies use social media as a communication medium, and also reflects the ambiguity in understanding social medial role for B2B relationship marketing. To further illustrate, some sellers use social media for fast communication with their sellers, whereas other buyers use social media as a knowledge management tool and do not truly comprehend the main role of social media; that is, for connection purposes. Companies have been using the social media for two reasons: for fast delivery of messages to consumers and for fast receipt of the message by consumers.

The concept of contact, on the other hand, appears in three themes: “social media enigma”, “unilateral and bilateral communication”, and “relationship”. The concept’s presence means that the companies’ adoption of social media stemmed from their perception that social media is essential for contacting other businesses, and that companies contact other businesses via social media for communication and relationship purposes. For instance, whilst some buyers use social media as a platform for their viewers and sellers’ viewers to connect with each other, the findings illustrate that some buyers consider sales to be the main priority, rather than using social media for interaction or as a relationship platform with their viewers.

Table 4.21 presents a summary of interviewee quotes based on all the concepts in “social media enigma” theme.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>perceived need to use</td>
<td>There are [other] things that I need to do with my hands, and at the same time I need to update [on social media]. Yes, every time. Even a <em>selfie</em> is a work. We need that. We need that to show that this company is active. People would see how active you are. [Customers may question] whether [or not] this company is still alive, [or] whether other companies stopped because sometimes they start and they stop. It is a challenge to update and update and update. I tried my very best to attract [other companies] to use the [social media].</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fast (the concept also belongs to 'unilateral and bilateral communication' theme)</td>
<td>The frequency [of using social media] depends on where I am. If I am close to [the company and its employees] then I will not using it. If I am far from them, and there is something I need to tell them, [then] it will be frequent. [Also], [it] depends on the problem. If there are certain things I need to clear up with them, I [may] be using it the whole week.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[The reason we are using social media] is because it is trending. This is one of the biggest platform, [we] can sell [our] product, [and we] can increase [our] sales. In Malaysia right now, everybody [has] smartphones... Most of them [have] their own social media account... Recently, like two years ago, Malaysians slowly accepting buying product online. They slowly trust the companies who do online business.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[Social media] is actually a knowledge management tool. A knowledge repository where everything is there but [with] less human interaction. It saves time, [we] do not have to wait. [For example] if I send an email, it [could] take two weeks for them to reply. The questions that I have are not available online. If it is available online, then it is pretty fast. I like it very much because everything is there.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[If we were to have problems, [with social media] they would know fast and they would attend to my problem fast as well. Also, because of the social media, we can know the trails of previous inquiries and much more. Almost all information can be received from social media. [The company not only] have comments, [but also] notes, [and] FAQ page on their social media.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table continues...*
Table 4.21
Summary of Interview Quotes relating to the “Social Media Enigma” Theme
(Second-phase Interviews: Buyers that Currently Use Social Media) – Cont’d

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[the concept also belongs to ‘unilateral and bilateral communication’ and ‘relationship’ themes]</td>
<td>Sometimes [that company] sent email if there is any promotion regarding the service. If we like it, then we will contact [the company via social media].</td>
<td>Buyer 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Normally, we agree to communicate at night. That is when we discuss our point of views of the companies, my company and the other company. If the company gets a project, it will contact me first. If my company get a project and the project involves printing, then I will contact [the company].</td>
<td>Buyer 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes we do use Facebook and Instagram. For instance, I use Facebook and Instagram to promote the company’s product. If there are [viewers who are interested], they can contact me. We have all the details on Facebook and they can [also] contact the owner of the [seller] company if they have further queries… We [receive] many orders during festive seasons. Most of the time, [the sales] depend on what we post on our social media. If the [viewers] are interested with our package, they will contact us.</td>
<td>Buyer 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Developed for this research.

In addition to the themes of “unilateral and bilateral communication”, “information sharing”, and “social media enigma”, another theme that appears on the concept map is the “relationship” theme (Figure 4.4), suggesting that from the buyers’ perspective, relationship is also one role of social media for B2B relationship marketing. The theme is represented by the light blue circle on the concept map. On the basis of the colour heat, “relationship” appears to be the fourth salient theme in terms of its relevance to the research question. Unlike the “relationship” theme in the concept map in Figure 4.3, the “relationship” theme in Figure 4.4 appears to be less salient when compared to other themes within the respective concept maps, implying that relationship appears to be less important as a social media role when viewed from the buyers’ perspective.
iv. Relationship

The “relationship” theme consists of three concepts: relationship, contact, and marketing. These three concepts suggest that companies use social media for relationship purposes, such as for contacting and marketing to other businesses. Buyer 1 in particular claims that the use of social media improves his store’s relationship with other companies: “[Social media] improves our store’s relationship with that company. [If] we were to have problems and [if] they would know fast, they would attend to [our] problem fast as well”. Other interviewees made the following comments:

Usually it’s quite good to communicate [with] each other... we will upload on the social media like Twitter, Instagram, or others. The relationship has become less client [oriented and] more to friendship [oriented] now. We get closer each day. When we are close, it’s easier to work with [each other] (Buyer 10).

For me, it is very appropriate [to use social media] because I have been using social media at the beginning of my relationship with the company, before the relationship was established. It seems that, with the presence of the social media, I manage to interact with the company.... For me, there is nothing wrong [with] using social media. Moreover it can strengthen company’s relationships, not only the relationship between business-to-business, but also between business-to-customer. Although for me, social media may seem to look...less formal compared to methods like email, telephones or face-to-face, but it can still be used (Buyer 3).

The second concept to appear in the “relationship” theme is contact, which also appeared in “social media enigma” and “unilateral and bilateral communication”. Contact indicates that the companies adopted social media owing to their perception that the use of social media is essential for contacting other businesses, and that the companies have been contacting other businesses via social media for communication and relationship purposes. Such examples were illustrated earlier when reporting the findings of the “unilateral and bilateral communication” theme.

The last concept in the “relationship” theme is marketing. This concept implies that the companies have been using social media for relationship purposes, particularly to market to other businesses, as mentioned by Buyer 10: “To me, social media is the best form [of] marketing [for] every aspect”. Another buyer agreed:
Yes, definitely [social media is important]. Sometimes we [have] an event, a small event, like launching [another company’s] product in our shop. It will promote and market, and the promotion [can be seen by] our shop [via] our Instagram account. This is more effective. We can cater [to] buyers like their followers, and also we [can increase our] marketing and promotion at the same time (Buyer 12).

Table 4.22 presents a summary of interviewee quotes based on the concepts in “relationship” theme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>relationship</td>
<td>[Social media] improves our store’s relationship with that company. [If] we were to have problems and [if] they would know fast, they would attend to [our] problem fast as well.</td>
<td>Buyer 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Usually it’s quite good to communicate [with] each other... we will upload on the social media like Twitter, Instagram, or others. The relationship has become less client [oriented], [but] more to friendship [oriented] now. We get closer each day. When we are close, it’s easier to work with [each other].</td>
<td>Buyer 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>For me, it is very appropriate [to use social media] because I have been using social media at the beginning of my relationship with the company, before the relationship was established. It seems that, with the presence of the social media, I manage to interact with the company... For me, there is nothing wrong [with] using social media. Moreover it can strengthen company’s relationships, not only the relationship between business-to-business, but also between business-to-customer. Although for me, social media may seem to look like less formal compared to methods like email, telephones or face-to-face, but it can still be used.</td>
<td>Buyer 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table continues...
### Table 4.22
Summary of Interview Quotes relating to the “Relationship” Theme
(Second-phase Interviews: Buyers that Currently Use Social Media) – Cont’d

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>contact</td>
<td>Sometimes [that company] sent email if there is any promotion regarding the service. If we like it, then we will contact [the company via social media].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Normally, we agree to communicate at night. That is when we discuss our point of views of the companies, my company and the other company. If the company gets a project, it will contact me first. If my company get a project and the project involves printing, then I will contact [the company].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes we do use Facebook and Instagram. For instance, I use Facebook and Instagram to promote the company’s product. If there are [viewers who are interested], they can contact me. We have all the details on Facebook and they can [also] contact the owner of the [seller] company if they have further queries... We [receive] many orders during festive seasons. Most of the time, [the sales] depend on what we post on our social media. If the [viewers] are interested with our package, they will contact us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To me, social media is the best form [of] marketing [for] every aspect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes, definitely [social media is important]. Sometimes we [have] an event, a small event, like launching [other company’s] product in our shop. It will promote and market, and the promotion [can be seen by] our shop [via] our Instagram account. This is more effective. We can cater buyers like their followers, and also we [can increase our] marketing and promotion at the same time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Developed for this research.

v. Efficiency

In addition to “unilateral and bilateral communication”, “information sharing”, “social media enigma”, and “relationship”, the concept map generated a theme called “efficiency”, represented by the dark blue circle in Figure 4.3. Compared to most
themes on the concept map, the location of “efficiency” is distant from social media, implying that efficiency has a less important role for social media and suggesting that “efficiency” is less important than other themes on the concept map, and in fact appears to be the least salient theme in terms of its relevance to the research question.

The first concept to emerge in the “efficiency” theme is feedback. This concept suggests that feedback contributes to the efficiency of using social media for B2B relationship marketing. One example is how a company uses feedback provided through social media, as mentioned by Buyer 1: “For my online business, other than using their tools, I also set up a Facebook page. From there, I give my feedback through my online store’s page which is on their Facebook page.” Buyer 1 further added:

After I’ve…used the company’s tool...I feel compelled to giving feedback. I just go to the company’s Facebook page, then comment about how [the company’s] website is very easy to use, easy to set up, does not impose a very high fee for us, the small online retailers. I hope that my comments [on the company’s Facebook page] would bring more customers to the company (Buyer 1).

The second concept appearing in the “relationship” theme is easy, implying that easy is an attribute that contributes to the efficiency of using social media, as suggested in the following comments.

It’s easier [with social media]. [It] is easy for us to collaborate without having to meet. [Via] social media, we can do everything without having to [meet] face-to-face. It saves time, saves energy, and we can do other work at the same time (Buyer 10).

I do think that there are benefits of [using social media]. Some [are] for networking purposes. It is going to be easy for our existing customers to promote [us], the agents, and also our products to other new customers or beneficiary. [It is also beneficial for] our customers to keep in touch, know where to go, and how to find us if they couldn’t find us directly through phones or messages (Buyer 13).

I would say, it is good for both sides to have social media to communicate and then to relay information. It is fast, it is clean and also easy to retrieve [information at] a later date if we need to. I think every service provider [and its] customers should communicate this way.... This would help a lot and not just for both parties, but for other customers as well because all information can be read there (Buyer 1).
The last concept in the “efficiency” theme is cost, implying that cost saving contributes to social media efficiency for B2B relationship marketing, as mentioned in the following comments:

[We will] most likely [use social media] frequently because we can get more coverage and exposure at the same time. We will help each other. I will promote that company [and] it will promote me in return. It is like a win-win situation. It is free. It is better to use things that could save time, save energy, money and [much more] (Buyer 10).

Yes, because we have seen [the benefit]. We have once used flyers and banners but those did not work. Sometimes, we even sent out 3000 flyers [and] only two to three person gave us a call. But through social media, we get nice feedback and free advertising. People hype the news, without cost. Cost down! It really cut the cost! (Buyer 11).

The summary of interviewee quotes based on all the concepts in the “efficiency” theme is presented in Table 4.23.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>feedback</td>
<td>For my online business, other than using their tools, I also set up a Facebook page. From there, I give my feedback through my online store’s page which is on their Facebook page.</td>
<td>Buyer 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>After I’ve had used the company’s tool... I feel compelled to giving feedback. I just go to the company’s Facebook page, then comment about how [the company’s] website is very easy to use, easy to set up, does not impose a very high fee for us, the small online retailers. I hope that my comments [on the company’s Facebook page] would bring more customers to the company.</td>
<td>Buyer 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>easy</td>
<td>It’s easier [with social media]. [It] is easy for us to collaborate without having to meet. [Via] social media, we can do everything without having to [meet] face-to-face. It saves time, saves energy, and we can do other work at the same time.</td>
<td>Buyer 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table continues...
Table 4.23
Summary of Interview Quotes relating to the “Efficiency” Theme
(Second-phase Interviews: Buyers that Currently Use Social Media) – Cont’d

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>easy – cont’d</td>
<td>I do think that there are benefits of [using social media]. Some of it [are] for networking purposes. It is going to be easy for our existing customers to promote [us], the agents, and also our products to other new customers or beneficiary. [It is also beneficial for] our customers to keep in touch, know where to go, and how to find us if they couldn’t find us directly through phones or messages.</td>
<td>Buyer 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I would say, it is good for both sides to have social media to communicate and then to relay information. It is fast, it is clean and also easy to retrieve [information at] a later date if we need to. I think every service provider [and] their customers should communicate this way... This would help a lot and not just for both parties, but for other customers as well because all information can be read there.</td>
<td>Buyer 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cost</td>
<td>[We will] most likely [use social media] frequently because we can get more coverage and exposure at the same time. We will help each other. I will promote that company [and] it will promote me in return. It is like a win-win situation. It is free. It is better to use things that could save time, save energy, money and [much more].</td>
<td>Buyer 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes, because we have seen [the benefit]. We have once used flyers and banners but those did not work. Sometimes, we even sent out 3000 flyers [and] only 2 to 3 person gave us a call. But through social media, we get nice feedback and free advertising. People hype the news, without cost. Cost down! It really cut the cost!</td>
<td>Buyer 11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Developed for this research.
Table 4.24 presents a summary of all themes and concepts derived from second-phase interviews.

### Table 4.24
Summary of Themes and Concepts
(Second-phase Interviews: Buyers that Currently Use Social Media)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Unilateral and Bilateral Communication | • interact  
• discuss  
• promote  
• dealing  
• fast  
• contact |
| Information Sharing           | • information  
• share  
• discuss  
• promote  
• communicate  
• directly |
| Social Media Enigma           | • perceived need to use  
• fast  
• contact |
| Relationship                  | • relationship  
• contact  
• marketing |
| Efficiency                    | • feedback  
• easy  
• cost |

Source: Developed for this research.

### 4.6 Conclusion

This chapter began by presenting the interviewees’ background, followed by the analysis of the research findings. Two concept maps were derived from the interview transcriptions: one from the first-phase interviews and another one from the second-phase interviews. Findings from the first-phase interviews resulted in a concept map based on seller companies and findings from the second-phase interviews resulted in a concept map based on buyer companies. Both seller and buyer companies are currently
using social media for B2B relationship marketing purposes. Chapter 5 will discuss the findings in relation to the research objectives, principal research question, and research subquestions.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

“When you reach the end of what you should know, you will be at the beginning of what you should sense.”

(Kahlil Gibran)

5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 presented the descriptive analysis of the interviewees’ backgrounds and the research findings for the first and second research subquestions (RQ1 and RQ2). This chapter presents an additional synthesis of the research subquestions, answers the main research question, and addresses the research objective. Following this introduction, Section 5.2 begins by outlining a synthesis of research findings that answers the second and third research subquestions (RQ2 and RQ3). The section then answers the main research question and addresses the objective of this study. Next, the conclusions drawn from the current research are presented, followed by a discussion of implications of the research from both theoretical (Section 5.3) and managerial perspectives (Section 5.4). Finally, this chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study in Section 5.5 and recommendations for future research in Section 5.6. The outline of this chapter is detailed in Figure 5.1 below.
5.2 Discussion

As detailed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4, this study explored the role of social media in B2B relationship marketing, guided by one primary research question and three research subquestions. The primary research question is “What is the role of social media in B2B relationship marketing in organisations that use social media?” The associated subquestions are:

RQ1: How do businesses operationalise social media in B2B relationship marketing?

RQ2: For what purpose do businesses use social media in B2B relationship marketing?

RQ3: How consistent are the perceptions of sellers and buyers engaging with social media in B2B relationship marketing?
Chapter 4 presented the findings for RQ1 and RQ2. This chapter further analyses the findings of RQ1 and RQ2, and answers RQ3 which also offers a discussion of the findings in the context of the overarching research question.

5.2.1 Social Media in B2B Relationship Marketing

This study explores the role of social media in relationship marketing among B2B companies. Based on previous literature, social media is adopted slowly by B2B companies and the reasons for slow social media adoption by B2B companies (Michaelidou et al., 2011) include lack of understanding of the possibilities of social media, difficulties in adopting new mental models and practices needed for the adoption, and lack of evidence of similar cases using social media (Kärkkäinen, et al., 2010). Despite that social media adoption among B2B companies is slower than that of B2C companies (Kärkkäinen, et al., 2010), and that traditionally social media have been used more often and more extensively by B2C companies than B2B companies (Katona & Sarvary, 2014), this paper clearly demonstrates that, in relationship marketing, not only B2C companies but the B2B companies are also utilising various social media platforms for many relationship marketing –related reasons. This contributes to the existing social media and Web 2.0 literatures, because other than few academic studies focusing on case studies and examples (i.e. Steelmaster, 2012), there are no found earlier academic literature on the utilisation of social media in the B2B context which evaluates in a more comprehensive way; from the perspectives of B2B seller and buyer companies.

B2B Relationship Marketing

Research shows that companies’ marketing strategies are becoming less and less traditional transaction-oriented, and instead more relationship-oriented (Eyuboglu & Buja, 2007; Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Vargo & Lusch, 2008). The existence of digital environments contributes to better Internet marketing in the B2B sector. For example, it can decrease communication costs between B2B companies (Sharma, 2002; Walters, 2008), and it can provide a source of information for B2B companies, their
brands, products and services (Berthon, Lane, Pitt, & Watson, 1998; Welling & White, 2006), which then create awareness about the B2B companies, increases their brand recognition, and improves buyers’ purchasing intentions (Drèze & Hussherr, 2003; Manchanda, Dubé, Goh, & Chintagunta, 2006). Additionally, Internet marketing among B2B companies contribute to an increase in sales by existing (Sharma, 2002) and prospective buyers (Welling & White, 2006), and provide platforms for seller-buyer interaction and relationships (Hennig-Thurau, et al. 2010). Despite the many benefits of the digital environment and Internet marketing towards B2B companies, there are limited studies relating to the role of social media, especially in relationship marketing among B2B companies.

Existing literature indicates that there is limited research on social media in the B2B environment and that there is a significant gap between the actual and potential use of social media among B2B companies (Jussila et al., 2011). This study is novel because not only does it discover how B2B companies utilise social media but also what role social media plays in B2B relationship marketing by exploring the issue from a dual perspective: the seller and buyer of B2B companies. Additionally, these B2B companies which utilise social media in relationship marketing are represented by different types of industries (i.e. fashion, oil and gas, e-commerce, finance, education) with different business logistics, and ranging from small to large companies. As such, this exploratory social media study is somewhat extensive for the B2B sector.

For this study, the B2B context was chosen because the B2B environment is different in many ways to that of the B2C environment (Gillin and Schwartzman, 2011) and there have been very limited academic studies within the B2B context (Jussila, et al., 2011). Concerning the reasoning, the researcher realised that there is a clear and strong need to explore the social media role in the B2B environment, despite the fact that some of the social media role in the B2C environment might be overlapping with the B2B environment (Jussila, et al., 2013). Furthermore, within the limited social media studies in the B2B environment, most have only discussed social media within the broader topic of marketing, thus, there is a clear need for specific relationship marketing-related research.
The B2B environment is different to the B2C environment in the sense that B2C companies are generally more transactional than that of B2B companies whereas B2B companies are likely to be more relational than that of B2C companies (Webster, 1992), making social media a more relevant area of B2B relationship marketing study. As the economic value of social media for marketing actions becoming more visible, B2B companies are slowly adopting social media as one of their marketing strategies (Salo, et al., 2013). Yet, it is apparent that there is limited current academic research on social media, especially studies focusing on social media overall as opposed to studies on the specific type of social media (e.g. corporate blogs, social networking sites, and virtual worlds). According to Salo, et al., (2013), B2B companies are gradually using different combinations of social media to influence their buyers, and buyers are slowly using different social media combinations to aid them in their business tasks. As such, exploring social media overall gives broad implications to knowledge and practices of B2B relationship marketing.

Web 2.0 and Social Media

While taking a broad perspective of relationship marketing, the focus of this study is on social media - an interactive platform which provides a medium for relationship marketing among B2B companies. For this research, social media was chosen as a relationship marketing platform because social media facilitates and enhances social interaction between B2B sellers and buyers, by allowing B2B companies to cultivate personalised, two-way interaction and relationships between them (Kho, 2008). Hanna, Rohm, and Crittenden (2011) stated that social media contributes to Web transition, from an information platform to a platform of influence. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 2, there has been a shift from what was known as the Web 1.0 era to Web 2.0 era, which is a multidimensional and more interactive web (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2009).

Due to its interactive characteristic, the term “Web 2.0” has often been used to define social media by many researchers (i.e. Weinberg and Pehlican, 2011; Palmer and Koeneg-Lewis, 2009; Levy, 2009; Reigner, 2007). However, Kaplan and Haenlein (2009) suggest that the term “Web 2.0” was not originally meant to describe the new transformation era of the Internet, but was acquired later on after the web
transition. As such, for the purpose of this study, Web 2.0 is defined as a platform which offers development and evolution for social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Parallel with the definitions by Constantidines and Fountain (2008), the term “social media” is defined as media with social characteristics such as participation, conversation, seamless, open, and communal whereas the term “Web 2.0” is described as the digital communication platform.

For this study, social media referred to the use of all types of social media, including social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Despite the rising number of companies experimenting with social media, and the increasing number of scholarly social media-related articles, the adoption of social media is still considered slow in B2B companies’ marketing strategies (Michalelidou, et al., 2011) and in fact completely new to many B2B companies (Jussila, et al., 2011). According to Scott (2010) and Thomas and Barlow (2011), there are many new marketing strategies and skills which are required to be learned by companies in order to fully leverage social media utilisation. Many of the best practices used in traditional media are likely to remain effective in the social media domain, however, some of the practices may require adaptation (Freberg, 2012). Hence, this study explores, from the dual perspectives of the B2B sellers and buyers, the operationalisation of social media, and the role of social media in B2B relationship marketing.

i. Social Media Platforms

In the B2B environment, there are many social media platforms used by the sellers and buyers. The findings of this study illustrate that seller companies use Facebook more often than they use other social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, LinkedIn or blogs. The findings also illustrate that some sellers use other social media platforms (such as blog, Youtube, LinkedIn), other than the three most commonly used social media platforms in Malaysia (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram). While the findings show that all sellers use Facebook for B2B interaction with their buyers, the overall social media use varies with the seller. Some sellers rely solely on Facebook as a social media platform while other sellers use more than one platform. The findings also show that in addition to the publicly known social media platforms (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, LinkedIn), a closed social
media platform (by invitation only), “Linx”, is used by one seller when interacting with its joint ventures (Seller 9).

Like sellers, all buyers use Facebook for B2B interaction with their sellers whereas slightly more than one-third of the buyers use Twitter and/or Instagram. Another similarity of the findings relating to social media platforms is that for both buyers and sellers, after Facebook, the two most commonly used social media by the companies in the B2B relationship environment are Twitter and Instagram. Like some sellers, certain buyers also use other social media platforms (such as blog), other than the three most commonly used social media platforms in Malaysia (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram).

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), there are hundreds of examples of social media which belong to different media types. These various types of social media can be further classified in terms of 1) social presence or media richness, and 2) self-presentation or self-disclosure (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), as shown in Table 5.1. For instance, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube and LinkedIn belong in the social networking sites category. Based on this study, Linx is an example of a business networking site, used by a seller company when interacting with its joint-venture buyer company. The findings from this study also illustrate that all the blogs used by B2B companies interviewed are company-sponsored blogs with most of the blogs linked to their company-sponsored help page. Interestingly, no company either uses or has its own company-sponsored cause/help sites.
Table 5.1

Classification of B2B Social Media Platforms
by Social Presence/Media Richness and Self-presentation/Self-disclosure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Presence/Media Richness</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>- User-sponsored Blogs/Micro-blogs</td>
<td>- Social Networking Sites*</td>
<td>- Virtual Social Worlds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Company-sponsored Websites/Blogs*</td>
<td>- Invitation-only Social Networking Sites</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Company-sponsored Cause/Help Sites*</td>
<td>- Business Networking Sites*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- News Delivery Sites</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>- Collaborative Websites</td>
<td>- Creativity Work Sharing Sites</td>
<td>- Virtual Game Worlds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Social Bookmarking Sites</td>
<td>- Open Source of Software Communities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Podcasts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Educational Materials Sharing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Social media platforms used by B2B companies interviewed during this study.

Source: Developed for this study based on Kaplan & Haenlein (2010); Kietzmann, et al., (2011), Mangold & Faulds (2009).

With respect to social presence and media richness, B2B companies interviewed during this study utilise social media platforms such as company-sponsored websites/blogs, and company-sponsored cause/help sites, as these types of social media are often text-based and thus allow for a comparatively simple exchange. At the next level, social media platforms with higher social media presence and media richness are social networking sites and business networking sites. All B2B seller and buyer companies interviewed in this study utilise social networking sites and only one seller company utilises its own business networking sites when interacting for relationship marketing purposes. These types of social media enable the sharing of pictures, videos, and other forms of media in addition to text-based communication.
Based on this study, no B2B company uses social media with the highest level of social presence and media richness - social media that replicates three-dimensional face-to-face interactions in a virtual environment (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), such as virtual social worlds and virtual game worlds. Research shows that participants who use virtual social worlds for relationship purposes are mainly represented among more recent users (Hassouneh, 2014), yet, the findings from this study illustrate that no sellers nor buyers of B2B companies utilise virtual social worlds for relationship marketing purposes. One possible reason for sellers and buyers of B2B companies not utilising social media with the highest level of social presence and media richness is because social virtual worlds is not the best social media platform for relationship purposes. Even though “seeking relationship” appeared to be one of the driving factors which motivate the utilisation of social virtual worlds, it was not the strongest driver, ranking fifth after friendship, escape, role playing, and achievement (Hassouneh, 2014).

From the perspective of self-presentation and self-disclosure, all B2B companies interviewed during this study utilise social media platforms with a higher level of self-presentation and self-disclosure (which are company-sponsored websites/blogs, company-sponsored cause/help sites, social networking sites, and business networking sites), consistent with the characteristics of social media which promotes participation, conversation, and openness amongst its users. The findings from this study also illustrate that no B2B company utilises any social media platform with a lower level of self-presentation and self-disclosure. As such, based on the findings from this study, there is no major variation between the seller and buyer of B2B companies in the choices of social media platforms used for relationship marketing purposes.

ii. Frequently Used Hardware

In terms of frequently used hardware, the findings illustrate that there are no major differences between the choices of hardware used by sellers and buyers of B2B companies. The findings from this study illustrate that seller companies use a smartphone most frequently, compared to other devices such as a desktop, laptop, or tablet. Research by Moorman (2015) shows that, from 2014 to 2015, the average size of overall digital audiences increased by 22%, with an increment of only 1% for desktop digital audiences but 41% for mobile (smartphone and tablet) audiences. Interestingly,
among all the sellers interviewed, no seller (0 seller) used a tablet as the most frequently used hardware for interacting with the buyer in the B2B environment. Like sellers, many buyer companies interviewed during this study use a smartphone as the most frequently used hardware, compared to other devices such as a desktop, laptop, or tablet. However, among all the 15 buyers interviewed, only one buyer uses a tablet as the most frequently used hardware in the B2B environment.

Mobile devices provide advantages not only through integrating phone functionality, but also for information searching, and interaction among users (Ström, Vendel, & Bredican, 2014). Consumers’ constant companion is the mobile phone and in the B2C environment, this makes it an ideal relationship gateway between the retailer and consumer, and an ideal supplementary channel for distance selling (Shankar, et al, 2010). Personal computers (desktop and laptop) are different from mobile devices (smartphones and tablets) due to a limited keyboard and screen size (Mahmoud & Yu, 2006). Mobile devices offer functions such as cameras, scanners and a Global Positioning System (GPS), which makes mobile marketing potentially different from personal computers’ Internet and traditional marketing (Ström, Vendel, & Bredican, 2014). According to the Mobile Marketing Association, mobile marketing is defined as “a set of practices that enable organizations to communicate and engage with their audience in an interactive and relevant manner through any mobile device or network”.

Even though this qualitative study is not able to generalise the increment of digital audiences used by B2B companies, the findings from this study illustrate that compared to other devices (such as a desktop, laptop, and tablet), a smartphone is the most frequently used hardware by B2B companies in relationship marketing, that is, by both sellers and buyers of B2B companies. The possible reason for the smartphone to be chosen as the most preferred device by B2B companies is due to its functionality, (for example, the GPS, scanner, and camera) (Mahmoud & Yu, 2006), and its function as an ideal mobile and relationship marketing device between buyers and sellers, especially when the users are remote or on-the-go (Shankar, et al., 2010). As such, based on the findings from this study, there is no major difference between the choice of frequently used device by sellers and buyers of B2B companies in relationship marketing; both sellers and buyers frequently used a smartphone the most, when compared to other devices such as a desktop, laptop, and/or even tablet.
iii. Social Media Supportive Measure

Despite previous literature stating that companies have now started to penetrate the online social networks and offer direct links from corporate websites to social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), to date, little is known about how companies use social media in B2B relationship marketing, specifically in providing social media supportive measures such as 1) training, 2) policies/rules, and 3) templates/standards/scripts for their employees. This study provides findings on companies’ social media supportive measures from the first-phase interviews. Social media supportive measures include 1) training, 2) policies/rules, and 3) templates/standards/scripts for employees. Based on this study, sellers give higher priority to policies and/or rules, as compared to other supportive measures, such as 1) training, and 2) templates, standards and/or scripts. The findings also show variation in how B2B companies provide social media supportive measures: several companies provide no supportive measures in regard to social media use, many companies provide at least one of the supportive measures, and some companies provide all three supportive measures.

One possible reason for why training is less offered as a social media supportive measure by B2B companies is that social media is already widely used by many users, hence, this type of training is less crucial for employees. While the majority of the companies which do not provide training to their employees believe that training would be helpful for employees’ development, some companies have a different point-of-view, such as Seller 19 who stated the following:

At the moment I think it is not that significant [to have trainings] because everyone knows [how to use social media], it’s just at the end of our fingertips. I think for now, [staff] do not need training to use the basic [social media] application. Everyone has the ability to use it (Seller 19).

In terms of social media supportive measures, such as templates, standards, and/or scripts, the possible reason for these supportive measures being less offered by B2B companies is due to the characteristic of social media which promotes User Generated Content (UGC). Compared to the traditional one-to-many platform, emerging technologies increase the possibility of a many-to-many channel of communication (Shklovski, Palen, & Sutton, 2008). Social media promotes
conversations among its users (Plangger & Mills, 2013), as opposed to simply “pushing” one-way communications onto audiences in the way that traditional media does (Kietzmann, et al., 2011). Consistent with its interactive characteristic (Hennig-Thurau, et al., 2010), social media also plays a role as a relationship platform for sellers and buyers (Kho, 2008). Specific templates, standards and/or scripts may limit the level of interaction between sellers and buyers of B2B companies.

Additionally, this study finds that B2B seller companies provide social media supportive measures, such as policies and rules, more than they provide other supportive measures such as training, and templates/standards/scripts. This may be due to security reasons. Research shows that what individuals are saying about companies online (Plangger, 2012; Kietzmann, et al., 2012) concern the marketing managers (Plangger & Mills, 2013). Sadly, regardless of whether the information is confirmed or unconfirmed, users showed the same levels of intent to believe with the information (Freberg, 2012), leaving companies vulnerable to misunderstandings and rumours. As such, policies and rules relating to social media should be given a higher priority by B2B companies, especially by the marketing managers.

Conclusion of Social Media Operationalisation in B2B Relationship Marketing

The findings from this study answered RQ1, “How do businesses operationalise social media in B2B relationship marketing?”. The research findings reveal that there are no major differences between sellers and buyers of B2B companies regarding how they operationalise social media in B2B relationship marketing, specifically, regarding the choice of social media platforms and hardware. According to the findings, all sellers and buyers use Facebook for B2B interaction. The findings also illustrate that Twitter and Instagram are the two most common social media used by B2B companies in relationship marketing. In terms of the most frequently used hardware, both sellers and buyers of B2B companies use smartphones, and then other devices such as desktops, laptops, or tablets. Additionally, this study finds that sellers give more priorities to policies and/or rules, as compared to other social media supportive measures such as training, and templates, standards and/or scripts. As the findings of social media operationalisation show, B2B companies from various industries and of varied size
and/or logistics were able to exploit social media as one of their relationship marketing strategies. However, it is still not known what role social media plays in B2B relationship marketing, particularly between seller and buyer companies, and whether buyers and sellers have different perspectives about the role. The following sections, Section 5.2.2 and Section 5.2.3 respectively, present the role of social media in B2B relationship marketing from the seller and buyer perspectives, by discussing the social media themes which were derived as a result of interviews with the seller and buyer companies. Section 5.2.4 discusses the comparison between their perspectives.
5.2.2 Social Media Themes from the Seller’s Perspective

Table 5.2

Summary of Themes and Concepts from the Seller’s Perspective
(First-phase Interviews: Sellers that Currently Use Social Media)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Importance</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| First               | Bilateral Communication | • interact  
• communicate  
• connect  
• promote |
| Second              | Relationship          | • relationship  
• developing  
• maintaining and enhancing |
| Third               | Social Media Enigma   | • perceived need to use  
• attract  
• promote |
| Fourth              | Unilateral Communication | • fast  
• reach  
• news |
| Fifth               | Information Sharing   | • information  
• sharing |

Source: Developed for this research.
As presented in Chapter 4, a concept map was derived from the interview transcriptions of sellers that currently use social media for B2B relationship marketing (Figure 5.2). Results in the Leximancer colour-heat map indicated that the most relevant theme appeared to be “bilateral communication”, followed by “relationship”, “social media enigma”, “unilateral communication”, and “information sharing”. A list of these themes according to their relevancy and a list of concepts that are related to each of the themes are presented in Table 5.2. The descriptions for each of these five themes are elaborated as below.

i. Bilateral Communication

An interesting finding of the first-phase interviews is that the main reason sellers use social media in the B2B environment is for bilateral communication, and more specifically, for interacting, communicating, promoting, and connecting with their buyers. As compared to the traditional media, the Internet embodies bilateral communication technologies that allow information to move in both directions between buyers and sellers (Browning, 1996). The interactive capabilities of the Internet are considered by many to be in its greatest strength (Browning, 1996; Morris, 1999). No other mass medium, such as newspapers, radio, or television, has the capacity for direct and instantaneous feedback between the transmitter and its receiver. Like the Internet in general, social media are mainly used for two-way communication between the transmitter and receiver (Fensel, Fensel, Leiter, & Thalhammer, 2012), despite the fact that many other social media users are viewing a given platform. During the first-phase interviews, an investment sales agent described how the company’s employees utilised social media for promotional purposes, often relying on company-prepared scripts designed not only to attract potential buyers but also for interacting with its existing buyers.

ii. Relationship

In the B2B environment, “relationship” is the second most important reason sellers use social media for seller-buyer relationships. According to Möller and Halinen (2000), the B2B environment fosters several levels of relationships (i.e. seller, seller’s seller, buyer, and buyer’s buyers). Unlike B2C relationships, B2B relationships are embedded in the relationship network and channel system, and thus knowing the history of a relationship is essential to understanding the relationship context (Möller &
Halinen, 2000). Consistently, the findings of first-phase interviews suggest that depending upon the nature of the seller-buyer relationships, sellers tend to use social media (to varying extents) when developing, maintaining, and enhancing relationships. During the interview, a sales and event executive elaborated on the benefits of using social media when interacting with the company’s buyers. According to the executive, social media can not only strengthen the existing seller-buyer relationships when negotiating businesses, but also allow the counterparts to get to know each other.

### iii. Social Media Enigma

When interacting with their buyer(s), sellers often use social media for rather undefined reasons. This activity is referred to as the social media enigma, because sellers’ reasons for using social media are not well understood by them. Often, sellers use social media because they believe that such use is necessary, as in the case of following trends or attracting potential buyers. During the first-phase interviews, a co-owner of a photography company stated that the reason the company uses social media in the B2B environment is to attract other photographers. The co-owner explained that while Twitter is a suitable platform for attracting other photographers, it is a less suitable platform to attract potential individual consumers. According to Moorman Christine (2013), director of The CMO Survey and Austin Finch senior professor of business administration at Duke University’s Fuqua School of Business, one of the biggest challenges of using social media is that many companies perceive social media as a “cute” promotional activity, whereas social media may actually be utilised as a mass marketing strategy.

### iv. Unilateral Communication

The findings of this research show that in addition to using social media for bilateral communication and relationship, or because the understanding of social media is enigmatic, sellers use social media in the B2B environment for one-way communication, such as to forward updates and to reach consumers in a timely manner. The finding suggests that social media not only carry the characteristics of the new media (the Internet), but also the characteristics of traditional media such as newspaper and television. According to Rowland (1999), most traditional media are unilateral communication technologies whereby information flows in one direction, reducing interaction between a transmitter and a receiver. For instance, newspapers permit their
receivers to read their published information and television allows the receivers to view and listen to the programs. Even though some traditional technologies (e.g. the fax machine and telephone) use bilateral communication between a transmitter and a receiver (Rowland, 2006), the Internet greatly enhances the level of interactivity, speed, and ease of giving feedback. Consistently, a founder of a fashion company in Malaysia stated that the company relied on social media to deliver accurate messages in a timely manner to its buyer, located in Indonesia. According to the founder, if the company were to share news or information via telephone, the information may not be as accurate as when using social media because the companies use different communication dialects. Using social media, however, allows information to be conveyed accurately through written information, often using standardised language.

v. Information Sharing

In the B2C environment, companies often provide specific information on a variety of subjects that may be of interest to their consumers (Dobele, Lindgreen, Beverland, Vanhamme, & Van Wijk, 2007). The innovation literature has increasingly stressed the efficient use of knowledge and information, not only in the B2C environment (Levy, 2009; Ribiere & Tuggle, 2010) but also in the B2B environment (Kärkkäinen, Jussila, & Janhonen, 2011). Consistent with prior studies, the findings from this research indicate that information sharing appears to be one of the top five reasons sellers use social media in the B2B environment. The findings of the first-phase interviews illustrate that every seller interviewed uses social media for sharing updates and knowledge with buyers. For instance, a production manager of a fashion company explained how social media play a vital role for the company in conveying information to its buyers. The company sends messages and pictures on various social media platforms, including on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

Concept with Overlapping Themes

As mentioned earlier, a concept map (Figure 5.2), derived from the interview transcriptions of sellers that currently use social media for B2B relationship marketing, 3

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3 *Dialect* is a particular form of a language which is peculiar to a specific region or social group (Oxford University Press, 2015). Often, people from different states in Malaysia use different Malay language dialects; Bahasa Malaysia, Kelantanese, Terengganuan, Kedahan, Sarawakian, Bajau, Negeri Sembilan Malay, Banjar, Brunei and Indonesian (mm2h, 2013).
indicated that the relevant themes appeared to be “bilateral communication”, “relationship”, “social media enigma”, “unilateral communication”, and “information sharing”. A list of these themes and a list of concepts that are related to each of the themes were presented in Table 5.2. However, the concept map (Figure 5.2) and the list in Table 5.2 indicated that there is a concept which belongs to more than one theme. As shown in Table 5.3, the concept promote belongs to both the “bilateral communication” and “social media enigma” themes. This section will discuss further the concept promote to better understand why it belongs to both themes.

Table 5.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Themes (Overlapping)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promote</td>
<td>Bilateral Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Media Enigma</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Promote

From the seller perspective, the only concept which belongs to more than one theme is promote. As illustrated in Table 5.3, the concept belongs to both the “bilateral communication” and “social media enigma” themes. This suggests that seller companies use social media as a platform to promote themselves and their offerings, which involves two-way communication with their buyers and reflects ambiguity surrounding the reasons for using social media. As illustrated in Table 5.4, an example of the former is illustrated by Seller 2 which stated that, “Mostly, the sales and marketing manager get to use social media because [the company] needs to market the product. I think the employees get the chance to use social media as well to promote the product of the company”. An example of the latter is shown by Seller 3 who mentioned that, “We need social media to promote and to expand our [relationships]. [This will] put us in the place where people [will] see us. So, I think [social media] is helpful.” Another example of the latter is:

The company uses [social media] mainly [as a] marketing tool [which] we use to
promote our channel... When we approach the bloggers, we need them to follow our channel... we need them to promote it. We [either] use our social media [or] put our information on the bloggers’ blogs... With our suppliers, we broadcast all the programs we buy from TV stations in Indonesia... We promote them in Malaysia, so people in Malaysia will know that [we] have the special [channels from] Indonesia (Seller 18).

Social media has improved the way companies communicate with both current and potential buyers, and/or other stakeholders (Parent, Plangger, & Bal, 2011). It is being debated that we are in the middle of a new communication era (e.g. Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011) as the roles of user-generated content and buyer interaction are emphasised in marketing communications (Dennis, Merrilees, Jayawardhena, & Wright 2009; Liu, Karahanna, & Watson, 2011). This study contributes to the discussion as the findings from this study indicate that, in the B2B environment, seller companies use social media for promoting businesses to their buyers, an act which involves interaction or communication with their buyer companies. Additionally, the findings also indicate that sellers use social media for promoting themselves and their offerings not only to their viewers, but also to their buyers’ viewers. The findings illustrate that whilst sellers are making an effort to promote the business to a group of audiences, understanding the interaction role of social media from seller companies for promoting the businesses is enigmatic. Based on the findings, little effort is made by sellers to maintain the interaction or bilateral communication with their viewers, including their buyers. Current literatures argue that there is a strong power shift due to social media (Simula, Töllinen, & Karjaluoto, 2013); now, users not only want to share their ideas and opinions with a mass of viewers, but they also want companies to listen and be responsive to them (Kietzmann, et al. 2011).
Table 5.4
Summary of Interview Quotes relating to the Concept *Promote*
(First-phase Interviews: Sellers that Currently Use Social Media)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>promote</td>
<td>promote to buyers, involving seller-buyer communication</td>
<td>Mostly, the sales and marketing manager get to use social media because [the company] needs to market the product. I think the employees get the chance to use social media as well to promote the product of the company.</td>
<td>Seller 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>promote</td>
<td>promote to viewers and buyers’ viewers, with less interaction or communication with the viewers</td>
<td>We need social media to promote and to expand our [relationships]. [This will] put us in the place where people [will] see us. So, I think [social media] is helpful.</td>
<td>Seller 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>promote</td>
<td></td>
<td>The company uses [social media] mainly [as a] marketing tool [which] we use to promote our channel... When we approach the bloggers, we need them to follow our channel... we need them to promote it. We [either] use our social media [or] put our information on the bloggers’ blogs... With our suppliers, we broadcast all the programs we buy from TV stations in Indonesia... We promote them in Malaysia, so people in Malaysia will know that [we] have the special [channels from] Indonesia.</td>
<td>Seller 18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Developed for this research.*

Conclusion of Social Media Themes from the Seller’s Perspective

These findings of first-phase interviews partially answer RQ2, which is “*For what purpose do businesses use social media in B2B relationship marketing?*” The findings derived from first-phase interviews illustrate that seller companies use social media in the B2B environment for bilateral communication, for relationship purposes, in response to the enigmatic understanding of social media, for unilateral...
communication, and for information sharing. The findings of each of these social media themes are presented in Table 5.5. However, to answer RQ2 completely, the findings of second-phase interviews need to be further analysed. The second-phase interviews provide the findings from the buyer perspective—that is, why buyer companies use social media in the B2B environment.

Table 5.5
Findings of Social Media Themes
based on Sellers that Currently Use Social Media
(First-phase Interviews)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Companies</th>
<th>Bilateral Communication</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Enigma</th>
<th>Unilateral Communication</th>
<th>Information Sharing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seller 1</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 2</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 3</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 4</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 5</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 6</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 7</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 8</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 9</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 10</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 11</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 12</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 13</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 14</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 15</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 16</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 17</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 18</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 19</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Developed for this research.
### 5.2.3 Social Media Themes from the Buyer’s Perspective

**Figure 5.3:** Concept Map from the Buyer’s Perspective.

Second Phase Interviews: All Buyers are Currently Using Social Media.

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**Table 5.6**

Summary of Themes and Concepts from the Buyer’s Perspective (Second-Phase Interviews: Buyers that Currently Use Social Media)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Importance</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| First               | Unilateral and Bilateral Communication | • interact  
• discuss  
• promote  
• dealing  
• fast  
• contact          |
| Second              | Information Sharing                 | • information  
• share  
• discuss  
• promote  
• communicate  
• directly         |
| Third               | Social Media Enigma                 | • perceived need to use  
• fast  
• contact         |
| Fourth              | Relationship                         | • relationship  
• contact  
• marketing          |
| Fifth               | Efficiency                           | • feedback  
• easy  
• cost                      |

Source: Developed for this research.
Another concept map was derived from the interview transcriptions of buyers who are currently adopting social media for B2B relationship marketing (Figure 5.3). The Leximancer colour-heat map indicates that the most relevant theme appeared to be “unilateral and bilateral communication”, followed by “information sharing”, “social media enigma”, “relationship”, and “efficiency”. A list of these themes according to their relevancy and a list of concepts that are related to each of the themes are presented in Table 5.6. The descriptions for each of these five themes are further elaborated as below.

i. Unilateral and Bilateral Communication

The findings suggest that buyers’ most important reason for using social media in the B2B environment is to promote an amalgam of one- and two-way communication that allows interacting, discussing, promoting, dealing, or discussing with their sellers in a timely manner. As stated earlier, most traditional media are unilateral communications technologies, whereby information flows in one direction (Rowland, 2006). Browning (1996) and Morris (1999) describe the Internet as a bilateral communication technology, whereby the information flows in both directions. The findings of the second-phase interviews show that social media in the B2B environment function as both unilateral and bilateral communication technology. This notion is supported by an owner of a food and beverages company, who described social media as a management tool because social media function as a knowledge warehouse that utilises less or in certain cases zero human interaction. The owner, however, stated that when seller-buyer interactions occur, social media reduce the seller-buyer response time and increase the likelihood of receiving a response from sellers over that of former communication methods like emails.

ii. Information Sharing

The next most important reason buyers use social media in the B2B environment is for information sharing. This finding has some support in the literature, with previous studies (e.g. Lee, Oh, & Kim 2013; Smith, et al., 2012; Ryan & Jones, 2011) describing how, given that social media users are active in content creation, especially in the B2C environment, businesses could potentially lose control over information publicly held on social media. Nevertheless, the research findings of the second-phase interviews show that every buyer interviewed in the B2B environment in
Malaysia shares information on social media by discussing, promoting, or communicating directly with sellers. The findings from this research support Katona and Sarvary’s (2014) description of social media as a means for users to exchange, share or create ideas and information in virtual networks. For instance, a company’s owner from the fashion industry stated that much information in the form of messages and pictures was shared and retrieved via social media. The information includes that received from comments or notes and that listed on the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page.

### iii. Social Media Enigma

Even though social media function through the Internet, the technology itself is not the main reason for the increased popularity of social media. Instead, according to Chaffey et al. (2009), popularity results from users’ desire to be social by sharing their experiences with other users. Andzulis, et al. (2012) stated that businesses started to utilise social media simply because they want to keep up with the latest trends, even though they have yet to fully understand the reasons for social media use. Similarly, the findings of the second-phase interviews illustrate that buyers do not fully understand the reasons for their use of social media for B2B relationships. Buyers believe that there are strong needs for using social media, but they are not able to clearly articulate these reasons. For instance, a co-owner of a buyer company (Apparel Merchandise, Service for Event Management and Creative Design) explained that the reason for the company’s use of social media when interacting with its sellers is to follow the trends. According to the owner, over the past two years (2012–2014), more companies have established their own social media presence, thus requiring the company to have its own social media presence as well.

### iv. Relationship

Relationship appears to be a less important reason that buyers use social media in the B2B environment. The findings illustrate that buyers use social media for relationship purposes, such as for contacting and marketing to their sellers and other prospective buyers. The research findings support a study by Michaelidou, et al. (2011) suggesting that the interactions among B2B companies on social media allow them to create customer value as well as to develop and foster relationships among themselves. Correspondingly, a director of a graphic design company noted that the company uses
social media such as Facebook and Instagram to promote its products and to be contacted by prospective buyers. The responses received in the second-phase interviews are similar to the responses of interviewees in a study by Andzulis and colleagues, in which lead generation and prospecting are among the reasons B2B companies utilise social media (Andzulis, Panagopoulos, & Rapp, 2012). The findings from the second-phase interviews are also similar to those of the first-phase interviews in the sense that both findings illustrate that social media use for B2B relationships occurs in many stages of a relationship. During the second-phase interviews, an owner of a design and technology stated that the company believes social media can be used at any time—not only at the early stage but also after the seller-buyer relationships have been established. The owner of this buyer company mentioned that the company used social media in the pre-relational stages (i.e. even before the relationships between the company and its sellers began).

v. Efficiency

Efficiency is the least important reason buyers use social media in the B2B relationship environment. Efficiency is the only theme that appears only from the buyer perspective and not from the seller perspective. The findings of the second-phase interviews illustrate that efficiency includes ease of use, low cost, and effectiveness in receiving feedback. According to Tapscott (1999), the production cost for the Internet is far less than that of traditional media like television shows and magazines. Regardless of the time of day, users can access information online because the Internet is asynchronous—that is, there is no timing requirement for the start of a transmission. The Internet also transcends geographical proximity (Bimber, 1999), since geographical location or distance has little meaning in cyberspace. A director of an electronics company stated that the company has seen that the benefit of using social media far exceeds that from using traditional methods (sending thousands of flyers to sellers). The company received more responses, had reduced printing costs, and saved much promotional time and energy.
As mentioned earlier, a concept map (Figure 5.3), derived from the interview transcriptions of buyers that currently use social media for B2B relationship marketing, indicated that the relevant themes appeared to be “unilateral and bilateral communication”, “information sharing”, “social media enigma”, “relationship”, and “efficiency”. A list of these themes and a list of concepts that are related to each of the themes were presented in Table 5.6. However, the concept map in Figure 5.3 and the list in Table 5.6 indicated that there are concepts which belong to more than one theme. As shown in Table 5.7, there are four concepts which belong to more than one theme: promote, discuss, fast, and contact. This section will discuss further these concepts to better understand why they belong to more than one theme.

Table 5.7

List of Concepts with Overlapping Themes
(Second-Phase Interviews: Buyers that Current Use Social Media)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Themes (Overlapping)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promote</td>
<td>Unilateral and Bilateral Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information Sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss</td>
<td>Unilateral and Bilateral Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast</td>
<td>Unilateral and Bilateral Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Media Enigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact</td>
<td>Unilateral and Bilateral Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Media Enigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relationship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Developed for this research.
i. Promote

The first concept which belongs to more than one theme is *promote*. As illustrated in Table 5.7, the concept belongs to the “unilateral and bilateral communication” and “information sharing” themes. This suggests that buyer companies use social media as a platform to promote themselves and their offerings, an act which involves 1) communication with their sellers, and 2) sharing information such as creating awareness not only with their respective sellers, but also with other companies that are connected with the buyers themselves and/or their sellers. As illustrated in Table 5.8, an example of the former illustrates how Buyer 6 uses social media when promoting the company to the seller:

> In fact, it is a must for us to have Facebook and Instagram to promote [our] company [to the seller]. It is important. But I would say Instagram is more useful to promote the company because it is easily handled compared to Facebook, because [the Facebook’s] interface is disorganised (Buyer 6).

Examples of the latter show how other companies use social media for promotion by creating awareness:

> Social media is very useful for small online retailers and maybe the big ones as well in order to promote [and] to make aware of all the product [or] services offerings… But [we have to] make sure that all information there must be accurate even though we can change it later [because] sometimes people do print screen for dispute later. With all businesses as well, we must be clear upfront or in transparent in order to do business. Online business is based on trust since viewers cannot see the product upfront. Social media does help, we can put all information and pictures there (Buyer 1).

Social media is used more for sharing information. If I want to upload story on the online portal, I will share them [on] my Facebook, on my Twitter and Instagram. At the same time, they will share [on] their social media too. Same goes if they share things on their social media and then I will retweet them on Twitter, I will repost them on Instagram and I will reload the picture on Facebook. News and event for that company. I am more like helping them to promote the products and their launchings (Buyer 10).

Previous studies demonstrate that social media, in the B2B environment, allows
users to provide information not only about the firms themselves, but also their brands, products and services (Berthon, Lane, Pitt, & Watson, 1998; Welling & White, 2006), which result in the B2B companies gaining better awareness and brand attitude (Drèze & Huss herr, 2003; Manchanda, Dubé, Goh, & Chintagunta, 2006). The findings from this study contribute to the current literature by illustrating that, compared to seller companies, buyer companies play a greater role in creating awareness about their companies and offerings. One possible reason for this is because buyers are likely to pay more attention to consumer/end-user purchase intention. Current literatures exemplify that, in addition to awareness and brand attitude, purchase intention is another possible digital marketing goal for B2B companies (Simula, Töllinen, & Karjaluoto, 2013). Studies show that by easing transaction processes, sales to existing customers may increase (Sharma, 2002), whereas by gathering leads, sales to potential customers may grow (Welling & White, 2006).

**Table 5.8**

**Summary of Interview Quotes relating to the Concept Promote**

(Second-phase Interviews: Buyers that Currently Use Social Media)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promote</td>
<td>(the concept belongs to “unilateral and bilateral communication” and “information sharing” themes)</td>
<td>In fact, it is a must for us to have Facebook and Instagram to promote [our] company. It is important. But I would say Instagram is more useful to promote the company because it is easily handled compared to Facebook, because [the Facebook’s] interface is disorganised.</td>
<td>Buyer 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>buyer-seller communication</td>
<td>Social media is very useful for small online retailers and maybe the big ones as well in order to promote [and] to make aware of all the product [or] services offerings. But [we have to] make sure that all information there must be accurate even though we can change it later [because] sometimes people do print screen for dispute later. With all businesses as well, we must be clear upfront or in transparent in order to do business. Online business is based on trust since viewers cannot see the product upfront. Social media does help, we can put all information and pictures there.</td>
<td>Buyer 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table continues...*
Table 5.8
Summary of Interview Quotes relating to the Concept Promote
(Second-phase Interviews: Buyers that Currently Use Social Media) – Cont’d

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>promote – cont’d</td>
<td>(the concept belongs to “unilateral and bilateral communication” and “information sharing” themes)</td>
<td>Social media is used more for sharing information. If I want to upload story on the online portal, I will share them [on] my Facebook, on my Twitter and Instagram. At the same time, they will share [on] their social media too. Same goes if they share things on their social media and then I will retweet them on Twitter, I will repost them on Instagram and I will reload the picture on Facebook. News and event for that company. I am more like helping them to promote the products and their launchings.</td>
<td>Buyer 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Developed for this research.

ii. Discuss

The next concept which belongs to more than one theme is discuss. Like promote, the concept discuss also belong to the “unilateral and bilateral communication” and “information sharing” themes (Table 5.7). This suggests that buyer companies use social media as a platform for discussion with their sellers. Some buyers use social media for a basic level of discussion which involves communication with their sellers, whereas other buyers use social media for a higher level of discussion which involves sharing information such as crowdsourcing with their own viewers and their seller’s viewers. As illustrated in Table 5.9, an example of the former is illustrated by Buyer 8 who mentioned that “[Social media] make things simplify. Simplify in communication, when we [are] far from each other; sharing pictures [or] videos and discussing through [social media].” Following is an example of the latter:

[The reason we are using social media] because we can collaborate and we can know if this way is not working, we will try another means. If the viewers or [number of] “likes” are low, we can try [something else], maybe people want other kind of thing. So from that, we can discuss [on social media]. We can add value (Buyer 10).
Gillin and Schwartzman (2011, p. 219) revealed that “the most essential skill of the B2B marketer has become the ability to listen.” Simula, Töllinen and Karjaluoto (2013) believe that the statement is most likely valid for the B2C environment, but dubious about whether this holds true in the B2B environment where buyers and consumers/end-users are often distinct entities. This study contributes to the debate as the findings indicate that buyers of B2B companies use social media not only for discussing directly with their sellers, but also crowdsourcing viewers’ preferences and opinions to better enhance the buyer-seller discussions. Surprisingly, from the seller perspective, social media is used for neither discussion nor crowdsourcing. The findings of this study show that buyer companies pay closer attention to consumers/end users’ point-of-views than seller companies do. This is consistent with the argument made by Hoyer, et al. (2010) that in the B2C environment consumers’ active participation in sellers’ product development remains in its infancy. Simula, Töllinen and Karjaluoto (2013) argue that the statement is also true for the B2B environment even if “buyer companies” are the “end-users”.

**Table 5.9**

Summary of Interview Quotes relating to the Concept *Discuss*  
(Second-phase Interviews: Buyers that Currently Use Social Media)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>discuss</td>
<td>direct discussion between buyer and seller</td>
<td>[Social media] make things simplify. Simplify in communication, when we [are] far from each other; sharing pictures [or] videos and discussing through [social media].</td>
<td>Buyer 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>discussion that involves crowdsourcing viewers’ point-of-views</td>
<td>[The reason we are using social media] because we can collaborate and we can know if this way is not working, we will try another means. If the viewers or [number of] “likes” are low, we can try [something else], maybe people want other kind of thing. So from that, we can discuss [on social media]. We can add value.</td>
<td>Buyer 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Developed for this research.*
The third concept which belongs to more than one theme is fast. As shown in Table 5.7, the concept belongs to “unilateral and bilateral communication” and “social media enigma” themes, suggesting that some buyer companies use social media for communication purposes whereas other buyer companies do not truly comprehend the core concept of social media; that is, for interaction among users. As illustrated in Table 5.10, an example of the former is illustrated by Buyer 1:

[If] we were to have problems, [with social media] they would know fast and they would attend to my problem fast as well. Also, because of the social media, we can know the trails of previous inquiries and much more. Almost all information can be received from social media. [The company not only] have comments, [but also] notes, [and] FAQ page on their social media… I would say, it’s good for both of us, for both sides, to have social media to communicate and to relay information. It’s fast, it’s clean and also easy to retrieve at a later date, if we need to (Buyer 1).

The example of the latter is:

[Social media] is actually a knowledge management tool. A knowledge repository where everything is there but [with] less human interaction. It saves time, [we] do not have to wait. [For example] if I send an email, it [could] take two weeks for them to reply. The questions that I have are not available online. If it is available online, then it is pretty fast. I like [social media] very much because everything is there (Buyer 4).

Previous studies have argued that social media tools enable fast and customised communication with buyers (Kho, 2008), and make it easy for B2B companies to stay connected not only with their partners, but also with their distributors and manufacturers (Weber, 2009). The findings from this study which indicate that some buyer companies use social media for fast communication with their sellers are consistent with the literature. However, the findings also illustrate that other buyers use social media as a knowledge management tool and do not truly comprehend the main role of social media; that is, for connection purposes. Whilst research shows that investment in social media by B2B companies continues to increase significantly, the majority (69%) of the business buyers surveyed are spectators who either read blogs, watch user-generated videos, read online forums and reviews, or listen to podcasts; and 29% of them are joiners who only visit social networking sites or only maintain a company profile on the social networking sites.
(Forrester Research, 2009). Parallel with a statement made by Jussila, et al. (2011), there is a significant gap between the potential and the actual practices around social media by businesses in the B2B environment.

### Table 5.10
Summary of Interview Quotes relating to the Concept *Fast*
(Second-phase Interviews: Buyers that Currently Use Social Media)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fast</td>
<td>(the concept belongs to “unilateral and bilateral communication” and “social media enigma” theme)</td>
<td>[If] we were to have problems, [with social media] they would know fast and they would attend to my problem fast as well. Also, because of the social media, we can know the trails of previous inquiries and much more. Almost all information can be received from social media. [The company not only] have comments, [but also] notes, [and] FAQ page on their social media… I would say, it’s good for both of us, for both sides, to have social media to communicate and to relay information. It’s fast, it’s clean and also easy to retrieve at a later date, if we need to.</td>
<td>Buyer 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fast communication</td>
<td></td>
<td>[Social media] is actually a knowledge management tool. A knowledge repository where everything is there but [with] less human interaction. It saves time, [we] do not have to wait. [For example] if I send an email, it [could] take two weeks for them to reply. The questions that I have are not available online. If it is available online, then it is pretty fast. I like it very much because everything is there.</td>
<td>Buyer 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Developed for this research.

### iv. Contact

The last concept which belongs to more than one theme is *contact*. This concept is different than any other concept as it belongs to three different themes,
including “unilateral and bilateral communication”, “social media enigma” and “relationship”. This suggests that some buyer companies use social media for communication and/or for relationship purposes, whereas other buyer companies do not truly understand the core concept of using social media; that is, for interaction purposes. Table 5.11 provides an example of how a buyer company could use social media for communication with its seller. Buyer 11 mentions that, “Sometimes [that company] sent email if there is any promotion regarding the service. If we like it, then we will contact [the company via social media].” Another example illustrates how a buyer company utilised social media for relationship purposes; a reason that is beyond one-way or two-way communication:

Normally, we agree to communicate at night. That is when we discuss our point of views of the companies, my company and the other company. If the company gets a project, it will contact me first. If my company get a project and the project involves printing, then I will contact [the company] (Buyer 7).

There are also some buyer companies that do not truly understand the interaction concept of social media. For instance, Buyer 6 mentioned that:

Sometimes we do use Facebook and Instagram. For instance, I use Facebook and Instagram to promote the [seller] company’s product. If there are [viewers who are interested], they can contact me. We have all the details on Facebook and they can [also] contact the owner of the [seller] company if they have further queries… We [receive] many orders during festive seasons. Most of the time, [the sales] depend on what we post on our social media. If the [viewers] are interested with our package, they will contact us (Buyer 6).

On social media, users are not only connecting, but also interacting and sharing with each other (Halligan & Shah, 2010). As stated by Scott (2010), social media provides an online platform for users to share thoughts, content, ideas, and relationships. This study supports the discussion as the findings indicate that, in the B2B environment, buyer companies use social media to provide a platform to contact or to be contacted by their sellers. Additionally, the findings from this study also indicate that social media provides a platform for buyers and sellers to contact each other, which indirectly promotes the relationship between them. Ozuem, et al. (2008) argue that interactive digital channels, such as social media, promote more flexible buyer-seller discussions, which challenges the concept of one-way or
unilateral marketing communications. In the same vein, Simula, Töllinen, and Karjaluo (2013) state that the power of online social networks is that buyers can be cultivated from passive receivers into active influencers. Yet, the findings from this study portray that there are some buyers who do not truly comprehend the main role of social media as a platform for interaction among viewers. Whilst some buyer companies use social media as a platform for their viewers and sellers’ viewers to connect with each other, the findings illustrate that some buyers consider sales to be the main priority, rather than using social media for interaction or as a relationship platform with their viewers. Even though it has been stated that social networks have an economic impact on online sellers as social networks enable easier connectivity and enhanced accessibility (Stephen & Toubia, 2010), according to Weinberg and Pehliv (2011), the main capability of social media for buyers is to empower and give them influence which encourages the relationship building between the buyers and their sellers.

Table 5.11
Summary of Interview Quotes relating to the Concept Contact
(Second-phase Interviews: Buyers that Currently Use Social Media)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>contact (the concept belongs to “unilateral and bilateral communication” and “social media enigma” and “relationship” themes)</td>
<td>buyer provides a platform for seller to contact them if needed, an act which encourage seller-buyer communication</td>
<td>Sometimes [that company] sent email if there is any promotion regarding the service. If we like it, then we will contact [the company via social media].</td>
<td>Buyer 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>seller and buyer keep contacting each other, an act which promotes seller-buyer relationship</td>
<td>Normally, we agree to communicate at night. That is when we discuss our point of views of the companies, my company and the other company. If the company gets a project, it will contact me first. If my company get a project and the project involves printing, then I will contact [the company].</td>
<td>Buyer 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table continues...
Table 5.11

Summary of Interview Quotes relating to the Concept Contact – Cont’d
(Second-phase Interviews: Buyers that Currently Use Social Media)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contact – cont’d (the concept belongs to “unilateral and bilateral communication” and “social media enigma” and “relationship” themes)</td>
<td>provides a platform for viewers and sellers’ viewers to contact, if interested. (main purpose of the platform is for sale rather than for relationship purposes)</td>
<td>Sometimes we do use Facebook and Instagram. For instance, I use Facebook and Instagram to promote the [seller] company’s product. If there are [viewers who are interested], they can contact [our company]. We have all the details on Facebook and they can [also] contact the owner of the [seller] company if they have further queries… We [receive] many orders during festive seasons. Most of the time, [the sales] depend on what we post on our social media. If the [viewers] are interested with our package, they will contact us.</td>
<td>Buyer 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Developed for this research.

Conclusion of Social Media Themes from the Buyer’s Perspective:

These findings of the second-phase interviews answered the other half of RQ2, which is “For what purpose do businesses use social media in B2B relationship marketing?” The findings derived from the second-phase interviews illustrate that the reasons buyer companies use social media in the B2B environment are for unilateral and bilateral communication, for information sharing, as a response to the enigmatic understanding of social media, for relationship purposes, and for efficiency. The findings of each of these social media themes are presented in Table 5.12. Based on the findings of first- and second-phase interviews, RQ2 can be answered in its entirety. Businesses use social media in B2B relationship marketing for unilateral and bilateral communication, for relationship purposes, owing to social media enigma, for information sharing, and for efficiency.
Table 5.12
Findings of Social Media Themes
based on the Buyers that Currently Use Social Media
(Second-Phase Interviews)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Companies</th>
<th>Unilateral Communication</th>
<th>Bilateral Communication</th>
<th>Information Sharing</th>
<th>Enigma</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Efficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 1</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 2</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 3</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 4</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 5</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 6</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 7</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 8</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 9</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 10</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 11</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 12</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 13</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 14</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer 15</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 14 6 15 9 3 15

Source: Developed for this research.
5.2.4 Comparison of Social Media Themes from Seller and Buyer Perspectives

To answer the third research subquestion (RQ3), which is “How consistent are the perceptions of sellers and buyers engaging with social media in B2B relationship marketing?”, the social media themes between seller perspective and buyer perspectives need further analysis. Table 5.13 presents a summary of social media themes based on seller and buyer perspectives.

Table 5.13
Summary of Social Media Themes
Based on Seller and Buyer Perspectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Ranking based on Level of Importance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seller Perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Sharing</td>
<td>Fifth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Second</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unilateral Communication</td>
<td>Fourth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilateral Communication</td>
<td>First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media Enigma</td>
<td>Third</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiency</td>
<td>-Not applicable-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Developed for this research.
As Table 5.13 shows, six social media themes arise from the comments of both buyers and sellers. Most of the social media themes from seller’s perspective are similar to those of the buyer’s perspective with the exception of “efficiency”. From the perspective, “bilateral communication” and “relationship” appear to be the two most important reasons sellers use social media for B2B relationship marketing. Buyers and sellers considered social media enigma to have the same level of importance—that is, social media is the third most important reason. The least important reasons sellers use social media in the B2B environment are for unilateral communication and information sharing with their buyers.

From the buyer’s perspective, bilateral communication remains one of the important reasons companies use social media in the B2B environment. Other important reasons are unilateral communication and information sharing. As mentioned earlier, social media enigma has the same level of importance for both sellers and buyers. Unlike social media enigma, relationship holds a different level of importance. Relationship is a less important reason from the buyer’s perspective than from that of the seller. Another reason companies use social media in the B2B environment is efficiency. Although efficiency is ranked as the least important reason, it is the only theme that appears only from the buyer perspective. Figure 5.4 illustrates the level of consistency between social media themes from the perspectives of both buyers and sellers.
Figure 5.4: Themes of Social Media in B2B Relationship Marketing

Source: Developed for this research.
Information Sharing

Information sharing is valued as a more important social media role from the buyer perspective than from the seller perspective. From the seller perspective, information sharing is the least important social media role. However, information sharing is the second most important social media role from the buyer perspective. In the B2C environment, online search engines serve as the primary information source for American families when preparing for vacation trips (eMarketer, 2008). Web 2.0 and social media have several advantages in the B2C environment, such as relationship management (Klamma, Cao, & Spaniol, 2007; Levy, 2009; Ribiere & Tuggle, 2010; Röll, 2004; Schneckenberg, 2009), knowledge acquisition (Levy, 2009; Ribiere & Tuggle, 2010; Richards, 2009; Schneckenberg, 2009), information and knowledge management (Ribeire, 2010), and information and knowledge sharing (Levy, 2009).

The findings from this study illustrate that information sharing is also an essential social media role in the B2B environment. This study differs from many other studies with the discovery, through its research findings, that information sharing is the reason all the interviewed companies use social media for relationship marketing purposes. The research findings indicate that information sharing is the only reason every seller and buyer interviewed in this study is using social media, even though none of these companies perceives information sharing as the main reason for using social media in the B2B relationship marketing environment. As such, information sharing serves as an entrance key to the reasons B2B companies in Malaysia use social media for relationship marketing.

Relationship

Relationship has a more important social media role from the seller’s perspective than from the buyer’s perspective. From the buyer’s perspective, relationship is the second most important social media role for B2B relationship marketing. Relationship, however, appears to be just one of the roles (and not one of the most important roles) from the buyer’s perspective. Hence, it is apparent from the findings of this study that, compared to buyers, sellers perceive the exchange relationship to be a more important social media role for their companies. The research findings support the view that seller perceptions of their buyers may differ from the
actual business scenarios (Andzulis, et al., 2012). The researcher interviewed 12 sales
staff and managers from various industries, asking them during what stage of the sales
process do social media have the most effect on their businesses. Interestingly, all
interviewees answered “prospecti ng” and “lead generation” (when developing a
relationship with the buyers) to that interview question. However, the researcher then
discovered that social media could influence every step of the sales processes, as
reflected in the seller sales processes.

The findings from the research by Andzulis and colleagues (2012) and from this
study demonstrate that it is not easy to differentiate which specific stage of a sales
process or a relationship is most closely associated with the use of social media. In
other words, the use of social media may influence every stage of a relationship,
including developing, maintaining, and enhancing relationships, or every business
processes such as marketing and lead generation. The findings from this research
suggest that relationship appears to be one of the reasons for social media use among
B2B companies in Malaysia, not only for sellers but also for buyers. The research
findings illustrate that different relationships use social media for different reasons
(relationship, communication, social media enigma, efficiency), regardless of the
various relationships that occur between various buyers and a particular seller (see
Table 5.13). As social media encourages conversations and open communication
among its users, it is possible that the use of social media may increase engagement
levels and influence buyer perceptions of the business or seller (Fisher, 2011).

Unilateral Communication

It is evident from the research findings that unilateral communication is
weighted differently by the sellers and buyers. That is, unilateral communication is
valued as having a more important social media role when viewed from the buyer
perspective than that of seller perspective. From the seller perspective, unilateral
communication is the second least important social media role. However, from the
buyer perspective, unilateral communication is one of the most important social media
roles in B2B relationship marketing. This study suggests that a possible reason for
unilateral communication to be more important to buyers than to sellers is that buyers
are more likely to send unidirectional messages to the sellers than the sellers are to send
such messages to their buyers. The research findings illustrate that during the seller-
buyer interaction, when sellers send messages to buyers, buyers are likely to respond to the messages, and hence bilateral communication occurs between them. However, when buyers send a message to sellers, sellers have a lower tendency to respond to the message (because sellers have less reason or are not obligated to do so), and thus the communication occurring between them is unilateral. It is interesting and remarkable to find that sellers are not consistently using social media to its fullest potential, possibly because they are incapable or lacking in time management skills, or simply because they are ambivalent as to the benefits of social media.

As stated earlier, in the seller-buyer relationship context, social media are likely to function for developing, maintaining, and enhancing relationships between sellers and their buyers, whereas buyers are likely to utilise social media for prospecting or lead generation and for marketing to other companies, including to the seller companies. The findings from this study support the view that social media play a role for broadcasting both static and dynamic information (Fensel, et al., 2012). Broadcasting static information refers to disseminating contents (mostly) through static structures such as Wikipedia (Fensel, et al., 2012) and blogs. The findings from this research illustrate that most sellers’ and buyers’ blogs broadcast static information. Broadcasting dynamic information, on the other hand, allows interaction with information and published streams among users, such as when each item has its own URL, allowing the URL to be bookmarked and shared and to appear in search results (Fensel, et al., 2012). Many sellers and buyers interviewed in this research broadcast dynamic information to other companies through social networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram. Even though bilateral communication can occur when broadcasting dynamic information to other companies, the findings from this research show that buyers do use social media for unilateral communication, such as broadcasting news or reaching other companies (including prospects), not necessarily their existing sellers.
Bilateral Communication

The research findings suggest that in contrast to unilateral communication, bilateral communication (i.e. bi-directional information exchange between buyer and seller) is weighted as equally important in its social media role for both sellers and buyers. In other words, bilateral communication is the most important social media theme in B2B relationship marketing from both perspectives. Possible reasons for bilateral communication to be the most important reason from both perspectives are explained by Haney (1964) in a comparative study between unilateral and bilateral communication. The data from Haney’s study illustrate that unlike unilateral communication, bilateral communication tends to generate much less frustration and distinctively more accurate messages, and to produce significantly more recipient confidence in the interpretation of messages (Haney, 1964). When viewed from the seller’s perspective, bilateral communication is the most important social media role. However, from the buyer’s perspective, another most important social media role for B2B relationship marketing (in addition to bilateral communication) is unilateral communication. As the findings illustrate that buyers do not always respond to messages, the use of bilateral communication among the interviewed B2B companies is flawed, or at least ineffectual. Nevertheless, bilateral communication remains the most important social media role from both seller and buyer perspectives.

Importantly, the research findings indicate that every company interviewed (sellers and buyers) uses social media for unilateral communication and/or bilateral communication (see Table 5.13). Hence, although there are differences between social media’s role as a unilateral and a bilateral communication medium, differentiating between the two is not easy. Thus in this research unilateral and bilateral communication are treated as a single social media role. In other words, rather than addressing unilateral and bilateral communication as two distinct roles, this study views unilateral and bilateral communication as a whole. When analysed from a bigger perspective, the research findings illustrate that communication (unilateral and bilateral communication) is likely to be more important for buyers than that for sellers. Table 5.13 illustrates that all buyers perceive communication as the main social media role for B2B relationship marketing in Malaysia. However, not all sellers perceive the same.
Social Media Enigma

The findings of this research show that social media enigma is a reason both sellers and buyers use social media in B2B relationship marketing in Malaysia. Interestingly, social media enigma is the only theme that is valued the same by buyers and sellers. That is, social media enigma is the third most important social media role in B2B relationship marketing from both perspectives. The theme of social media enigma derives from the notion that businesses use social media simply because they want to follow the latest trend without truly comprehending the reasons for such actions. Andzulis, et al. (2012) explained that the earliest development of web sites occurred because of the prevailing thought that businesses must “be on the Internet”, even if the businesses had yet to fully understand the reasons why they should be doing so. Similarly, many companies today started to employ social media simply to “have a social media presence ”such as Facebook and LinkedIn pages and a Youtube channel, even though their social media pages and channels contribute little to the companies’ value proposition (Andzulis, et al., 2012).

A different level of insight is provided when considering the social media enigma theme, which is larger in the concept map of the seller perspective in than that of the buyer perspective. Even though many businesses (from both seller and buyer perspectives) do not truly comprehend their reasons for using social media, more companies from the seller perspective do not understand their actual reasons for using social media in B2B relationship marketing than companies from the buyer perspective. Even though social media enigma is not the main reason for B2B relationship marketing for any buyer, the research findings indicate that social media enigma appears to be the main B2B relationship marketing reason for several sellers. The findings illustrate that sellers are more likely to be using social media because of social media enigma than are buyers.

Efficiency

According to the Leximancer concept map, efficiency ranks as the least important social media role and it is the only role that appears from only one perspective. An interesting finding in the study is that the efficiency theme does not appear to be a social media role for sellers (as illustrated on the Leximancer concept map from the seller perspective), but appears to be a social media role for buyers (as on
the Leximancer concept map from the buyer perspective). It is interesting to discover that efficiency is the least important role for buyers, given that social media should or could also promote efficiency on the part of the buyer. For instance, a buyer could learn about the performance of an existing product from other users’ comments, thus minimising sellers’ need to test a product themselves. A buyer could also become aware of innovations (or new uses for existing products) from other users or sellers through the social media conversation. The findings from this research show that even though none of the buyers interviewed in this study perceives efficiency as the main reason for social media utilisation in the B2B relationship marketing, every buyer interviewed considered efficiency as one of the reasons for such purpose.

As noted earlier, for the purpose of this study, the term “efficiency” is defined as the efficiency in operationalisation of social media, including ease of use, low cost, and, effectiveness in receiving feedback (such as efficient in operation time and ability to reach geographically distanced users). The findings from this study support one of six core principles that motivate the importance of social media. According to Siricharoen (2012), a core principle of social media is independence, which is also known as “anytime, anyplace collaboration”. Similarly, Kasteler (2010) stated that the main objective of social networking sites is to be widely accessible to users, and Asur and Huberman (2010) stated that social media provide fast public discourse because of the various media’s speed, ease of use, and reach. The findings from this study illustrate that businesses use social media not only because of time efficiency and easy access by many, but also because of cost efficiency. Business Insider reported that to reduce costs, Procter & Gamble would lay off more than 1,500 staff, including marketers, because Facebook and Google can be more efficient than the traditional media (Edwards, 2012). Budget management has become increasingly important for businesses, and hence social media have been used for effectively promoting products and/or services anytime and anywhere (Siricharoen, 2012).
Conclusion of Comparison between Social Media Themes from the Seller and Buyer Perspectives

The findings from this study answered RQ3, which is “How consistent are the perceptions of sellers and buyers engaging with social media in B2B relationship marketing?”. The research findings reveal several similarities between the perceptions of sellers and buyers. For instance, bilateral communication and social media enigma rank as themes with the same level of importance from both seller and buyer perspectives. Even though information sharing, relationship, and unilateral communication also have a role in B2B relationship marketing from both seller and buyer perspectives, these roles are ranked differently in each perspective. The findings from this study indicate that the major difference between the seller and buyer perceptions of social media is that efficiency has a social media role in B2B relationship marketing for buyers, but not for sellers. Therefore, in answering RQ3, the findings from this study illustrate that there are both commonalities and significant differences in the seller and buyer perspectives of social media’s role in B2B relationship marketing in Malaysia. A summary of each of these social media themes, based on their respective seller-buyer relationships, is presented in Table 5.14.
### Table 5.14
Summary of Social Media Themes based on Seller-Buyer Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Companies</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Enigma</th>
<th>Efficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seller 7</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 19</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 5</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 18</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 8</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 3</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 16</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 1</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 2</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 4</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 6</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 9</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 10</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 11</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 12</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 13</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 14</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 15</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seller 17</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Themes | | | | | |
|--------|---|---|---|---|
| ✓✓     | 4 | 9 | 6 |   |
| ✓      | 4 | 10| 5 |   |
| Total  | 8 | 19| 11|   |

*To protect participants’ identities, participants were labelled as Seller 1–Seller 19 or Buyer 1–Buyer 15. Colour denotes the corresponding buyer-seller relationships.

*Source: Developed for this research.*
5.2.5 Comparison between the Internet Presence and Social Media Presence on B2B Relationship Marketing

Source: Adopted from Sharma (2002).

Figure 5.5: Evolution of Internet Presence

Source: Developed for this research.

Figure 5.6: Themes of Social Media in B2B Relationship Marketing

Source: Developed for this research.
The findings from this study illustrate that despite several similarities, there are few differences which exist between the role of social media and the role of the Internet towards B2B relationship marketing, especially during the e-commerce era. To further illustrate, a review of previous literature on the Internet presence demonstrates that companies adopt website functions to various degrees in order to provide different capabilities and benefits to buyers (Dooling, Burgess, & Cooper, 2002; Hanson, 2000). Companies use websites for many purposes, including 1) for communicating with buyers and providing them with information (Buhalis, 1998; Dooling, et al., 2002; Lexhagen, 2005; Sharma, 2002; Subramanian, Shaw, & Gardner, 2000); 2) selling directly to buyers (Dooling, et al., 2002; Lexhagen, 2005; Sharma, 2002; Subramanian, et al., 2000), hence increase transaction efficiency; and 3) for pre and post-transactional communication, such as for customer support or customer service (Buhalis, 1998; Dooling, et al., 2002; Lexhagen, 2005; Sharma, 2002), which may contribute to relational transactions and better seller-buyer relationships.

However, a comparison between this study and the study by Sharma (2002), relating to the evolution of the Internet presence, shows that compared to the role of the Internet, social media provides a greater benefit to B2B companies. Based on Sharma’s study, a B2B company’s Internet presence was expected to evolve through several stages, beginning with the information stage and continuing through to the stages of knowledge, communication, relationship marketing, and e-commerce (Sharma, 2002). As Figure 5.5 shows, the stages illustrate an increase in the complexity of Internet processes and an increase in the company’s values towards its buyers. According to Sharma (2002), the boundaries of the Internet stages are unclear, but the progression of companies is predicted towards the “higher value” direction. The detailed comparisons between the stages of the Internet presence and the role of social media in the B2B marketing environment are discussed in the following sub-headings.

**Information**

Based on the study by Sharma (2002), during the Internet or Web 1.0 era, information was provided by sellers to buyers during the early stage. Although some customisation of facilities may have been available for buyers, buyers were the main navigators of the information, such as visiting the sites and obtaining information, and
performing transactions with sellers. The flow of information during the earliest stage of the Internet presence was one-way, from the sellers or B2B marketers to buyers. The information received by buyers was often limited, whereby sellers or B2B marketers were only aware of their buyers’ names, addresses and some additional information relating to the transaction. According to Sharma (2002), as the stages of the Internet presence increased, buyers started to gather more information on their buyers through buyers’ behaviour on the sellers’ websites and through internal databases. Information included buyers’ preferences, attribute importance, and purchases. Often, buyers utilised customer relationship management (CRM) systems for managing buyers’ data.

Today, during the social media era, although one-way flow of information is still apparent, especially during one-way communications from seller to buyer, or from buyer to seller, the findings from this study show that all B2B companies (sellers and buyers) utilise social media for information sharing, that is, for bi-directional flow of information. With the existence of Web 2.0 and User Generated Content (UGC) technological tools, B2B companies have the capabilities to author, structure, and follow-up on large amounts of shared information online. Consistent with previous research by Stenmark (2008), Golder and Huberman (2006), and Summer (2006), sellers and buyers of B2B companies are able to filter, search, and/or navigate information, express themselves freely, participate flexibly, organise data through web tagging, and access mass information, through news and feeds, from many channels into one channel simultaneously.

As such, the level of information sharing during the social media era is less restricted than that of the Internet or Web 1.0 era. Information ownership has broken away from being centrally controlled by, for example, an administrator, or solely a uni-directional flow from sellers to buyers. It is apparent from this study that despite social media allowing for bi-directional flow of information (from B2B sellers to B2B buyers, and vice-versa), the role of social media as a unilateral communication medium is more valued or important for the buyers of B2B companies than the sellers, hence conforming to the idea that B2B buyers have greater control of information during the social media era than the Internet era.
Communication

During the Web 1.0 era, B2B companies or marketers used the Internet to initiate bilateral communication which often occurred prior, during and post-transaction. For instance, sellers may have utilised the Internet to inform buyers about a product launch, involve buyers when designing a product, or provide a service information to their buyers. According to Sharma (2002), the Internet during the Web 1.0 era was used in a similar way as the written letter and telephone were used during the traditional media era.

Now, during this social media era, B2B companies also utilise social media for bilateral communication. Based on the findings of the study, at the time of writing, bilateral communication is one of the most important social media roles for both B2B sellers and buyers, as it appears as the most important theme in the B2B relationship marketing from both perspectives. Despite the lack of academic research on social media in the B2B environment, social media has already been demonstrated to provide additional opportunities for B2B companies due to its ability to enhance interaction, collaboration and communication, thus bringing significant benefits to companies (Jussila, et al., 2011). For instance, B2B companies can utilise social media to identify new product ideas, to uphold marketing activities, and to expand collaboration with buyers, not only within but also between B2B companies (Gilin & Schwartzman, 2011; Hoffman & Fodor, 2010, Lehtimäki, 2009; Barker, 2008).

Therefore, the comparison study between the bilateral communication role during the Internet era and the social media era shows that there is similarity between the two. Additionally, as mentioned in the preceding section (Section 5.2.5), when viewed from the seller’s perspective, the research findings from this study illustrate that bilateral communication is the most important social media role. However, from the buyer’s perspective, another most important social media role for B2B relationship marketing (in addition to bilateral communication) is unilateral communication. As such, bilateral communication is likely to be more valuable to B2B sellers than B2B buyers during this social media era, which is similar to B2B sellers during the Internet era, despite the fact that social media is equipped with UGC technological tools.
Relationship Marketing

During the Internet era, the stage following the communication stage was the relationship marketing stage, as shown in Figure 5.5. Through communication and interaction via a seller-buyer platform, B2B sellers or B2B marketers could utilise the Internet to develop relationships with their buyers. For instance, sellers could provide required financial data through a bank customised website, allowing for formal and informal links of companies’ information systems. According to Sharma (2002), another linkage exemplar is provided by the Wal-Mart and Procter & Gamble systems. The existence of these systems and transaction platforms during the Internet era improved referrals and increased cross-selling within existing buyer groups.

Similarly, during the social media era, relationship is apparent as one of the social media roles for B2B companies. Based on the research findings, forming relationships during the social media era appears to be a more important role from the seller’s perspective than the buyer’s perspective. The findings from this study are consistent with the previous literature by Berry (1995). Table 5.15 presents the concept of relationship marketing, which was introduced to demonstrate a different perspective to transactional marketing.

Table 5.15
Comparison between Pure Transactional and Pure Relationship Marketing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transactional Marketing</th>
<th>Relationship Marketing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus on a single sale</td>
<td>Focus on customer retention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oriented to products or services features</td>
<td>Oriented to customer values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short time scale</td>
<td>Long time scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little emphasis on customer service</td>
<td>High customer service emphasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited customer commitment</td>
<td>Goal is to increase customer loyalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate customer contact</td>
<td>High customer contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality is primarily a concern of production</td>
<td>Quality is the concern of all</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As illustrated in Table 5.15, social media plays a role as a relationship medium, in which social media is utilised by sellers to focus on their buyer retention rather than on a single sale, concern for buyer values rather than on products or services features, plan for long time rather than short time scale, emphasise high rather than limited customer service, aim for high rather than limited buyer loyalty and buyer contact, and concentrate on the overall quality rather than on the production quality. Even though relationship appears to be more important for sellers than for buyers of B2B companies during the social media era, social media does play a role as a relationship medium for B2B buyers.

A comparison study between the role of relationship during the Internet and social media eras illustrates that relationship appears to be important for B2B companies during both eras. Additionally, during both eras, relationship is likely to be more important for sellers than for buyers of B2B companies.

**Efficiency**

The final stage during the Internet era is the stage of e-commerce. During this stage, B2B companies often perform commerce transactions via the Internet. Often, B2B companies or marketers link all the systems together to lessen the transaction costs. Repeated transactions and reduced and, hence transaction efficiency and the relationship effectiveness is increased. During this stage, all departments within a company (sellers and buyers of B2B companies) have access to the same information platform. Thus, the e-commerce platform is able to increase the level of efficiency during transactions among B2B companies not only by reducing transaction cost, but also through decreasing transaction cycle time. To further illustrate, Sharma (2002) stated that Cisco manage its website and able to reduce millions of dollars, while GE Power Systems manage to reduce cost and cycle time, and increase buyer satisfaction through the use of an e-commerce platform.

Interestingly, during the social media era, although efficiency appears to be one of the roles of social media, efficiency ranks as the least important and is the only role which appears from only one perspective, that is, from the buyer perspective. The findings from this study support the notion by Chen and Popovich (2003), Fairhurst
(2001) and Kotorov (2003) that relationship marketing is more than a technological tool. While the evolution of technology has helped to enhance the relationship marketing concept (Winer, 2001), few (if any) relationship marketers would agree that relationship marketing is solely a technological tool to build relationships between sellers and buyers. As mentioned earlier in the literature review (Chapter 2), Shoemaker (2001, p. 178) defines relationship marketing as “the technology used to blend sales, marketing, and service information systems to build partnerships with customers”. The research findings show that efficiency is not the main social media role in B2B relationship marketing, and in fact that social media plays a greater role as a means for information sharing, communication, and/or relationship building between B2B companies. One possible reason for this is because during the social media era, the B2B companies have other mediums to ensure a high level of transaction efficiency among sellers and buyers, such as the e-commerce platform (efficiency in sale transaction), and instant messenger (efficiency in ease of use).

Conclusion of Comparison between the Internet Presence and Social Media Presence in B2B Relationship Marketing

In conclusion, a comparison study between the Internet and social media eras with regard to B2B relationship marketing reveals that there are several similarities and differences. The similarities include the characteristics of bilateral communication and relationship marketing. During both eras, bilateral communication and relationship are relatively important for B2B companies. Another similarity is that during these eras both bilateral communication and relationships are likely to be more important for sellers than for buyers of B2B companies. The differences which exist between the Internet and social media eras are the information flow and efficiency levels of the technologies. Firstly, information ownership during the social media era breaks away from a central control and a uni-directional flow of information. Secondly, unlike efficiency during the Internet era, efficiency during the social media era is not the most important reason for B2B companies to utilise the technologies. Instead, efficiency is regarded as a social media role only from the B2B buyer perspective.
As mentioned earlier, the findings from this study reflect the ambiguity surrounding the reasons for using social media in B2B relationship marketing by sellers and buyers. In other words, during the social media era, there are companies which do not truly understand their actual reason for using social media. One possible reason for this is because with the existence of UGC technological tools, B2B companies can easily employ and use social media and it is virtually free. When compared to the Internet era, the ability of B2B companies to utilise the Internet was more expensive and more complex (i.e. creating e-commerce, or corporate website), hence companies were more likely to give thorough consideration before deciding on having an Internet platform such as a corporate website and/or e-commerce platform. As such, despite several similarities which exist during the Internet and social media eras in relationship marketing, the social media era has been more influential on B2B companies, especially for buyers, than that of the Internet era, as demonstrated in the following.

Table 5.16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Level of Importance towards B2B Relationship Marketing</th>
<th>Internet Presence</th>
<th>Social Media Presence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information Sharing and Unilateral Communication</td>
<td>Different Technology Characteristic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relatively more important for B2B sellers</td>
<td>Relatively more important for B2B buyers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilateral Communication</td>
<td>Similar Technology Characteristic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relatively more important for B2B sellers</td>
<td>Relatively more important for B2B sellers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Similar Technology Characteristic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relatively more important for B2B sellers</td>
<td>Relatively more important for B2B sellers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiency</td>
<td>Different Technology Characteristic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relatively more important for B2B sellers</td>
<td>Relatively more important for B2B buyers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Developed for this research.
5.3 Theoretical Implications

The findings from this study clearly demonstrate the significant contributions of social media’s role in B2B relationship marketing in Malaysia. The findings show that even though many similarities exist between buyers and sellers as to the role of social media, few differences emerged between the two. As illustrated in Table 5.14, every company has its own reasons for using social media in B2B relationship marketing.

To the best of the researcher’s knowledge, at the time of writing, this is the first two-dimensional study integrating the related research areas of social media, relationship marketing, and the B2B environment. Prior literature reveals that studies relating to social media activities are segmented into specific areas, such as social media classifications, tools, and applications, with less emphasis on elements in the broad picture such as the role of social media. Additionally, many previous studies on the use of social media focus mainly on social networking sites, with only limited studies examining social media as a whole. Among these limited studies that take a broad perspective of social media, only a few integrate the studies with other broad research areas such as relationship marketing, and analyse the use of social media from the B2B perspective. Researchers such as Gilin and Schwartzman (2010), Stelzner (2011), Lehtimäki, Salo, Hitula and Lankinen (2009) and Carabiner (2009) have focused largely on the unidirectional marketing perspective—that is, from the perspective of a company to its individual customers. This study is unique in its investigation of the role of social media in B2B relationships from two perspectives—from the sellers to their buyers and from the buyers to their sellers.

The vast majority of previous studies on social media do not appear to adopt a rigorous approach in research design or application (e.g. Gilin & Schwartzman, 2011), in which some of the studies were case studies performed based on secondary data. While there are some academically business-oriented studies on social media, most of these studies considered the B2C environment (e.g. Füller & Matzler, 2007; Kohler, Matzler & Füller, 2009; Sawhney, Verona & Pradelli, 2005; Verona, Pradelli, & Sawhney, 2006). Overall, to date, there has been a paucity of academically robust research examining social media issues utilising an inductive (in-depth interview) approach so as to accommodate the inherent complexity of these issues within a B2B context. Even though Kärkkäinen and colleagues (2011) reported over a dozen prior
academic studies integrating focal areas of customer interface, innovation, and the B2B environment, many of these studies were non-academic writings such as blogs, and relatively few studies clearly elaborated the use of Web 2.0 or social media. Some studies did not make clear which types of social media had been used.

This study is one of the few studies on social media that clearly reports on relationship marketing from the B2B standpoint. A relatively current study relating to social media’s ability to create customer understanding is based upon social customer relationship management (social CRM) or customer relationship management 2.0 (CRM 2.0) (e.g. Sigala, 2010; Greenberg, 2010; Leary, 2008). Traditionally, customer relationship management (CRM) has been described as a set of philosophies, strategies, and technological tools that would efficiently and effectively manage relationships between companies and their customers (Greenberg, 2003). CRM 2.0 provides strategies and technological tools for modern types of customer insights that result in value to the relationships between the companies and their customers. However, current literature focuses more on the sales and marketing perspective, and considers fewer or no direct implications of B2B companies. Even though most customer relationship management is regarded as an essential paradigm shift in marketing literature, most of the studies in the relationship management field have concentrated on B2C customers as individual customers (Greenberg, 2010; Payne, Storbacka, & Frow, 2008; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Rowley, Kupiec-Teahan, & Leeming, 2007). The use of social media for relationship management as not been clearly reported in the marketing literature stream from the B2B viewpoint.

This research explores the use of social media from the seller and buyer perspectives, and reveals that thus far, academic research on social media in the B2B environment is very limited. Even though undoubtedly more quantitative research, such as survey-based studies, should be undertaken in the B2B environment to confirm the findings of this study, this research has described how the seller and buyer differ from each other in their social media role for B2B relationship marketing in Malaysia. Additionally, prior research has not considered the buyer perspective separately, and thus has not been able to holistically view the use of social media for relationship marketing in the B2B environment. This study not only contributes to overcoming this deficiency, but also augments the understanding of the similarities and differences in the buyer and seller perspectives of social media’s role. This research has also
illustrated that Web 2.0 and social media have contributed to relationships between sellers and their buyers. Most of the relationships between companies in the B2B environment have been achieved through the development of Web 2.0, and social media and could not have been achieved through the use of the traditional web, that is, Web 1.0.

Comparison with prior literature has confirmed that, in spite of several similarities, the role of social media in the B2B environment has inherent differences from that in the B2C environment. Even though this study explores the reasons companies use social media in B2B relationship marketing, the findings from this study illustrate that the promotion of the exchange relationship is not the key reason companies use social media. Instead, the research findings identify information sharing as the only reason every seller and buyer uses social media in B2B relationship marketing in Malaysia. Like unilateral and bilateral communication, relationship appears to be just one of the reasons for some sellers and buyers in Malaysia to use social media for B2B relationship marketing. Another remarkable contribution to the social media literature is the discovery of the social media enigma theme, illustrating that some buyers and sellers in Malaysia who use social media do not truly comprehend their reasons for doing so. Lastly, the findings from this study reveal that efficiency, in terms of saving time, being cost-efficient, and being able to reach distant users, appears to be one of the reasons buyers in Malaysia use social media in the B2B environment. However, these reasons are not important enough to appear as a reason for the sellers to utilise social media. Figure 5.4 summarises the research findings from both seller and buyer perspectives.

5.4 Managerial Implications

A central purpose of this research is to investigate what is believed to be an important role of social media in the B2B environment for both sides of the marketing channel dyad (i.e. buyers and sellers). The salient findings provide insight into several critical areas for business researchers and B2B companies. The numerous practitioner articles relating to social media offer no consensus on the best social media practice. However, according to Andzulis et al. (2012), prior social media studies make several points in common, including 1) the use of social media is essential among businesses,
2) the shift of consumerism power is moving from sellers to buyers (Baer, 2010), and
3) the use of social media requires resources, commitment, and strategy integration, not
only between the sellers and their business strategies, but also with their buyers and the
buyers’ strategies. These common points from prior research are similar to the key
points derived from the research findings of this study, which include that 1) the use of
social media provides information to businesses, 2) buyers’ reasons for using social
media are not necessarily similar to sellers’ reasons, 3) there are common social media
practices among businesses, and 4) social media offer an integrated marketing
communication tool.

Social Media as a Source of Information for Businesses

In the B2B environment, social media play a pivotal role in providing a source
of information for the companies especially for the buyers. Whilst it is apparent from
this study that despite social media allowing for bi-directional flow of information
(from B2B sellers to B2B buyers, and vice-versa), the role of social media as a
unilateral communication medium is more valued or important for the buyers of B2B
companies than the sellers. The study conforms to the idea that the level of information
sharing during the social media era is less restricted than that of the Internet or Web 1.0
era, hence B2B buyers have greater control of information during the social media era
than the Internet era. As information ownership has broken away from being centrally
controlled (e.g. by an administrator or solely a uni-directional flow from sellers to
buyers), buyers that are currently using social media may fully use social media as a
source of information; by sharing, creating, and/or exchanging ideas and information
with their sellers via various social media platforms. Buyers that are not currently using
social media may be missing the opportunity to be updated quickly with the latest
information from their sellers.

Buyers’ and Sellers’ Reasons for Using Social Media May Differ

In spite of having several similarities, sellers and buyers have many differences
in their reasons for using social media. For instance, even when a seller’s main reason
for using social media is for relationship purposes, its buyers may not have relationship
as their main reason. Relationship may not even be one of the reasons for the buyers to
be using social media. A suggestion for sellers could be to understand their buyers and
to explore the possible benefits of social media presence. Before a seller enters the social media arena, the seller should at least have a clear understanding of social media’s role for its company. The seller needs to comprehend the potential benefits of social media not only for the company, but also for its buyers. Social media in the B2B environment should not be only about following trends or benefiting one entity. At its core, the use of social media involves interaction with another entity, which means that the use of social media supports the philosophy of relationship marketing. Thus, when dealing with buyers, a seller should ensure that the buyers also receive some benefits, or at least perceive the value of utilising social media even if the potential benefits for the seller are different from those for its buyers. Without truly comprehending the reasons for using social media, the company may waste time and forfeit the buyers’ commitment to the company.

**Businesses Share Common Social Media Practices**

Even though every seller and buyer has its own way of utilising social media, the research findings reflect common social media practices among the businesses interviewed for this study. The research findings illustrate that the smartphone and the desktop appear to be the most frequently used devices by sellers and buyers. Facebook is the most commonly used social media platform by sellers and buyers. Two other platforms that are commonly used by sellers and buyers in Malaysia are Twitter and Instagrams. Although the research findings show that not every company has its own supportive measures (such as training, policy, rules, templates, standards, or scripts), many companies do provide their employees with at least one of the supportive measures. For the B2B companies to better gain the benefits of social media, companies need to invest time and commitment to the use of social media.

**Social Media: An Integrated Marketing Communication Tool**

As mentioned earlier, the research findings show that even though some sellers and buyers use social media for relationship purposes, relationship (unlike information sharing) is not the reason for social media use by every seller and buyer. The use of social media appears to be just one of several integrated marketing communication tools since many sellers and buyers do employ other communication tools such as email, telephone, and even applications on smartphones (such as Whatsapp and Viber), in
addition to social media. At some point, many sellers and buyers do meet face-to-face to develop, maintain and/or enhance their relationship. A new strategy involving social media does not have to be entirely different from the company’s current practice; rather, the new strategy involving social media can be implemented by adapting particular practices associated with the evolving and enjoyable social media platform. Social media will undoubtedly be more transformative in the coming years, and the important aspect of social media transformation is companies’ use of social media in the earlier stage, before social media have become too complex to be used or adapted to the companies’ strategies.

5.5 Limitations

As with all research, a number of limitations associated with the nature and conduct of this study warrant further discussion. Detailed attention to these limitations may provide context for the generalisability of results and may provide a more complete schema for future research activities. These limitations are also acknowledged to give readers greater understanding of the context of this research.

The researcher

Given that the interviews within the two phases of the interviewees were conducted by a single researcher, the data received from the interviews may have been subject to researcher subjectivity bias. The research could have achieved greater objectivity by conducting the interviews with additional researchers, who preferably had a corporate background. Researchers with a strong corporate background may have a better understanding of the corporate culture, and thus be able to better probe the interviewees. As this study was undertaken in a single country, the ability to apply the findings and conclusions of this research to the general population of B2B companies that use social media may be limited. However, this study employed semi-structured interviews with sets of buyers and sellers of B2B companies. The cooperation between sellers and buyers in the B2B sector is considered to be generally more intense and more direct than in the B2C sector (Kärkkäinen, et al., 2011), and therefore it is argued that the study produces rich information as well as an in-depth understanding of the role of social media in B2B relationship marketing in Malaysia. Additionally, this study
limits the bias of research subjectivity as it employed objective measures by utilising semi-structured interview guides when conducting interviews.

**Sampling strategy issues**

As this is the first research on social media in B2B relationship marketing in Malaysia and internationally, the specific sampling strategies (see Chapter 3: Developing a Sampling Strategy) were adopted to better ensure that the targeted businesses utilise social media for the purpose of B2B relationship marketing. Interviewees for the second-phase interviews were recommended by the interviewees of first-phase interviews who use social media for B2B relationship marketing. Even though no criteria limited the choice of participants in terms of their company size, market focus, or industry, businesses of the second-phase interviews may have characteristics similar to those of the businesses from the first-phase interviews. The similar characteristics of the businesses may contribute to less variation in the research findings. Furthermore, some of the businesses interviewed during the first-phase interviews were using social media to interact with other businesses that are located overseas (e.g. in Brunei, Indonesia, Singapore, and the United States). Given that the scope of this study is businesses in Malaysia, it was decided to not interview businesses located outside Malaysia. Despite having research limitations owing to sampling issues, according to Maxwell (1992), qualitative research ensures that the researcher comprehends the variation in the setting phenomena of interest and allows the researcher to test progressive ideas about the specified setting by choosing phenomena that are relevant to the validity of the ideas. Often, the type of sampling executed in qualitative research is either theoretical (Strauss, 1987) or purposeful (Patton, 1990), instead of random sampling or other sampling methods of achieving statistical representativeness (Maxwell, 1992). In qualitative research, some sort of phenomena inference (as in this study) is common because examining everything is not possible, even if the setting phenomenon is small (Maxwell, 1992).

**Selection Process**

Given that the context of the research is Malaysia, the interviewees of both interview phases were recruited either through businesses in Malaysia or directly through the preceding interviewees (see Chapter 3: Developing a Sampling Strategy).
Not all businesses of the first-phase interviews used social media. Among those that use social media, some use social media for functions that are business-to-consumer (B2C), business-to-government (B2G), or business-to-public. Thus, the number of businesses interviewed during the first-phase interviews that use social media for B2B relationship marketing was relatively low. Because all interviewees of the second-phase interviews were recommended by the interviewees of the first-phase interviews, the low number of businesses during the first-phase interviews (which uses social media for B2B relationship marketing) made it harder for the researcher to gain high access to potential interviewees for the second-phase interviews. The small sample size of this qualitative study limits the sample-to-population generalisability of the research findings (Firestone, 1993). Nevertheless, this study is consistent with the thematic saturation recommendations made by Dick (1990), in which interviews are executed until data saturation is achieved. To achieve credibility of the research findings, this research not only executed two phases of interviews (from sellers’ and buyers’ perspectives), but also for each phase of interviews, additional interviews were undertaken to ensure data saturation was achieved. This approach ensures that the quality of the final research data is maintained after accounting for companies that do not use social media and companies that do use social media but not for B2B purposes.

**Process Issues**

Many businesses have a private and confidential policy that prohibits them from sharing contact details of other businesses. These businesses are mostly large businesses and their decision making procedures greatly depend on board meetings. Often, three to four weeks passed before the businesses were told that they could not share information of other businesses. Hence, this research had greater access to small businesses, which may bias the research findings. Additionally, the use of semi-structured interviews may affect the research findings with reporting bias. Interviewees may have shaped their answers in the best interest of their corporate images rather than reporting their actual corporate cultures. Some interviewees were also not able to reveal certain information or answer all interview questions owing to their businesses’ privacy policy. As mentioned earlier, to minimise the limitations of this study and to achieve credibility for the research findings, this research executed more interviews than needed for data saturation. By utilising interview guides, the researcher also probed interviewees (see Chapter 3: Conducting Interviews) with prompting questions. During
each part of the interview process, the interviewee’s responses were reflected back to
the interview guides to ensure that both interviewee and interviewer were clear on a
specific point and expressed meanings (Bogdan & Taylor, 1989), hence maintaining the
credibility of research findings.

5.6 Future Research

Despite the limitations presented in the previous section, this research remains
as the first study of its kind within the Malaysian context, and its research findings are
capable of informing future research that may be undertaken in other developing
markets, in developed markets, or within the Malaysian context but at a population
level. The goal of this research is to explore social media’s role in B2B relationship
marketing in Malaysia. Given that the topic of this research is relatively new, countless
possible paths exist that may be pursued by future researchers.

Cross-internationalisation Studies

In focusing on relationship marketing among businesses in Malaysia, this study
identified a number of social media roles that encourage relationship marketing among
businesses. These findings offer a resourceful background for future research for both
emerging (e.g. Singapore, Taiwan, and Hong Kong) and emerged markets (e.g. United
States, United Kingdom, and Australia). Replicating the research in emerging markets
of different continents might reveal whether the current findings hold true in other
emerging markets, providing a better understanding of the current research findings.
Given that demographic shifts and globalisation trends influence the understanding
between nations (Cronin, 2003), cross-internationalisation studies between businesses
in emerging and emerged markets may also help to improve the understanding of social
media roles in B2B relationship marketing.

Quantitative Studies

From a methodological perspective, future research could employ a quantitative
approach. According to Yin (1984), generalisability in qualitative research is normally
based on the assumption that research theory may be useful in understanding similar
situations, rather than in drawing conclusions about a particular population through
statistical inferences. Even though a qualitative study may be able to detect minor issues that may not be observable in a quantitative study, a quantitative study would increase the size of the sample, and thus may also improve the systematic generalisability of the research findings to a wider population (Maxwell, 1992; Patton, 2002; Proctor, 2005). Future studies could also validate the findings using a longitudinal rather than a cross-sectional methodological approach. An advantage of longitudinal studies is that the researchers are able to detect changes or development of the target population, not only at the macro level but also at the micro level (Institute for Work & Health, 2015). That is, over time, longitudinal studies would better enhance the understanding of social media roles in the stages of relationship marketing, such as when developing, maintaining, and enhancing relationships with other businesses. As a consequence, knowledge of social media use in B2B relationship marketing may also improve the existing managerial strategies.

**Wider Scope of Social Media Studies**

One area of research that was not directly discussed in this study is the classification of social media (i.e. social media types and applications) based on industries or geographical locations, such as countries or sub-areas within a country. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) classified social media into types based on the level of 1) social presence/media richness and 2) self-presentation/self-disclosure. Each social media type or application may result in different, or possibly additional, social media roles for B2B relationship marketing. For instance, Seller 12 utilised Youtube for B2B promotional purposes, such as presenting a softlaunch or teasers to its buyers. Seller 24, on the other hand, made use of Twitter when attracting photography companies, but not for attracting its other buyers. Additionally, analysing the consistency of the role of social media in relationship marketing of B2B and that of B2C environments may provide abundant opportunities for future studies.

**Studies on Other Areas of B2B Environment**

Within the B2B context, several areas offer opportunities for additional studies that were not the objectives of this research, such as corporate culture, pricing strategy, and branding. Social media offer a fruitful area for B2B research not only when with
respect to relationship marketing strategies, but also in association with other business strategies. A basic assumption is that the use of social media enables complex communication, collaboration, and social interaction among the users (Kärkkäinen et al., 2011). The future of social media in the B2B environment depends greatly on both sellers and buyers, and where social media will take both will evolve with time and innovation. Even though this study reveals many social media roles for the buyer and seller in B2B companies, to date, knowledge is still scarce regarding the use of social media especially in the B2B environment (Kärkkäinen, et al., 2011). Hence, research on social media in any B2B-associated areas will open the way for many future endeavours.

In conclusion, in spite of ambiguity as to whether more B2B companies will employ social media for relationship marketing purposes in the future, the findings from this study illustrate that the use of social media serves as a great source of information sharing among B2B companies. Within the limit of one study, this research focused on exploring the differences of social media’s role for sellers and their buyers in the B2B environment, which has been examined very little in the past. Future researchers could confirm the results of this study quantitatively. It is hoped that this research functions as a stepping stone for many more studies relating to social media role in the B2B environment.

“We surrendered to the Internet, nervously accepted our dependence on it, as the extent of that dependency sunk in. It seemed the ‘Net’ would never stop growing and changing, leaving us forever scrambling to catch up.”

(Professor Susan Herring)


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Dear Y. Bhg. Tan Sri/Dato’ Seri/Datuk/Dato’/Datin Seri/Datin/Sir/ Madam,

Data Collection for an Exploratory Study on the Role of Social Media in Business-to-Business Relationship Marketing: A Malaysia Context

I am an academic staff at Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) and currently enrolled as a full time student in Griffith University, funded by Malaysia’s Ministry of Higher Education. I am writing to request your assistance and support for the above project by furnishing required information.

For your information, my project involves interviewing employee(s) in relationship marketing fields. I would like to gain an understanding of the role of social media as a mean of marketing relationships between your company and other companies. Thus, I believe that your experiences and firsthand knowledge in the company can provide essential data for my study. I would be grateful if you could voluntarily participate in the project.

Please be assured that all information provided will be treated confidentially. For you further information, I have attached herewith the information sheet concerning the project. Should you require further clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me at my email address: nuramalina.mohamadzaki@griffithuni.edu.au or at my telephone no: +61 (0)4 5126 0016 (Australia) or +6 (014) 2345 211 (Malaysia). I am grateful for your support to ensure the success of the research.

I am looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours faithfully,

NurAmalina Mohamad Zaki
PhD Candidate
Griffith Business School
Business 1 (GO1), Room 3.13
Mobile: +61 (0)4 5126 0016 (Australia)
+6 (014) 2345 211 (Malaysia)
Email: nuramalina.mohamadzaki@griffithuni.edu.au

I strongly endorse this research study and would greatly appreciate your support.

Assoc. Prof. Scott Weaven
Lecturer of Marketing
Griffith Business School
PhD Principal Supervisor

Dr. Mitchell Ross
Lecturer of Marketing
Griffith Business School
PhD Principal Supervisor

Dr. Wei Shao
Lecturer of Marketing
Griffith Business School
PhD Principal Supervisor
Y.Bhg. Tan Sri/Dato' Seri/Datuk/Dato'/Datin Seri/Datin/Tuan/Puan,

Pengumpulan Data untuk Kajian Penerokaan tentang Peranan Media Sosial dalam Pemasaran Perhubungan Antara Perniagaan dengan Perniagaan dalam Konteks Malaysia


Yang ikhlas,

…………………………       ……………………………

Nur Amalina Mohamad Zaki      Prof. Madya Scott Weaven
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…………………………………

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APPENDIX 2 (English): Information Sheet

THE GRIFFITH BUSINESS SCHOOL

An Exploratory Study on the Role of Social Media
in Business-to-Business Relationship Marketing: A Malaysia Context

INFORMATION SHEET

A Research Conducted by NurAmalina Mohamad Zaki,
Associate Professor Scott Weaven, Dr. Mitchell Ross, and Dr. Wei Shao
Department of Marketing, Griffith University
Ph: +61 (0)7 5552 8713
Email: nuramalina.mohamadzaki@griffithuni.edu.au,
ors.weaven@griffith.edu.au, or m.ross@griffith.edu.au, or w.shao@griffith.edu.au

This study aims to further enhance the understanding of social media role as a mean of marketing relationships between companies. The study is being conducted as a requirement for PhD studies at Griffith University undertaken by NurAmalina. The findings from the study should provide direct evidence from the point of view of businesses, on the role of social media in business-to-business (B2B) marketing relationships in Malaysia.

There are no identifiable risks associated with your involvement with the study. Your participation will be created confidentially. They will be known only to the researchers and will be analysed on collective basis only. You may choose to receive a copy of aggregated results. If you wish to receive a copy of the aggregated results, you may email the researcher(s) for the summary results. The results will only be published as part of final PhD proposal, PhD thesis, academic conference proceedings, books, journals, or through conference presentations, and again, on a collective basis.
Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. There is no obligation to participate and no negative consequences if you choose not to participate. Even if you agree to participate, you can withdraw at any time during the study. If you decide to withdraw after commencing interviews, any information that has already been collected will not be used.

The conduct of this research involves the collection, access and / or use of your identified personal information. The information collected is confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties without consent, except to meet government, legal, or other regulatory authority requirements. A de-identified copy of this data may be used for other research purposes. However, your anonymity will at all times be safeguarded. For further information consults the University Privacy Plan at www.griffith.edu.au/ua/aa/vc/pp, or telephone +61 (0)7 3875 5585.

If you have any question about the study, please do not hesitate to contact either one of the researchers. Further, if you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the study, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Office for Research, Room 4.25, The Learning Commans Building (G11), Gold Coast campus, Griffith University, Queensland 4215, Australia or directly on +61 (0)7 373 54375 or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au or the Head, Department of Management and Marketing, Faculty Management and Economics, University Malaysia Terengganu (UMT), Terengganu directly on +6 (09) 668 4203/4309.
Appendix 2 (Malay): Kertas Maklumat

THE GRIFFITH BUSINESS SCHOOL

Kajian Penerokaan tentang Peranan Media Sosial
da dalam Pemasaran Perhubungan Antara Perniagaan dengan Perniagaan
da dalam Konteks Malaysia

KERTAS MAKLUMAT

Satu Penyelidikan oleh Nur Amalina Mohamad Zaki,
Profesor Madya Scott Weaven, Dr. Mitchell Ross, dan Dr Wei Shao
Jabatan Pemasaran, Griffith University
Telefon: +61 (0)7 5552 8713
Emel: nuramalina.mohamadzaki@griffithuni.edu.au,
atau s.weaven@griffith.edu.au, atau m.ross@griffith.edu.au, atau
w.shao@griffith.edu.au

Kajian ini bertujuan memperkaya pemahaman mengenai peranan media sosial sebagai
suatu cara memasarkan perhubungan antara syarikat. Kajian ini dijalankan untuk
memenuhi keperluan pengajian PhD Nur Amalina di Griffith University. Dapatan
daripada kajian ini akan dapat memberikan bukti langsung dari aspek perniagaan
tentang peranan media sosial dalam pemasaran perhubungan antara perniagaan dengan
perniagaan (B2B) di Malaysia.

Penglibatan anda dalam kajian ini adalah tanpa risiko yang boleh dikenalpasti.
Penglibatan anda adalah sulit. Ini hanya diketahui oleh penyelidik dan akan dianalis
secara kolektif sahaja. Hasil kajian ini akan hanya diterbitkan secara kolektif sebagai
sebahagian tesis PhD akhir dan dalam jurnal-jurnal akademik.
Penglibatan anda dalam kajian ini adalah secara sukarela. Tidak ada paksaan untuk anda mengambil bahagian dan tidak ada kesan negatif jika anda mengabaikan kajian ini. Walaupun tuan/puan bersetuju untuk mengambil bahagian, anda boleh menarik diri pada bila-bila masa semasa kajian ini dijalankan. Jika anda mengambil keputusan untuk menarik diri selepas temu bual dimulakan, apa-apa maklumat yang telahpun dikumpul akan diabaikan.

Jika terdapat sebarang pertanyaan tentang kajian ini, sila hubungi mana-mana penyelidik. Malahan, jika anda menghadapi sebarang masalah atau ingin membuat aduan tentang tindak-tanduk etika kajian ini, sila hubungi Manager, Research Ethics, Office for Research, Room 4.25, The Learning Commons Building (G11), Gold Coast campus, Griffith University, Queensland 4215, Australia atau talian terus +61 (0)7 373 54375 atau research-ethics@griffith.edu.au atau Ketua, Jabatan Pengurusan dan Pemasaran, Fakulti Pengurusan dan Ekonomi, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT), Terengganu atau talian terus +6 (09) 668 4203/4309.

APPENDIX 3 (English): Interview Guide

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE (FIRST PHASE)

Respondent’s Name : _______________________________________________

Company’s Name : _______________________________________________

Date : _______________________________________________

A - To obtain information about respondent:

1) How long have you been working?
   • With this department:
   • With this company:
   • With other companies:

B - To obtain information about respondent’s company:

1) How many employees does the company have?
2) How old is the company?
3) Where is the company located? *
4) What is the annual turnover rate of the company? *
5) How does the company position itself in the industry? *
6) What is the main market focus of the company?
   • International
   • Domestic

* Prior to interviewing, respondent’s company information will be obtained from the company’s website. The rationale of asking these questions are to verify the information with respondents and to obtain additional information if the company’s website does not provide the information needed.

Respondents were also asked information relating to their buyers. However, in order to maintain the confidentiality of respondents and their buyers, organisation names were not mentioned during the interviewing sessions. Instead, during the interviews, each respondent was referred as ‘this company’, each buyer was referred as ‘that company’ a
group of buyer companies were referred as ‘those companies’, and the relationship
between each respondent and its buyers was referred as the ‘relationship between the
companies’.

C - To explore general information pertaining social media:

1) What is the first word that comes to mind when you think about social
   media?
2) Does your company use social media?
   (If no, end the interview)
3) Who gets to use social media in this company?
   (If not everyone get to use, who are those people?)
4) Have you use social media in this company?
   (If no, can you give names of those who use social media for this company?,
    then end the interview)
5) How often do you use social media in this company?
6) How long have you been using social media in this company?

D - To explore information on what social media the company uses:

1) Can you give examples of social media the company uses?
2) What do you use it for?
   * Between companies : 
   (If not for between companies, end the interview)
3) How long has the company been using social media to communicate with
   other companies?
4) In your opinion, at what stage of the relationships do you think the company
   use social media? During developing, maintaining, or enhancing
   relationships with other companies?
5) Do you think it is the best time? Why do you think so?
   (If no, when is the best time?)
6) Who normally start the relationships? Your company or other companies?
7) Who normally is more active or more interested in using social media to
   communicate? Your company or other companies?
To explore information on how and why does the company uses social media:

1) What is the hardware does the company use for social media?
   - Desktops
   - Laptops
   - Tablets
   - Smartphone

2) In your opinion, why does the company use social media when communicating?
   - With other companies?

3) What benefits does the company get from using the social media?
   - Between companies?

4) Do you think communicating using social media is the best way to communicate?
   - Between companies?
   (If yes, how is it better off than any other communication method?)

5) Is there any downside of using social media?
   - Between companies?

6) Does the company support or encourage the use of social media?
   - Between companies?
   (If yes, how?)

7) In your opinion, how important are social media in this company?

8) Is there any training provided by the company on how to use social media?
   (If yes, how and how often?)
   (If no, do you think training would be useful for the company? Why?)

9) Is there any policy / rule relating to the use of social media in this company?
   (If yes, can I have the copy of the policy?)

10) Is there any template, standard or script relating to the use of social media in this company?
    (If yes, can I have a copy of the template?)
    (If no, do you think a template would help?)
F - Closing Statement

1) Is there any other comment would you like to give about social media?
2) Is there any other comment would you like to give about the role of social media in this company?

Thank you for your time.

*** End of Interview ***
APPENDIX 3 (Malay): Panduan Temu Bual

PANDUAN TEMU BUAL SEPARA BERSTRUKTUR (FASA PERTAMA)

Nama Responden : _______________________________________________
Nama Syarikat : _______________________________________________
Tarikh : _______________________________________________

A - Untuk mendapatkan maklumat mengenai responden:

1) Sudah berapa lama anda bekerja?
   • Dengan jabatan ini:
   • Dengan syarikat ini:
   • Dengan syarikat lain:

B - Untuk mendapatkan maklumat mengenai syarikat responden:

1) Berapa jumlah pekerja dalam syarikat ini?
2) Sudah berapa lama syarikat ini beroperasi?
3) Apakah lokasi syarikat ini? *
4) Apakah kadar perolehan tahunan syarikat ini? *
5) Bagaimanakah syarikat ini menentukan kedudukannya dalam industri? *
6) Apa fokus pasaran utama syarikat ini?
   • Antarabangsa
   • Tempatan

* Sebelum temu bual, maklumat mengenai syarikat akan diperolehi daripada laman web syarikat ini. Rasional bertanyakan soalan sebegini adalah untuk memeriksa semula maklumat syarikat dari responden dan untuk memperoleh maklumat syarikat ini sekiranya laman web syarikat tidak menyediakan maklumat yang diperlukan.

Para responden juga disoal mengenai maklumat yang berkaitan dengan pembeli-pembeli mereka. Namun, bagi mengekalkan kerahsiaan responden dan pembeli-pembeli, nama-nama syarikat tidak akan disebut sewaktu sesi temurah. Sebaliknya, sewaktu sesi temurah, setiap responden dirujuk sebagai ‘syarikat ini’, setiap pembeli...

C - Untuk mengetahui **maklumat umum** berkenaan media sosial:

1) Apakah perkataan pertama yang terlintas dalam fikiran anda apabila memikirkan berkenaan media sosial?
2) Adakah syarikat anda menggunakan media sosial?
   (Jika tidak, **temu bual berakhir**)
3) Siapa yang dapat menggunakan media sosial dalam syarikat ini?
   (Jika bukan semua yang dapat menggunakan, siapakah mereka?)
4) Adakah anda pernah menggunakan media sosial dalam syarikat ini?
   (Jika tidak, bolehkah anda menyatakan nama mereka yang menggunakan media sosial dalam syarikat ini?, kemudian tamatkan temu bual ini)
5) Berapa kerapkah anda menggunakan media sosial dalam syarikat ini?
6) Sudah berapa lamakah anda menggunakan media sosial dalam syarikat ini?
   (Teruskan ke seksyen D)

D - Untuk mengetahui **maklumat mengenai media sosial yang digunakan oleh syarikat**:

1) Bolehkah anda menyatakan contoh-contoh media sosial yang digunakan oleh syarikat ini?
2) Apakah tujuan penggunaannya?
   - **Antara syarikat:**
   (Jika bukan untuk **antara syarikat**, temu bual berakhir)
3) Sudah berapa lamakah syarikat ini menggunakan media sosial untuk berkomunikasi dengan **syarikat** yang lain?
4) Pada pendapat anda, penggunaan media sosial oleh syarikat ini berada pada tahap hubungan yang mana? Semasa membangunkan, mengekalkan atau memperkayakan hubungan dengan syarikat yang lain?
5) Adakah ini masa yang terbaik? Kenapa anda berpendapat sedemikian?
   (Jika bukan, bilakah masa yang terbaik?)
6) Siapakah yang biasanya memulakan hubungan? Syarikat anda atau syarikat yang lain?
7) Siapakah yang biasanya lebih aktif atau lebih berminat menggunakan media sosial untuk berkomunikasi? Syarikat anda atau syarikat yang lain?
   (Teruskan ke seksyen E)

E - Untuk mengetahui maklumat tentang bagaimana dan kenapa syarikat ini menggunakan media sosial:

1) Apakah perkakasan yang diguna pakai oleh syarikat ini untuk menggunakan media sosial?
   - Komputer meja
   - Komputer riba
   - Tablet
   - Telefon pintar

2) Pada pendapat anda, kenapa syarikat ini menggunakan media sosial untuk berkomunikasi?
   - Dengan syarikat lain?

3) Apakah faedah yang dinikmati oleh syarikat ini apabila menggunakan media sosial?
   - Antara syarikat?

4) Adakah berkomunikasi menggunakan media sosial suatu cara yang terbaik?
   - Antara syarikat?
   (Jika ya, bagaimanakah ia lebih baik berbanding sebarang kaedah komunikasi yang lain?)

5) Apakah kelemahan menggunakan media sosial?
   - Antara syarikat?

6) Adakah syarikat membantu atau menggalakkan penggunaan media sosial?
   - Antara syarikat?
   (Jika ya, bagaimana?)

7) Pada pendapat anda, sejauh manakah pentingnya media sosial dalam syarikat ini?

8) Adakah sebarang latihan bagaimana menggunakan media sosial disediakan oleh syarikat ini?
(Jika ya, bagaimana dan berapa kerapkah?)
(Jika tidak, pada pendapat anda, adakah latihan berguna kepada syarikat ini? Kenapa?)

9) Adakah terdapat apa-apa polisi / peraturan berkaitan penggunaan media sosial dalam syarikat ini?
   (Jika ya, bagaimana saya boleh mendapatkan salinan polisi tersebut?)

10) Adakah terdapat apa-apa templat, standard atau skrip berkaitan penggunaan media sosial dalam syarikat ini?
    (Jika ya, bagaimana saya boleh mendapatkan sesalinan templat tersebut?)
    (Jika tidak, pada pendapat anda, adakah templat boleh membantu?)

F - Kenyataan Penutup

1) Adakah anda mempunyai sebarang komen lain mengenai media sosial?
2) Adakah anda mempunyai sebarang komen lain mengenai peranan media sosial dalam syarikat ini?

   Terima kasih kerana meluangkan masa anda.
   *** Temu Bual Berakhir ***
APPENDIX 4 (English): Interview Guide

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE (SECOND PHASE)

Respondent’s Name : _______________________________________________

Company’s Name : _______________________________________________

Date : _______________________________________________

A - To obtain demographic information about respondent:

1) What are your present job responsibilities?
2) How long have you been working?
   • With this department:
   • With this company:
   • With other companies:

B - To obtain about respondent’s company:

1) How many employees does the company have?
2) How old is the company?
3) Where is the company located? *
4) What is the annual turnover rate of the company? *
5) How does the company position itself in the industry? *
   • Market Leader
   • Ordinary Company
   • New Company
6) What is the main market focus of the company?
   • International
   • Domestic

* Prior to interviewing, respondent’s company information will be obtained from the company’s website. The rationale of asking these questions are to verify the information with respondents and to obtain additional information if the company’s website does not provide the information needed.
Respondents were also asked information relating to their sellers. However, in order to maintain the confidentiality of respondents and their sellers, organisation names were not mentioned during the interviewing sessions. Instead, during the interviews, each respondent was referred as ‘this company’, each seller was referred as ‘that company’, and the relationship between each respondent and its seller was referred as the ‘relationship between the companies’.

C - To obtain general information pertaining social media:

1) Have you heard of the term social media before?
2) What is the first word that comes to mind when you think about social media?

D - To obtain information about the company’s relationships with other company:

1) How long have your company been a consumer of ______ / the company?
2) Please discuss your level of satisfaction* with the current business relationship with ______ / the company?
3) Please describe how you use social media when dealing with ______ / the company?
4) How long have your company been using social media when interacting with ______ / the company?

E - To explore information on what types of social media does the company uses for the purpose of B2B marketing relationships:

1) Please give some examples of social media that your company use when dealing with ______ / the company?
2) Does your company use any other social media? If yes, does your company use it when dealing with ______ / the company?
3) Please elaborate what do your company uses social media for?
4) Does social media adds value to the business relationship with ______ / the company? Why?

F - To explore information on why does the company uses social media for the purpose of B2B marketing relationships:

1) Please discuss why do you think your company uses social media when interacting with ______ / the company?
2) Please detail how important do you think social media is to your company in dealing with ______ / the company? Why?
3) What are the method you use other than social media when interacting with ______ / the company?
4) Is social media better off than any other communication method way when interacting with ______ / the company? Why?
5) Is social media the best way to interact with ______ / the company? Why?
6) Please comment if there is any other benefit of using social media when dealing with ______ / the company?
7) Please comment if there is any other downside to using social media when dealing with ______ / the company?

G - To explore information on how does the company uses social media for the purpose of B2B marketing relationships:

1) Please elaborate on the devices your company uses for social media when dealing with ______ / the company. Does your company provide the devices?
   - Desktops
   - Laptops
   - Tablets
   - Smartphone
2) Is there any other device your company use specifically for social media purposes?
3) Does your company support the use of social media when dealing with ________ / the company? (If yes, how?)

H - To explore information on at what stages of the relationships does the company uses social media (for the purpose of B2B marketing relationships):

I) Please detail how frequently do you use social media to interact with _______/ the company?

2) Does your company already develop a relationship with _______/ the company before start using social media to interact with _______/ the company?

   (If yes, why don’t your company use social media in the earlier?)

3) Do you think it is the best time for the company to use social media for dealing with _______/ the company? Why? (If no, when do you think is the best time?)

I - Closing Statement

I) Is there are any other comment would you like to give about the role of social media between your company with _______/ the company?

2) Is there any other comment would you like to give about the role of social media in this company?

3) Is there any other comment would you like to give about social media?

Thank you for your time.

*** End of Interview ***
APPENDIX 4 (Malay): Panduan Temu Bual

PANDUAN TEMU BUAL SEPARA BERSTRUKTUR (FASA KEDUA)

Nama Responden : _______________________________________________
Nama Syarikat : _______________________________________________
Tarikh : _______________________________________________

A - Untuk mendapatkan maklumat demografi responden:

1) Apakah tanggungjawab pekerjaan anda sekarang?
2) Sudah berapa lamakah anda bekerja?
   • Dengan jabatan ini:
   • Dengan syarikat ini:
   • Dengan syarikat lain:

B - Untuk mendapatkan maklumat mengenai syarikat responden:

1) Berapa jumlah pekerja dalam syarikat ini?
2) Sudah berapa lama syarikat ini beroperasi?
3) Apakah lokasi syarikat ini? *
4) Apakah anggaran perolehan tahunan syarikat ini? *
5) Bagaimana syarikat ini menentukan kedudukannya dalam industri? *
   • Syarikat Utama
   • Syarikat Biasa
   • Syarikat Biasa
6) Apakah focus utama syarikat ini?
   • Antarabangsa
   • Tempatan

* Sebelum temu bual, maklumat mengenai syarikat akan diperolehi daripada laman web syarikat ini. Rasional bertanyakan soalan sebegini adalah untuk memeriksa semula maklumat syarikat dari responden dan untuk memperoleh maklumat syarikat ini sekiranya laman web syarikat tidak menyediakan maklumat yang diperlukan.
Para responden juga disoal mengenai maklumat yang berkaitan dengan penjual mereka. Namun, bagi mengekalkan kerahsiaan responden dan penjual, nama-nama syarikat tidak akan disebut sewaktu sesi temuramah. Sebaliknya, sewaktu sesi temuramah, setiap responden dirujuk sebagai ‘syarikat ini’, setiap penjual dirujuk sebagai ‘syarikat tersebut’, dan hubungan antara setiap responden dan penjualnya dirujuk sebagai ‘hubungan antara syarikat-syarikat’.

C - Untuk mendapatkan maklumat umum mengenai media sosial:

1) Pernahkah anda mendengar terma media social sebelum ini?
2) Apakah perkataan pertama yang terlintas dalam fikiran anda apabila memikirkan berkenaan media sosial?

D - Untuk mendapatkan maklumat tentang hubungan syarikat ini dengan syarikat yang lain (hubungan dengan syarikat dari temu bual fasa pertama):

1) Sudah berapa lamakah syarikat anda menjadi pelanggan ______ / syarikat berkenaan?
2) Sila bincangkan tahap kepuasan anda mengenai perhubungan perniagaan semasa dengan _____ / syarikat berkenaan.
3) Sila huraikan bagaimana anda menggunakan media sosial apabila berurusan dengan _____ / syarikat berkenaan.
4) Sudah berapa lamakah syarikat anda menggunakan media sosial bila berinteraksi dengan _____ / syarikat berkenaan?

E - Untuk mendapatkan maklumat mengenai apakah jenis media sosial yang digunakan oleh syarikat untuk hubungan pemasaran B2B:

1) Sila nyatakan beberapa contoh media sosial yang digunakan oleh syarikat anda apabila berurusan dengan _____ / syarikat berkenaan.
2) Adakah syarikat anda menggunakan mana-mana media sosial yang lain? Jika ya, adakah syarikat anda menggunakanapabila berurusan dengan _____ /syarikat berkenaan?
3) Sila huraikan apakah tujuan syarikat anda menggunakan media sosial?
4) Adakah media social menambah nilai hubungan perniagaan dengan _____ / syarikat berkenaan? Kenapa?

F - Untuk mendapatkan maklumat tentang kenapa syarikat menggunakan media sosial untuk hubungan pemasaran B2B:

1) Sila bincangkan pada fikiran anda kenapa syarikat anda menggunakan media sosial apabila berinteraksi dengan ______ / syarikat berkenaan.
2) Sila berikan huraian, pada fikiran anda, bagaimanakah kepentingan media sosial kepada syarikat anda apabila berurusan dengan ______ / syarikat berkenaan. Kenapa?
3) Apakah kaedah selain media sosial yang anda gunakan apabila berinteraksi dengan ______ / syarikat berkenaan?
4) Adakah media sosial lebih baik berbanding kaedah komunikasi yang lain apabila berinteraksi dengan ______ / syarikat berkenaan? Kenapa?
5) Adakah media sosial cara terbaik untuk berinteraksi dengan ______ / syarikat berkenaan? Kenapa?
6) Sila berikan komen jika terdapat sebarang faedah penggunaan media sosial yang lain apabila berurusan dengan ______ / syarikat berkenaan.
7) Sila berikan komen jika terdapat sebarang keburukan penggunaan media sosial yang lain apabila berurusan dengan _____ / syarikat berkenaan.

G - Untuk mendapatkan maklumat tentang bagaimana syarikat menggunakan media sosial untuk hubungan pemasaran B2B:

1) Sila berikan huraian mengenai peralatan berkaitan media sosial yang digunakan oleh syarikat apabila berurusan dengan _____ / syarikat berkenaan. Adakah syarikat anda menyediakan alat-alat berkenaan?
   - Komputer Meja
   - Komputer Riba
   - Tablet
   - Telefon Pintar
2) Adakah syarikat anda menggunakan mana-mana alat yang lain khusus untuk media sosial?
3) Adakah syarikat anda menyokong penggunaan media sosial apabila berurusan dengan _____ / syarikat berkenaan? (Jika ya, bagaimana?)

H - Untuk mendapatkan maklumat tentang pada tahap hubungan manakah syarikat menggunakan media sosial (untuk perhubungan pemasaran B2B):

1) Sila berikan butiran tentang kekerapan anda menggunakan media sosial untuk berinteraksi dengan _____ / syarikat berkenaan.

2) Adakah syarikat anda terlebih dahulu membina perhubungan dengan _____ / syarikat berkenaan sebelum mula menggunakan media sosial untuk berinteraksi dengan _____ / syarikat berkenaan? (Jika ya, kenapa syarikat anda tidak menggunakan media sosial lebih awal?)

3) Pada pendapat anda, adakah ini masa terbaik bagi syarikat anda menggunakan media sosial untuk berurusan dengan _____ / syarikat berkenaan? Kenapa? (Jika tidak, bilakah masa yang terbaik?)

I - Kenyataan Penutup

1) Apakah komen yang lain yang ingin anda kemukakan tentang peranan media sosial antara syarikat anda dengan _____ / syarikat berkenaan?

2) Apakah komen yang lain yang ingin anda kemukakan tentang peranan media sosial dalam syarikat ini?

3) Apakah komen yang lain yang ingin anda kemukakan tentang media sosial?

Terima kasih atas masa terluang anda.

***Temu Bual Tamat***
Dear Miss Mohamad Zaki

I write further to the additional information provided in relation to the conditional approval granted to your application for ethical clearance for your project "NR: The Role of Social Media in B2B Relationship Marketing" (GU Ref No: MKT/23/13/HREC).

This is to confirm receipt of the remaining required information, assurances or amendments to this protocol.

Consequently, I reconfirm my earlier advice that you are authorised to immediately commence this research on this basis.

The standard conditions of approval attached to our previous correspondence about this protocol continue to apply.

Regards

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Dear Miss Mohamad Zaki

I write further to the additional information provided in relation to the conditional approval granted to your application for ethical clearance for your project "NR: The Role of Social Media in B2B Relationship Marketing" (GU Ref No: MKT/07/14/HREC).

This is to confirm receipt of the remaining required information, assurances or amendments to this protocol.

Consequently, I reconfirm my earlier advice that you are authorised to immediately commence this research on this basis.

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CONSENT FORM

A Research Conducted by NurAmalina Mohamad Zaki, Associate Professor Scott Weaven, Dr. Mitchell Ross, and Dr. Wei Shao
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By signing below, you are indicating that you:

• Have been made aware of the general purpose and demands of the study as outlined in the information sheet.

• Have had the opportunity to ask any questions arising from the information sheet and these questions have been answered to your satisfaction.

• Aware that as a volunteer in this study you may withdraw at any time. If you choose to withdraw after commencing interviews, you understand that all information collected from your prior to your withdrawal will not be used.

• Aware that the interviews are to be tape recorded and the tape will be erased following analysis of the data. And, you understand that all information given will be treated CONFIDENTIALLY.

• Understand that you can contact the research team if you have any questions about the project, or the Manager, Research Ethics, Office for Research, Room 4.25, The Learning Commons Building (G11), Gold Coast campus, Griffith University, Queensland 4215, Australia or directly on +61 (0)7 373 54375 or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au or the Head, Department of Management and Marketing, Faculty Management and Economics, University Malaysia Terengganu (UMT), Terengganu directly on +6 (09) 668 4203/4309 if you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the project; and

• Agree to participate in this study.

Name: ____________________________________________
Signature: ____________________________________________
Date: ____________________________________________
Appendix 7 (Malay): Borang Keizinan

THE GRIFFITH BUSINESS SCHOOL

Kajian Penerokaan tentang Peranan Media Sosial dalam Pemasaran Perhubungan Antara Perniagaan dengan Perniagaan dalam Konteks Malaysia

BORANG KEIZINAN

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Dengan menandatangani di bawah, saya mengesahkan bahawa saya:

- Telah memahami tujuan umum dan keperluan kajian ini sebagaimana yang digariskan dalam kertas maklumat.
- Telah diberi peluang untuk mengemukakan apa-apa pertanyaan tentang perkara berbangkit dalam kertas maklumat tersebut dan pertanyaan saya telah dijawab menurut kehendak saya.
- Memahami bahawa walaupun penyertaan saya adalah secara sukarela dalam kajian ini, saya boleh menarik diri pada bila-bila masa. Jika saya memilih untuk menarik diri selepas temu bual dijalankan, saya memahami bahawa semua maklumat yang dikumpul sebelum penarikan diri saya tidak akan digunakan.
- Memahami bahawa temu bual akan dirakamkan dalam pita dan rakaman pita tersebut akan dipadamkan selepas data dianalisis. Dan, saya memahami bahawa semua maklumat yang diberikan adalah SULIT.
- Memahami bahawa jika terdapat sebarang pertanyaan mengenai projek ini atau mengenai tindak-tanduk etika dalam projek ini, saya boleh menghubungi kumpulan penyelidik atau Manager, Research Ethics, Office for Research, Room 4.25, The Learning Commons Building (G11), Gold Coast campus, Griffith University, Queensland 4215, Australia atau talian terus +61 (0)7 373 54375 atau research-ethics@griffith.edu.au atau Ketua, Jabatan Pengurusan dan Pemasaran, Fakulti Pengurusan dan Ekonomi, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT), Terengganu atau talian terus +6 (09) 668 4203/4309; dan
- Bersetuju untuk mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini.

Nama: ____________________________
Tandatangan: ____________________________
Tarikh: ____________________________